



Some of the 205 excess wild horses gathered at the Garfield Flat HMA (Churchill County) in October 2009. Stillwater Field Office

## BLM-Carson City District *District Program Highlights*

March 18, 2010

The BLM-Carson City District is responsible for the stewardship of approximately 5.3 million acres of Federal public lands and is divided into the **Sierra Front Field Office** on the west (public lands in Carson City, Douglas, Lyon, Storey, and Washoe counties in Nevada and portions of Alpine, Lassen and Plumas counties in eastern California) and the **Stillwater Field Office** on the east (public lands in Churchill, Mineral and a portion of Nye Counties).

Few BLM Districts face the kind of complex ownership pattern of private, other Federal, Native American, state and local agency lands found here. Population pressure along the Sierra Front's urban/wildland interface causes the **Sierra Front Field Office** to focus on lands and realty, open space and urban sprawl, fire suppression, recreation, law enforcement and cooperative relationships with local governments and interest groups. The **Stillwater Field Office** to the east is a hotbed for geothermal energy development, range management, wild horse and burro herd management areas, mining, wilderness and wildlife habitat, as well as our daily coordination with NAS Fallon.



### **Federal Stimulus Projects**

Nationwide, the BLM has been allocated \$320 million in the following project categories: Abandoned Wells, Construction, Deferred Maintenance, Habitat Restoration, Hazardous Fuels Reduction, Renewable Energy Authorizations, Roads and Bridges, and Trails. The nine ARRA projects assigned to the BLM-Carson City District Office include:

#### **Sierra Front Field Office ARRA Projects:**

**1. United Merger Mill at American Flat-Abandoned Mine Lands** (Storey County) – BLM will complete a NEPA analysis and prepare a Memorandum of Agreement with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office to allow for future abatement of significant public safety hazards associated with the mill site located within the Comstock National Historic District. The environmental assessment (EA) will evaluate alternative plans for demolition, site reclamation, monitoring, and cultural resource preservation. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) has completed their assessment of the site, identifying physical safety hazards and alternatives for reclamation – their report is due by the end of March 2010. The NEPA analysis will depend on information generated by the COE. The EA will be by the end of September 2010.

**2. Carson Woodland Health Project** (Douglas & Lyon Counties)–this project is 95 percent completed and has involved the contracted removal of thousands of small encroaching pinyon and



**2. Carson Woodland Health Project** (Douglas & Lyon Counties)—this contracted project is 95 percent completed with the removal of thousands of small encroaching pinyon and juniper trees within sagebrush habitat at Sunrise Pass and Big Meadows in the Pine Nut Mountains of Lyon and Douglas Counties. This has resulted in greatly improved conditions for sage grouse and other wildlife species.

**3. Indian Creek Recreation Area Road Reconstruction** (Alpine County, CA) - This project will pave the road through the campground at the Indian Creek Recreation Area, which is located approximately 45 miles southwest of Carson City. The project will employ contract workers and should start in May 2010.

**4. Curtz Lake Interpretive Trail** (Alpine County, CA) - This environmental/interpretive trail and trailhead project will include the reclamation of old interpretive trail segments and construction of the new interpretive trail and kiosks; reclamation of the two parking areas and the creation of one parking area and trailhead; and construction of a new road realignment and the upgrading of the existing access road. A contract for engineering, road work and an Interpretive Plan will be awarded by June 2010, construction of the access road, parking area, trail and kiosk completed via a contract(s) to be awarded by September 2010.

**Stillwater Field Office ARRA Projects:**

**1. Desatoya Restoration** (Churchill County) - A contracted cultural resource inventory is underway on 625 acres in the Desatoya Sage Grouse Population Management Unit of Churchill County, Nevada, as part of an environmental analysis and tribal consultation necessary for vegetation treatments to reduce fire hazard fuels and restore ecological balance between woodland and sagebrush habitat.

**2. Cold Springs Pony Express/Telegraph Station** (Churchill County) – A contract has been awarded to Morgan Pavement of Utah to construct a paved access apron and parking lot adjacent to the Cold Springs interpretive site. The site is located on the north side of U.S. Highway 50, approximately 132 miles east of Carson City.



Future site of access apron and parking lot on the north side of U.S. Highway 50 in Churchill County.

Weather constraints have delayed the construction start date to starting May 10.

**3. Sand Mountain Recreation Area Road Reconstruction** (Churchill County) - This project will apply 1.5 miles of a new road base and asphalt surface from the edge of U.S. Highway 50 to the fee pad at Sand Mountain Recreation Area. The road improvements will address safety requirements and provide safer access to the recreation area. Sand Mountain Road also provides access to the Sand Springs Pony Express Station. The project will employ contract workers; Federal Highways Administration shows a tentative schedule of contract advertizing in March, award in April, and begins construction in May or early June.



### **District-wide ARRA Projects:**



Collapsing exclosure fence near Dry Valley Spring (Washoe County) that is to be replaced.

