

Wild horse distribution center to open in PA/MD area

BY DEBBIE KOONTZ
HARRISBURG — The south-central Pennsylvania/northern Maryland area has been selected by the Bureau of Land Management as the locale of the first wild horse and burro distribution center in the Northeast.

Toward that end, representatives of the Bureau, an agency of the U.S. Department of the Interior, met on Wednesday with nearly 300 individuals interested in establishing and operating the facility.

The main objective of opening this distribution center is to have animals available for adoption by people in the vicinity of the center who cannot travel the greater distance to the next nearest center which is located in Tennessee. This center is currently the only one east of the Mississippi River.

According to Steve Altman, public information specialist for the BLM, the high number of individuals attending the meeting was not really surprising considering that over 250 people have already requested contracts to fill out and submit for consideration.

The purpose of the meeting Wednesday was largely for prospective bidders to ask questions about the requirements for the center, and to compare their current housing situation with the minimum requirements as set by the BLM.

Parties interested in operating the new facility must be able to provide facilities and services to

feed and maintain a minimum of 150 wild horses and burros at a time, to load the animals when adopters arrive to pick them up, and to handle the paperwork associated with the pickup of the animals.

According to Altman, the adoptions, as well as shipments of wild horses and burros from corrals out west, will be arranged by BLM and the operator will not be responsible for choosing and recruiting adopters.

"What we're looking for," said Roger Hildebeidel, BLM eastern states director, "is someone who cares about the animals, knows how to handle and feed them properly, and can deal with the public on a day-to-day basis."

A deadline of February 10 has been set for the contracts, and the projected opening date will be May 1. According to Altman, the winner of the contract will have 45

from the time the contract is awarded to get the facility ready for use. The contract will be good for 36 months, and can be renewed at that time.

As the center in Tennessee works now — and how the new center here will likely be run, according to BLM horse and burro specialist Betty Gillas — a shipment generally leaves the west on Mondays and arrives on Thursdays or early Fridays. The horses/burros are then adopted out over the weekend — the adopters having been chosen in advance in most cases.

In reference to the "minimum requirements" for a facility, Gillas said, "You would not be out of the running just because you are not within the area we have graphed for the center. The decision will be made on the point system and you may not get a high point for being

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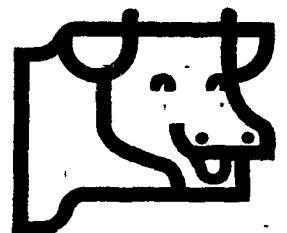
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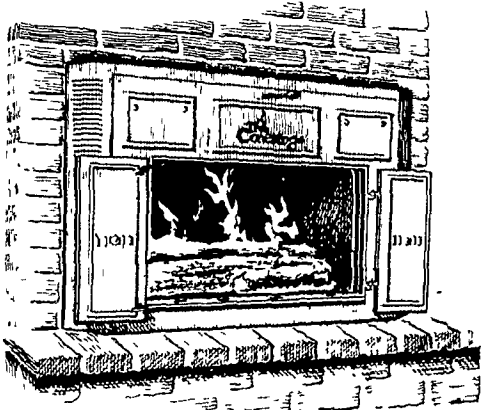
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