



# Colorado Chapter of the National Mustang Association

18501 Road J, Cortez, CO 81321

## Fall/Winter 2010

### Pond work done this year in Spring Creek Basin



*A bulldozer operator with BLM out of Grand Junction was in the basin for three weeks this fall. In that time, he dug out three ponds.*

One of the most exciting developments to report this year is the digging out of three additional ponds within Spring Creek Basin Herd Management Area. The local BLM office paid for this project with funds from the state Wild Horse & Burro Program. Five ponds were on the original priority list to be dug out, and two were dug out last year: southwest of Round Top and the "double ponds" in the eastern part of the basin. We got a lot of rain during about a three- to four-week period this summer, and when the time came to dig out more ponds, two of the three remaining ponds on the priority list were full of water: the pond north of Flat Top, and the little pond in the northwestern part of the basin.

Fortunately, NMA/CO and Disappointment Wild Bunch Partners have expressed concern about water availability in the basin, and two ponds that were dry - but not on the list - were dug out, as well as the area remaining on the priority list. The ponds dug out this fall are: the pond near Knife Edge, an area called "sorrel flats" below the road in the eastern part of the basin and the pond right beside the road in the northeastern part of the basin.

As of early October, all these ponds had water, and it marks possibly the first time all the ponds in the basin have had water at the same time in at least the last three years.

This marks a successful partnership between our advocacy groups and BLM, and we are appreciative on behalf of the horses. Better water availability increases the amount of range the horses utilize in their grazing patterns, which contributes to the overall health of the range. BLM conducted a water quality test this spring that confirmed our knowledge that the water in the basin has extremely high levels of saline - salt. NMA/CO also is committed to working toward realization of a second fresh-water catchment as well, for which we have a previously signed agreement with the local BLM. The challenge is to find a suitable location for this clean-water source. The original catchment continues to serve an important function to provide horses with a continuous source of fresh water. Its western location serves only a few bands, however, so we will continue to work with BLM to place a second catchment or water guzzler system. Other herd areas, such as the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range in Montana, have used these systems to great benefit. Membership funds helped pay for one delivery of water this year to the catchment to augment fresh water from rainfall and snowmelt.

### Certified to dart with PZP

This summer, NMA/CO president TJ Holmes traveled to The Science and Conservation Center in Billings, Mont., to attend darting training with the goal to become certified to dart wild mares remotely (with a darting rifle) with fertility control drug PZP (porcine zona pellucida). This was successfully completed. Dr. Jay Kirkpatrick and his staff are excellent.

Native PZP has been used at Assateague Island National Seashore, managed by the National Park Service, for more than 20 years. They see a 95 percent efficacy rate and now use fertility control alone to manage that herd - without the need for costly, inhumane roundups and removals.

PZP has benefits in at least three major areas: Cost effectiveness, genetic viability and behavior. NMA/CO with Disappointment Wild Bunch Partners submitted a proposal this spring to implement a fertility control program in Spring Creek Basin using volunteer darters and native - or annual - PZP. We have many advantages here for this program: Our herd area is small (about 22,000 acres), our herd is small (appropriate management level is 35 to 65 horses), our mares are documented and identified (eliminating the need for branding) because of an ongoing project implemented after the 2007 roundup, and our mares are

approachable. NMA/CO will buy a darting rifle for use here as well as possibly other, private mustang sanctuaries.

**Cost-effectiveness:** We estimate BLM could reduce roundups per decade from about three to one, saving at least \$100,000 per decade



*Winona, left, with her dam, Kestrel. They are the granddaughter and daughter of buckskin Luna.*

in roundup costs with a more than \$2 million savings in horses NOT rounded up during that decade and sent to long-term holding. **Genetics:** With reversible PZP, every horse contributes his or her genetics to the herd. **Behavior:** Families stay together longer because roundups are fewer and less often.

Problems in these areas of the alternative to fertility control - roundups - are unacceptable. **Cost:** Rounding up, removing and warehousing mustangs are the biggest expenditures in BLM's Wild Horse & Burro Program. Millions of dollars are spent on roundups, and millions more are spent keeping horses in long-term holding facilities and pastures. **Genetics:** Roundups are devastating to herd genetics. When horses are removed - young horses being the most desirable for BLM's unsustainable adoption market - they never have the opportunity to contribute their genetics. **Behavior:** Roundups are devastating to herd behavior as families are torn apart and social bonds are broken forever.

Mares on PZP live longer, healthier lives as documented on Assateague Island. This is a boon for healthy herds of mustangs.

Visit [springcreekwild.wordpress.com](http://springcreekwild.wordpress.com) to follow your Spring Creek Basin mustangs!