**1. Carson City Nevada District Riparian Exclosures** (District-wide Project) - Twenty-one riparian fence maintenance and fencing projects scheduled for FY2010 have now been completed.

The total project will involve maintenance and fencing work on 63 riparian and wildlife exclosures located on grazing allotments throughout the Carson City District over the next few years.

**2. Wildlife Sighting Capture** (District-wide Project)— this project involved entering numerous historic paper records on wildlife and habitat into a searchable format as part of State of Nevada's Natural Heritage database. This geographic information systems-based database will help focus ground reviews used in planning project locations and will also be used to proactively plan wildlife habitat restoration and enhancement into project proposals. This project was completed in December 2009.

### **Renewable Energy** **Stillwater Field Office:**

BLM has contracted with Environmental Management & Planning Solutions, Inc. (EMPSi) to develop the Salt Wells Energy Projects EIS, which includes two geothermal energy development projects and a proposed twenty-two mile long right-of way for transmission lines. Ormat Technologies, Inc. and Vulcan Power Company are the proponents of the geothermal plants and Sierra Pacific Power Company (NV Energy) is the applicant for the ROW. The Salt Wells area is about 15 miles east of Fallon in Churchill County, Nevada. BLM and the proponents presented the proposed projects on October 21 in Fallon to the Churchill County Commissioners and at a public open house that followed. A draft EIS is projected to be available to the public by August 2010.



Members of the BLM's EIS Interdisciplinary Team, various agency representatives, and the EIS contractor discuss scoping issues on a field tour in November 2009. The ENEL binary geothermal power plant at Salt Wells, which was dedicated in April 2009, is in the background.

### **Sierra Front Field Office:**

**Blackhawk to Heybourne Transmission Line EIS:** NV Energy has proposed construction, operation and maintenance of a new 120 kV overhead transmission line and two substations in Storey, Lyon, Carson City and Douglas counties Nevada. The proposed



project is needed to meet project electrical needs in the Carson City area. An Environmental Impact Statement is currently underway. The proposed in-service date is June 2012.

**New Comstock Wind Energy Project:** The proposed New Comstock Wind Energy Project by Great Basin Wind, LLC, is the first wind energy project within the Sierra Front Field Office that is proposing to move into the development phase. As proposed, the project would generate a maximum of 200 MW of electricity by using 71 wind turbines, with 210 ft. to 330 foot tall towers supporting a nacelle and three blades up to 170 feet in length. The New Comstock Wind Energy Project would be located in the Virginia Mountain Range within Storey and Washoe Counties, with some features located in Carson City. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is being prepared by the BLM (at the proponent's expense). BLM is preparing to award a contract for the development of the EIS and estimates the EIS will be completed in early 2011.

**Pah Rah Wind Project:** Ridgeline Energy is currently identifying up to 66 wind turbines sites within their proposed project in the Pah Rah Mountain Range. This proposal would include an eight mile, 120 kV overhead transmission line to the Tracy Power Plant adjacent to I-80. NEPA analysis has not yet begun.

**Virginia Peak Wind Project:** Virginia Peak Wind Company (VPWC) is developing a wind energy project that would generate up to 85 MW of electricity. The Virginia Peak Wind Project is located on private land and the only BLM involvement is a proposed road segment (7/10 mile) that will add a switchback to an existing road located on BLM land. VPWC has submitted a ROW application to the BLM for the proposal to build the road segment. BLM will analyze potential impacts in an Environmental Assessment prior to the decision on granting the requested ROW; this process has not yet been initiated.

## **Fire Management**

In 2009, BLM reassigned our staff from the NDF heavy airtanker reload base at the Minden Airport so as to fully staff the BLM Stead Airtanker Base in Washoe County rather than hosting two bases barely at or below minimum staffing levels. By consolidating all of our heavy air tanker support at Stead, and supplementing this base with highly mobile single engine air tankers (SEATs) across western Nevada, BLM firefighting efforts will continue to be effectively supported in a way that makes best use of scarce resources.

2009 was a relatively mild fire season across the western Great Basin with little lightning activity and only a few large human-caused fires. Total acreage burned was 33,363 acres, a **96-percent drop below the five year average** of 669,276 acres. However, the U.S. Drought Monitor still shows the majority of the western Great Basin to be in an abnormally dry to severe drought, so 2010 could see a significant fire danger in our area.

## **Fuels Management Projects**

In 2010, the Carson City District's fuels management program will conduct seven wildland urban interface projects on 580 acres in Carson City and Douglas County (Nevada) and Alpine County (California), and one non wildland urban interface project on 935 acres in Lyon County. Treatment methods will be a combination of mechanical and prescribed fire.

