



U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

The Bureau of Land Management

# Wild Horse and Burro Program Status

June 12, 2017



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## Presentation Overview

- Wild Horse and Burro Act (1971 as amended)
- Program Status
- Existing & Past Management
- Management Challenges
- Management Options





# Presentation Overview

## Take Away Messages

- Wild Horse and Burro Program Is **Not Sustainable** in Present State
- **On-range** Population Growing Uncontrolled
- **No fertility control methods** available that are affordable, easily applied and highly effective.
- **Off-range** holding too expensive
  - 50,000 animals in holding at cost of nearly \$50,000 million





# Wild Horse & Burro Act (1971 as amended)

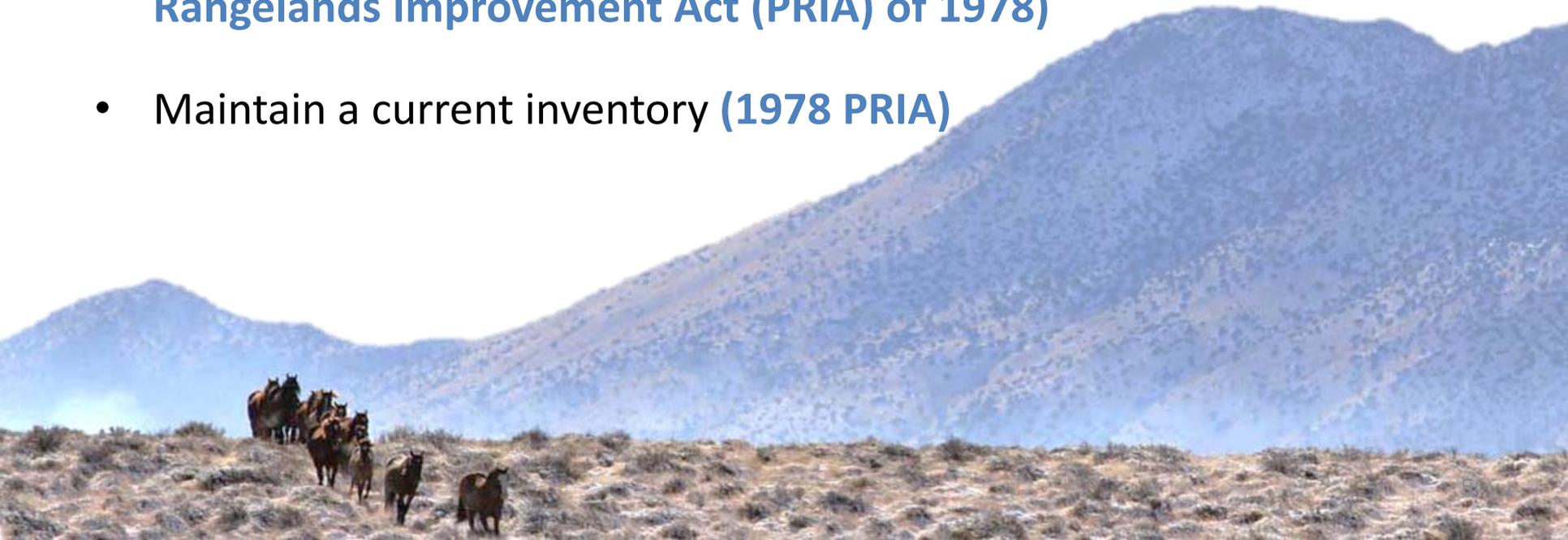
- Protect, Manage and Control
- Only applies to BLM & USFS
- Manage where found in 1971 (no relocation)
- Maintain a thriving natural ecological balance in combination with other multiple uses
- Appoint an Advisory Board
- Remove from private land when requested





# Wild Horse & Burro Act (1971 as amended)

- Authorization for the use of helicopters for capture and motor vehicles for transport (**Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA)**)
- Immediately remove excess animals and determine if AMLs are to be achieved by removal or destruction of excess animals or other means such as sterilization or natural controls (**The Public Rangelands Improvement Act (PRIA) of 1978**)
- Maintain a current inventory (**1978 PRIA**)





