

US plans 50% more wild horse roundups amid Western drought

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

RENO, Nev. – U.S. land managers have begun efforts to capture about 50% more wild horses than originally planned this year because of severe drought across the U.S. West – about 6,000 additional animals primarily in Nevada, Oregon and Colorado.

The Bureau of Land Management said the emergency roundups that began Sunday in Oregon and Monday in Nevada concentrate on places where “chronic overpopulation” of the herds “already has stretched the available food and water to its limits.”

“As one of the agencies charged with the responsibility to protect and manage America’s wild horses and burros, the BLM is prepared to take emergency action where we can in order to save the lives of these cherished animals,” said Nada Wolff Culver, the bureau’s deputy director for policy and programs.

The agency is committed to “continuing our efforts to reduce overpopulation across the West and achieve healthy, sustainable herd sizes that are more capable of withstanding severe conditions, including prolonged drought, which are becoming more frequent due to climate change,” she said in announcing the effort Monday.



A livestock helicopter pilot rounds up wild horses in Washoe County, Nev., in 2008. Federal land managers say they’re beginning to capture about 50% more horses than they originally planned this year across public U.S. rangeland in the West because of severe drought. BRAD HORN/AP FILE

Horse advocates say the emergency roundups that will continue into September are being driven by pressure from ranchers who don’t want the mustangs competing with their livestock for limited forage and water.

One advocate said she’s especially disappointed the Biden administration is continuing the policies of former President Donald Trump

and previous administrations that prioritized removal of horses that are federally protected without reining in the number of cattle and sheep grazing on the same land.

“Profit-driven interests ravage the landscape, and we blame the horse,” said Laura Leigh, president of the nonprofit group Wild Horse Education.

“Absolutely nothing has changed under the Biden administration except we are being spoon-fed a dose of greenwash that they ‘care’ about the environment and wild things,” she said.

The National Cattlemen’s Beef Association said ranchers already have made voluntary changes to reduce and rotate grazing on federal lands during a drought “more pervasive and dramatic than we have seen in years,” said Kaitlynn Glover, the association’s executive director of resources.

“These removals are critical for the horses as well as the health of the rangelands,” she said in an email to The Associated Press. “Even in times where resources are plentiful, these overpopulated herds cause serious dam-

age to the landscape.”

The bureau already has gathered 1,200 animals this year and originally intended to round up about 12,000. The new effort would push the total to about 18,000 across 10 Western states from Montana to California.

The bureau says the estimated 86,000 free-roaming mustangs and burros on federal lands is three times what the ecosystem can sustain, something that animal advocates dispute.

About 1,400 that are rounded up would be returned to the range after they receive contraceptive drugs. But the total rounded up would be more than double the 9,181 gathered last year.

The previous peak over the past decade was 9,749 in 2018. Fewer than 4,100 were gathered annually from 2013 through 2017.

Culver noted that the land agency announced last week that it was taking additional steps to ensure that captured horses made available for public adoption do not end up in the hands of secondhand buyers who ship them to slaughterhouses.