



2022 GRIC FERAL HORSE MANAGEMENT PLAN INFO SHEET

Background

Since the introduction of free roaming horses within the Gila River Indian Community beginning in 1694, they have become highly regarded and are a valued sight throughout the GRIC landscape. However, in recent years, the feral horse population within GRIC has increased to a level which is unsustainable for the Community's rangelands. Given the current population and distribution, these horses present a large threat to human health and safety as well as economic resources, ecosystem and environmental health. A reduction in the abundance of feral horses within the Gila River Indian Community is necessary to protect these valuable resources. The 2022 Feral Horse Management Plan outlines the actions needed to reach and maintain a healthy population level within the Community.



Photo: USC Libraries.

Known and Potential Impacts

Current population levels and distribution are contributing to three significant issues within the Community. These include:



Horse and Vehicle Collisions

One of the largest concerns facing the Community is the threat of health and safety from collisions involving feral horses. From 2014 – 2022 there were 106 Collisions involving horses within Community boundaries. Collisions were concentrated along rural, high speed, highly trafficked roads; including Nelson Road, Casa Blanca Road, Riggs, Beltline, and SR87. As populations continue to increase, the potential for collision increases as well. In addition to the loss of property, these collisions pose the risk of the loss of human life.

Agricultural Crop Depredation

Agricultural crop depredation, meaning the consumption or damage to agricultural crops, is another concern. These depredations occur disproportionately across the agricultural landscape, affecting some farmers far more significantly than others and is a substantial financial burden. To illustrate the point, two of the largest agriculturalists within the Community, Gila River Farms and Ramona Farms, have a combined estimated annual production loss >\$2,000,000 along with an estimated crop re-establishment cost > \$600,000.



Photo: Woodrow Crumbo.

Habitat Degradation

Most notably in Districts 5 and 6, is a clear indication of habitat degradation caused by the horses. Areas near water sources and travel routes between water and feed sources being the most affected. The impacts of high-use by the horses on the environment include:

- Reduced plant abundance, composition, and diversity;
- Increase in bare ground and erosion;
- Decreased air quality resulting from an increase in airborne particulates;
- Creation of incised water channels leading to decrease in water table;
- Decrease in wildlife habitat; and
- Decreased opportunity for income generation through livestock grazing.



Photo: Stan Cunningham.

Management Strategy

The strategy for feral horse control outlined in the 2022 Feral Horse Management Plan includes the:

- Containment and reduction of feral horse numbers in the core, larger population in District 6 to reduce the distribution and minimize impacts on human safety, Community resources and habitats;
- Removal of isolated populations of feral horses;
- Prevention of new populations of feral horses from establishing within the Community; and the
- Cooperation and coordination of activities between the Department of Environmental Quality, Department of Land Use Planning and Zoning, Gila River Police Department, Districts and the Office of General Counsel.



Monitoring and Evaluation

GRIC is committed to an evidence-based approach to the management of feral horses. Monitoring and evaluation are fundamental to that approach, helping to ensure that decisions are based on the best information available and that the effectiveness of management improves over time as knowledge increases. Monitoring provides the information necessary for evaluating how successful management has been, as well as identifying where changes in the management approach is needed. Monitoring and evaluation of the feral horse management program will be structured according to the safety, natural, and animal welfare outcomes, the indicators and measures of change, and the deliverables (outputs) of the 2022 Feral Horse Management Plan.

