



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
911 N.E. 11th Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97232-4181

In Reply Refer to:

FWS-R1-NWRS-RS/032215

JUL 26 2007

Howard M. Crystal, Esq.
Meyer, Glitzenstein & Crystal
1601 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20009-1056

Dear Mr. Crystal:

This responds to your letter of July 18, 2007, concerning a roundup of horses and burros at Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) this summer. At the outset, I want to clarify that we will not be rounding up 1,400 horses and burros at the Refuge this year. Additionally, we have canceled the horse and burro gather which was scheduled to occur next week, and will instead take time to address the several comments raised in your letter, in a revised environmental assessment.

As described on page 36 of our June 2007, environmental assessment, natural population growth of the Sheldon horse and burro herd is quite high, averaging 17 to 23 percent annually. We remain very concerned that additional growth in the herd's population will result in more damage to the Refuge's valuable and sensitive riparian habitats, and will increase vehicle collisions with horses and burros on State Route 140. Therefore, while we complete our comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) for the Refuge, we intend to continue gathering and adopting out horses and burros approximately equal in number to the average annual recruitment in recent years (roughly 300-350 animals per year). The CCP, which is currently scheduled to be completed in 2010, will address the Refuge's horse and burro management program, and will be accompanied by an environmental impact statement.

Please contact Paul Steblein, our Refuge Project Leader, for the Sheldon-Hart Mountain National Wildlife Refuge Complex, with any additional questions or comments. Paul can be reached at P.O. Box 111, Lakeview, Oregon 97360; or by telephone at 541-947-3315.

Sincerely, *Acting*

Regional Director

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IN AMERICA**

Howard M. Crystal, Esq.

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cc:

Senator Harry Reid (NV)

Senator John Ensign (NV)

Representative Dean Heller (NV)

Senator Ron Wyden (OR)

Senator Gordon Smith (OR)

Representative Greg Walden (OR)