# BLM officials meet with public in Denver

On June 14, NMA/CO board members Pati and David Temple traveled to Denver to provide comments at a public workshop held by the National Wild Horse & Burro Advisory Board in response to Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar's wild horse and burro initiative aimed at improving the program.

NMA/CO made several points, including: our support of birth control to reduce gathers

and herd social disruption and urged BLM to consider immunocontraception as the foundation for addressing population; stressed the need for the development of a management strategy that contains many tools with flexibility depending upon the varying landscapes; the implementation of an equine education program for all BLM personnel working with wild horses based on

humane and effective training and handling methodology; genuinely inviting working partnerships with wild horse advocacy groups; to consider only limited adoptions with the criteria that any wild horse could be transferred only to qualified adopters; and to move horses out of expensive and unnatural holding pens and back onto their native ranges by opening closed herd areas.



## Roundup scheduled for 2011

According to BLM's 2011 proposed gather schedule, the next Spring Creek Basin roundup is set for Sept. 17-21, 2011 (subject to change).

Despite our requests since 2007 that subsequent roundups in Spring Creek Basin be done by the bait trapping method, this will be a roundup conducted by helicopter. Included in our fertility control proposal is the idea that with the tremendous cost savings of that program, BLM may consider bait trapping in the future. It does cost more and takes longer, neither of which BLM likes. But it is a humane method of capturing mustangs - and that's what we like and will continue to advocate.

On the schedule, 90 horses are indicated as "planned number to gather," and 60 are slated for removal. Although the official answer from BLM is that no decision about fertility control will be made until the environmental assessment (EA) is under way



*Traveler has a mare and their yearling and 2010 fillies.*

next year, 10 mares are listed on the schedule for "FC" - fertility control - which is what we proposed.

We hope the BLM herd area manager will officially approve our PZP proposal and implement it with this roundup under a five-year EA, which will give the vaccine time to work and allow us time to evaluate its efficacy. We also hope BLM will take into account our extensive documentation and knowledge of the horses' kinship and genetics when deciding which horses to leave in the basin and which to remove, as well as which mares to treat with PZP.

NMA/CO will encourage members to comment on next year's EA - the report that indicates BLM's roundup plans in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) - in favor of implementing a fertility control program using volunteer darters. Watch the blog for this update, which will probably come in August 2011. Also, NMA/CO has new brochures about the herd; ask us for one with your membership.

## Births and deaths in 2010

Spring Creek Basin mares had 11 foals this year. The first foal was born April 2, and the last foal was born Sept. 15.

We did have four foal deaths. The causes are unknown, and none of the foals lived to even a week old, though I don't know how or exactly when they died. It happened to mares of all ages: a first-time mother, a mare with one foal, a mare with two foals, a mare that had had many foals.

In the limited time of documentation since the 2007 roundup, we've seen an average of one foal death per year until this year. No adult deaths this year.

Births and deaths are a natural part of life in the basin, and to ensure that existence, NMA/CO supports natural predation. To



*Baby girl Puzzle was born Sept. 1. She is the daughter of Chipeta and band stallion Copper.*

that end, we have met with Division of Wildlife and BLM officials, to suggest a limit or moratorium on mountain lion hunting in and near the basin. This would have the added benefit of reducing the number of loose hounds chasing wildlife.

Above all, we do our best to ensure that the horses have all they need in terms of forage, water, natural shelter and the families that are so important to their health and well-being. We have a pretty good mix of ages in the basin, with babies up to horses likely in their mid- to late teens. Older, experienced horses are crucial to teaching the youngsters all about their home and survival. We see it with mares and their foals, older siblings, even bachelor stallions.

*Bachelor stallions Mouse, left, and Aspen, have a chat on a mid-autumn morning in Spring Creek Basin.*



## BLM seeks investigation of program

According to a BLM press release dated Aug. 27, "BLM has asked the National Academy of Sciences/National Research Council to make an independent technical review of the Wild Horse & Burro Program to ensure that BLM is using the best science available in managing wild horses and burros on Western rangelands."

BLM has been under increasing heat from the public regarding its mismanagement of our mustangs. NMA doesn't agree with all of BLM's policies, but members recognize BLM as the managing agency of our wild horses and burros - and thus recognizes the need to work with managers for the horses' benefit. We are working hard to ensure the survival of our mustangs!

The National Mustang Association/Colorado chapter is committed to the well-being and continued wildness of the mustangs of Spring Creek Basin in Southwest Colorado. To that end, your tax-deductible memberships or contributions directly benefit the herd in the form of projects such as fence maintenance, tamarisk eradication, water enhancement, education and sharing information about these magnificent horses that represent our country's western heritage. Our local board is made up of TJ Holmes, Pati and David Temple, and Karen Keene Day.