United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Tonopah Field Office
P.O. Box 911 (1553 S. Main St.)
Tonopah, Nevada 89049
Phone: 775-482-7800; Fax: 775-482-7810
http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo/battle_mountain_field.html

APR 26 2010

In Reply Refer To:
4700 (NVBO200)

Dear Interested Public:

The Tonopah Field Office is planning to complete an Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze the impacts of conducting a wild horse and burro (WH&B) gather in the Montezuma Peak and Paymaster Herd Management Areas (HMA). The gather areas are located within Esmeralda County in southwestern Nevada. Refer to the enclosed executive summary of the gather area for more information.

The Appropriate Management Level (AML) for the Montezuma Peak HMA was established by the Final Multiple Use Decisions (FMUD) for the Montezuma Allotment in September 2007, the Magruder Mountain Allotment in September 2004, and Yellow Hills Allotment in June 2003. The AML for the Paymaster HMA was established by the FMUDs for the Sheep Mountain Allotment in June 2003, Montezuma Allotment in September 2007, Monte Cristo Allotment in June 2002, and Yellow Hills Allotment in June 2003. The FMUDs were issued following an interdisciplinary analysis of monitoring data, the completion of Rangeland Health Evaluations (RHE) for each allotment, and the involvement of interested public.

The proposed gather would involve the removal of all WH&B outside of the HMAs, thereafter; WH&B would be removed from inside the HMAs as needed to achieve AML. The table on the following page lists the AML, current population estimate, proposed number to gather, proposed number to remove and release, and estimated post-gather populations of WH&B.

Hair samples would be collected from a representative sample of animals for analysis of genetic diversity within the WH&B herds.

Gather operations would commence after the completion of an Environmental Assessment/Gather Plan, Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), and the issuance of a decision pending any appeals or court decisions. The WH&B gather could take place as early as September 9, 2010 for the Montezuma Peak HMA and September 14, 2010 for the Paymaster HMA.

As interested public, you are asked to submit comments, issues, alternatives, recommendations, or other input for the inclusion into the Environmental Assessment. Please make your

submissions in writing or via email at *Montezuma_gather@blm.gov*. Comments must be received in this office no later than Monday, May 24th.

HMA	Allotment	AML (WH/B)	Est. Population[a] (WH/B)	Est. Number to Gather[b] (WH/B)	Est. Number to Remove (WH/B)	Est. Number to Release (WH/B)	Est. Post Gather Population (WH/B)
Paymaster	Sheep Mtn	28/0					
	Montezuma	0/0					
	Monte Cristo	8/0					
	Yellow Hills	1/0					
	Unallocated	1/0					
	Total	**38/0**	**68/0**	**42/0**	**42/0**	**0/0**	**26/0**
Montezuma	Montezuma	0/0					
	Magruder Mtn	2/10					
	Yellow Hills	2/0					
	Total	**4/10**	**81/71**	**77/61**	**77/61**	**0/0**	**4/10**

[a] Represents the estimated population based on February 2010 inventory adjusted for 16% rate of increase.
[b] Estimated gather numbers based on the ability to capture 95% of the estimated population. Efficiency could be influenced by season, weather conditions, and terrain.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you can request in your comment for us to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

If you would rather not remain on the mailing list for the Montezuma Peak or Paymaster HMA WH&B gathers, and do not wish to receive the Environmental Assessment /Gather Plan and subsequent decision documents, please submit your request in writing to the address identified on the letterhead.

The Final Environmental Assessment will be available to the interested public on compact disk upon request. However, this request will not extend the comment period.

For more information regarding the proposed gather, please contact Dustin Hollowell at (775)482-7847.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Seley
Field Manager

Executive Summary for the Montezuma Peak and Paymaster HMA 2010 Gather

The Montezuma Peak and Paymaster herd management areas (HMA) are both located entirely within Esmeralda County, Nevada southeast of Tonopah. The HMAs lie in the transitory ecotone between the Mojave Desert and Great Basin and share the usual arid environment of the area. Dominant vegetation communities include salt-desert-shrub, isolated pinyon-juniper, small interspersed communities of Wyoming sagebrush, with low plant density. Available water and forage for wild horses is scarce. Vegetative characteristics combined with the location and general climate create an inhospitable environment for wild horses, especially when the appropriate management level (AML) is exceeded. Several issues regarding wild horse and burro management in the HMAs have been identified:

