



Overview of Proposal for the Soldier Meadows/Return to Freedom Wild Horse Preserve



Introduction

Return to Freedom (RTF) is pleased to partner with the **Soldier Meadows Ranch and Lodge (SMR)** to jointly propose both cost-effective, short-term and a long-term solution for the Calico Mountains horses, which reside in the Calico Mountains Complex north of Gerlach, Nevada. This practical program not only saves taxpayers millions of dollars and improves stewardship of the Herd Management Areas (HMAs) within the Calico Mountains Complex, but it also forges a long-term solution to wild horse management on the range, and promotes eco-tourism opportunities and other educational programs. As such, it reflects the goals of Interior Ken Salazar's vision for reform of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) wild horse and burro management program.

The RTF/SMR offers a three-point plan for the Calico Complex:

Part 1: A solution for the disposition of the recently-captured Calico horses:

Provides a cost-effective and humane alternative to the current plan to relocate the majority of these horses to holding facilities in the Midwest and maintain them at taxpayer expense for life.

Part 2. A new direction for cost-effective, on-the-range management of wild horses within the Calico Complex:

Offers BLM the opportunity to break the unsustainable cycle of gather, removal and long-term holding that forms the core of the current management plan for the Calico Complex.

Reduces grazing pressure by converting livestock AUMs to wild horses while also enhancing range conditions.

(SMR will manage its cattle herd depending on the livestock AUM's needed for use by wild horses on the Allotment; SMR is prepared to manage its cattle on private land).

Part 3. A Wild Horse Preserve at Soldier Meadows Ranch and Lodge.

Allows BLM to showcase this historically significant herd, while promoting ecotourism opportunities in a rural community and forging a public/private partnership of the type envisioned under Interior Secretary Ken Salazar's plan for reform of the BLM wild horse program.

The Parties

Soldier Meadows Ranch and Lodge, acquired by Kudrna Nevada, LLC in 2005 and managed by Jim and Kathy Kudrna, consists of nearly 10,000 acres of private property, a year-round Lodge and Visitor Center and the Soldier Meadows Allotment which is comprised of approximately 379,000 acres of Multiple Use Public Lands administered by the BLM which are currently used for cattle grazing and wild horses.

Return to Freedom Sanctuary (RTF), incorporated in 1997, is dedicated to preserving the freedom, diversity and habitat of America's wild horses through sanctuary, education and conservation, while enriching the human spirit through direct experience with the natural world. RTF manages intact bands representing various strains of America's wild horse herds, and has utilized a PZP immunocontraception program with a 93% success rate for the past 10 years. RTF has been an active participant in the rescue and relocation of approximately 1,000 horses. RTF's educational programs for youth and adults are popular nationally and internationally.

Soldier Meadows Allotment at the Calico Mountains Complex

The Soldier Meadows Allotment, consisting of 379,000 acres of BLM lands, is presently allocated 16,000 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) and contains three of the five Herd Management Areas (HMAs) in the Calico Mountains Complex:

- Calico Mountains HMA. 157,000 acres; Appropriate Management Level (AML) - 200-333 horses

- Black Rock West HMA: 91,905 acres; AML - 56-93 horses
- Warm Springs Canyon HMA: 83,000 acres; AML - 105-175 horses

The area is historically significant and was a cavalry remount station established during the Civil War. The Soldier Meadows Ranch stone barn, in which captured mustangs were held and broken before being sent into battle, still stands on the Soldier Meadows ranch property.

The Calico Complex horses themselves are unique; many are buckskins, palomino and cremellos, with a great percentage of sorrels. Many have the intriguing contrast of streamlined bodies with the feathers associated with draft breeds.

A limiting factor for sustaining large numbers of wild horses, as well as native wildlife and livestock within the Calico Complex is its many non-functional water resources. A 1981 BLM map inventoried some 800 water sources on the Soldier Meadows Allotment. Most of these water sources have been damaged over the years, and the majority of these water sources are in need of repair.

