

2012 Diamond Complex Assessment BLM administered: Battle Mountain, Ely, Elko districts

wild horse removal scheduled January 2013



Horse Canyon, Diamond HMA July 2012

Preliminary Report (Final Version) of Drought/Range assessment Diamond Herd Management Area, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) jurisdiction

Preliminary assessment covers the Diamond HMA from Corta as the northernmost point through Walters Canyon. Second visit to specified areas and assessment South into Blackpoint scheduled.

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Overview of the Herd Management Area:

Currently the BLM is planning a removal operation in the “Diamonds.”

The Diamonds comprise three areas: The Diamond HMA is approximately 40 miles long and averages 6-9 miles wide extending from the ridge down slope along the western face of the Diamond Mountain Range, comprising 164,737 acres. The Diamond Hills North HMA comprises the northernmost portion of the Complex and is approximately 12 miles long by 12 miles wide encompassing 69,305 acres of public land. The Diamond Hills South HMA is located in the most northeastern tip of the Diamond Mountain Range comprising the smallest portion of the Complex at 21,162 acres of public land. For a total of 255,204 acres.

The BLM estimates populations as follows: Diamond at 342 with AML of 151, Diamond Hills North as 202 with AML of 37, Diamond Hills South with 282 and AMML of 10-22.

The last removal operation was in 2004 and reportedly left the population at 255 horses with 86 mares being treated in July with PZP-22.

Nine legal grazing allotments overlap portions of the HMA. Five of those allotments showing populations considered off HMA.

Since 2000 grazing adjustments have been made to permits including reduced AUM's and restricted use in portions of the Herd Management Area to protect riparian areas.

Claims in the scoping letter, and within documents supporting livestock restriction, use by wild horses is listed as a causative factor.

The entire area assessed has no area that does not allow livestock grazing. The absence of such an area severely limits the ability to gain definitive illustration of a comparison to the specifics that would exist without domestic livestock impact.

Overview of Findings:

Drought conditions present within the areas assessed. Use patterns by wild horses may be effected reflective of current drought conditions.

Forage analysis as well as feces evaluations were performed and noted.

Heavy prior year utilization by livestock permittees was noted in all areas assessed. Of primary concern are areas under current utilization that show overuse from domestic livestock in prior years.

Of serious concern is the noted heavy current livestock use in Horse Canyon. The heavy utilization of the range has rendered the area into a severely degraded state that has developed over a minimum of three years. The current use of the area was done by assessment of the permittee and leads to the serious question of ability to self assess. Utilization by wild horses in that area was not current in any substantial amount. The horse sign showed winter and early spring use in a transitory pattern.

Of serious concern: the only water present at Horse Canyon is a water haul. No surface water is currently present in any significant amount. Any growth expected on the range will not occur. The number of cattle on that range speak very clearly to the lack of comprehension of proper utilization of a public resource.

Assessment of Davis Canyon showed that the same prior years over use by domestic livestock had occurred. At the time of the assessment domestic livestock had just be turned into the canyon. Of note was the immediate impact to riparian areas. The heavy number of cattle had already impacted the range significantly. Of note were the lounging areas directly located in within riparian systems; including consumption of new willow growth to previously damaged stems from prior years uses. Wild Horse use of the Davis canyon area also showed a transitory pattern of use and with no new sign present. This observation is indicative that the horses moved through

the area prior to cattle impact and was not present in any manner that demonstrated overuse such as the lack of significant trailing.

Corta showed signs of significant trailing but no new signs of wild horses except a single band. The spring had sufficient water to allow the band to survive the current drought if population movement stabilizes. The area also demonstrated significant sign of domestic livestock in the form of sheep. Several areas showed an extended period of occupation. Of note were the amount of alcohol containers among evidence of sheep. Significant number of relatively new shotgun shells noted near the water source, as well as sheep carcass.

Three mile Canyon also demonstrated significant impact of domestic livestock that extends beyond the current year. Riparian areas showed significant damage. Wild Horse use again demonstrated to be transitory.

Walters Canyon was the only area observed that showed significant wild horse sign. Significant trails were observed. Estimated the area is in use by 70-80 animals.