Montezuma Peak HMA

- frequent cyclical drought
- low forage availability
- low forage production
- shrub dominated
- little available water
- AML significantly exceeded
- emergency gather in 1996

Paymaster HMA

- frequent cyclical drought
- low forage availability
- low forage production
- shrub dominated
- little available water
- AML exceeded

Livestock animal unit months (AUM) and AMLs were adjusted with the latest final multiple use decisions (FMUD) for each allotment. The following table illustrates the size of each allotment involved, the portion of each allotment comprising the HMAs, and changes in AML and livestock AUMs from the latest FMUDs for the allotments. Please note that no AUMs were allocated for livestock within the portion of the HMAs that reside in the Montezuma allotment. A more detailed discussion of livestock AUMs and AML adjustments will be presented in the Environmental Assessment.

				WH&B AML						Livestock AUMs		
				pre-FMUD		post-FMUD		% change				
HMA	Allotment	Acres	HMA-Acres	WH	B	WH	B	WH	B	pre-FMUD	post-FMUD	% change
Montezuma Peak	Montezuma	538,297	66,000	138	0	0	0	-100	0	10,668	8,927	-16
	Magruder Mt	625,015	11,486	13	0	2	10	-85	++	6,426	4,481	-30
	Yellow Hills	62,203	444	2	0	2	0	0	0	1,212	5,40	-55
Total		**1,225,515**	**77,930**	**153**	**0**	**4**	**10**	**-97**	**0**			
Paymaster	Montezuma	538,297	7,360	3	0	0	0	-100	0	10,668	8,927	-16
	Sheep Mt	88,435	59,353	28	0	28	0	0	0	1,738	1,738	0
	Monte Cristo	496,018	17,112	8	0	8	0	0	0	9,352	7,187	-23
	Yellow Hills	62,203	2360	2	0	1	0	-50	0	1,212	540	-55
	Unallocated	NA	14,407	7	0	1	0	-86	0	NA	NA	NA
Total		**1,184,953**	**100,592**	**48**	**0**	**38**	**0**	**-21**	**0**			

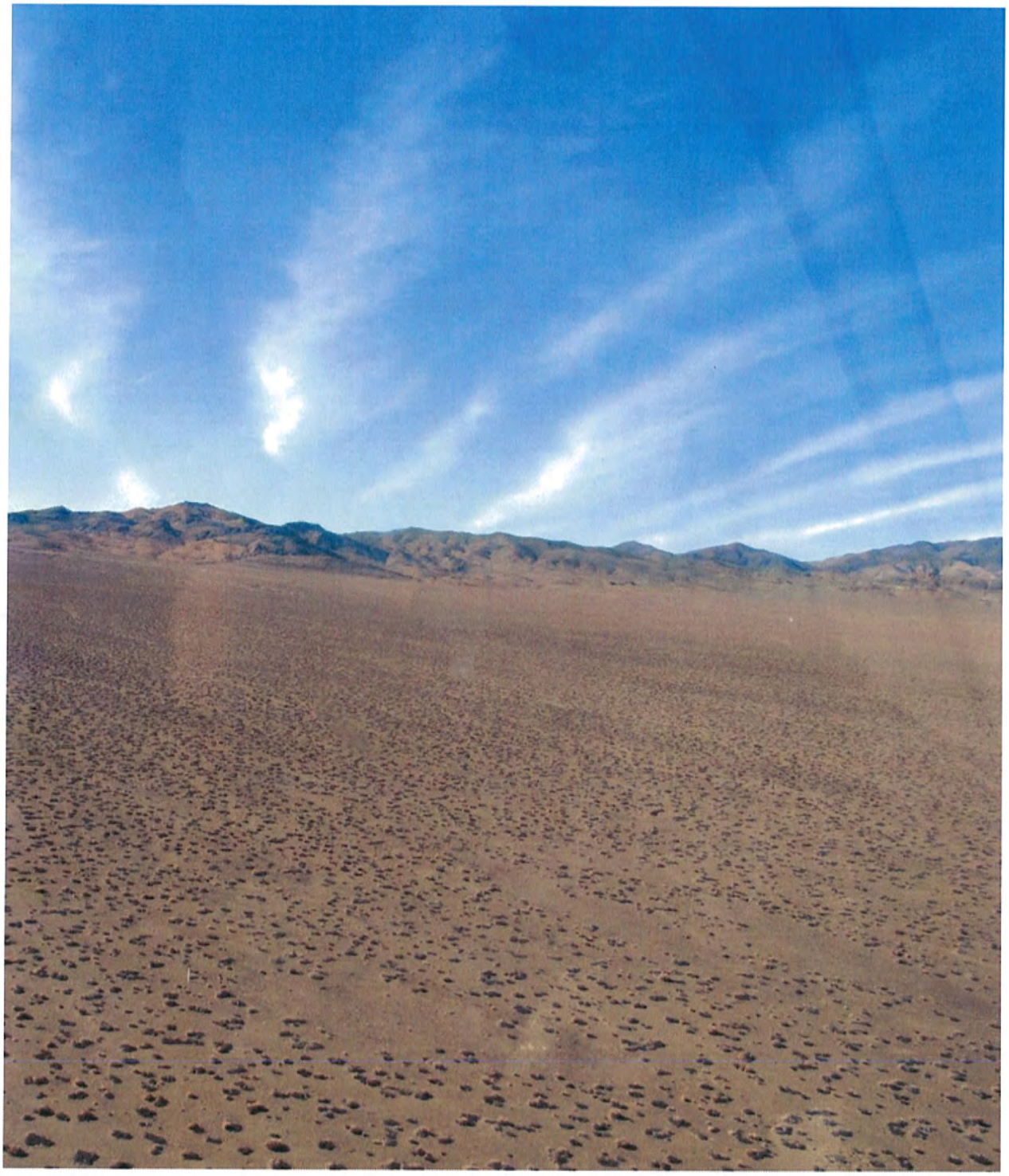
Wild horses in the Montezuma Peak HMA in September 2006.