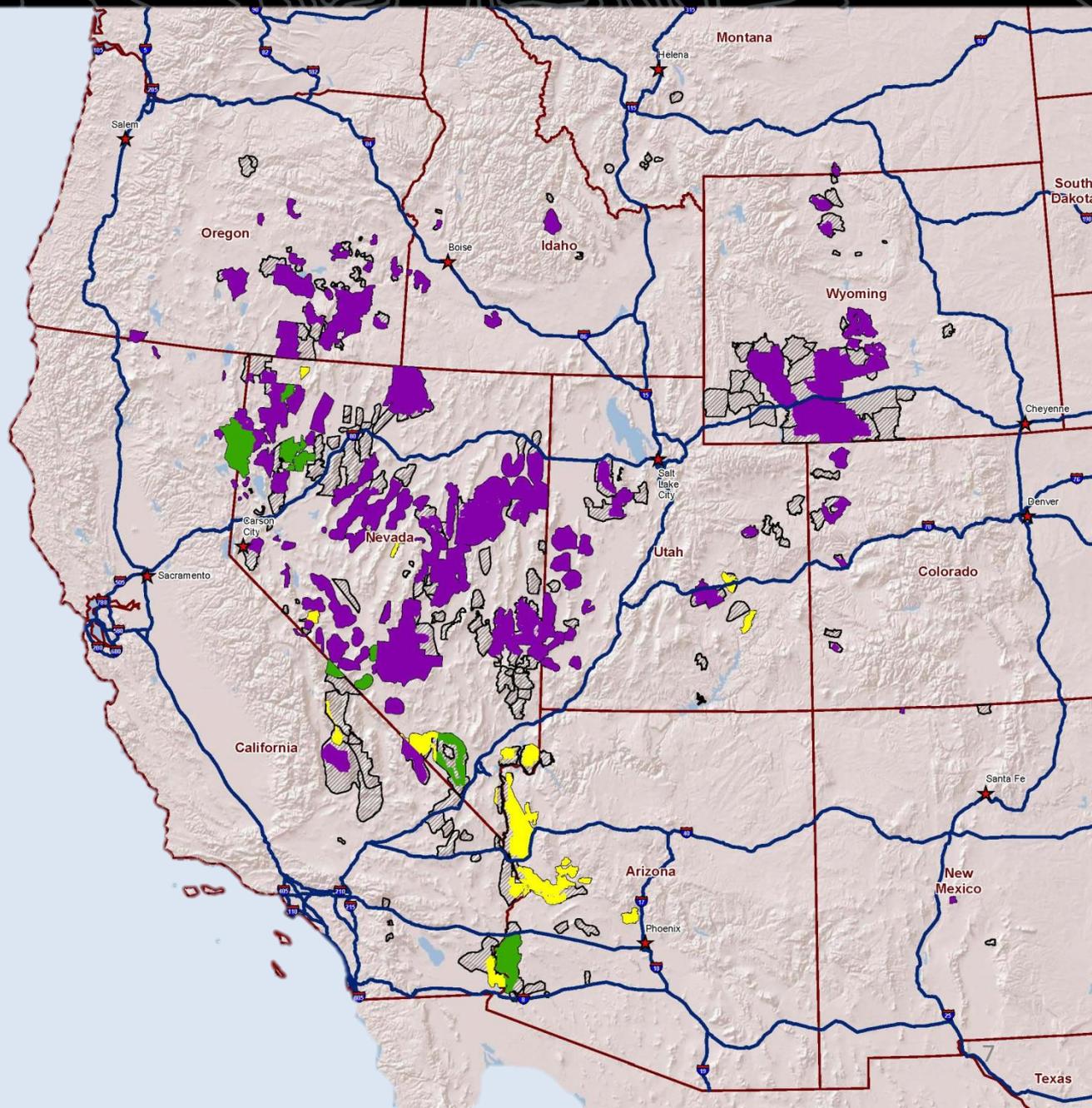
# Wild Horse & Burro Act (1971 as amended)

- Excess animals made available for adoption **(1978 PRIA)**
- Destroy those for which no adoption demand exists **(1978 PRIA)**
- Sale w/o limitation **(Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2005)**
  - Offered unsuccessfully for adoption 3 times
  - Animals older than 10 years
- **Since 2010, annual legislation has prohibited sale without limitation and destruction of healthy animals**