Jim Kudrna, manager of Kudrna Nevada, LLC and operator of the Soldier Meadows Ranch, has repaired and reinstated 48 water sources within the Soldier Meadows Allotment. At natural springs, the water source is located and a portion of the natural water flow is diverted by pipe from the source to a trough (where existing Trough Range Improvements exist) and then overflow water is piped to a pond. Where there are no existing troughs, water flow is piped directly to a pond. Ponds provide the best source from which wild horses and other wildlife can drink without negatively impacting the source of the natural springs.

Mr. Kudrna has since observed that when horses are provided such water sources, they are able to drink and then scatter out of the area, instead of congregating around scarce water resources and fighting over them thereby reducing damage and preserving riparian areas.

The AUM's for cattle on the Soldier Meadows Allotment and AMLs for horses in the Calico Complex were determined by BLM when very limited water resources were available (prior to Mr. Kudrna's repair of nearly 50 water holes). These AUM and AML numbers could then be re-evaluated based on the range water resources as repairs are made.

By converting livestock AUMs to wild horses while also enhancing range conditions through spring repair and other improvements, grazing pressure within the allotments will be greatly reduced.

SMR will manage its cattle herd depending on the livestock AUM's needed for use by wild horses on the Allotment; SMR is prepared to manage its cattle on private land.

The 2010 Calico Wild Horse Gather

Between December 28, 2009 and February 4, 2010, the BLM conducted a helicopter roundup of the horses living within the Calico Complex's five HMAs, capturing and removing 1,922 horses from the range. These include: 536 horses from the Black Rock East HMA; 236 horses from the Black Rock West HMA; 359 horses from the Warm Springs HMA; 454 horses from the Calico HMA; and 241 horses from the Granite Range HMA. Of the total, 1,049 horses were removed from the HMAs within the SM Allotment. Horses removed from the range were transported to a BLM short-term holding facility near Fallon, Nevada.

According to BLM records, 97 horses have died, and 82 horses have been processed and sent for adoption at the Palomino Valley Facility, east of Sparks, Nevada, leaving a total of approximately 1,740 horses (in addition to an unreported number of newborn foals) at the Fallon holding facility. *Under BLM's current plan, the majority of these horses will be sent to long-term holding facilities in the Midwest, costing taxpayers in excess of \$800,000 per year in off-the-range holding costs over the 20-30 year lifespan of the horses.*

The RTF/SMR Proposal Overview

Part 1: Cost-effective and Humane Solution for Disposition of Recently-Captured Calico Horses

- Relocation of the 1,049 horses removed from the three HMAs encompassed by the Soldier Meadows Allotment to 5,000 acres of the private deeded lands at SMR. Priority will be given to re-establishing and maintaining wild horse family bands, and to allow the horses to live in as free-ranging a state as possible.

SMR/RTF is receptive to transfer of up to 1,700 of the captured Calico horses to the private lands at SMR. .

- SMR will accept a reduced rate from BLM of \$1.22 per day per head (\$.10/horse/day below BLM's most recent long-term holding contract) for short-term maintenance of any horses relocated from Fallon holding facility to private lands. Fees charged would be used to compensate SMR/RTF for staff, feeding and management of the horses and pastures during the time that horses are confined to SMR's private lands.
- All Calico mares at the Fallon short-term holding facility will be vaccinated with PZP and re-vaccinated at appropriate intervals to ensure that reproduction is controlled.*

Costs to BLM for the contraception may be decreased through donor/grant support from foundations, non-profit organizations and/or private individuals,

as well as available RTF staff and volunteers, trained by the Science and Conservation Center, to administer contraception.

- Eventual return of appropriate number of the recently gathered horses to the Calico Complex HMAs encompassed by the Soldier Meadows Allotment (Calico, Black Rock West and Warm Springs Canyon).