Burro in the Montezuma Peak HMA in September 2006.

Band of wild horses in the Paymaster HMA near Tonopah in September 2006.

Typical habitat within the Montezuma Peak HMA. Photo taken in February 2010.

Wild horses and habitat in the Montezuma Peak HMA in February 2010.



Typical habitat of the Paymaster HMA. Photo taken in February 2010.

Wild horses and habitat in the Paymaster HMA in February 2010.

Frequently Asked Questions About Wild Horse Gathers in the Battle Mountain District – Montezuma Peak and Paymaster Herd Management Areas.

Where would the BLM gather horses and burros?

The BLM would gather up to 119 excess wild horses and 61 burros in southwestern Nevada within the Montezuma Peak and Paymaster (wild horses only) HMAs, as well as any wild horses and burros residing outside the established boundaries of these HMAs.

Why is the BLM gathering the Montezuma Peak and Paymaster herds?

The proposed gather is needed to achieve and maintain the appropriate management level (AML) of wild horses in Montezuma Peak and Paymaster and prevent further deterioration resulting from the current overpopulation within the herd management areas (HMAs) in south western Nevada. The current wild horse population for the 2 HMAs is approximately 149 which is over 2-times the AML of 42. The current burro population for Montezuma Peak HMAs is approximately 71 burros which is 6-times over the AML of 10.

Is this an emergency action?

It is not currently, but could become, due to limited forage and water resources. If this population management action is not completed in the near future, the likelihood of an emergency situation increases due to limited winter forage and reduced water availability, drought conditions, or severe weather.

Why doesn't the BLM just let nature take its course and allow the wild horse and burro populations to self-regulate?

Experience gained in managing wild horses and other large herbivores indicates that soil, vegetation, and water resources are usually severely damaged before nature (weather, overpopulation, disease and predation) negatively affect population growth rates.

Under the 1971 Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act the BLM is required to remove the excess wild horses and burros before range damage occurs.

What is the Appropriate Management Level of wild horses or burros?

The appropriate management level is the number of wild horses or burros to be managed within a designated herd management area which results in a thriving natural ecological balance and avoids a deterioration of the range.

Why are AMLs for Montezuma Peak and Paymaster HMAs so low?

