

Colorado Wild Horse Working Group



COLORADO

Department of Agriculture



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Learn more about Colorado Wild Horse Management Support on the [Colorado Department of Agriculture's website](https://www.colorado.gov/agriculture).

Cover and Section Title pages photos by Kathy Degonia, Robin Wadhams, and Cindy Wright. Back Cover Photo by K. Simpson

A dark horse with a white patch on its hindquarters, standing in a field. The horse is facing left, and its head is turned slightly towards the camera. The background is a soft, out-of-focus landscape with green grass and a hint of a fence or trees in the distance.

Executive Summary

The current wild horse management workforce in Colorado is primarily composed of dedicated volunteers. These passionate individuals and groups contribute thousands of hours annually, driven solely by their commitment to the cause.

Sustainable Wild Horse Management Recommendations

At the heart of this report lies a critical recommendation: strategic darting as the cornerstone of sustainable wild horse population management. This approach is not merely a suggestion; it is the vital key to unlocking lasting solutions for this intricate challenge. While the majority of the Working Group's insights are tailored for the State of Colorado, this comprehensive report also delivers targeted recommendations specifically for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). We extend our sincere appreciation to the Colorado BLM staff, whose engaged and supportive collaboration has been invaluable throughout this rigorous process.

Yet, the Working Group underscores a crucial reality: the power to enact transformative changes in federal wild horse management ultimately rests with Washington, D.C. These recommendations are therefore presented with a clear expectation: that Colorado BLM leadership will champion these findings, conveying them forcefully to the national office and advocating tirelessly for their swift implementation. Forging a sustainable future for wild horse management demands a unified, concerted effort—a powerful synergy between state and federal action.


Executive Summary, continued

Submission of Recommendations

With these critical insights and a shared vision for the future, the Colorado Wild Horse Working Group proudly submits these final, pivotal recommendations to the Colorado General Assembly and Governor Polis.

We commend the Legislature and the Governor for their foresight in recognizing the profound importance of this issue and for dedicating essential resources to this vital endeavor. The intensive 18 months of dedicated work have yielded invaluable insights, shaping a deeper understanding among all Working Group members.

This committed coalition of stakeholders now looks forward with anticipation, eager to witness Colorado's decisive implementation of the recommendations outlined in this Final Report, and its continued emergence as a national leader in responsible wild horse management.



“Amid our diverse roles and backgrounds, interests and emphases, there is safety when we go together toward the common purpose.

Each voice is valued, and opinions are considered. And all working group members are keeping the Wild Horse Program primary purpose in mind.

Like wild horses, it's safest for everyone when we go together.

Tracy Scott, Steadfast Steeds

Definitions

Automated trapping:

Capture of wild horses in pens using remote control devices.

Colorado Department of Corrections (CDOC)

Darting:

A method for fertility control using darts delivered by a specialized mechanism.

Enterprise:

A government-owned business that operates within a state agency.

Estray horses:

Horses that are outside BLM-designated herd management areas.

Federal protection:

The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 protects wild horses and burros from harassment or killing on federal lands and in holding facilities. This protection extends for one year post-adoption until a new owner receives a title, ending when the horses are sold and a bill of sale is issued.

FTE:

A full-time equivalent employee

Immunocontraception:

Uses the animal's immune system to prevent fertilization of eggs.

Online corral:

BLM's virtual adoption program uses a website rather than in-person events to find new homes for wild horses.

Portable OK corral:

Portable corral system on wheels, with a trailer hitch to be towed and accompany portable tilt chute. It funnels animals from open areas into the portable tilt chute.

Definitions, continued

Portable tilt chute:

On a chassis with a trailer hitch, the chute has hydraulic systems to gently squeeze and hold animals in place for veterinary, hoof, and other care. It tilts on its side to efficiently care for hooves.

Preserve:

A preserve is an area of land that is set aside and protected from development and other uses in order to protect one or more species or natural features.

PZP:

Porcine Zona Pellucida is a form of immunocontraception that is authorized for use on wild horses. Training is required to deliver PZP.

Sale authority:

BLM is authorized to sell wild horses and burros over 10 years old or that have been unsuccessfully offered for adoption at least three times.

Sunset review:

A review by the Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies to determine if a regulation or program is still necessary or should be terminated.

Note to Reader

The Colorado Wild Horse Working Group discussed both federally protected wild horses on herd management areas (HMAs) managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and non-federally protected wild horses that roam on public, private, and Tribal lands in the San Luis Valley and southwest Colorado.

Except where otherwise noted, this report refers to all these horses when the term "wild horse" is used. When references are specific to federally protected wild horses on HMAs, this is noted.

The Wild Horse Working Group acknowledges that many local, state, and federal laws may intersect with wild horse management and the recommendations below. The Working Group intends for all applicable local, state, and federal laws to be followed.



Year One Recommendations (Submitted 2024)

Year One (2024) Recommendations

After spending the last two years learning about all the components of the wild horse management challenge outlined above, the Colorado Wild Horse Working Group reached a consensus on the following recommendations.

The Colorado Wild Horse Working Group submitted Recommendations 1, 1.1, 1.2, and 2.0 as part of their **Year One Report** in November 2024. These are included below for reference and context. New recommendations begin on page 14 below.

Recommendation One: Establish a Program (Submitted November 2024)

Establish and provide funding for a wild horse program within the CDA; establish a five-year sunset review cycle. The purpose of the wild horse program would be to:

1. Support, promote, and participate with the BLM, the CDOC, and other partners in Colorado's humane, non-lethal management, care, and adoption of wild horses.
2. Provide staff and material support for scientifically proven contraceptive fertility control on three herd management areas (HMAs) and the one Wild Horse Range in Colorado to achieve and sustain wild horse populations at the designated appropriate management level (AML) for each HMA; use immunocontraceptive control methods, considering different or additional scientifically proven method after consulting with the Wild Horse Advisory Group about potential changes. **See Recommendation 1.1 for more details.**
3. Provide staff and resources to support adoption efforts and events undertaken by the BLM, the Colorado CDOC, and wild horse sanctuaries, preserves, and refuges in Colorado. **For more details, see Recommendation 1.2.**
4. Provide funding for current and increased capacity at wild horse sanctuaries, preserves, and/or refuges to support the humane management of wild horses in Colorado.

