

Current Focus Issues Regarding the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Herd

About the Pryor Mountain Wild Horses

- The Pryor Mountain Wild Horses are descended from escaped Spanish horses brought over by the conquistadors about 500 years ago. DNA evidence links the horses to those bred in the Caribbean during the conquest of Mexico and South America. Some Crow Indians believe the Pryor Horses are descended from their large herds that at one time roamed the Pryors. The wild horses may also be descendants of the Lewis and Clark expedition horses that were stolen from expedition member, Sergeant Nathaniel Pryor, in 1806 in the Pryor Mountains. The herd is unique with strong Spanish characteristics and also a wide variety of coat colors.
- The herd is currently comprised of about 178 horses that are one year and older, and about 22 foals
- The BLM Animal Management Level (AML) is currently set at 95 (+/-10%) horses over 1 year old.

The Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range

- The Pryor Mountains are located on the Montana/Wyoming Border adjacent to the Bighorn River and Canyon about 100 miles south of Billings, Montana.
- The Pryor Mountain wild horses occupy about 40,000 acres of Bureau of Land Management, Custer National Forest, and Park Service lands within the designated range. The horses are managed by the BLM. The range includes high subalpine meadows, fir and pine forests, deep canyons, pinyon pine/juniper ecosystems and desert sage flats. The range boundaries were drawn with less regard to the actual use areas of the horses than to jurisdictional boundaries between the Forest Service and BLM & cattle grazing permits.
- Water sources are important in the often-arid lower elevations of the range. In addition to some natural springs and snow-fed waterholes, there are two water catchments designed to spread out the horses' use of the range.
- Some 40 horses live permanently in the Custer National Forest, adjacent to the horse range and many more horses move into the this area during the summer months to graze. These horses are called "trespassers". The Forest Service does not recognize the horses' rights to live in the Custer National Forest, which encompasses a portion of their historic range.

THE *Cloud*
FOUNDATION



Native or Exotic?

While many see the wild horse as a feral exotic species, recent studies show clear evidence that horses did in fact develop to completion in North America, migrated to Europe and Asia over the land bridge and then probably died out in North America some 8000 years ago. Noted geneticist Dr. Jay Kirkpatrick has said that there is more difference between the different horse breeds (i.e. quarter horse, thoroughbred, Belgian draft horse, etc.) than there is between the horse that died out in North America and the contemporary wild horse that returned with the Spanish Conquistadors. North America has changed very little in terms of climate and plant life since Pleistocene times. When horses were returned to North America with the Conquistadors, they became a reintroduced native species that easily re-inhabited the environment in which they evolved. (Wild Horses as Native North American: by Jay F. Kirkpatrick, Ph.d. and Patricia M. Fazio, Ph.d.)

Management Tools used by the Bureau of Land Management

- PZP- (*Porcine Zona Pellucida*) an immuno-contraceptive drug used on mares and administered through field darting or injected after round-ups
- Bait-trapping – capturing horses lured into corrals baited with hay or protein blocks
- Round-ups or Gathers- Helicopter used to bring horses down off the mountain, where the horses to be removed are auctioned off, preferably in an open-bid, live auction process. Horses that are older (>10 years) or who are not adopted here or at two subsequent adoption events are sold or sent to long-term holding at significant expense to taxpayers.

Wild Horse and Burro Act, passed by the United States Congress in 1971

This act was passed to protect America's wild horses where they were found at the passage of the act and holds the BLM to manage for sustainable wild horse herds, protecting them from harassment and harm. The Act calls for wild horses to be managed "where presently found."

Main Focus Issues for the Cloud Foundation

1. Range Expansion: The PMWH Range was created in 1968 prior to the passage of the WHB Act of 1971. The range was expanded in 1974 but excluded thousands of acres used by the Pryor horses at the time the act was passed. Current range boundaries for the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Herd leave out important historical grazing areas used for centuries by this herd. We would like to see the range formally expanded to the west to include part of the Custer National Forest as well as BLM's Demi John Flat.

- Range expansion would allow the BLM to revise the Animal Management Level (AML) to legally support a genetically viable herd of 200-300 horses.

2. Raise AML: We ask that the BLM drop its plans to take the herd to far below levels of genetic viability and recommend that the herd be managed at a minimum of 150 adult horses (two years and older). Once expansion is approved, then the herd would be allowed to grow to between 200 and 300 adult animals.

