

Fertility control as a tool within U.S. Forest Service sustainable wild horse program management: An example from New Mexico

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Under the authority of the Wild Free-roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971, as amended, the U.S. Forest Service manages approximately 7100 wild horses (*Equus caballus*) and 900 wild burros (*Equus asinus*) on 34 active wild horse and/or burro territories across approximately 1.2 million acres. Since 2009, the Carson National Forest (NF) in northern New Mexico has been working toward sustainable on-range management through partnerships and use of fertility control to slow wild horse population growth and maintain healthy herds and rangelands. The Carson NF formalized their wild horse fertility control program in 2014 with the current established protocol, remote delivery instruments, equipment, training, and record-keeping on their two wild horse territories (WHT), the Jicarilla WHT and the Jarita Mesa WHT. Wild horses are treated with the fertility control vaccine Porcine Zona Pellucida (PZP or ZonaStat-H, registered by the Humane Society of the United States under the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency). As of winter 2017, the initial primer dose had been administered to almost half the mares on both the Jicarilla WHT via remote delivery/field darting and on the Jarita Mesa WHT via bait trap, treat, and release. The combination of gathers and removals, adoptions and sales, and partnerships for gentling training and on-range fertility control are tools the Carson NF is using within the context of an overall program to sustainably manage wild horse populations. We are continuing to monitor the effectiveness of this strategy on total population growth. This session reviews the experience of the Carson NF, including costs, personnel time, and results, to help government agency leadership make informed decisions about which herds could be good candidates for fertility control, and the resources necessary to be successful.