Recommendation One, continued

(Submitted November 2024)

5. Establish, distribute, and revise as necessary training and certification programs at Colorado educational and nonprofit institutions, as well as educational materials regarding wild horses in Colorado.
6. Manage a Wild Horse Advisory Board on a five-year sunset review cycle to receive non-binding, expert advice regarding wild horse adoption support, education, training, and certification in Colorado. See **Recommendation 2.0** for more detail.
7. Focus on federally protected wild horses with the option to address non-federally protected wild horses as opportunities arise, subject to State and federal law as applicable.
8. Provide funding to support the wild horse program from both the General Fund and through additional funding mechanisms such as:
 - a. Leveraging existing and/or expanded department resources to support wild horses from Departments of Agriculture, Corrections, Labor, and Local Affairs, as well as the Colorado Tourism Office. These funds may be incorporated into their respective decision items and/or combined with funds from an enterprise.
 - b. Supporting a Governor's Office budget line item request.
 - c. Engaging state legislators to encourage local leaders to fund, promote and support wild horse needs in cooperation with BLM, local Chambers of Commerce, visitor bureaus or local horse-related events.
 - d. Expanding efforts to engage nonprofits and foundations beyond animal welfare and wild horse advocacy organizations to include non-traditional organizations such as community foundations, philanthropies and veterans organizations.
 - e. Engaging private sector and benefactor partners for funding, promotion and education through horse sponsorships, distilleries, wineries, breweries, sports franchises, celebrities and mass transit organizations that trade on or utilize iconic horse imagery.
 - f. Developing an engaging logo and branding to emotionally and financially connect products and services to our mission.

Recommendation 1.1: Support Immunocontraceptive Darting (Submitted November 2024)

Provide material support for on-the-ground immunocontraceptive darting on the HMAs and the Wild Horse Range in Colorado, such as:

1. Managing State FTE darters and/or hiring subcontracted darters.
2. Coordinating with other State agencies, federal agencies, and nonprofit entities to hire darters (e.g., CDOC, veterans, Rocky Mountain Youth Corps, etc.).
3. Funding/administrative support for others to dart.
4. Coordinating darting events in partnership with BLM and/or on-range partners.
5. Buying or funding equipment and/or technology to support darting efforts (e.g., equine facial recognition software, database, vehicles).
6. Coordinating with educational institutions to provide training, certification, and/or internships to increase / support darting.



Pacino and D. Henry – photo by Kathy Degonia



Mad Max and band – Photo by Kathy Degonia

Recommendation 1.2: Ensure Long-Term Adoption Success (Submitted November 2024)

Provide staff and resources to expand adoption and long-term adoption success, such as:

1. Developing a system of shared equipment and staff expertise that private adopters, sanctuaries, preserves, and refuges could use (e.g., portable tilt chute with associated staff to deliver and operate it and a portable OK corral to safely get horses into the chute for medical care).
2. Initiating the development of training programs and certifications for horse trainers to assist in making horses more adoptable and in training people to be effective horse adopters (through Colorado educational institutions and/or specific programs for veterans, inmates, etc.).
3. Funding grant opportunities to support humane treatment of wild horses and/or providing grant-writing support to nonprofits to pursue other funds.
4. Working with BLM to develop additional training, holding, or adoption opportunities such as expanding options with CDOC, expanding the Wild Horse Inmate Program (WHIP), etc.).

Recommendation Two:

Establish a Wild Horse Advisory Board

(Submitted November 2024)

Establish a Wild Horse Advisory Board to provide CDA non-binding, expert advice regarding wild horse adoption support, education, training, and certification in Colorado.

1. The voluntary Advisory Board membership should reflect similar expertise to that of the Colorado Wild Horse Working Group.
2. The budgetary impact of the Advisory Board should be limited in order to maximize the funding available for wild horse darting, adoption, and associated support efforts.
3. The Advisory Board should be on a five-year sunset review cycle and should be reviewed separately from the five-year sunset review for the wild horse program at CDA.
4. The Advisory Board could provide input to CDA regarding:
 - a. Financial and material support for wild horse adopters, sanctuaries, preserves, and refuges in Colorado.
 - b. The content and delivery of outreach, education, training, and certification regarding wild horses in Colorado.
 - c. Working with BLM, preserves, sanctuaries, and refuges to coordinate the movement of wild horses off HMAs and other lands into temporary holding, adoption events, forever homes, etc.
 - d. Coordinating and/or assisting with compliance checks to ensure that adopted horses are well cared for and that adopters have the support they need to be successful.
 - e. Working with BLM, partners, and others to ensure comprehensive information about adoption and adoption success is available in a timely manner and widely publicized.

This includes marketing information about adoption events, horses available to adopt, adopter self-assessments and resources, financial information, etc.



Year Two Recommendations

Year Two (2025) Recommendations

Our journey to consensus began with a preliminary survey, revealing divided perspectives on a new wild horse preserve in Colorado. Roughly half of the Working Group supported additional long-term care, while the other half held reservations, with views shifting based on funding, ownership, and whether the facility would house federally protected horses (see Appendix D for full results). Despite these initial complexities, the Working Group achieved a significant breakthrough: through extensive discussion, we forged consensus on two key recommendations for a new wild horse preserve in Colorado.

A New Vision for Cañon City

Following an on-site exploration, a groundbreaking vision for Cañon City emerged. Members envisioned a dedicated pasture or preserve area for wild horses, offering passive viewing and enriching educational opportunities for visitors. This innovative approach seeks to provide a long-term home and care for these animals without requiring the State of Colorado to assume costly, perpetual ownership. It's a model that expands beyond current short-term care, allowing more horses to benefit while acknowledging concerns about state resource investment. Crucially, the existing CDOC land itself represents a substantial state contribution, highlighting the potential for external funding to support ongoing operations.

Optimizing the Cañon City Facility

Building on this vision, our second recommendation urges Colorado to optimize the Cañon City facility for pasturing, viewing, training, and adoption. This must be done humanely, and with financial and environmental responsibility at its core. Thoughtful implementation promises significant benefits: it will boost public awareness, increase adoptions, and create new revenue streams through events, fee-for-service offerings, and strategic marketing. When combined with our other adoption-focused recommendations (detailed below), these initiatives hold tremendous potential to transform the lives and futures of Colorado's wild horses coming off the range.

Creative Funding Models

Securing sustainable funding for a new preserve's acquisition and ongoing operations is a critical challenge that deeply concerns many Working Group members. While costs vary widely by location and model, the financial commitment is substantial. For instance, a recent Colorado refuge expanded by acquiring 6,000 acres for \$6 million (\$1,000 per acre). Even with state-owned land, as with the CDOC options, significant operational costs remain. To address these realities, the Working Group thoroughly explored diverse funding avenues, including naming rights, sponsorships, corporate partnerships, and public-private partnerships.