Through the Rangeland Health Assessments completed for these HMAs and assessment of monitoring and climate data, the Tonopah Field Office has determined that the habitat available within these areas cannot support large numbers of healthy wild horses. These areas are located within the transition between Mojave Desert and Great Basin ecotypes. These desert environments receive low annual rainfall and support sparse vegetation and limited water. Emergency gathers were required within Montezuma Peak HMA and other HMAs in Esmeralda County in 1996 to remove horses suffering from starvation and lack of water.

What data does the BLM use to establish Appropriate Management Levels?

The BLM determines the appropriate management level of wild horses and burros based on an ongoing program of monitoring over several years involving studies of grazing utilization, trend in range ecological condition, actual use, precipitation (climate), the results of land health assessments, and other factors.

The process generally begins with a management evaluation. Through the evaluation process, resource monitoring data is analyzed and a determination is made as to whether the current management and stocking levels for wild horses and/or burros (or livestock or wildlife) are achieving land health objectives.

If land health objectives are not being met, changes in management or stocking levels are proposed. The results of the BLM's analysis are documented in an environmental assessment which is provided to the interested public for review and comment.

The BLM carefully considers the public's comments when making a final decision. The public is also provided with the opportunity to request administrative review if they disagree with the BLM's final decision.

How does the BLM determine when a gather to remove excess wild horses or burros is needed?

The BLM monitors grazing utilization, trend in range condition, actual use, population data, and other factors to determine if excess animals are present and removal is necessary to restore the range to a thriving natural ecological balance and prevent a deterioration of the range.

What does the BLM do with wild horses and burros when they are removed from the range?

Healthy horses are placed in good homes through adoption or sale to qualified individuals.

Wild horses that have not been adopted are maintained in BLM-managed short-term holding corrals, or in long-term pastures.

What standard procedures does the BLM use to assure humane handling and treatment of wild horses and burros during gathers?

The Standard Operating Procedures are outlined in the gather contract, and included within the Environmental Assessments for wild horse and burro gathers. They outline the specific actions the contractor is expected to take to assure the safe, effective and humane handling and treatment of wild horses during gather operations.

The procedures also address the feeding, care, sorting, handling, transportation, equipment, communications, animal condition, fertility control, etc.

A large stud has his teeth examined to estimate his age during the Callaghan HMA wild horse gather, January 2009.

How many Herd Management Areas are managed by the Battle Mountain District? How many acres?

The Battle Mountain District manages 28 Herd Management Areas on about 3.6 million acres. There are approximately 3,500 to 4,000 wild horses and burros in the Battle Mountain District.

The BLM as a whole manages 180 Herd Management Areas on about 32 million acres in ten western states.

Why are you using a helicopter to gather wild horses and burros? I've been told that it is inhumane.

Helicopters prove to be the safest and more effective way to gather wild horses and burros, safer than roping from horseback or other methods. We work close with our contractors and are onsite to monitor the gather to assure that the wild horses/burros are gathered in manner that will minimize any injuries or harm.

For example, the contractor's helicopter pilot directs the animals in a manner that allows animals to remain with their mothers. The BLM also prohibits gathering wild horses and burros with a helicopter during the 6 weeks before and the 6 weeks following the peak foaling period, normally from March through June for most wild horse and burro herds.

Animals are allowed to travel at their own pace for the most part, and if needed due to young, old, or sick animals, the horses walk.

Horse in the working chute ready to be aged. Paymaster HMA gather, September 2006.

Mares to be released back to the HMA. Paymaster HMA Gather, September 2006.

Release of horses back to the range. Bald Mountain HMA – January 2009.

Why do wild horses and burros die during gathers?

During wild horse and burro gathers, animals may die due to injuries sustained during the gather which amount to only one half of 1%, which is very low when handling wild animals. In other cases, animals are humanely euthanized due to issues that existed before the gather.

Animals that are euthanized for non-gather related reasons include those with old injuries (broken hip, leg) that have caused the animal to suffer from pain or prevents them from being able to travel or maintain adequate body condition; old animals that have lived a successful life on the range, but now have few teeth remaining, are in poor body condition, or are weak from old age; and wild horses and burros that have congenital (genetic) or serious physical defects such as club foot, or sway back and would not be successfully adopted, or should not be returned to the range.

