

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)
REGARDING THE HEBER WILD HORSE TERRITORY PLAN/STRATEGY

1. Q: What is a wild horse?
A: "Wild horse" is a legal status provided to unmarked and unclaimed horses and their progeny that were considered wild and free roaming on public lands at the time of passage of the Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act (WHBA) of 1971 (see 36 CFR 222.60 (b)(13)). Wild horses are managed to achieve and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance in wild horse territories established under the Act. Any horse introduced onto the Forest on or after December 15, 1971 by accident, negligence or willful disregard of private ownership is NOT a wild horse. Such horses are defined as unauthorized livestock. (see 36 CFR 262.10) Unauthorized livestock do not have the status of a wild horse under the Act.

2. Q: What prompted establishing a Wild Horse Territory on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests?
A: After passage of the WHBA of 1971, a Wild Horse Territory was established near the town of Heber for a small band of wild horses. A 1974 census of horses in the HWHT found only seven horses. Over the next 20 years the herd size remained very small. The last census of the Territory in 1993 found only two mares and it is believed that the wild horse herd no longer exists. In 2002, the Rodeo-Chediski (R-C) Fire burned many fences in the area. It was after the fire that hundreds of stray horses were discovered on National Forest lands, adjacent to neighboring tribal lands, but not on the HWHT. There are many sources for these stray horses including tribal and private lands. A proposed round-up of stray livestock (horses) in adjacent areas after the R-C fire was litigated. Plaintiffs alleged that these horses were descended from the Heber Territory wild horse herd and were entitled to protection under the WHBA. That litigation was settled in 2007 with an agreement to complete a territory management plan/strategy for the HWHT. The environmental analysis and development of the plan/strategy is expected to be completed in 2016.

3. Q: When did the A-S realize there were more horses than usual?
A: A large number of stray horses appeared after the 2002 R-C Fire destroyed boundary fencing.

4. Q: Why was there a problem before the original proposed roundup?
A: There were unauthorized animals that had strayed onto A-S following the R-C fire. Unauthorized livestock is subject to impoundment under Federal and State laws. The number of stray horses posed a threat of resource damage to burned areas recovering from the fires and the stray horses have created conflicts with other landowners and users of the A-S.

5. Q: How did the White Mountain Apache Tribe become involved?
A: The Tribe gathered many of the stray horses following the R-C Fire. Due to the boundary fence continuing to be in disrepair, many horses have since strayed back onto the A-S.

6. Q: What were the effects following the 2002 Rodeo-Chediski Fire?
A: Several miles of boundary fence were burned during the R-C Fire in 2002. New growth in the burned areas provided an attractive food source for stray horses from neighboring lands.

7. Q: Why has it taken so long to attempt another Wild Horse Plan/Strategy?
A: The A-S has been working on revising the A-S Land Management Plan, Travel Management planning and recovering from the historic 2011 Wallow Fire that changed the landscape. These

planning processes took precedence over the Heber Wild Horse Territory Plan/Strategy. During the interim, horses continued to stray onto Forest Service lands and increase in numbers.

8. Q: What is the current status of the Plan/Strategy?

A: The A-S is currently gathering data and will continue gathering data throughout 2015 in support of the HWHT planning process.

9. Q: How long will it take for the A-S to complete a plan/strategy?

A: The USFS along with an Enterprise Team, comprised of other Forest Service employees, will help the A-S with the Heber Wild Horse Territory Plan/Strategy while following National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) guidelines. This process is expected to take 1-2 years to complete.

10. Q: Has the horse population increased since the 1993 survey?

A: Yes, surveys completed since 2005 indicate the number of horses on Forest Lands has increased.

11. Q: Has any field work occurred?

A: Yes, in 2014 one aerial survey was done in the spring and another survey was conducted February 2015 to get a revised estimate of the number of horses. Riparian surveys were completed this summer to assess if conditions have changed following the initial field work from 2007.

12. Q: What's the potential timeline moving forward?

A: The Heber Wild Horse Territory Plan/Strategy Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) should be completed by 2016.

13. Q: How does A-S coordinate with BLM on wild horse management?

A: The USFS cooperates with the State of Arizona on management of stray livestock, including impoundment of livestock, brand inspection, claims by owners, and disposition of unclaimed livestock. Wild horses are managed by BLM and the USFS under the WHBA. The A-S cooperates with BLM in adoption or long term storage of unadoptable and excess wild horses.

14. Q: I've been told that formerly domesticated horses would not be able to survive in the wild. Can you shed any light on that question?

A: We aren't analyzing survivability.

15. Q: What's the usual fate of unauthorized or stray livestock?

A: In the state of Arizona it is handled by the Arizona Dept. of Agriculture. If there is a brand showing ownership they return to the registered owner. If not, they refer to Arizona Revised Statute Title 3 Agriculture 3-1402 Holding and Sale of Stray Animals; repossession before and after sale, no liability of state.

<http://www.azleg.gov/FormatDocument.asp?inDoc=/ars/3/01402.htm&Title=3&DocType=ARS>

16. Q: Is there a relocation destination in mind?

A: This is not being considered at this stage of the project.

17. Q: Are there plans to increase the territory or the management area allowed for wild horses?

A: There are no plans to expand the existing territory.

18. Q: Could you describe, in detail, how the Heber Wild Horses occupying the territory and adjacent lands are causing negative impacts to the land/vegetation and the other users' of the surrounding lands?

A: The A-S Heber Wild Horse Territory Interdisciplinary Team recently conducted field studies of the conditions of the landscape within the territory. When the findings have been analyzed of any changes in conditions and what impacts may have occurred since 2001 after the Rodeo-Chediski the findings will be shared within the A-S Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

19. Q: If the horses' negative impacts could be mitigated, would USFS be willing to work toward a solution, allowing the horses to stay on the territory, if that is the wishes of the majority of the community? Can the Heber Wild Horse Territory support the horse population at its current size on a long term basis? If not, why?

