

## Public Comments Sought On Wild Horse And Burro Policy

WASHINGTON — A draft program policy that would guide management of wild horses and burros has been released for public review and comment by the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management. The policy statement covers all aspects of the program from management on public lands to removal and disposition of excess animals.

"We have recognized for some time that changes need to be made in the wild horse and burro program," said BLM Director Robert F. Burford. "Our emphasis must remain on humane treatment of the animals, but we also must consider their impact upon the public land resources that we are required to protect, upon other public land users, and upon neighboring private landowners, as well as the cost effectiveness of the program."

"Disposition of excess wild horses and burros is a key segment of the draft policy statement," Burford continued. "We have incorporated the Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board's five-step process, which provides a wide range of options for placing the animals in the private sector."

The first four steps of the process are: the Adopt-A-Horse Program as it exists today, with adoption

fees of \$125 per horse and \$75 per burro; special adoptions at altered fees; training of horses by prison inmates prior to adoption; and adoption and placement of horses on privately funded sanctuaries located on private lands.

Under the fifth step, the Advisory Board recommended implementation of the provision of the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act requiring the destruction of unadopted animals. If an animal remains unadopted after it has been available for 90 days, it will be considered unadoptable and destroyed humanely.

"I voluntarily placed a moratorium on the destruction of healthy excess animals in January 1982," explained Burford. "However, we now have as many as 10,000 excess wild horses in holding facilities, which costs the Federal taxpayer about \$25,500 per day or \$9.3 million per year. It's difficult to justify these expenses when the law requires us to destroy unadoptable animals."

To recognize wild horses and burros as a significant resource on public lands, the draft policy statement requires that they be considered comparably with other resource values during development of resource management

plans covering herd areas. After appropriate management levels are identified in the plans, BLM will attempt to reach and maintain those levels within three years.

The draft policy also requires that management of wild free-roaming horses and burros be at the minimum level possible to attain the resource objectives stated in the land use plans, and, where private lands are intermingled with public lands, cooperative agreements with private landowners to sought before a herd management area is established.

A three-stage priority for removing wild horses and burros is outlined in the draft policy: removal from private lands upon the request of the landowner; removal from public lands where resource damage is occurring or imminent; and removal from public lands as necessary to maintain appropriate management levels.

The need for safe transportation of captured animals that minimizes stress and risk of injury to the animals is emphasized in the draft policy. A preference for using straight-deck trailers to transport wild horses is established.

The draft policy also encourages the involvement of humane organizations in monitoring the adoption program and inspecting adopted animals, and proposes to expedite transfer of title to adopters who have humanely maintained their wild horses and burros for a period of one year.

The draft policy statement is based on recommendations submitted to the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture by the national Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board in December 1986. The Board, which held meetings across the United States to solicit public comments, is comprised of nine members representing various interests related to wild horse and burro management and the general public.

Public comments on the draft

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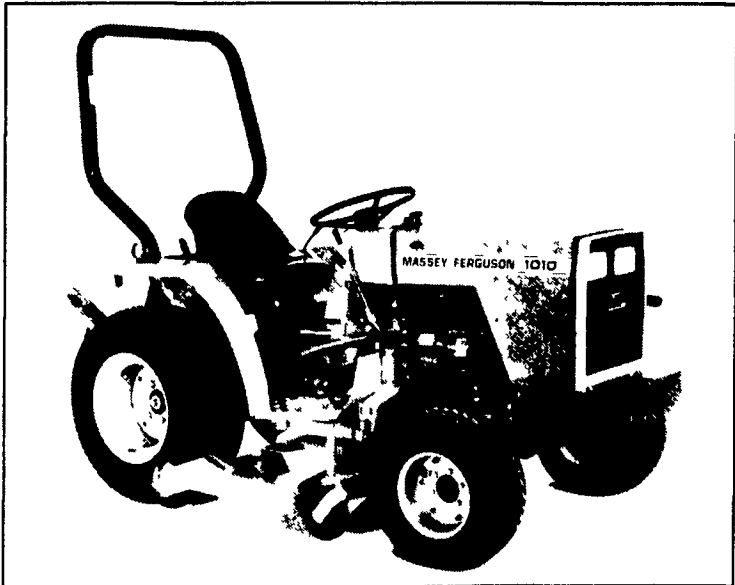
policy statement will be accepted until May 22, 1987, and should be addressed to the Director (250), Bureau of Land Management, 909 Premier Building, Washington, D.C. 20240.

Approximately 44,800 wild horses and burros currently roam public lands in 10 Western States. Although planning is still incomplete, BLM estimates about 30,000 animals will be maintained on public lands. Most of the wild horses are found in Nevada and Wyoming; most wild burros are located in California and Arizona. Approximately 90,000 excess animals have been removed from public lands since 1973, and more than 70,000 wild horses and burros have been placed in private maintenance through the Adopt-A-Horse Program.

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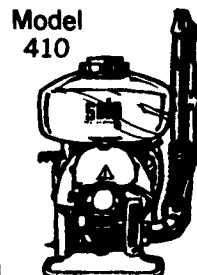
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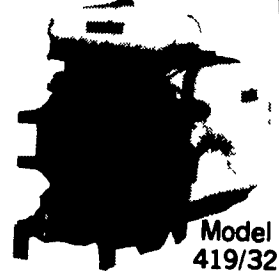
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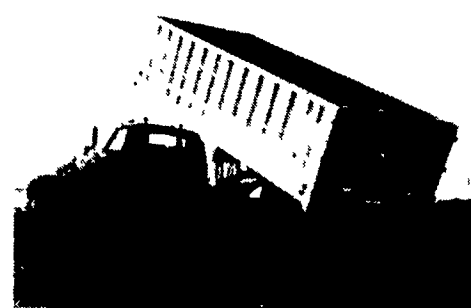
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