Exploring Naming Rights and Sponsorships

While legally complex, especially on federal lands (where current HMAs do not offer naming rights), state or private preserves offer greater flexibility for naming opportunities. These could form part of a broader, multi-tiered sponsorship strategy. Imagine: dedicated fees for naming buildings or even individual horses, alongside branded content and merchandise. Potential partners span a wide range, from outdoor and tourism companies to agricultural interests, veterinary schools, and philanthropic organizations. Developing such a comprehensive strategy demands significant effort and expertise, but its potential to generate substantial support warrants further investigation should a new preserve move forward.

Public-Private Partnerships (P3s)

The Working Group also delved into the potential of Public-Private Partnerships (P3s) as a funding mechanism. These are innovative collaborations between public agencies and private companies, designed to benefit all parties, including a return on investment for the private sector. While each P3 is unique, successful models require a clearly defined purpose and specific roles for each partner. Notably, Colorado has a dedicated P3 Office within the Department of Personnel and Administration, offering valuable resources and successful models from various other sectors that could be applied here.

Creative Funding Models, continued

Diversifying Funding Streams

Beyond specific preserve models, the Working Group explored a range of additional strategies to support wild horses, including:

- Leveraging existing State resources
- Requesting a dedicated Governor's Office budget line item
- Engaging State agencies and local leaders
- Expanding outreach to diverse nonprofit organizations and foundations
- Actively engaging private sector partners
- Developing compelling branding and a distinctive logo

Regardless of whether a new preserve is established, ongoing State resources will be essential for wild horse management. Given Colorado's current budget landscape, a multi-pronged, creative approach to funding is not just beneficial, but necessary.

Beyond Horses: Economic and Ecological Benefits

A wild horse preserve offers more than just a home for horses; it presents a dual opportunity for economic growth and significant ecological benefit. Through increased tourism, it can stimulate local economies.

Furthermore, depending on land management, a preserve could become a vital refuge not only for wild horses but also for other native and threatened species that Colorado is actively working to protect.

As demonstrated by other Colorado preserves, these facilities can contribute significantly to habitat conservation, even allowing for compatible uses like cattle grazing. Working Group members recognized that highlighting these natural resource benefits could unlock additional private and public funding, helping to support a preserve and offset its costs, regardless of ownership or protection method.

Recommendation Three:

On-Range Population Management

New in 2025

Recommendation 3.1: Targeted Immunocontraception for Colorado Wild Mares

Dart at least 80% of mares on each HMA in Colorado through ongoing collaboration between BLM, the on-range partners, the Colorado Department of Agriculture, and US Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services. Implementation of this recommendation should consider these caveats:

- Depending on how well recorded an HMA herd is, darting goals may be greater or more conservative when considering age, population size, and response to immunocontraceptives.
- If a herd is well-recorded, the Working Group recommends darting 90-100% of treatable mares. Treatable mares are generally over 2 and include mares up to advanced ages.

Recommendation 3.2: Management Strategies for Non-Federally Protected Wild Horses

Work with internal and external partners to establish management strategies for non-federally protected wild horses in the San Luis Valley, southwest Colorado, and on Tribal lands. Implementation considerations include:

- Developing a revised population estimate for these horses based on new management strategies.
- Connecting estimated population to planning efforts related to additional preserve capacity and long-term care needs.



Community of caring describes the working group. People from various organizations coming together to brainstorm and create recommendations for the benefit and promotion of the wild horses. Hopefully, these recommendations can be implemented.

Kathy Degonia, Piceance Mustangs

Recommendation Four:

Cañon City Complex Operations and Development

New in 2025

Recommendation 4.1: Establishing Transitional Holding and Educational Facilities

Consider providing preserve / pasture area for transitional / interim wild horse holding, viewing, and education at CDOC's Cañon City Complex in a humane way that does not result in the State of Colorado owning wild horses in the long term. Consider the following funding mechanisms:

- P3
- Private donations
- Foundation contributions
- Grants
- Other funding opportunities mentioned elsewhere in this report

Recommendation 4.2: Optimizing Operations at the Cañon City Complex Optimize the number of wild horses that move through the Cañon City Complex in a way that is humane, financially, and environmentally responsible. Implementation considerations include:

- Providing a pasture and viewing area.
- Offering educational opportunities.
- Holding / training horses on request by adopters (fee for service).
- Exploring options for a preserve that does not result in long-term State ownership of horses.
- Marketing the horses and services available at Cañon City Complex.

Recommendation 4.3: Establishing the Cañon City Adoption Pavilion Establish a wild horse adoption pavilion outside the security perimeter at Cañon City.

Recommendation 4.4: Expanding Wild Horse Inmate Program Training at Cañon City

Explore increasing WHIP training of additional wild horses at CDOC's Cañon City facility.

Recommendation Five:

Public Engagement, Adoption, and Adopter Support

New in 2025

Recommendation 5.1: Expanding Wild Horse Tourism and Education

Work with internal and external partners to explore expanding wild horse tourism and education. Implementation considerations include: Tours on the HMAs. Tours and educational programming at one or more preserves in the state. Marketing efforts for all wild horse related opportunities in the state. Fundraising to support these efforts.

Recommendation 5.2: Media and Outreach for Wild Horse Management

Conduct media and outreach activities related to wild horse management activities in Colorado. Specific implementation strategies may include: Using campaigns, websites, radio ads, and media outreach to build public awareness of adoption events and wild horse preserve efforts statewide. Working in collaboration with the BLM, its on-range partners, and other entities throughout Colorado to maximize awareness of wild horse management efforts and events. Developing a comprehensive media kit—including videos, flyers, and other promotional materials—and distributing it to partners to ensure consistent messaging and wider audience engagement for adoption events.

Recommendation 5.3: Adopter Education and Training

Provide adopter education and training. Specific implementation strategies may include: Implementing online and virtual support tools, such as a pre-adoption checklist or training videos, a pre-adoption support program to connect wild horse experts with prospective adopters, supportive informational videos, and/or online wellness check surveys. Developing incentives for adopters to complete training videos and quizzes, such as free training sessions, support calls with trainers, etc.