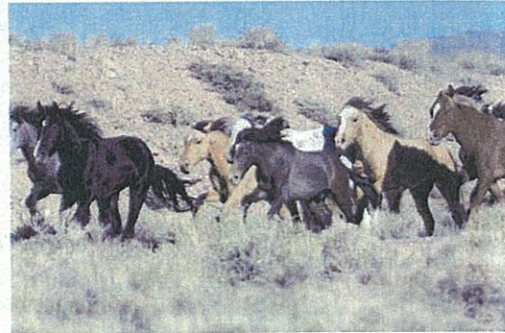


The fuels management program is in the process of planning four new projects for over 7,000 acres of treatment in Lyon, Storey and Churchill Counties and anticipates completing all four planning efforts in 2010. Treatment methods for the projects in planning would be a combination of mechanical and herbicide.

## **Wild Horse Management**

### **Stillwater Field Office:**

Census overflights have shown that there were five herd management areas (HMAs) over the appropriate management level (AML): Desatoya, Garfield Flat, Lahontan, Marietta and Wassuk. Only one wild horse gather was scheduled on the Carson City District for FY2010; this was completed in October 2009 at the **Garfield Flat HMA** in Churchill County when 205 horses were captured and removed. The HMA is now at the AML of approximately 85 horses.



Wild horses in the Garfield Flat HMA (Churchill County) being gathered in October 2009– this was the first gather in this HMA in five years.

### **Sierra Front Field Office:**



BLM wild horses from the ranges of Nevada, two months into their saddle training by NNCF inmate-trainers.

BLM personnel assist the Nevada Departments of Agriculture and Corrections four times annually in conducting saddle-trained horse competitive adoptions in Carson City. The events have been well attended and very successful despite the national economic downturn, with about 96 percent of horses offered being successfully adopted. The next adoption/auction is set for Saturday, May 29, 2010, at the Northern Nevada Correctional Facility/Stewart Conservation Camp on the south side of Carson City.

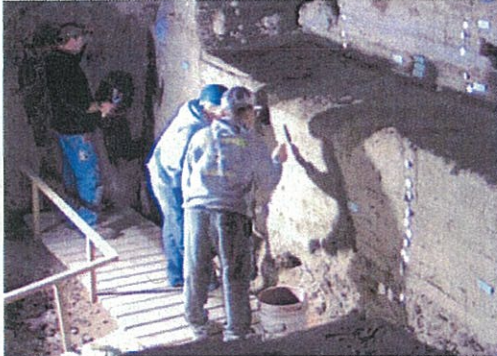
## **Cultural Resources Management**

**Sierra Front Field Office:** The BLM currently identifies the Pah Rah/High Basins Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) as 3,881 acres where special management attention is required to protect historic, cultural and scenic values. The ACEC is adjacent to the new Golden Eagle Regional Park, a 320-acre recreational facility operated by Washoe County and the City of Sparks. Evidence of over 3,500 years of intensive use by Native Americans is preserved in over 1,500 pecked images (petroglyphs), stone artifacts, seasonal camps, and residential sites. The artifacts and sites indicate that both flora and fauna were used as food sources. In order to help protect the ACEC, the BLM utilizes over 45 site steward volunteers to monitor over 30 signs and 40 archaeological sites. For the last four years, as public pressure on the ACEC has accelerated, the interest and number of volunteer stewards



continues to grow, increasing in both the number of participants and the number of sites visited and monitored. The BLM Sierra Front Field Office is preparing to write a Management Plan for this ACEC by 2011.

#### **Stillwater Field Office:**



Archaeologists from the region assist the BLM in cleaning Hidden Cave and preparing it for future public visits and filming.

BLM has teamed with the Nevada Department of Transportation, the Nevada State Museum, the Churchill County Museum, and the University of Nevada to prepare an updated and high-definition video of Hidden Cave, used by Native Americans starting over 9,000 years ago, and now a popular tourist destination. Staff from the BLM cultural resources program and volunteers from the Churchill County Museum annually lead over 60 tours that reach approximately 1,000 members of the public, including school, scout, and church groups.

#### **Volunteer Program**

Over 780 BLM volunteers worked for the Carson City District in FY2009, contributing over 13,000 hours across just about every resource management program. Estimated value of their contributions to the agency was over \$265,000.

Special recognition went to Don & Joanne Murray, Archaeological Site Stewardship Program Leaders in the Nevada Rock Art Foundation – they were the **BLM's 2009 National Making a Difference Award** winners. They documented numerous rock art sites on BLM lands in the Reno/Sparks area, while training dozens of other volunteers to monitor archaeological sites.



District Manager Chris McAlear presents the *National Making a Difference Award* to Joanne Murray at the July Sierra Front-NWGB RAC meeting in Carson City.

District volunteer highlights in FY2009 included the *Great Truckee Meadows Community Cleanup* of public lands north of Golden Valley and Sun Valley on Mother's Day Weekend in May (over 180 cubic yards of trash and a dozen abandoned vehicles removed); and the *Carson River Cleanup/National Public Lands Day* event co-hosted with the Kiwanis Club of Carson City in September (225 volunteers from the Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts, Naval Junior ROTC, Key Club, Carson City Equestrian Alliance, Lyon County Equestrians, and others participated in this one day event).