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 **Management of Bureau of Land Management Wild Horses and Burros**

The American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) and American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) have adopted policy on the Management of Bureau of Land Management Wild Horses and Burros, which reads as follows:

The wild free-roaming horses and burros on lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management in the Western United States are a unique population of animals protected by the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act (Public Law 92-195). This act and subsequent amendments provide for the necessary management, protection and control of these animals on public lands.

At present time, the number of wild horses and burros on the range is three times greater than the appropriate management level determined by the Bureau of Land Management. Historically, herd population numbers have increased at the rate of 15-20% per year. Overpopulation has created welfare risks such as starvation and dehydration due to scarce food and water supplies in some management areas. Current population control methods employed by the BLM, including the removal of excess horses from the range, adoption of gathered horses by private individuals, sex-ratio adjustments and contraceptive vaccines, have not been successful in achieving manageable population numbers.

The AAEP and AVMA believe multiple strategies are necessary for the wild horse and burro population to reach the desired level that optimizes the health of the animals on the range, while reducing welfare impacts caused by overpopulation in areas of limited resources.

The AAEP and AVMA endorse the humane management of the wild horse and burro population through a combination of the following strategies:

1. Ongoing development and use of long-lasting, effective contraceptives in herds where feasible.
2. Use of permanent sterilization methods such as spaying or castration in selected herds where repeated capture or darting with contraceptive vaccines is not feasible. The AAEP and AVMA encourage research into other methods of permanent sterilization to prevent pregnancy.
3. Continued removal of animals from areas where the range cannot support a growing population because of the danger of starvation or dehydration or where the population numbers threaten limited rangeland resources and wildlife.
4. Continued development of new adoption and sales strategies for animals removed from the range. Strategies may include collaboration with private enterprises within the horse industry as well as public sector and non-governmental organizations so that the animals may be utilized for recreation, companionship or placement in privately funded sanctuaries.
5. Unrestricted sale, which was incorporated into the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burro Act by amendment in the Omnibus Appropriations Act of 2005, should also be an available management strategy for horses in holding that are over the age of 10 years or have been offered for adoption unsuccessfully three times.

Additionally, the AAEP and AVMA support the BLM’s existing policy that allows for the humane euthanasia of wild horses and burros for reasons related to health and welfare, including animals that are seriously ill or injured with a poor prognosis for improvement; irreversibly lame; starved with a poor prognosis for recovery; or dangerous.

While safe and effective long-lasting contraceptive methods are under development, it will be years before they are fully tested and available. The AAEP and AVMA believe short-term and permanent sterilization methods combined with greater private-sale and adoption options will best serve the Bureau of Land Management’s mission to protect the health and welfare of wild horses and burros.

1. American Veterinary Medical Association. AVMA Guidelines on Euthanasia. Available at: <https://www.avma.org/KB/Policies/Documents/euthanasia.pdf>.

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