Recommendation Five:

Public Engagement, Adoption, and Adopter Support, continued

New in 2025

Recommendation 5.4: Facilitating Horse-to-Adopter Matching

Facilitate horse-to-adopter matching through the Colorado Department of Corrections (CDOC), with the flexibility to include training and gentling support through the Wild Horse Inmate Program (WHIP) or other programs. Specific implementation strategies may include: Asking Wild Horse Inmate Program (WHIP) trainers to prepare short write-ups from training that can be used to create short horse bios to enhance pre-adoption training and education on individual horses' specific needs. Creating a questionnaire to form connections between prospective adopters and horses. Upon entering an adoption event, prospective adopters will stop at a "matching" table and provide information to help guide their adoption choice.

Recommendation 5.5: Adopter Wellness and Community Support

Implement a comprehensive wellness check system and establish a community of care for wild horse adopters in Colorado. Specific implementation strategies may include: Creating a network of trained volunteers and community members who can support adopters, including those adopting horses out of state. Focusing on connection, support, and follow-up rather than enforcement or punitive compliance. Working with partners to develop "community connection" packets with Colorado contacts that all adopters (in- and out-of-state) can reach out to with questions, to rehome the horse, or to take the horse if things do not go well. Coordinating with BLM and other government and nongovernmental partners to ensure comprehensive care and support for adopted horses and the people who adopt them.



Recommendations for Bureau of Land Management

Strengthening the State-BLM Partnership

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) plays an absolutely critical role in the management of wild horses, and their collaboration is paramount to the success of any statewide efforts.

We've been fortunate to engage with the generous and open-minded staff in BLM's Colorado Office, who have provided invaluable insights and exchanged ideas freely with the Wild Horse Working Group. They've made it clear that while significant program changes originate in Washington, D.C., they are committed to relaying the Working Group's recommendations to the national level. Furthermore, as the State of Colorado deepens its financial and resource investment in wild horse management, it is crucial for the BLM to formally recognize and actively engage with these efforts.

A willing and eager partnership between the BLM and the State will create a synergistic force, benefiting not only both entities but, most importantly, securing a brighter future for Colorado's wild horses. Their active involvement is not just welcome, it's essential for truly transformative progress.

With this understanding – and without any commitments being made at the state level – the Working Group is eager to present several key recommendations to the BLM. These suggestions echo themes we've explored throughout our discussions: there's immense potential to amplify the marketing of adoption events, enhance the information provided to potential adopters, and more rigorously address those who might exploit the adoption system.

Remy's Band at Spring Creek Basin – Photo by TJ Holmes



Additional Recommendations for BLM: Public Engagement, Adoption, and Adopter Support

New in 2025

Suggestion 1: BLM Formal Acknowledgment and Collaboration

The Colorado Wild Horse Working Group recommends that BLM formally acknowledge and collaborate with any state-implemented programs that align with federal objectives. This recommendation encourages coordination across agencies, especially where the State of Colorado is implementing complementary programs related to adoption or wellness checks. Formal acknowledgment from BLM could support greater integration and alignment.



Suggestion 2: BLM Efforts to Prevent Adoption Failure and Exploitation

The Colorado Wild Horse Working Group recommends that BLM take additional steps to avoid adoption failure or financial exploitation of the system, such as avoiding cash incentives and prioritizing solutions that support equine well-being. This recommendation encourages continued efforts to support successful adoptions and protect program integrity. It builds on Year One and Final Report recommendations from the Working Group and emphasizes the importance of safeguarding both horses and adopters.

Additional Suggestions for BLM: Public Engagement, Adoption, and Adopter Support, continued New in 2025



Suggestion 3: BLM Communication and Outreach for Adoption Events

The Colorado Wild Horse Working Group recommends that BLM improve communication and outreach around adoption events. This recommendation reflects ongoing interest in the BLM continuing to strengthen its public engagement and outreach efforts around adoption opportunities.

Suggestion 4: BLM Review and Revision of Adopter Information

The Colorado Wild Horse Working Group recommends that BLM review and revise the information provided to adopters to ensure it is clear and accessible prior to adoption. This recommendation encourages improvements to the timing and format of information provided to adopters, particularly around requirements such as fencing. Enhancing the clarity and delivery of this guidance could better support informed adoption decisions and reduce confusion.



Advancing Fertility Control

Wild Horse Overpopulation: Updated Projections and Darting Scenarios

In its Year One Report, the Wild Horse Working Group estimated that with current levels of immunocontraceptive darting, the number of wild horses in excess of the appropriate management level (AML) identified by BLM and the available space at existing preserves, sanctuaries, and refuges could potentially be as high as 2,500 in 2025 and up to 5,000 by 2028. These numbers included federally protected wild horses removed from the herd management areas (HMAs) in Colorado, as well as the additional feral horses in the San Luis Valley, on Tribal lands, and elsewhere in southwest Colorado.

The Year One Report noted that with more ambitious or “maximum” darting, overcapacity could be reduced to 3,500, in 2028. These numbers were surprising to several Working Group members, so they committed to further research and analysis, particularly related to darting effectiveness. Since delivering the Year One Report, the Working Group has done additional research into this issue. This revised information includes more comprehensive historical darting data focused on treatable mares from the HMAs and improved population estimates from non-federal areas, which resulted in an updated population model.

The new estimate of statewide overcapacity in 2025 is 1,359. If current darting levels hold steady, the overcapacity in 2029 is predicted to reach 3,270 horses. While no darting currently occurs on non-federal or Tribal lands, if comprehensive darting programs were put in place in the referenced non-federal and Tribal herd areas and HMA darting was increased to 90% of treatable mares, the Working Group’s model predicts much slower population growth and an overcapacity of 1,717 in 2029.