Young foal investigates one of the gather workers. Silver Peak HMA gather, September 2006.

I object to the horses losing their freedom.

The range is a fragile ecosystem. It is a high desert environment where forage and water supplies are naturally limited. Add to this, harsh winters where the snow and ice cover the ground with a thick layer, drought, or fires ignited by lightning, and the already limited food supply becomes even scarcer.

One has to decide the order of importance: save the horses' freedom, or have them suffer due to overpopulation. Starvation is a painful death. In order to preserve healthy horses and healthy rangelands into the future, the populations must be kept in balance with the habitat, and excess wild horses must be removed.

Wild horses removed from the range go on to either be adopted by loving families or will go to Long Term Holding Pastures, where they will roam free without limited forage or water for the rest of their lives.

Why doesn't the BLM supplement the horses with food and water?

Under the 1971 Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act, we are required to manage wild horses and burros at the minimum feasible level of management. These are wild animals. It is not consistent with management at the minimum feasible level to provide supplemental feeds or rely on water developments that require frequent maintenance.

However, we do supplement (haul) water during emergency situations, if necessary, and may develop or improve water sources within HMAs to improve distribution of the wild horses and promote resource improvement.

Thin horses captured from the Paymaster HMA, September 2006.

Applying the freezemark identifcation for the mares given fertility control vaccine. Rocky Hills HMA, January 2009.

Rather than remove the wild horses and burros, why doesn't the BLM eliminate or reduce livestock grazing?

Livestock grazing is evaluated for conformance with Standards for Rangeland Health and adjusted through appropriate decisions following coordination with the interested public and completion of Environmental Assessments

Congress made the decision to manage public lands for multiple use purposes, not just a single use.

While passing the 1971 Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act, the conference committee specifically stated that: "The principal goal of this legislation is to provide for the protection of the animals from man and not the single use management of areas for the benefit of wild free-roaming horses and burros."

Congress affirmed its intent for multiple use when it passed the 1976 Federal Land Policy and Management Act, requiring BLM to manage the public lands for a wide variety of uses (including livestock grazing) under the principles of multiple-use and sustained yield.

Livestock grazing is often seasonal in nature. The ranchers move livestock to various areas or completely off the range onto their own private lands. Wild horses and burros stay on the range year round.

Closing public lands within HMAs to livestock grazing would not be a long term solution, and would not allow the BLM to significantly increase the number of wild horses and burros on the range. At growth rates of 17-22% per year, it wouldn't be long before the BLM needed to remove excess wild horses and burros.

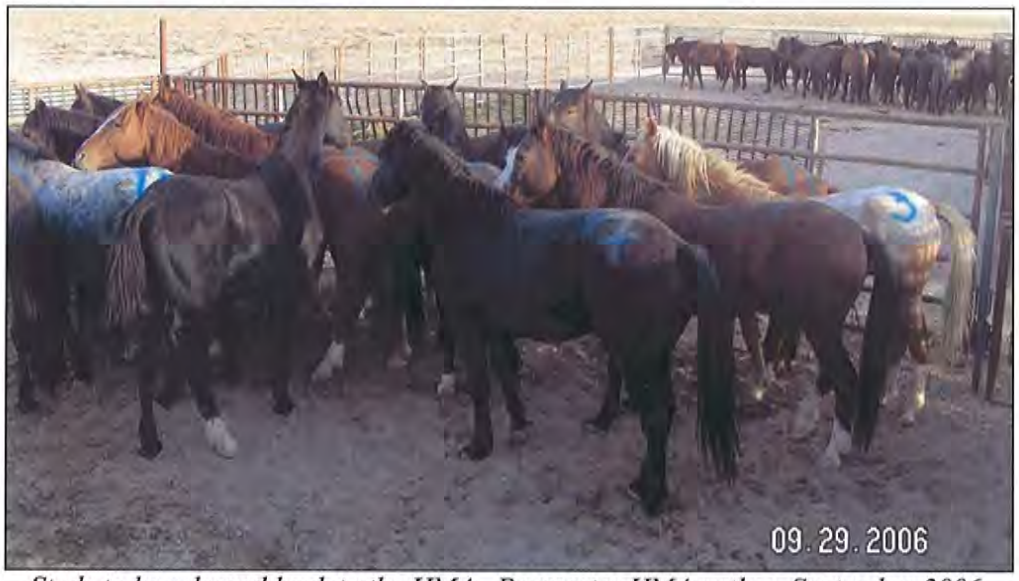
To maintain healthy wild horse population and prevent range damage, we would be required to remove an even larger number of excess wild horses and burros each year.

