

**Sagebrush Ecosystem Program**

201 S. Roop Street, Suite 101  
Carson City, Nevada 89701  
Telephone (775) 684-8600  
Facsimile (775) 684-8604

www.sagebrusheco.nv.gov

BRIAN SANDOVAL  
Governor



**Tim Rubald**, Program Manager  
**John Copeland**, Forestry/Wildland Fire  
**Melissa Faigeles**, State Lands  
**Kelly McGowan**, Agriculture  
**Lara Niell**, Wildlife

**STATE OF NEVADA**  
**Sagebrush Ecosystem Program**

**SAGEBRUSH ECOSYSTEM COUNCIL**  
**STAFF REPORT**  
**MEETING DATE: March 13, 2014**

**DATE:** March 7, 2014  
**TO:** Sagebrush Ecosystem Council Members  
**FROM:** Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team  
Telephone: 775-684-8600  
**THROUGH:** Tim Rubald, Program Manager  
Telephone: 775-684-8600, Email: timrubald@sagebrusheco.nv.gov  
**SUBJECT:** Discussion and consideration of the revisions to the Wild Horses and Burros section of the Nevada State Alternative (E) in the BLM/ USFS Sub-regional EIS.

---

**SUMMARY**

This item requests SEC consideration of the adoption of the revised Wild Horses and Burros section of the State Alternative within the EIS. The SETT worked with various stakeholders and the Science Work Group (SWG) to gain input on best available science, suggested revisions, and pertinent citations that provide greater detail and specificity on the State's goals, objectives, and management actions. This provides a greater likelihood for the State Alternative to be considered as the preferred alternative.

**PREVIOUS ACTION**

**March 27, 2013** – The Council directed the SETT to meet with USFWS and NDOW staffs to discuss the USFWS comments on the Nevada State Plan and report back to the Council.

**April 22, 2013** – The Council directed the SETT to further develop the Nevada State Plan and the EIS Alternative to incorporate the concerns expressed by the USFWS.

**July 30, 2013** – The Council adopted the Sagebrush Ecosystem Strategic Detailed Timeline, which included revision of the State Plan/ EIS Alternative.

**February 13, 2014** – The Council directed staff to schedule a meeting with the Science Work Group (SWG) to develop revisions to the Nevada State Alternative (E) in the BLM/ USFS Sub-regional EIS and for staff to submit those revisions at their March meeting for consideration.

### **BACKGROUND**

The original Wild Horses and Burros section of the State Alternative in the EIS was generally deemed insufficient for the purpose of outlining the needs of the State. It provided little direction to the BLM and USFS beyond managing and maintaining these animals to Appropriate Management Levels (AML), which is similar to the current BLM/USFS Alternative and the No Action Alternative.

The SWG met on February 19, 2014 to discuss and develop additional concepts and more detailed guidance regarding Wild Horses and Burros management. Following that meeting, staff revised existing and incorporated additional goals, objectives, and management actions to incorporate concepts and best available science from the SWG meeting. These changes provide more detail on management and thus strengthen the State Alternative, providing a greater likelihood for the State Alternative to, at least in part, be selected as the preferred alternative.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends the SEC review and further revises, as needed, the proposed Wild Horses and Burros section of the State EIS Alternative.

### **POSSIBLE MOTION**

Should the SEC agree with the staff recommendation, a possible motion may be: “Motion to approve the revised Wild Horses and Burros section of the State EIS Alternative, as amended.”

### **Attachments:**

1. Wild Horses and Burros section of the State Alternative as submitted by staff through a document that contrasts the original and revised versions of the section.

km: TR

1 **Goals and Objectives:**  
2 **Wild Horses and Burros excerpts for the**  
3 **revised State of Nevada Alternative**  
4

5 **Alternative E – State of Nevada Alternative (Revised by the SETT with guidance from the SWG**  
6 **February 2014)**

7 **Color Code**

8 **Existing Language**

9 *Proposed Language*

10  
11 **Goal E-WHB 1: TMA-11.1: Maintain wild horses at Appropriate Management Levels (AMLs)**  
12 **in designated Horse Management Areas (HMAs) throughout the Sage-grouse Management Area**  
13 **(SGMA)**

14 *Goal E-WHB 1: As authorized in the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971,*  
15 *maintain wild horses and burros at or below established AMLs in designated Herd Management*  
16 *Areas (HMAs) and Wild Horse and Burro Territories (WHBTs) within the SGMA to reduce*  
17 *impacts to Greater sage-grouse (GRSG) habitat. Avoid negative or potentially irreversible*  
18 *consequences that will occur within the SGMA due to non-active management (e.g. let nature*  
19 *take its course, wait until horse health or resource conditions are critical), by using all available*  
20 *tools and actively managing wild horses within HMAs and WHBTs.*