**2025 ESTIMATED
OVERPOPULATION**

1359

Projected 2029 Overpopulation:
Current Darting Rates

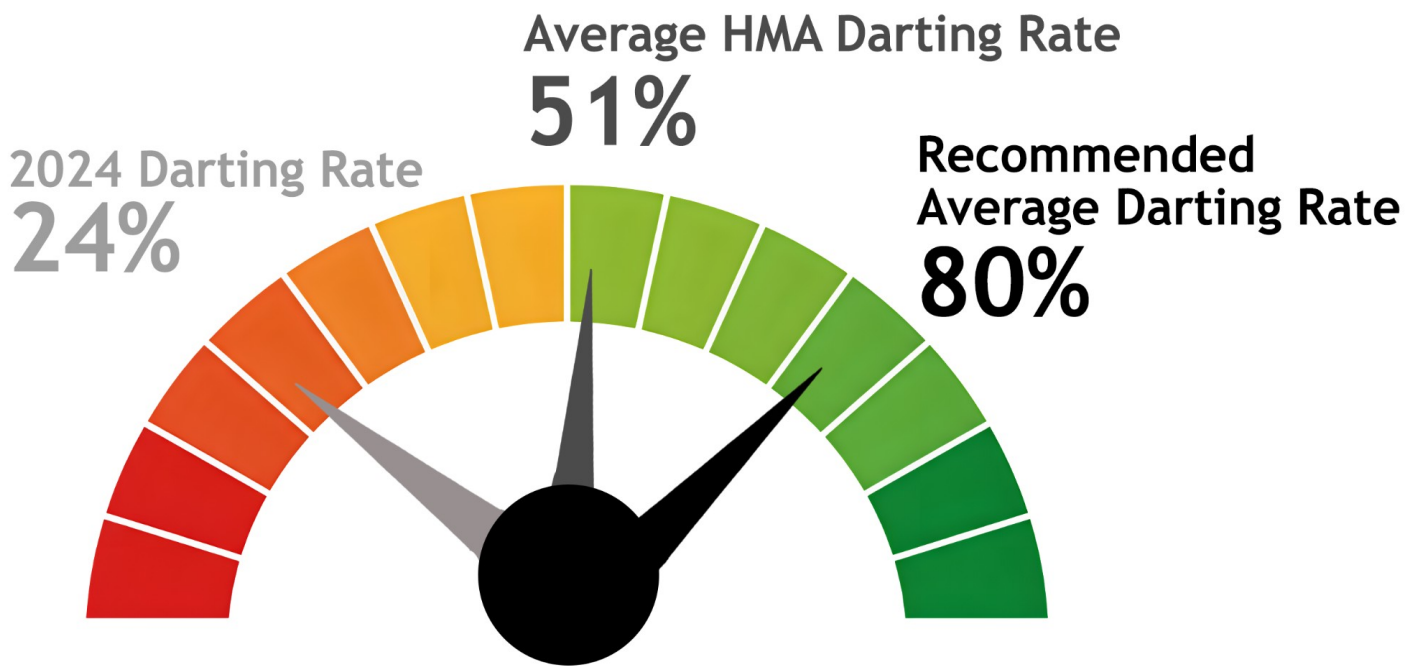
3270

Projected 2029 Overpopulation:
90% Darting Rate

1717

Darting Effectiveness: Current Status and Targets

Although the best analysis of darting effectiveness would come from annual foal counts on each HMA, this data is not available in all HMAs. Working Group members therefore did a deeper dive into the existing research on HMA wild horse population and fertility, which yielded helpful information. The Working Group learned that a high percentage of mares on a given HMA would need to be treated to stop herd population growth (see Appendix A). Darting needs to be very comprehensive to account for several variables, including the age and fertility of each mare, seasonality, and potential non-responders to immunocontraceptives.



Current darting levels in Colorado vary by HMA, but the average darting coverage of the 4 HMAs is 51%, reflecting less darting progress in the largest herds versus substantial progress in the smallest herds. When considering the statewide population of treatable mares, however, only 24% were darted in 2024. To account for population variability, the Working Group recommends an annual darting target of at least 80% of the mares on each HMA in Colorado ([Recommendation 3.1](#)). If a herd is well-recorded, the Working Group recommends darting 90% of treatable mares. Treatable mares are generally over 2 and include mares up to advanced ages.

Investment in Fertility Control

While this darting target is an average, herd managers can adjust it annually based on local factors such as average herd age, genetic diversity, immunocontraceptive effectiveness, and population size. (For more detailed research and assumptions, please refer to Appendix A.)

Increasing the darting of mares is crucial for two main reasons:

- **Achieving Appropriate Management Levels (AML):** It helps bring all Herd Management Areas (HMAs) in Colorado to their sustainable population limits.
- **Reducing Off-Range Horses:** Over time, it decreases the number of horses that must be removed from the range and require placement in adoption programs, preserves, sanctuaries, or refuges.

A highly encouraging development is the State of Colorado's recent investment in increasing darting efforts on the HMAs. As noted in the Working Group's Year One Report, the Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA) initially committed \$100,000 through 2025 for a contract with US Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services staff to support increased darting. To date, this funding has enabled the darting of 26 wild horses on the Sand Wash Basin HMA, and Wildlife Services staff are now beginning efforts on the Little Book Cliffs Wild Horse Range. The CDA plans to continue this annual \$100,000 collaboration with Wildlife Services through 2028.

These investments not only advance fertility control but also significantly reduce the burden on the dedicated on-range volunteers who have managed this work for years. BLM partner organizations cannot sustain these efforts alone. Therefore, the State's commitment of additional resources is vital to ensuring these nonprofit entities can continue their essential role in helping BLM manage wild horses. (Further details on the work of BLM partners and the benefits of Colorado's financial contributions are available in the Working Group's Year One Report.)



A dedicated conservationist navigates a snowy, brush-covered hillside, carrying specialized equipment designed for humane wild horse fertility control. – photo by Kathy Degonia

Sustaining Progress: State Investment and Emerging Challenges



The State's investments are crucial for managing Colorado's wild horse population and reaching Appropriate Management Levels (AML). However, this support must be sustained, and contraceptive methods may evolve, impacting delivery and effectiveness.

The Colorado Department of Agriculture and the new Wild Horse Advisory Committee can partner with the BLM to manage wild horse herds on HMAs, aligning with the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act.

Ongoing research explores new contraceptive options for longer treatment longevity and emerging remote darting technologies. While opinions on specific methods vary, the Working Group consistently supports sustainable wild horse populations and healthy rangelands.

This goal is complicated by an estimated 1,100 (estimates vary) unowned, unmanaged feral horses in the San Luis Valley, on Tribal lands, and southwest Colorado. Although discussed, the Working Group did not resolve management solutions for these horses. Urgent work is needed, and the Working Group recommends that the State of Colorado collaborate with partners to establish management strategies for these populations.

“The diversity of interest in Colorado's mustangs has made this working group a historic gathering. Discussion by members about good management of wild lands and wild horses has been beneficial for advocates and others going forward. Colorado's mustangs are treasures, and their well-being on- and off-range is of paramount importance.

TJ Holmes, Spring Creek Basin Mustangs

A photograph of a herd of horses grazing in a vast, open landscape. The horses are of various colors, including white, brown, and grey. They are standing in a field of low-lying green shrubs and grass. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains under a clear blue sky. A large, dark blue rectangular box is overlaid on the top half of the image, and a smaller, dark blue rectangular box is overlaid on the bottom half of the image, containing the title text.

