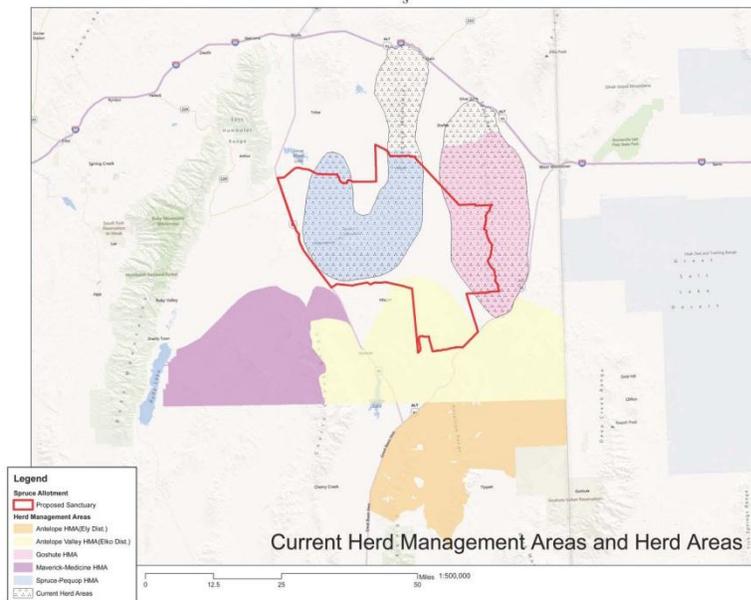


## Juggling horses for the Eco-Sanctuary

By Larry Hyslop



The area containing the Eco-Sanctuary and the three Herd Management Areas

Area ranchers provided a good turnout at the Wells scoping meeting, since the proposed Northeastern Nevada Wild Horse Eco-Sanctuary would be their neighbor.

It would take me ten columns to cover all the details in the proposal so this column looks at one aspect of the plan, the movement of horses. What follows is one of three proposals, but my guess is this version is being seriously looked at.

The Eco-Sanctuary is being proposed by Madeline Pickens' Saving America's Mustangs non-profit group. It would be created out of the present Spruce grazing allotment. This is located south of Wells on the East side of U.S. 93 and encompasses Spruce Mountain. Somewhere between 53 and 72 miles of fencing will be required to connect existing fencing and completely encircle the Eco-Sanctuary.

The Eco-Sanctuary would contain parts of three wild horse herd management areas (HMA). 93% of the Spruce/Pequop HMA land would be inside this fence, as would 27% of the Goshute HMA and 14% of the Antelope Valley HMA. The number of wild horses inside the proposed Eco-Sanctuary is not known exactly, but a very rough guess on my part is over 150 horses.

It would not happen exactly this way, but basically when the fence is complete, every wild horse inside the fence would be gathered by the BLM. All mares and foals would be removed, to be adopted, placed in long-term holding facilities or perhaps even released into another HMA. Stallions could be gelded on the spot and returned to the Eco-Sanctuary. More geldings would be retrieved from short or long term holding facilities to round out this non-reproducing herd. The number of geldings in the herd is still under discussion, but would be in the neighborhood of 500-900 horses.

That leaves wild horses on those HMA parts outside the Eco-Sanctuary fence. Part of the Antelope Valley HMA is east of Alternate U.S. 93 and these horses would be managed as part of the Antelope HMA just south of there. Another part of the Antelope Valley HMA is west of U.S. 93 and these horses would be managed as part of the Maverick-Medicine HMA just to the west.

But that still leaves some wild horses surrounding the Eco-Sanctuary. One alternative being looked at is for these three HMAs, Spruce/Pequop, Goshute, and Antelope Valley to have their designation

changed from HMA to Herd Area. HMAs contain wild horses but Herd Areas usually do not. These wild horses might be gathered by the BLM and removed.

The three HMAs would cease to exist. The BLM's Elko District Office now manages eight HMAs. After all is said and done, this would be reduced to five HMAs, plus the Eco-Sanctuary. The Spruce Mountain area would no longer contain any wild horses, unless you regard those geldings as wild horses.

Area ranchers had lots of questions at the Wells scoping meeting. The 53 to 72 miles of fencing is going to be a costly endeavor for the Saving America's Mustangs group. Ken Jones has the Valley Mountain grazing allotment just south of the proposed Eco-Sanctuary. He is opposed to the whole idea, and he is specifically concerned that the Eco-Sanctuary geldings will easily go through the fence onto his allotment. The BLM is proposing a standard range fence and Ken told me wild horses go through that type of fence now.

Gathering every wild horse inside the Eco-Sanctuary fence is going to be a Herculean task. Ken feels it cannot be done, and some wild horses will always elude capture. Even though most horses will be geldings on the Eco-Sanctuary, it will always contain a reproducing herd consisting of mares and stallions missed during gathers.

Whether all this is good or bad, true or false, is beyond me, I just write about it. The one thing I do know is it will be very interesting to see the reaction of the various wild horse advocacy groups to this proposal.

Elko Daily Free Press, "Nature Notes", 9/7/2012  
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