

**Testimony from David E. Pulliam, Jr., Chief of Habitat for the Nevada Department of Wildlife  
Presented to: State Legislative Committee on Public Lands, 10-24-2007**

NDOW field biologists have reported multiple observations of wild horse degraded habitat conditions. A good example is found in western Humboldt County in the East Black Rock Range Herd Management Area (HMA). The vast majority of springs in this and adjacent HMAs have been used to the point of no living vegetation, compacted, erodible soils, and loss of water flow. Horses have been observed waiting for their footprints to refill with water to provide a drink.

Similar conditions have been observed in other parts of Nevada. The Nevada Wild Horse Range experienced over 70 dead horses due to lack of safe water in the summer of 2007. Nearly two hundred horses died the summer of 2007 from the Jackson HMA due to lack of nutritional forage.

Appropriate Management Levels (AMLs) have been established with very little information or data. BLM is only required to consider the best information "available" which is often insignificant compared to the decision at hand (i.e. What number of horses can **survive in a thriving ecological balance** with wildlife?)

Horses have been observed defending the few remaining springs from use by wildlife or other horses. Research indicates that wild horses will prevent wildlife species from access to water. NDOW feels the wildlife impacts of this territorial exclusion behavior have not been adequately considered in setting AML.

Nevada's pattern of drought and wet cycles have received poor consideration in establishing AMLs' that result in a thriving natural ecological balance as required in the Wild Horse & Burro Act (WHBA). This is clearly evidenced by the emergency gathers BLM conducts when drought occurs.

Often there is little substantial and meaningful consultation with NDOW in the establishment of AML and in other WH&B management actions as required by the WHBA.

NDOW biologists (most of whom are highly experienced in aerial survey techniques, as this is one of the major tools used in management of wildlife populations) have questioned the accuracy of BLM WH&B survey techniques and identified that "POPULATION ESTIMATES" developed by BLM are under-estimations of existing population numbers. This has recently been substantiated when an NDOW biologist accompanied a BLM WH&B staff in an aerial survey of a Wild Horse Management area that BLM had an estimated population of approximately 300 animals with an AML of around 200 to 250. The actual count on this survey was over 1100 horses. Biologists experienced with aerial surveys recognize that counts do not include 100% if the existing

population. It is commonly estimated that thorough, aerial surveys of big game animals conducted by experienced biologists only count seventy percent of the actual population.

BLM continues in several HMA's to establish AML at levels identified by their own studies as non-viable (e.g. under 50 breeding animals or 150 total herd size); in some cases as little as 15 to 25 total horses. In light of the limited funding available it seems irrational to spend moneys on non-viable herd areas. It is also felt that the management of reintroducing breeding horses from other areas is inconsistent with the wild and free roaming intent of the act as well as the mandate in the act that all management activities shall be at the **minimal feasible level** and shall be carried out in consultation with the wildlife agency of the State

Our wildlife resources in the state of Nevada result in approximately \$700 million dollars spent within the state; much of which contributes to the economies of rural Nevada. Considering the cumulative impacts to wildlife from other conditions like wildfire and development, the inability of the federal agencies to adequately manage wild horses and burros is exacerbating impacts to wildlife and rangeland habitats.

NDOW supports the Nevada Wild Horse Commission in its recommendation to initiate litigation against BLM to insure the proper and timely management of wild horses and burros in the state.