Expanding Long-Term Care: A New Preserve

Wild Horse Preserve: Path to Consensus

The Working Group extensively deliberated on establishing a new wild horse preserve in Colorado, identifying key areas of convergence and a general direction for future efforts. While some members are passionate advocates for a new preserve, others remain open but hold reservations, and a notable segment opposes using State land or funds for what they see as a federal responsibility.

Expansion at Existing Facilities

Colorado currently has approximately 20 facilities providing long-term care for wild horses, operating under various models (refuges, sanctuaries, preserves). The Working Group explored their capacity for expansion:

- **Limited and Costly Expansion:** Ten facilities reported that they are near capacity. While 80% could take in a few more horses (typically fewer than 10 per facility), doing so would require significant resources—about \$10,000 per facility for infrastructure and \$6,000 per horse annually for care.
- **Capacity Constraints and Future Need:** Although modest expansion is possible, the overall number of additional horses facilities could support remains small. As darting efforts expand and Herd Management Area populations approach Appropriate Management Levels, fewer horses may come off the range. Still, current capacity falls far short of what's needed to place the estimated 3,085 non-federally protected horses by 2029, especially in the San Luis Valley, Tribal lands, and southwest Colorado.

Scaling Challenges for Horse Placement



Infrastructure (per horse)

\$1.6K



Annual Care Per Horse

\$6K



3085

**Non-federally protected horses may
need placement by 2029**

New Wild Horse Preserve: Private Lands and Related Options

The Working Group began exploring the potential for developing preserves on private land, recognizing the scarcity of large, undeveloped parcels in the state of Colorado.

Challenges of Private Land Acquisition

- Purchasing private land is costly and not supported by all Working Group members, especially if done by the State.
- Concerns persist about removing land from agricultural production or excluding it from the tax base, although mitigation strategies are available.

Potential Solutions

Conservation Easements: This tool enables private property ownership to remain while limiting future land use to preserve natural resource values, offering a public benefit without direct State acquisition costs (the benefit comes through forgone tax revenue). This could be a viable alternative pathway for a private land preserve.

Phased Planning and Partnerships: Some members support exploring preserve models through phased planning and partnerships with organizations that already own large tracts of land. These primarily privately funded nonprofits may offer immediate housing for additional horses while long-term solutions are developed. Examples include:

- **The Wild Horse Refuge:** Manages 30,000 acres in northwest Colorado and 7,000 acres in southeast Colorado, housing 370 wild horses.
- **Southern Plains Land Trust (SPLT):** Owns over 50,000 acres in southeast Colorado, managing land for both horses and bison.

Preserving land through easements and partnerships can expand care options for wild horses without the high cost or political hurdles of State land acquisition.



This working group was critically needed to bring different perspectives to bear on the issue of wild horse management, to craft durable and better approaches to wild horses in Colorado. The group created a shared foundation of knowledge and engaged in respectful dialogue, leading to robust recommendations for more progress for the wild horses and the rangelands on which they depend.

Nicole Rosmarino, Colorado State Governor's Office

New Wild Horse Preserve: State-Owned Lands

Colorado owns approximately 6.5 million of the state's 66 million acres, each serving a specific programmatic purpose. The Working Group explored potential preserve development on lands managed by:

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW)

- Challenge: Legal definitions classify federally protected wild horses as livestock one year after leaving federal control, which falls outside CPW's purview.
- Conclusion: This option was quickly deemed unviable due to legal limitations and existing land uses.

State Land Board (SLB)

- Challenge: Viability is complicated by the constitutional mandate to generate revenue for public schools. A mechanism for financial benefit from a preserve would be required.
- Impact: Using existing trust lands could disrupt current agricultural operations.
- Future Study: House Bill 25-1332 creates a "State Trust Lands Conservation and Recreation Work Group" (commencing September 2025, recommendations by September 2026) to study conservation leasing mechanisms. This could open avenues for a preserve, but it will take time.

Colorado Department of Corrections (CDOC)

- Promising Option: Discussions with CDOC staff were fruitful due to the variety of lands, existing wild horse management at Cañon City, and available on-site labor.
- Potential Sites: Six CDOC sites could potentially accommodate a preserve (see Table 2 for details). The Working Group focused on the Cañon City Complex and Buena Vista facility due to their location, size, proximity to HMAs, and highway accessibility.

Table 2: CDOC Site Locations	Acres
Cañon City	4200
Buena Vista	1700
Sterling	900
Arkansas Valley	350
Trinidad	350
Limon	350



BLM Wild Horse and Burro Facility at the Colorado Department of Corrections in Cañon City—photo courtesy of BLM

Spotlight on Colorado Department of Corrections Facilities

Cañon City Complex

Existing Capacity: Current wild horse facility can house up to 3,000 wild horses and burros.

Expansion Potential: CDOC has about 5,000 total acres (only 1,500 occupied). An adjacent private owner may partner, potentially adding up to 4,500 acres.

Viability: Existing facilities, knowledgeable staff, and the Wild Horse Inmate Program (WHIP) make it a strong option.

Adoption Hub Potential: Opportunity to build an expanded adoption area outside the security perimeter, near Highway 50, to create a larger hub for wild horse management, adoptions, and a preserve.

Buena Vista Facility

Existing Lands: Main facility (650 acres, half in use) and nearly 2,000 acres across parcels south of Highway 285.

Expansion Potential: Four adjacent private parcels near the Arkansas River lack legal access but could offer future expansion.

Existing Infrastructure: Includes hay barn, loafing sheds, and a historic stone structure (Chaffee County Historical Society interested in restoration for visitor/educational use).

Natural Advantages: Fully fenced, includes a pivot field (grows alfalfa for Cañon City horses), natural boundaries for enclosure, and proximity to Arkansas River rafting for tourism synergy.

New Wild Horse Preserve: State-Owned Lands, continued

Key Considerations for CDOC Options

Of all State-owned land options, CDOC lands received the most support, with Cañon City identified by CDOC staff as the most viable primary option.

While using CDOC land and on-site labor would reduce startup and operating costs, they would not be eliminated. Current budget constraints in Colorado, along with existing staffing challenges and the need for consistent equine care at Cañon City, remain concerns for some Working Group members.