21  
22 *Goal E-WHB 2: Under current federal funding limitations and the inability to use additional*  
23 *management techniques, as well as the difficulties in significantly reducing the number of wild*  
24 *horses in long term facilities, strive to resolve the impending conflict between the Wild and Free*  
25 *Roaming Horse and Burro Act and the Endangered Species Act.*

26  
27 **Objective E-WHB 1: TMA-11.2: Evaluate conflicts with HMA designations in SGMAs and**  
28 **modify LUPs to avoid negative impacts on GRSG. If necessary, resolve conflicts between the**  
29 **Wild and Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act and the ESA.**

30 *Objective E-WHB-1: Meet established AML levels in all HMAs and WHBTs in Core, Priority,*  
31 *and General Management Areas.*

32  
33 **Objective E-WHB 2: TMA-11.2: Evaluate conflicts with HMA designations in SGMAs and**  
34 **modify LUPs to avoid negative impacts on GRSG. If necessary, resolve conflicts between the**  
35 **Wild and Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act and the ESA.**

36  
37 **Objective E-WHB 3: See Role of Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team.**

38 *Objective E-WHB 3: Prioritize gathers for removal and/or population growth suppression*  
39 *techniques in HMAs, HAs, and WHBTs first within the State’s Core Management Areas and then*  
40 *within the Priority and General Management Areas. Additional prioritization should be given for*  
41 *HMAs and WHBTs that are near AML or where a reduction would serve the most beneficial*

42 *purpose. Proactively and adaptively manage herd sizes taking into consideration climate*  
43 *variability and other natural phenomena, similar to the restrictions placed on livestock*  
44 *managers. Consider that if action is not taken until herd health has become an issue, the range*  
45 *and water resources are likely to be in a highly degraded and potentially irreversible state.*

46

47

48

49

50

51

52

53

54

55

56

57

58

59

60

61

62

63

64

65

66 **Management Actions:**  
67 **Wild Horses and Burros excerpts for the**  
68 **revised State of Nevada Alternative**  
69

70 **Alternative E – State of Nevada Alternative (Revised February 2014)**

71 **Color Code**

72 **Existing Language**

73 **Proposed Language**

74  
75  
76 **Action E-WHB 1: TMA-11: Manage wild horses at AMLs to avoid and minimize impacts on**  
77 **SGMAs.**

78 *Action E-WHB 1: Even if current AML is not being exceeded, yet habitat within the SGMA*  
79 *continues to become degraded, at least partially due to wild horses or burros, established AMLs*  
80 *within the HMA or WHBT should be reduced through the NEPA process and monitored annually*  
81 *to help determine future management decisions. Unless already meeting the lowest established*  
82 *AML level, during periods of drought, AMLs should be reduced to a level that is consistent with*  
83 *maintaining GRSG habitat objectives (see Table 2.6).*

84  
85 **Action E-WHB 2: TMA-11: Manage wild horses at AMLs to avoid and minimize impacts on**  
86 **SGMAs.**

87 *Action E-WHB 2: Ensure that Herd Management Area Plans (HMAP) and WHBT plans are*  
88 *developed and/or amended within the Core, Priority, and General management areas, identified*  
89 *in the State's management areas map, taking into consideration the GRSG habitat objectives*  
90 *(see Table 2.6).*

91  
92 **Action E-WHB 3: TMA-11: Manage wild horses at AMLs to avoid and minimize impacts on**  
93 **SGMAs.**

94 *Action E-WHB 3: Methods that were used to initially establish AMLs should be reevaluated to*  
95 *determine if they are still sufficient to achieve GRSG habitat objectives (see Table 2.6).*

96  
97 **Action E-WHB 4: See Role of Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team.**

98 *Action E-WHB 4: Use professionals (botanists, rangeland ecologists, wildlife biologists,*  
99 *hydrologists, etc.) from diverse backgrounds to conduct land health assessments, proper*  
100 *functioning condition, site specific wild horse and burro grazing response indices assessments,*  
101 *and habitat objective assessments.*

102  
103 **Action E-WHB 5: See Role of Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team.**

104 *Action E-WHB 5: When implementing management activities, water developments, or rangeland*  
105 *improvements for wild horses or burros, consider both direct and indirect effects on GRSG and*

106 use the applicable Site Specific Consultation Based Design Features (SSCBDF) (see Appendix  
107 A) to minimize potential impacts or disturbances.