- Currently BLM has indicated they want to manage the herd at 92, an inadequate population to maintain genetic viability.
- The BLM has plans to remove 60 horses starting in August 2009, however there have been no Environmental Assessments or public comment periods allowed as of yet on this apparently, predetermined decision.
- The BLM has indicated plans to bring horses in from Utah to bolster the genetics of the herd when needed, or to set up satellite herds composed of rounded up or bait trapped Pryor horses. These horses would be managed outside their home in the Pryors.

3. Natural Management Strategy: We recommend that the BLM use fewer invasive management strategies and focus on a naturally balanced wild horse herd with a dynamic population of growth and decline. Number one in a natural management plan is to manage this large prey species with their natural predator: the mountain lion. We would like for the Montana Fish, Game and Wildlife and Wyoming Game and Fish agencies, to close mountain lion hunting in the Pryors. We are asking that no permits be issued for mountain lion hunting in the horse range and surrounding areas in the hope of promoting a predator-prey balance to again take hold in the Pryors and naturally manage population growth. A zero population growth average of the wild horses in the Pryors was attributed to mountain lion predation on foals in 2001-2004.

- Mountain lions are currently hunted in the Pryors and with no foal predation in 2007, the mountain lions do not constitute a viable predator population at this time.
- The Montgomery Pass wild horse range on the California/ Nevada border has not has a round-up for 27 years because mountain lions keep the horse population at zero population growth.
- If a predator-prey balance were again achieved, minimal round-ups would be necessary, freeing up money for range improvements.

4. Stop the Use of Infertility Drugs: We recommend that the BLM stop their failed PZP program that has promoted out-of-season births, abscessing, permanent lumps and bleeding on mares. The majority of young mares receiving the drug have never foaled or foaled out-of-season (September-December). The majority of older mares have foaled regardless of field darting, experiencing long term and short-term trauma. Ironically, the initial stated reason for the administration of PZP by BLM was *“purely from the standpoint of compassionate use”* and *“to prolong the life of the older mares”*. But it has not proven to be a humane management tool and BLM now complains of *“too many older horses”*.

Some facts:

- Nearly 50% of the young mares receiving the drug in the years 2001-2004 have never foaled. Of the 34 young mares to receive the drug between 2001-2004, 11 have died, 13 have foaled and 12 have not foaled.

- Of the 13 young mares that have foaled, five foals have been born out of season. One foal born in September 2005 never grew to full-size and was subsequently bait trapped and adopted out in September 2006. Another foal, born to a mare darted as a yearling and two-year-old in 2003 and 2004, was born in *December of 2006*. Two seven-year old mares given PZP as one and two-year-olds, foaled for the first time in September of 2007. (The majority of Pryor Mountain mares foal from May 15-June 15). Another 7-year-old mare foaled for the first time in November of 2008.
- Administration of PZP was stopped on younger mares in 2005 due to a natural decrease in population largely because of mountain lion predation, and the unexpected absence of foal production by the young mares.
- Of 21 older mares (11 years of age and older) given PZP beginning in 2003, 12 mares have foaled in spite of the field darting with PZP. Only nine mares have not foaled (drug worked as designed). One mare produced a foal at the age of 21 in 2007.
- Aside from the cruelty of raising a newborn foal going into a Montana winter, the drug has had other negative side effects in the form of abscesses, bleeding, and swelling on the hips of field darted mares. Of the 54 mares listed on the PMWHR Injection and Reaction Observations –updated June 2007 (BLM-03262), 41 mares are listed with swelling, nodules, bleeding or a combination of all these. 20 mares still have visible signs of nodules even years after they were injected.
- To our knowledge this is the only herd in the West to receive PZP via field darts (Assateague Island off the coast of Virginia uses field darts with few reported problems).
- The stated goal of the scientific community regarding an ideal wild horse fertility control agent was that it should be “*at least 90% effective*” (Wild Horse Contraceptive Research document, 1991 USGS website, posted 2-21-06). The PZP program in the Pryors has fallen far short of this goal.

Other Groups involved in the Pryor Mountains

- The Pryor Mountain Wild Mustang Center
- The Montana Wilderness Association
- The Crow Tribe
- The Pryors Coalition:
 - Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society
 - Our Montana, Inc.
 - The Frontier Heritage Alliance
 - Back Country Horsemen of Montana
 - The Cloud Foundation