Part 2: Five-Year Pilot Program for Cost-effective and Humane On-the-Range Management

- Range enhancements to maximize habitat for wild horses and other wildlife species, allowing BLM to increase Appropriate Management Levels (AMLs) for wild horses within the Complex.

Repair and horse-proofing of up to 200 strategic water sources within the SM Allotment. (Estimated cost to BLM is \$300,000- \$500,00, however, RTF is prepared to work collaboratively with BLM to provide volunteer labor as part of an extension of ongoing educational programs to minimize labor costs for these repairs.)

Repair and/or replacement of existing Allotment boundary fences. (As above, RTF is prepared to work collaboratively with BLM to provide volunteer labor as part of an extension of ongoing educational programs to minimize labor costs for these repairs.)

- Re-evaluation of AML for wild horses in the Calico Mountains Complex and annual grazing AUM in the Soldier Meadows Allotment based on water repairs performed and available forage.

- Conversion of SM Allotment Animal Unit Months (AUMs) from livestock to wild horses to accommodate horses in excess of AML.

SMR will manage its cattle herd depending on the livestock AUM's needed for use by wild horses on the Allotment; SMR is prepared to manage its cattle on private land, or to increase or decrease its cattle use in the Allotment accordingly.

*SMR will be reimbursed at a rate of \$350.000 per horse per year for AUMs used to maintain horse numbers in excess of AML. This cost is **\$131.00 per horse per year less than long-term holding costs**. These fees will help enable SMR/RTF to operate a successful sustainable wild horse preserve.*

- Release of as many horses as possible from RTF/SMR private lands to the range, based on revised AML and AUM conversion.

- Control of reproduction through aggressive use of PZP immunocontraception as necessary to maintain a healthy range, healthy wild horse herds and a thriving native wildlife population.

Part 3: RTF/SMR Wild Horse Preserve

- Temporary or permanent home at the RTF/SMR preserve for horses that cannot be returned to the range for whatever reason, and for horses who may need to be removed in future.
- Ongoing ecotourism and other activities utilizing SMR lodge facilities and RTF's internationally-recognized educational and conservation programs.
- Historic preservation - restoration of old cavalry barn and other facilities to preserve and educate about the unique history of this area and the wild mustangs who inhabit it.

SMR/RTF Plan Delivers Cost Savings to the U.S. Taxpayer

- Significant reduction in long-term holding (LTH) costs for gathered Calico horses:

LTH: \$1.32/day x 1,049 horses = \$505,408 per year.

SMR/RTF: \$.96/day (\$350/year) x 1,048 = \$366,800 per year for AUM use by "excess" Calico horses

**** this does not include foals being born to horses currently in holding facility.*

Minimum cost savings of \$138,608 per year.

Likely cost savings of at least \$322,008 per year, assuming that AML will be increased to encompass release of at least half of the 1,049 horses, meaning that 524 will be deemed "in excess of AML."

- Upfront costs to BLM for range repair and contraception offset by significant savings in long-term holding costs. Under BLM's current management plan for the Calico Complex, wild horses would be gathered and removed from the range every few years, perpetuating long-term, off-the-range holding costs.
- Avoids the trauma and cost of long-distance transportation of horses from Nevada to Midwestern holding facilities, castration and all other associated costs of current management, holding and adoption procedures.

Win-Win Situation

The SMR/RTF Proposal is an opportunity to create a **win-win** situation and establish a progressive and cost-effective model for other herd management areas. The SMR/RTF Proposal benefits: (1) **wildlife** which desperately need the water sources repaired; (2) **preservation of wild horses** in their native habitat; potential to return a

significant number of gathered horses to the range thereby reducing significant long term costs (3) **a rancher** who supports wildlife/wild horse eco-tourism; and (4) **American taxpayers** who are relieved of the unnecessary and exorbitant costs associated with maintaining thousands of wild horses in short and long-term holding facilities.