# BLM's Herd Areas (HAs) & Herd Management Areas (HMAs)



★	State Capitals
—	Road Classification
—	Freeway or Other Major Road
Herd Management Areas	
■	Both
■	Burro
■	Horse
▨	Herd Areas



## Wild Horses and Burros (WH&B) by the Numbers

- **10** western states have WHBs
- **177** Herd Management Areas (HMA's)
- **26.9** million acres of public rangelands
- **26,715** animals is the Appropriate Management Level (AML)
- **72,674** animals on the range (as of March 2016)
  - ½ in Nevada
- **46,574** animals in holding (February 2017)
  - 13,838 in 26 corrals (\$4.99 per day; **\$28.4 million** total in FY16)
  - 32,736 in 28 pastures (\$1.82 per day; **\$21 million** total in FY16)
- **3,116** adopted/sold in 2016 (\$2,367/animal adopted)
  - **Adoptions have declined from 7,800 in 2002**
- **3,038** removed from the range in 2016 (\$1,007/animal removed )





## 2001 Strategy to Achieve AML (2001 – 2012)

- BLM initiated a Congressionally supported Strategy to achieve Appropriate Management Levels (AML) in 2001
  - Aggressive removals (about 10,000/year)
  - Maximized adoptions (8,000/year)
  - Placement of unadopted animals in contracted pastures
- Base Assumptions were faulty
  - 48,000 on-range population in 2001
    - Many more were actually present on the range
  - Adoption demand of 8,000 could be maintained
    - Adoptions declined dramatically in subsequent years



# Current Management

- **Removals are currently being restricted** to 3,500 per year depending on how many animals leave the system via adoption, sales and mortality attrition.
  - Removing more animals than leave the system would render the program financially insolvent.
  - e.g. Caring for 1,000 unadopted animals in corrals = \$1.8 million/yr.
  - e.g. Caring for 10,000 unadopted animals in corrals = \$18 million/yr.
- **Increasing adoptions by offering more trained animals** through partnerships with prisons and NGOs
  - Currently about 3,000/year placed in private care good homes
- **Reducing holding costs by acquiring more pastures** (\$1.82 per animal per day) to decrease animal numbers in expensive corrals (\$4.99 per animal per day).
- **Research** initiated to develop more **effective fertility control methods** and management tools.



# Research

- Invested \$11 million in 21 research projects to develop better fertility control methods and new management tools
  - Longer acting contraceptive vaccines
  - Safe spay & neuter methods
  - Better tools: robust population models; burro survey methods, evaluate collars for GPS tracking, & sentinel herd demography studies.



# Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program (CAWP)

Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program being developed & implemented for:

1. On-Range
2. WHB Helicopter & Bait – Water Gathers
3. Corral and Pasture Holding Facilities
4. Adoption Events
5. Transportation

## CAWP Elements

- Standard Operating Procedures (care, handling, facilities & equipment).
- Training
- Audits





# Management Challenges

- Overpopulations: 84% of HMAs (March 2017) have populations that exceed target management numbers (AML)
- Current tools to control populations are removals and 1 year effective contraceptive vaccines that have to be reapplied to maintain infertility
- Effects of over populations
  - Deteriorated rangeland health and loss habitat for wildlife
  - Animal health affected
  - Animals moving out of HMAs
    - Onto private lands
    - Along highways into communities.