Of important note however is that in spite of the significant current use by wild horses the riparian areas demonstrated signs of regeneration from the prior years use. The riparian areas had species of birds in significant numbers as well as reptiles present. New growth was noted on willow and key grasses. Prior years use that appears to have impacted the riparian area significantly was domestic cattle use. Feces (domestic cattle) was present in large quantity and damage (prior years) reflective of current behavior noted at Davis canyon.

Areas near trailing show signs of significant grazing impact from wild horses. The use may be artificially created due to the heavy utilization noted in other areas from domestic livestock

Important notes on the Diamond HMA:

There are several observations of serious concern. The boundary lines of the Diamond cut across the mountain range to include only on the Western slope of the mountain down into a valley on the western side, the eastern slope being "off HMA." A significant portion of the inclusive area is bisected by drift fencing that has all of the gates closed this time of year. This limits movement of any wild population significantly to the eastern portion of the HMA. As overuse of the range (every canyon has a livestock permit) forces the horses over the top of the range (BLM land, not private) they are considered off HMA. Several large ranches exist on the Eastern slopes and into Newark Valley.

The rationale seems to encompass that the Diamond valley on the west is utilized by horses in the winter. Is this because of historic use or because that is when the fence is open? Does the turnout of Livestock (timing) create an artificial pattern of movement of wild horse populations creating a false "over-population?" Were the boundary lines inaccurately drawn and influenced by other factors than the intent of law?

During observation of the Three Mile allotment there was evidence of a possible unauthorized use of the range for domestic livestock (sheep).

How closely are permittees watched within the Diamond complex?
Have the restrictions put in place since 2000 been ignored?

It had been reported that 200 horses were over the ridge line (about 8500 ft) at Davis Canyon. Travel to the top of the peak and across the ridge showed no signs of horses congregating in any number. Minimal transitory sign was noted.

Recommendations:

A specific checklist must be created for permittees prior to the turnout of any domestic livestock. If a permittee over utilizes a range the year prior, and cannot self adjust use, the permittee must be formally restricted until the proper understanding exists in how to utilize a public resource. The permittee is using public land, not private. All uses must be accommodated, not just the permittee.

Trend patterns for movement of wild horse populations must be mapped. The schedule of livestock use must be noted in conjunction with movement of wild populations to adjust turnout schedule to reduce creation of artificial overuse.

The current “horse jumps” are inappropriate (and a farce) within the current line of drift fencing. In no way do they demonstrate an acceptable device to facilitate movement of intact bands of wild horses.

The extent of the fence line is not acceptable and portions must be removed.

Boundary lines must be evaluated for accuracy. Historic data on “off-HMA” use by wild horses and population counts must be utilized to create a trend map. The current movement may be caused by over utilization of public resource causing artificial movement out of the area, the boundaries should have included the Eastern slopes of the mountain range in the original marking or a combination of the two.

Post removal recommendation: an attempt must be made to determine what resources are required to appropriately manage the population as intended under the mandate. Animals must be permitted to utilize the range through a natural migratory route and have full resource to accomplish that movement. No area within the area assessed is restricted to horse use as a standard to measure horse use within the designated herd area. This must also be accomplished as the ability to actually determine any appropriate populations is not defined by the population’s viability within the area but instead defined by the use of private livestock. As wild horse populations are restricted entirely to occupancy within the boundaries

(and private livestock use is not) priority must be given to establishing an ability for natural utilization by wild horse populations.

Photographs:

Horse Canyon (at permittee water haul site)



Further into canyon



Horse Canyon, cattle in picture



Davis Canyon:



Davis Canyon, area pre this year grazing showing cattle damage (feces age) last year



Davis Canyon, cattle days of arrival eating new willow growth in riparian area



Davis Canyon, cattle arrive in 103 degree heat to riparian area



Corta



Corta



Band noted at water source, sufficient water present in proportion to current horse sign



Walters Canyon, other wildlife present including bird, reptile and mammal.



Significant horse population, in good health, observed and estimated by sign.
Walters





Walters. Prior years damage showing signs of regeneration regardless of current drought and horse populations.

“Horse Jumps” in drift fence. On high side represent over 3.5 ft high and about 3 ft. wide. Wire covering over rock has openings (if horses did make attempt) large enough to catch hooves and create significant injury risk.





“Horse Jump” in fence line.

Note: Assessments included observation of available forage, water and feces transects. Movement during current year may be impacted by drought. Areas of water hauling for domestic livestock show severe overuse of surrounding areas due to drought.

Full report will be completed after further assessment.