Is there livestock grazing in this area?

Yes, there are five allotments in the Montezuma Peak and Paymaster HMAs. Livestock use has already been adjusted and decreased due to on-going drought conditions within the area. There are no AUM's allocated for livestock use within the portions the HMAs that lie within the Montezuma allotment.

Are you removing wild horses and burros to increase livestock grazing use?

No. The fact is that there has been a 61% reduction in authorized livestock use on public lands since 1941.



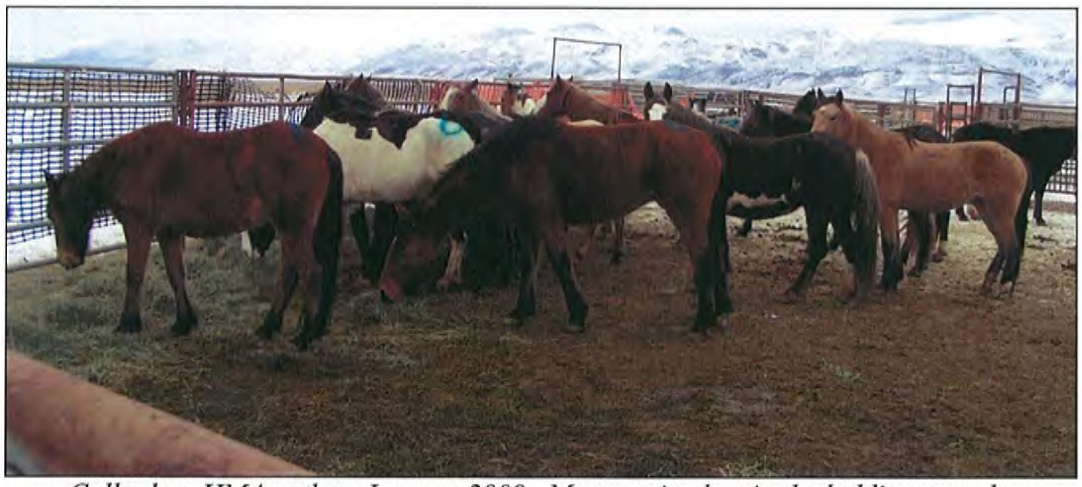
Studs to be released back to the HMA. Paymaster HMA gather, September 2006.

A BLM Specialist gives a mare the fertility control vaccine with a "jab-stick" that injects the time release pellets into her rump, Callaghan HMA gather, December 2008.

If foals are orphaned during the gather, how do you take care of them?