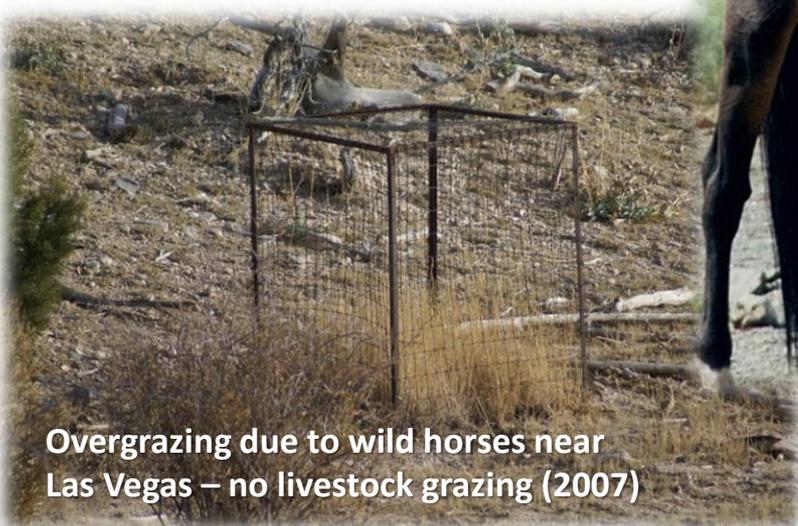




# What happens when there are too many horses and burros on the range?



Horse impacts on Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge – no livestock grazing.



Overgrazing due to wild horses near Las Vegas – no livestock grazing (2007)



Horse impacts on Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge – no livestock grazing.



# Management Challenges

- Increasing concerns from stakeholders
- Low adoptions and sales
  - Decreased from 7,800 (2002) to 3,100 (2016)
- High cost to maintain 46,000 unadopted animals.
  - About \$49 million/year; over 60% of budget
- Emergency conditions in some areas
  - Severe drought
  - Wildfire
  - Winter Mortality
- Litigation

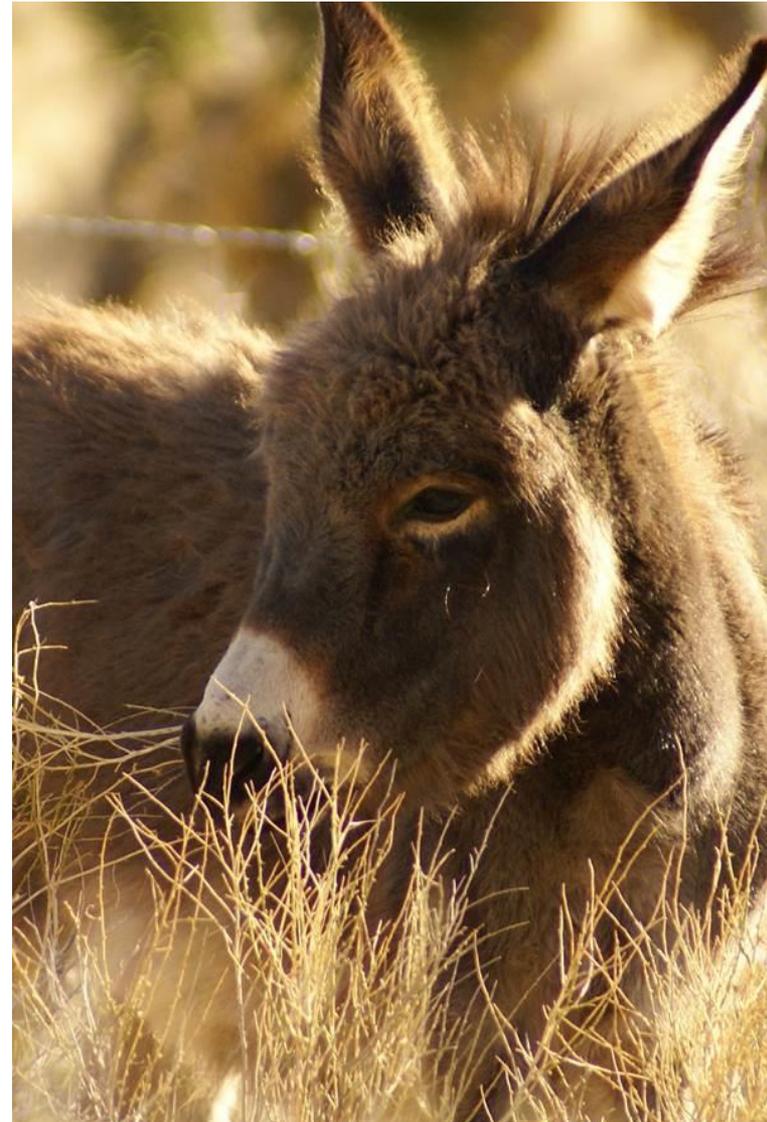




# Litigation (February 2016)

20 active cases

- 1 case – Objection to the use of prescribed fire in a herd management area
- 1 case – Challenges decision to create non-reproductive herd
- 4 cases – Objection to the use of fertility control vaccines to control population growth
- 5 cases – Failure to remove excess wild horses
- 9 cases – Objection to wild horse removals