108

109 **Proposed New Action Items**

110

111 *Action E-WHB 6: Given their capability to increase their numbers by 18%-25% annually,*  
112 *resulting in the doubling in population every 4-5 years (Wolfe et al. 1989; Garrott et al. 1991),*  
113 *wild horse gathers should be conducted to attain the lowest levels of AML. This in combination*  
114 *with continued and expanded use and development of effective forms of population growth*  
115 *suppression techniques will enable AML to be maintained for longer periods and reduce the*  
116 *frequency of gathers and associated cost and effort.*

117

118 *Action E-WHB 7: In order to expedite recovery time and enhance restoration efforts following*  
119 *wildfire, consider a significant reduction or temporary removal of all wild horses and burros*  
120 *within burned area where HMAs and WHBT overlap with GRSG Core, Priority, and General*  
121 *Management Areas. Wild horse grazing behaviors and specialized physiological requirements*  
122 *make unmanaged grazing on recently burned areas problematic for reestablishment of burned*  
123 *and/or seeded vegetation. (Arnold and Dudzinski 1978, Rittenhouse et al. 1982, Duncan et al.*  
124 *1990, Hanley 1982, Wagner 1983, Menard et al. 2002, Stoddart et al. 1975, Symanski 1994).*

125

126 *Action E-WHB 8: If current AML is being exceeded, consider emergency short-term measures to*  
127 *reduce or avoid degradation of GRSG habitat from HMAs or WHBT that are in excess of*  
128 *established AML levels within the SGMA.*

129

130 *Action E-WHB 9: If monitored sites are not meeting GRSG habitat objectives in Table 2.6, and it*  
131 *is determined that wild horses or burros are the primary causal factor, then implement*  
132 *protective measures as applicable in addressing similar emergencies (e.g. fire, flood, drought,*  
133 *etc.).*

134 ➤ *Consider exclusionary fencing of riparian or other mesic sites and implement water*  
135 *developments (following the SSCBDF as described in Appendix A) to ensure dispersal or*  
136 *avoidance of sites heavily impacted by wild horses (Feist 1971, Pellegrini 1971,*  
137 *Ganskopp and Vavra 1986, Naiman et al. 1992). A water source that meets the SSCBDF*  
138 *should be provided, as horses traditionally do not leave known water sources just*  
139 *because they are fenced.*

140 ➤ *Plan for and implement an immediate reduction in herd size to a level that would enable*  
141 *the area to recover to meet the habitat objectives in Table 2.6 and to preserve and*  
142 *maintain a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple-use relationship in that*  
143 *area. Consider lowering the AML levels to prevent future damage.*

144

145 *Action E-WHB 10: Implement a telemetry monitoring program for wild horses. Research*  
146 *regarding the direct interactions between wild horses and GRSG is identified as a need and*  
147 *could further assist the agencies in the development of habitat selection maps (Beever and*  
148 *Aldridge et al. 2011) as well as offer a general understanding of the intensity, timing, and*  
149 *duration of use by wild horses within the SGMA.*

150

151 *Action E-WHB 11: Work with professionals from other federal and state agencies, researchers at*  
152 *universities, and others to continue to develop, expand, and test more effective population*  
153 *growth suppression techniques, including contraception options.*

154

#### 155 **Climate Change-WHB**

156 *Action E-WHB-CC 1: See Role of Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team.*

157 *Action E-WHB-CC 1: As climate data becomes available, adjust wild horse and burro and*  
158 *rangeland management practices to allow for Core, Priority, and General Management Areas to*  
159 *sustain or increase their resiliency and resistance and maintain sufficient connectivity to provide*  
160 *genetic diversity among populations.*

161

162 *Action E-WHB-CC 2: See Role of Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team.*

163 *Action E-WHB-CC2: Collaborate with weather and climate professionals and agencies (UNR,*  
164 *DRI, NOAA, etc.) to proactively manage the rangelands resources and adjust, as necessary, the*  
165 *current wild horse and burro management policies. Ensure that sufficient ongoing public and*  
166 *political education is provided to minimize short sighted management decisions.*

167

168

#### 169 **Literature Cited:**

170

171 *Beever, E.A., and C.L. Aldridge, 2011. Influences of free-roaming equids on sagebrush*  
172 *ecosystems, with a focus on Greater Sage-Grouse. Pp. 273-290 in S.T. Knick and J.W.*  
173 *Connelly (editors). Greater Sage-Grouse: ecology and conservation of a landscape*  
174 *species and its habitats. Studies in Avian Biology (vol. 38), University of California*  
175 *Press, Berkeley, CA.*