



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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In Reply Refer To:
(8500/4350)
(CA-650.44)
NOPA CA-D05000-21-01

NOTICE OF PROPOSED ACTION

STATE: California

DISTRICT: California Desert

COUNTY: Inyo/San Bernardino

FIELD OFFICE: Ridgecrest Field Office
Attn: Carl Symons
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WILDERNESS AREAS:

Centennial Herd Area

Coso Range Wilderness
Darwin Falls Wilderness
Argus Range Wilderness
Great Falls Basin Wilderness

Slate Range Herd Area

Grass Valley Wilderness

Panamint Herd Area

Surprise Canyon Wilderness
Manly Peak Wilderness

LOCATION: TOWNSHIP RANGE
T18S-32S R37E-47E

All three Herd Areas overlap portions of Naval Air Weapons Station (NAWS) China Lake lands.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTION:

The action is to update the previous wild burro capture plan and associated Environmental Assessment CA-650-2002-099 for the Centennial, Slate Range and Panamint Herd Areas. The previous plan was operative from 2003-2016 and implemented provisions of the California Desert Conservation Area Plan (1980), as amended, to remove all burros from these herd areas. This action

is also necessary to address excess burro populations and impacts to resources in and around these herd areas and along roadways to reduce the risk of burro/vehicle collisions.

The gather would involve the use of temporary corral sites, helicopters, and wranglers on horseback. All temporary corral and trap sites would be outside of wilderness. Helicopters and wranglers on horseback would be used to herd the burros into the temporary corrals. No motorized or mechanized vehicle use or helicopter landings would be permitted within wilderness. Helicopters would be flying low elevation over wilderness areas and the wranglers would be horseback riding into wilderness areas to gather and herd the burros to the temporary corral sites. The proposed gather areas may include portions of Death Valley National Park lands adjacent to BLM lands; gathering activities within this area would be conducted in accordance with Death Valley National Park General Management Plan (2002).

The captured burros would be transported to the Ridgecrest Regional Wild Horse and Burro Holding and Adoption Facility, where they will be placed into the Bureau of Land Management's National Wild Horse and Burro Adoption Program. This action is part of the Bureau's continuing efforts to manage wild burro populations in accordance with the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan, as amended, which established the management level for wild burros within the Centennial, Slate and Panamint Herd Areas as zero.

A gather could occur during any time during the year and typically lasts between 2- 10 days, pending funding, number of burros to remove and weather conditions. Start dates will depend on the availability of helicopter and crews. The earliest target date to initiate this effort would be late spring/early summer, 2021.

BACKGROUND

In 1994, the California Desert Protection Act designated 16 wilderness areas and 2 wilderness study areas within the Ridgecrest Field Office (RFO) and transferred approximately 900,000 acres of public lands in the RFO to the new expanded Death Valley National Park. Seven herd areas overlapped these new wilderness designations.

The Centennial Herd Area overlaps Naval Air Weapons Station (NAWS) China Lake and portions of the surrounding Argus and Coso Range mountains. The Slate Range Herd Area overlaps the Slate Range Mountains and the Mojave B Range of NAWS China Lake, extending south along the east side of the Grass Valley Wilderness. The Panamint Herd Management Area overlaps portions of the Panamint Mountains, Panamint Valley and the Mojave B Range of NAWS China Lake.

The two remaining 1994 WSAs (White Mountains and Great Falls Basin) were subsequently designated wilderness by additional wilderness legislation. The 2019 Dingle Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act designated the Great Falls Basin Wilderness area within the Centennial Herd Area. The Act also designated the Surprise Canyon creek as a Wild and Scenic River within the Panamint Herd Area.

See attached map.

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS:

1981-2002 Wild horse and burro gathers occurred.
Oct. 1994 Passage of the California Desert Protection Act.
January 2003 Environmental Assessment CA-650-2002-099 completed for Ridgecrest Field Office Capture Plan for Wild Burro Gather and Removals for the Centennial, Slate Range and Panamint Herd Areas.
2003-2016 Wild Burro gathers occurred on BLM and NAWs lands as time and funding permitted.
Feb. 12, 2019 Passage of the Dingle Act, designating the Great Falls Basin Wilderness and Surprise Canyon Wild and Scenic River.
March 1, 2021 NOPA mailed out, environmental review process begun for new EA.
March-April New Environmental Assessment prepared.
May 28, 2021 Earliest tentative start date for a gather.

There is a 30-day public review period, starting from the date of signature of this NOPA for all actions proposed within Wilderness Areas. There is another 30-day public review period for the environmental assessment (EA). For some projects, these two time periods overlap. The EA will be posted for review on Eplanning ([EplanningUi \(blm.gov\)](https://eplanning.blm.gov)) sometime in March 2021. As always, your comments and questions are welcome concerning this and any other BLM action. For further information regarding this activity, please contact Marty Dickes, Wilderness Coordinator at e-mail: mdickes@ca.blm.gov or Alex Neibergs, Wild Horse and Burro Specialist at e-mail: aneiberg@blm.gov .

Carl Symons, Field Office Manager

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Enclosed: Map of Proposed Herd Gather Areas

Date