## Management Challenges

Excessive off-range costs have hindered BLM's ability to effectively manage population growth. On-range population is nearly 3x the target population level, and it continues to rise

**25,000**

**WH&Bs lived on public lands in 1971**

**27,000**

**WH&Bs can live in balance with wildlife and livestock on healthy public lands**

**73,000**

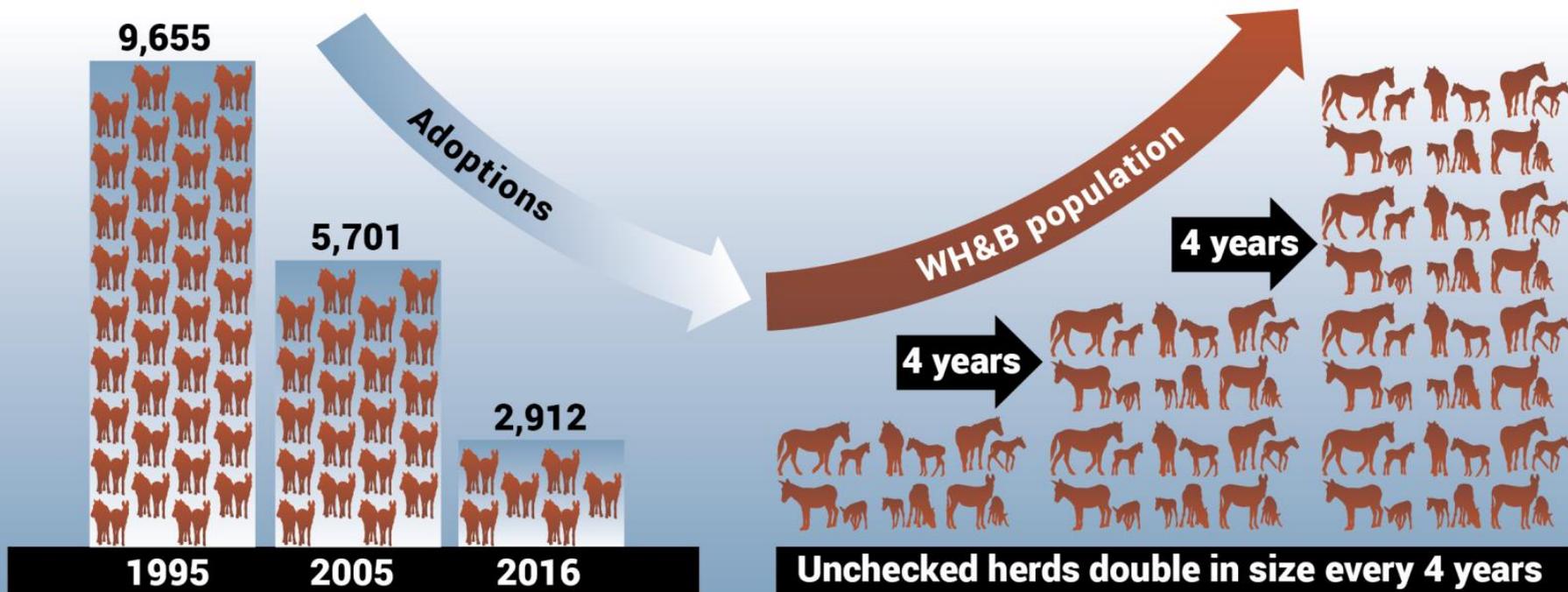
**WH&Bs live on public lands in 2017**



# Management Challenges

Since 2010, annual legislation has prohibited sale without limitation and destruction of healthy animals

Adoptions and sales are insufficient to keep up with on-range population growth.