A: After the A-S finishes the analysis process there will be recommendations made for the Draft EIS. Public involvement and input will be sought after and those comments will be reviewed and considered for the Final EIS.

20. Q: What's your response to the horse advocates who say there's still plenty of land for the horses to roam? We interpret this question to be "Why can't the horses roam free across the forests?"

A: There is an established territory of 20,000 acres. Currently, the horses are freely roaming across Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests. The US Forest Service considers them to be unauthorized or feral livestock. Unauthorized or feral livestock are domesticated horses that were either turned loose or escaped their owners and are now wandering the forests.

The final decision as to whether the horses are wild or not, has not yet been determined. We are working towards fulfilling the management plan that was mandated by the settlement of 2007. The development of the management plan determines the appropriate management level of horses that the territory can support on a year-round basis if they were to be deemed "wild horses."

21. Q: Generally speaking, why is it so important to manage animal populations?

A: The Forest Service is responsible for managing the public land resources they administer. These resources are managed under a multiple use – sustained yield premise so future generations will be able to enjoy and utilize the natural resources we enjoy today. Unmanaged animals can increase in numbers to a point where they exceed the ability of the land to support them. The forage that they sustain themselves on would begin to decline due to the continuous use impacting water, riparian systems, and wildlife habitat.

22. Q: If the horses were to be rounded up, how much would it cost?

A: The Forest is in the early stages of preparing a proposed action for the Heber Wild Horse Territory Management Plan. The cost of a gather or round up has not been considered at this time so it is hard to say how much it would cost.

23. Q: How is the Forest Service so certain the horses roaming the land now are just abandoned or stray? Is there proof, besides the numbers that show the current horses infiltrated the forest following the Rodeo-Chediski Fire? The Forest has census monitoring from 1974.

A: The last year any horses were reported to be present in the Heber Wild Horse Territory was 1992. From 1992 through 2000, no horses were seen in the territory. In 2004 through 2006, horses were being reported again and surveys completed since 2005 indicate the number of horses are increasing. The Rodeo-Chediski Fire occurred in 2002 and several miles of fence were

destroyed. The White Mountain Apache Tribe gathered many of the stray horses following the fire but many have strayed back onto the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests.

24. Q: The numbers show that in 1993, there were only 2 mares found on the Wild Horse Territory. I'm curious what the Forest Service thinks happened to those two horses. Did they just die off? And if that's the case, is there any proof of that?

A: No reporting had been reported in the territory between 1992 and 2000, their fate is unknown.

25. Q: I'm told the Forest Service is conducting an environmental study impact on how the horses affect the land. What are the findings?

A: The environmental analysis has only just recently begun and we won't know what the findings are until that analysis is completed.

26. Q: What's the latest on the public comment period?

A: The Forest is hoping to have a draft proposed action out to the public this spring.

27. Q: When would a final decision be made on what to do with these horses?

A: The anticipated decision date for this project is in the fall of 2016.

28. Q: What's your response to the horse advocates who say there's still plenty of land for the horses to roam?

A: We interpret this question to be "Why can't the horses roam free across the forests?"

There is a lot of land for them to roam on, in that the territory is 20,000 acres and there would still be the approximately 1 million acres of Forests. The horses cannot be allowed to roam free because the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests does not believe the horses that are on the forests to be "wild". We considered them to be unauthorized or feral livestock. Unauthorized or feral livestock are domesticated horses that were either turned loose or escaped their owners and are now wandering the forests. A final decision on whether the horses within the HWHT are wild has not been determined. We are working towards fulfilling the management plan that was mandated by the settlement of 2007. The development of the management plan determines the appropriate management level of horses that the territory can support on a year-round basis if they were to be deemed "wild horses."

29. Q: If the final plan calls for the rounding up of horses, how will the USFS make sure the animals are not, indeed, descendants of the original Heber herd?

A: A process for determining whether a horse is wild or feral unauthorized has not been completed yet, it is part of the proposed action that is still being developed.

30. Q: Where would the horses go if they are rounded up?

A: This will be addressed in the management plan that is being developed and will depend on how the horses are classified. If they are feral unauthorized they would fall under the purview of the Arizona Department of Agriculture and would either be returned to their owner or put up for sale. If they are classified as wild, they could be adopted out or placed in long-term holding facilities, or they could be managed over the long-term with contraceptives to bring the horse numbers in line with the appropriate management level identified for the territory.

31. Q: Generally speaking, why is it so important to manage animal populations?

A: The Forest Service is responsible for managing the public land resources they administer. These resources are managed under a multiple use – sustained yield premise so future generations will be able to enjoy and utilize the natural resources we enjoy today. Unmanaged animals can increase in numbers to a point where they exceed the ability of the land to support them. The forage that they sustain themselves on would begin to decline due to the continuous use impacting water, riparian systems, and wildlife habitat.

32. When are the studies expected to be released and will a public comment period begin at that time?

A: The Forest is working to have a proposed action developed and available to the public for their review and comments this summer. The public comment period for the proposed action will begin when the Forest makes the proposed action available to the public.

33. Q: If the Forest Service deems it necessary to remove the horses from Public Lands – will it be possible for those horses that are unclaimed to be sent to a sanctuary if the costs are paid? There is concern that the horses will be sold and sent to slaughter.

A: There are adoption provisions for qualified applicants under the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971. There are also provisions under the Arizona Livestock Sanitary Board (which is now the Arizona Department of Agriculture) in cooperation with the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service, that would allow the Arizona Department of Agriculture to direct the disposal of stray animals impounded on public land.