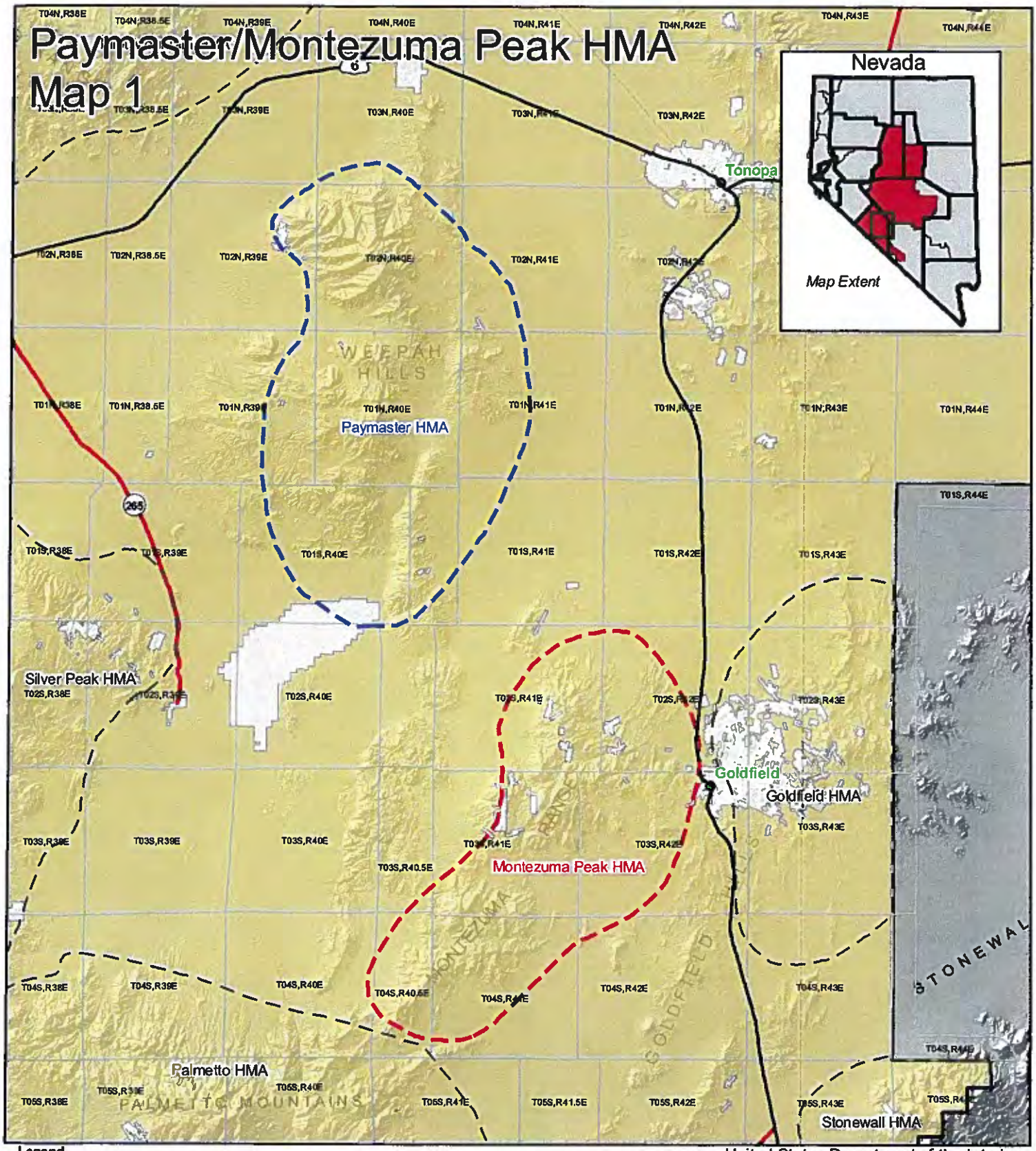
A very small number of foals can be orphaned in any gather. Sometimes foals which have been previously orphaned (abandoned by the mare) are also captured.

We make every effort to provide prompt, humane care to orphan foals. Orphan foals are fed milk replacer as needed to support their nutritional needs. Orphan foals may also be placed in an approved foster home to receive additional care. Once orphan foals are large enough, they are made available for adoption to qualified individuals who can provide them with a good home.



Callaghan HMA gather, January 2009. Mares enjoy hay in the holding corrals.

Paymaster/Montezuma Peak HMA
Map 1



Legend

- Cities
- Interstate Freeway
- State Route
- US Highway

BLM HMA

- Other HMA's

HMA

- Montezuma Peak
- Paymaster

Landowner

- Bureau of Indian Affairs
- Bureau of Land Management
- Forest Service
- National Park Service
- Nevada State
- Private