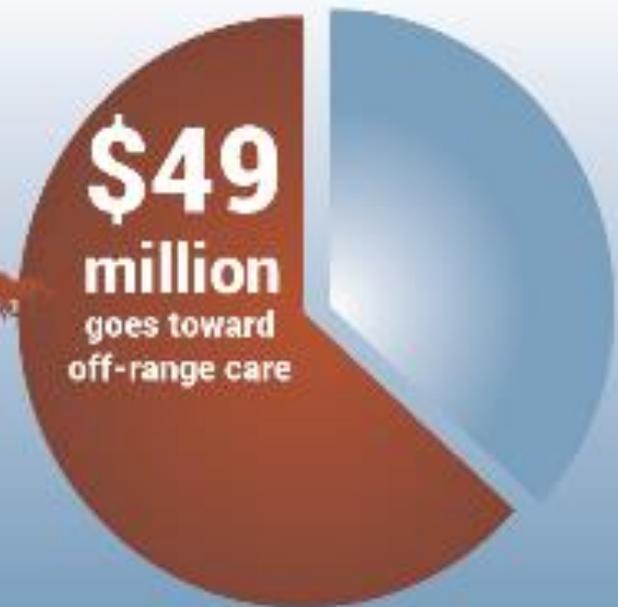


# Management Challenges

Without effective management tools, the BLM must care for unadopted and unsold animals at great cost to taxpayers.

WHB Budget = \$80 million

46,000

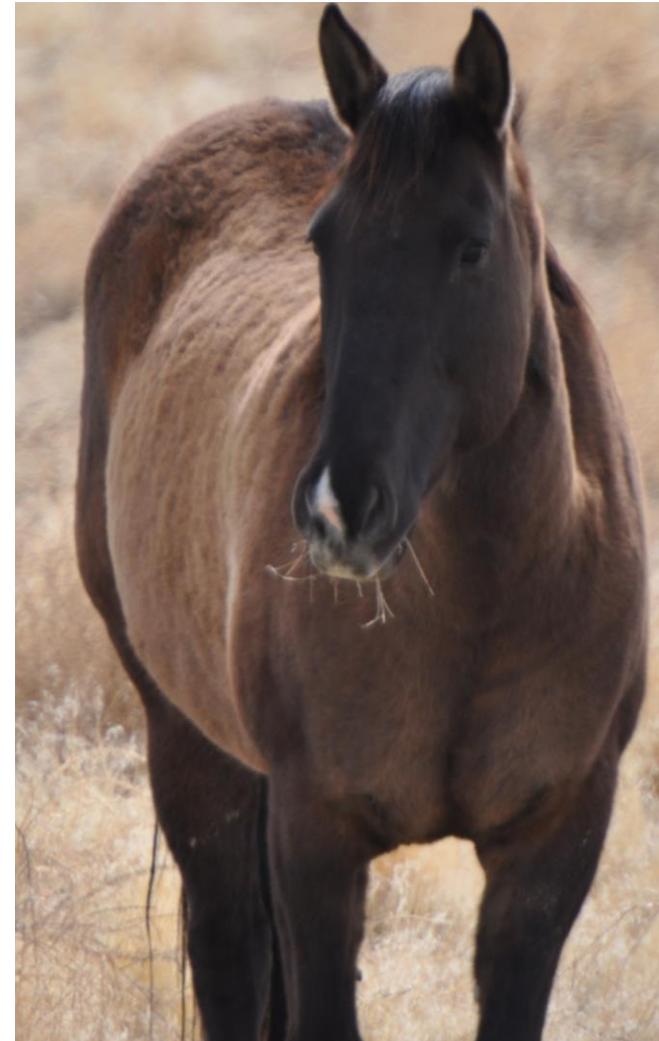


WH&Bs in off-range corrals and pastures



# Way Forward

- Existing Situation is not sustainable
- No ready solution currently exists
- The President's FY18 budget proposal includes a **request to remove the rider prohibiting unrestricted sale and euthanasia of excess animals** as provided for in the WH&B Act.
- The BLM will continue to look for creative and novel ways to:
  - Find new homes for excess animals, including forging effective partnerships for training animals
  - Development and application of fertility control methods
- Collaborate with Congress & stakeholders





End

Questions/  
Discussion

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