



2022 GRIC FERAL HORSE MANAGEMENT PLAN FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Reasoning for Management

Why is horse management necessary?

While it is understood that horses have become a valued species within the Community; the current population size and distribution of feral horses within the Community are contributing to three very serious issues. These are: horse and vehicle collisions (106 collisions from 2014-2022), agricultural crop damage (>\$2m/year), and habitat degradation (rangelands alone cannot support the amount of horses in GRIC).

Is reducing the horse population necessary if farmers install fences around their fields?

Given the current population level within GRIC, fencing of agricultural fields would have a devastating effect on both the horses and the environment. The horses have become heavily dependent on the additional forage afforded by the crops and should that resource be taken away, it would result in large scale starvation and put additional strain on the currently stressed vegetation within the rangelands.

What was the reasoning behind the selection of the Herd Management Area and the stocking rate?

The GRIC Herd Management Area (HMA) was selected based on the current feral horse distribution, availability of resources (e.g., access to food and water), avoiding allotted land, fencing logistics, and the ability to reduce or eliminate threats to human health and safety, economic concerns, and habitat throughout the Community. The target stocking rate for the area is ~180 horses, this was calculated using the Rangeland Analysis Platform (<https://rangelands.app>), which utilizes remotely sensed imagery and data from 1986-2021. Refinement of the stocking rate utilizing traditional ground rangeland evaluation techniques is scheduled to occur in year two of the plan.

Population Control Methods

Why can't we just use the birth control method to control the horse population?

This technique has been used in other areas and is generally only practical in small confined populations where an immediate reduction of environmental impacts is not required (Hobbs & Hinds 2018). Restricting methods to exclusively contraceptive measures would not address the current overpopulation of horses and the related issues.

Is fertility control safe?

The fertility control vaccine *Porcine Zona Pellucida* (PZP) has been a successful form of contraception because (1) it has prevented pregnancy an average of 90% or greater of the time in treated animals, (2) it can be delivered remotely by small darts, (3) the contraceptive effects are reversible, (4) it is effective across many species, (5) there are no debilitating health side-effects even after long-term use, (6) it has almost no effects on social behaviors, (7) the vaccine cannot pass through the food chain, and (8) it is safe to give to pregnant animals (Kirkpatrick et al. 2009).

How are round-ups conducted and are they safe?

Round-ups are scheduled for the first two years of the plan to reach a sustainable population level. After reaching that target, GRIC will maintain those numbers through bait-trapping and fertility control methods. The Community will contract an experienced entity to utilize a helicopter to herd horses into a catch pen where they can then be evaluated and transferred. A recent review of capture data from 70 helicopter round-up and bait-trapping events suggested a mortality rate of 1/300 horses during these events due to non-chronic/pre-existing conditions.

Once contained, will the horses have sufficient food and water?

Properly managed, the proposed HMA has enough forage and water resources to sustainably maintain a population of ~180 horses. There is one perennial and multiple ephemeral surface water sources, two solar wells and one additional proposed solar well scheduled for development in year two of the plan.

Disposition of Removed Horses

What will happen to the horses that are rounded up?

To enable successful rehoming or sale, GRIC will build cooperative partnerships with groups or individuals that have an interest and appropriate skills in rehoming or sale of captured horses. Once a buyer or adopter has received the horse(s) they will have full ownership of the horse.

Will the rounded up horses be killed?

In rare and specific instances, horses may need to be euthanized in response to pre-existing conditions or injuries sustained during capture activities. The Community will not euthanize horses unnecessarily; however, the Community cannot regulate an individual adopter or buyers activities once they take ownership of the animal.

How can I adopt or buy a horse?

The Community will advertise adoption/sale events at least one month in advance of the event. Interested parties should refer to the information provided in the event advertisements.

Miscellaneous

I have been impacted by feral horses on my property, can I get compensated for those losses?

Since the Community has an “Open Range” policy, landowners are responsible for excluding livestock from their land and will not be compensated for losses incurred from feral horse damage.

How much will this cost and who will pay for the plan implementation?

The initial three years of the plan have a combined estimated cost of ~\$930,000. The three-year cost is equivalent to ~30% of the annual losses that just two agricultural entities have reported, in addition to the losses caused by horse and vehicle accidents and loss of forage for domestic livestock. Potential supplemental funding opportunities have the potential to reduce the Community’s cost of the plan implementation during the first three years by over \$600,000.

Aren't the horses protected under the Wild Free-roaming Horses and Burro Act?

The horses within GRIC are not covered under the Wild Free-roaming Horses and Burro Act (amended 2005). The Act defines wild free-roaming horses and burros as “all unbranded and unclaimed horses and burros on public lands of the United States.”

Will visitors to the hotels or the horseback riding facility still be able to see the wild horses?

The successful implementation of the plan would result in the remaining horse population being located within the HMA ~5.5 miles southeast of the Koli Equestrian Center., on the south side of Riggs/Beltline Road. Therefore, the wild horses would most likely not be visible from the hotel grounds or in the immediate vicinity of the Koli Equestrian Center.