

## STATEMENT OF HEIDI HOPKINS

My name is Heidi Hopkins and the attached was written by me based on my observations of Jackson Mountains wild horse gather from June 13-16, 2012. I am a former BLM wild horse specialist and currently work for The Humane Society of the United States as the Program Manager for Wild Horses. This statement is true to the best of my ability on Wednesday June 20, 2012.

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Heidi Hopkins (with permission)

Statement of The Humane Society of the United States related to the Jackson Mountains emergency wild horse gather  
June 20, 2012

The BLM is conducting a declared emergency wild horse gather in the southern portion of the Jackson Mountains HMA in northern Nevada. This gather began on June 8, 2012. Water and forage in the southern portion of the HMA is extremely limited triggering an out of policy emergency gather during foaling season. Mares with foals or heavily pregnant mares being gathered in hot dry temperatures should be gathered using extreme caution.

The Humane Society of the United States had a representative on site June 13-16 and the following is a brief overview of what was observed.

The observation area was several hundred yards above the trap. A small hill impeded the public's view of the horses as they entered the mouth of the trap and once the horses were in the corral portion of the trap the public's view was obstructed by the visual barrier placed on the corral panels. Therefore most of what The HSUS could observe was the temperature during the gather operations and how far the helicopter was driving the horses to the trap. Forty-three horses were captured on Wednesday June 13<sup>th</sup>. All groups brought into trap were small to medium sized and with temperatures ranging from 72-85 degrees. At 12:40 pm, a group of seven horses (including two small foals) were aggressively pursued for about forty-five minutes. One of the foals was unable to keep pace and dropped back out of the group. The helicopter continued to pursue the group of six horses and drove them farther away from the foal. After the group of six horses, including the foal's mother, were miles away the helicopter pilot called to send out ropers. The contractor appeared to determine that roping was now necessary in order to reunite the mare and foal. After another half an hour the mare and foal were roped (the temperature was reported to be 85 degrees) and reunited at the temporary holding facility.

The HSUS is concerned that, although both animals were reported to be uninjured there appears to be several protocol or policy transgressions that should have been avoided.

First, the distance traveled by this group of horses, considering the temperature and the

presence of foals including 2 small foals was excessive.

Second, the amount of time this group of horses was aggressively pursued by the helicopter was unwarranted. It was clear to several observers that the behavior of this group of horses was going to prevent a successful capture and after several attempts toward the trap the pilot should have stood down. Certainly, once the foal became separated from its band, the helicopter should have made the decision to halt the gather.

The HSUS again strongly encourages BLM to implement the following management changes:

First, the BLM should proactively manage every herd so as to stabilize the herds through contraception before the herd reaches AML so that emergency gathers are unnecessary or at least significantly reduced.

Second, The BLM should set specific standards of care (i.e., limit the distance or time traveled during capture operations, set temperature limits for humane capture). These parameters for standards of care should be enforced at all times but especially during the extremely sensitive foaling period.

We understand that in July the BLM is preparing to release parameters included in the Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program.

After the incident that occurred on Wednesday, The HSUS expressed to the BLM our concerns and note that the BLM responded with some positive changes during the gather for the next three days. For example, several groups of horses were pursued and then let go when it was apparent that they would not come into the trap. No foals were separated from their bands during capture operations.

The BLM should immediately appoint an animal welfare liaison who can intercede in these emergency instances to balance the contractor's obligation to gather a set number of horses and the horse welfare on the range. In addition, if the contractor is paid "per head", The BLM and the contractor should provide a clause in the contract that provides for a "release in the best interests of the horses" clause so as to compensate the contractor for releasing horses when conditions warrant.

Last July, The Humane Society of the United States issued a detailed report recommending many improvements to BLM's Standard Operating Procedures at wild horse gathers, that report can be viewed at the following link:

[http://www.humanesociety.org/news/press\\_releases/2011/07/wild\\_horse\\_gathers\\_report\\_071311.html](http://www.humanesociety.org/news/press_releases/2011/07/wild_horse_gathers_report_071311.html)