Additionally, a significant concern is the ownership of wild horses at a potential State preserve. Horses adopted from HMAs lose federal protection and become owned livestock, incurring significant long-term care costs and responsibilities.

An inmate works with a horse at the Colorado Department of Corrections in Cañon City — courtesy NBC Nightly News Broadcast from January 7, 2018



A photograph of a white wild horse standing in a desert environment with sparse green and brown vegetation. A dark, semi-transparent rectangular box is overlaid on the upper portion of the image, containing the title text. The horse is facing forward, and its tail is visible on the right side.

Economic Opportunities: Wild Horse Tourism

Exploring the Potential of Wild Horse Tourism

Since the Working Group began meeting in November 2024, one theme has sparked consistent interest: the untapped potential of wild horse tourism to benefit local communities and Colorado’s broader tourism economy.

To better understand this opportunity, the group conducted an audit of existing and potential wild horse experiences across the state (see Appendix E). They found that while there are several places in Colorado to see wild horses in the wild or in fenced areas, there are few organized tourism offerings—such as guided tours, educational centers, or viewing platforms—that could turn interest into meaningful engagement and economic activity. A wild horse preserve could fill this gap, offering a new kind of visitor destination that blends conservation, education, and outdoor recreation.

Looking West: What’s Possible

Other states offer creative examples of how wild horse tourism can thrive. In Arizona, the Salt River Wild Horse Herd lives on Tonto National Forest land but is managed under a unique agreement with the State through the Salt River Wild Horse Management Group and they:

- Promote the herd and encourages visitation through its website
- Offer education about wild horses
- Accept donations to help support the herd’s care

The herd is also featured prominently by local tourism entities. For example, Visit Phoenix markets the Salt River as a unique experience that combines tubing, paddling, scenic beauty—and wild horses. The result is a compelling outdoor adventure that draws visitors to a natural area just outside a major metro area.

These success stories highlight what's possible when wild horse management and tourism work hand in hand. With thoughtful planning, Colorado could build its own version—one that supports the land, the animals, and the local economies that surround them.



Wild Horse Tourism: A Proven Draw, A Missed Opportunity for Colorado

Across the country, wild horses aren't just part of the landscape—they're powerful tourism drivers, economic assets, and cultural icons. One of the most famous examples is the Chincoteague ponies of Assateague Island, straddling the Virginia–Maryland coast.

Every summer since 1924, the Chincoteague Volunteer Fire Company has hosted the legendary Pony Penning event: a dramatic swim, public auction, and local festival that now draws tens of thousands of visitors. The event, immortalized in Marguerite Henry's *Misty of Chincoteague*, has turned a local herd into an international attraction. But the draw isn't limited to the annual swim. Year-round, tourists flock to:

- Pony viewing in the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge
- Guided boat tours
- Local museums and "Misty"-inspired landmarks

The Maryland side of Assateague Island is managed by the National Park Service, which has successfully used Porcine Zona Pellucida (PZP) fertility control since 1994 to keep the herd at a sustainable size. This model demonstrates how tourism and humane population management can coexist—an approach Colorado is also pursuing through fertility control and strategic placement. A well-managed wild horse preserve here could follow similar principles, balancing public engagement with long-term ecological health.



Wild Horse Tourism: Other States Are Leading the Way

Colorado isn't alone in exploring the intersection of wild horse management and tourism. Several states have already embraced this opportunity—each in a way that reflects their unique landscapes and cultures.

- North Carolina promotes safe, guided beach tours to view wild horses, backed by strong messaging around responsible visitation.
- Utah markets its BLM wild horse areas as rugged, off-the-beaten-path adventures.
- Wyoming's Wind River Wild Horse Sanctuary blends wild horse tourism with stories of the American West and Native heritage, offering guided visits and cultural programs.

These programs show how wild horse tourism can blend conservation, culture, and economic development—with meaningful benefits to local communities.

Colorado's Moment

Despite being home to herds, sanctuaries, and the historic Cañon City facility, Colorado has yet to fully embrace wild horse tourism. The opportunity is enormous.

According to the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade:

- Tourism brought in \$28.2 billion from 2019–2023
- Supported nearly 188,000 travel-related jobs
- Generated \$1.8 billion in tax revenue

Even a small share of this directed toward wild horse viewing, education, events, and adoption could be transformative—especially for rural communities near public lands and preserves. A wild horse preserve in Colorado could anchor:

- Educational tours and visitor centers
- Cultural festivals and horse-inspired arts/crafts
- Training, adoption, and volunteer programs

This is more than tourism—it's an untapped cultural and economic engine.

Finding Forever Homes: Wild Horse Adoption



Boosting Wild Horse Adoptions in Colorado

Colorado is stepping up its efforts to find forever homes for its wild horses. While the state has increased its investment into wild horses with expanded fertility control darting efforts, additional horses will still need to find homes. Even with a potential new preserve in Colorado, space will be limited, making successful adoption initiatives crucial for long-term wild horse management.

Expanding Adoption Avenues

While several Colorado sanctuaries, refuges, and preserves facilitate wild horse adoptions (like the well-known Meeker Mustang Makeover), the primary pathway is through Bureau of Land Management (BLM) events. The Colorado BLM offers four adoption methods: facility adoptions, Online Corral Virtual Adoptions, satellite adoptions, and the new Forever Branded Adoption Centers. The goal is ambitious: to double the 240 wild horses adopted in fiscal year 2024 in the upcoming fiscal year. To achieve this, the BLM is working to increase events, expand locations, boost promotion, and forge new partnerships.

However, the BLM faces hurdles, including limited funding and staffing for wild horse management. Facility constraints at Cañon City also pose a challenge, as adoption events within the security perimeter restrict public access. A promising solution? The Wild Horse Working Group and CDOC staff are eager to replicate the success of the Northern Nevada Correctional Center, where adoption events are held outside the prison's security perimeter, allowing for easier public access and showcasing horses trained by inmates. The primary barrier to this exciting concept is funding, as federal dollars are unlikely to be available.



Enhancing Adoption Awareness and Support

Despite these challenges, the BLM is actively working to expand and improve its adoption outreach, with additional funding allocated for 2025. Yet, timely and detailed information about adoptable horses remains a struggle for current BLM staff, though on-range partners and wild horse organizations are ready to assist. The newly authorized Wild Horse Advisory Committee may help, but increased investment in marketing and promotion would be even more effective. The Working Group believes that increased awareness of adoption events through State investment could significantly boost participation.