0 2.5 5 10 Miles

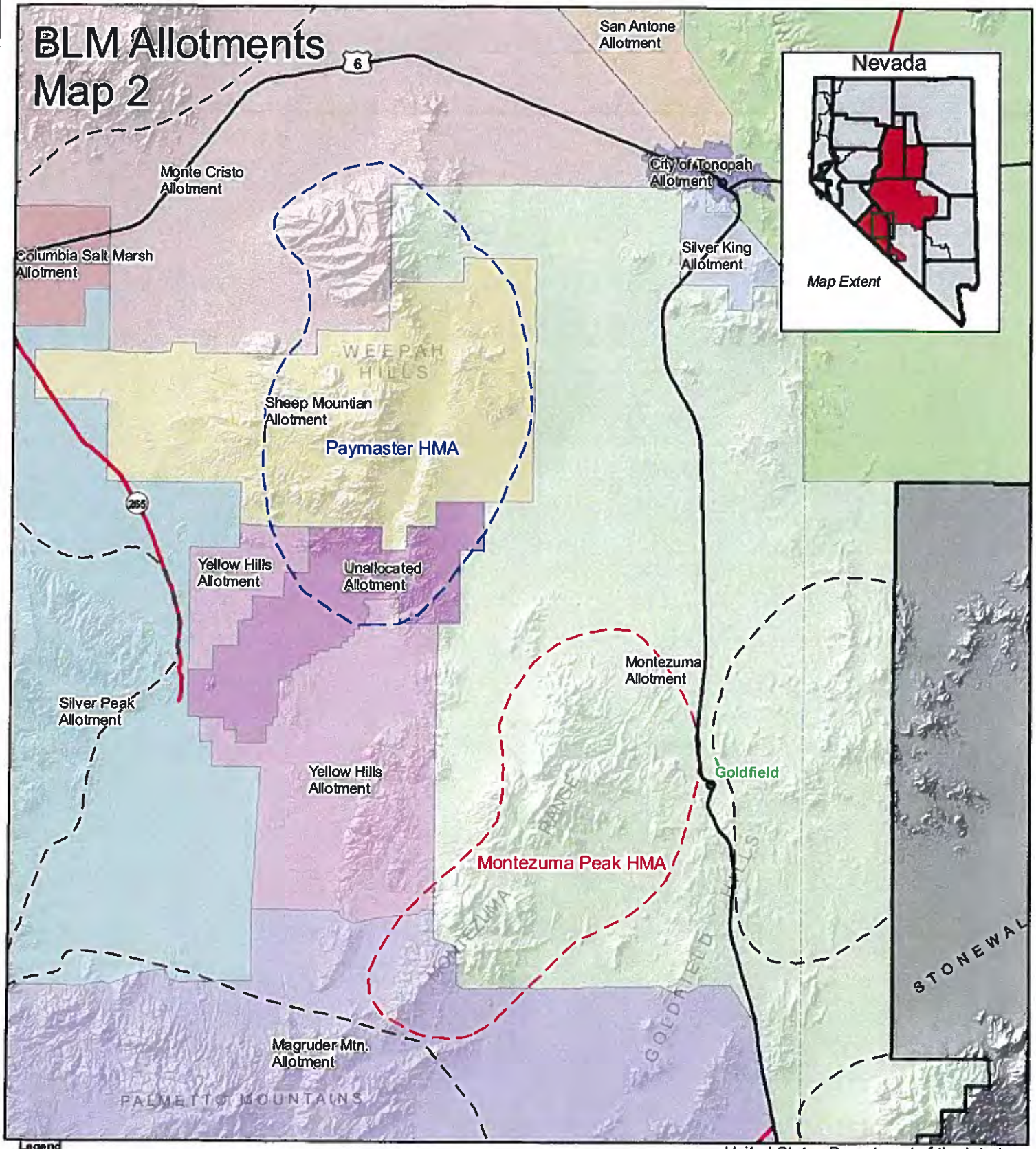
N W E S

United States Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management
Tonopah Field Office
1553 S. Main Street/P.O. Box 911
Tonopah, NV 89049-0911

Projection: UTM NAD 83, Zone 11N
Map Date: April 21, 2010

No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual or aggregate use with other data. Original data were compiled from various sources. This information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This product was developed through digital means and may be updated without notification.



Legend

- Cities
- Interstate Freeway
- State Route
- US Highway

BLM HMA

- Other HMA's

HMA

- Montezuma Peak
- Paymaster

Allotments

- City of Tonopah
- Columbia Salt Marsh
- Magruder Mtn.
- Monte Cristo
- Montezuma
- Ralston
- San Antone
- Sheep Mountian
- Silver King
- Silver Peak
- Unallocated
- Yellow Hills

0 2.5 5 10 Miles

N W E S

United States Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management
Tonopah Field Office
1553 S. Main Street/P.O. Box 911
Tonopah, NV 89049-0911

Projection: UTM NAD 83, Zone 11N
Map Date: April 21, 2010

No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual or aggregate use with other data. Original data were compiled from various sources. This information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This product was developed through digital means and may be updated without notification.