Beyond awareness, Colorado can empower potential adopters by providing a clearer understanding of what successful wild horse adoption entails. While the BLM website offers information, some adopters still don't fully grasp the commitment. Informational booths and training information, similar to those at BLM's Carson City facility, would be beneficial in Colorado, likely requiring State or private investment. Additionally, Colorado could offer online resources, training, quizzes, and incentives to prepare adopters better.



Photo by Kathy Degonia

Adoption Success: Training, Matching, and Community

Adopting a wild horse is a big commitment, and not all adoptions succeed, especially as adoption numbers rise. While past failures were sometimes linked to a now-ended cash incentive program, current attention is on other factors. The Wild Horse Working Group identified key barriers: insufficient horse training, adopter expectations, poor horse-adopter matching, and adopter reluctance to seek help.

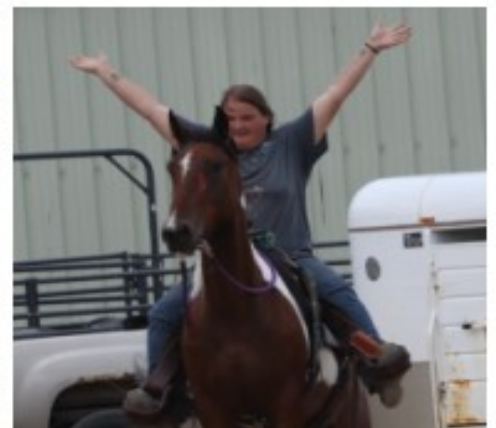
Enhancing Adoptability: From WHIP to Matching

The cornerstone of adoption success is training – for both horses and people. Horse training enhances their adoptability, increasing their chances of finding permanent homes. The BLM's Wild Horse Inmate Program (WHIP) at Cañon City, currently paused due to contract negotiations, is a vital initiative that provides incarcerated individuals with a trade and trains horses for adoption.

Reinstating WHIP is a priority for many Working Group members. While State resources for horse training would be welcome, there's a significant need for more people-focused training. Improving adopters' understanding and ability to respond to a wild horse would greatly improve adoption success. The BLM collaborates with partners like Mustang Challenge and Forever Branded to bridge this gap through adoption centers, training partnerships, and events. The State can further these efforts by developing online and virtual resources and investing in diverse adoption events that include training expos, clinics, and networking opportunities.

Beyond training, making better matches between horses and people is critical. Not every horse suits every adopter; their personalities and needs significantly impact their bond. While training helps, some horses connect with their trainers but not their adopters. More intentional matchmaking is needed, along with smoother transitions for horses from the wild to a trainer and then to an adopter. Learning and describing each horse's personality, and asking adopters to self-assess their needs, would greatly improve compatibility. While the BLM lacks a formal matching process, animal shelters and some horse sanctuaries have developed effective tools. State investment in improving this aspect of adoptions would be incredibly valuable and could significantly reduce failed adoptions. The BLM, WHIP, and nonprofit organizations are potential partners, but State leadership is essential.

Photos by Kathy Degonia



Building a Community of Care

Finally, addressing adopter reluctance to ask for help is a more complex challenge. Despite signing maintenance agreements, some adopters become overwhelmed and hesitant to seek assistance, which can lead to tragic consequences. While the BLM conducts compliance checks, staffing limitations make universal checks difficult, and the very idea of "compliance checks" can discourage dialogue. The BLM can repossess horses in cases of abuse or neglect, but this authority ends once a horse receives its title (as early as one year post-adoption) or upon purchase.

To address this, the Working Group proposes a "community of care". This concept leverages Colorado's extensive wild horse expertise, existing staff and programs, and the passion of professionals and volunteers statewide. This cooperative network would include nonprofit organizations with volunteers who could informally check in with adopters, answer questions, and connect them with resources like veterinarians and trainers. The goal is to create a supportive, empathetic environment that encourages adopters to ask for help. While the community of care aims for positive outcomes, State and local enforcement agencies can intervene if needed. Together, these committed experts can foster relationships and understanding, leading to more successful wild horse adoptions

Photo by Kathy Degonia






Colorado's Commitment to Wild Horses

Beyond the Report: A Vision for Wild Horse Management

This Report isn't just the culmination of the Colorado Wild Horse Working Group's dedicated efforts, born from Senate Bill 23-275; it's the dawn of a new era for wild horse management in our state. With House Bill (HB) 25-1283, the Colorado Department of Agriculture is poised to deepen its commitment, not only by continuing its vital darting initiatives but also by dramatically expanding support for adoptions and bolstering our existing sanctuaries, refuges, and preserves.

These recommendations are a powerful invitation for Colorado to elevate its dedication to these magnificent animals. We understand that the current budget landscape presents challenges, but just as seasons change, so too do economic tides. When the coffers replenish, Colorado has an extraordinary chance to set a national precedent, showcasing what a truly compassionate state can achieve when it heeds the collective wisdom of its people. Let's seize this opportunity to lead with empathy and innovation, forging a brighter future for Colorado's wild horses

A photograph of three wild horses running through a dry, brushy landscape. The horses are in motion, with their manes and tails flowing. The background is a hazy, open field with sparse vegetation.

We stood together—advocates, tribes, ranchers, veterinarians, conservationists, federal and state partners—to find innovative solutions to protect Colorado’s wild horses. The process wasn’t easy, but that’s what good human herd management is about: finding solutions.

Many of these ideas are now reflected in Colorado’s legislative direction as strategies for wild horse management. Colorado's model can guide wild horse conservation efforts across the country, and supports actions to ensure the sustainability of ecosystems for future generations.

Elise Lowe-Vaughn, Rewilding America Now



Appendices

Appendix A (Page 1): Population and Darting Data

Population Estimate Model Results

These revised estimates are based on updated population counts, darting progress, and removals in areas across Colorado. Current darting patterns reflect sustaining the levels of darting in HMAs, as outlined above, and no darting in non-HMA areas across Colorado.

Maximum Darting assumes 90-100% of fertile mares will be treated across the state.

All Horse Projections	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Total-Current Darting	2317	2682	3114	3624	4228
Total- Maximum Darting	2317	2559	2597	2635	2675
Total Overcapacity- Current Darting	1359	1724	2156	2666	3270
Total Overcapacity- Maximum Darting	1359	1601	1601	1677	1717

Little Book Cliffs

		Partner Estimates							
Year	BLM Total Population - 20% Growth Estimate	Total Population	Mare Population > 2 yrs	Treatable Mare Population	Mares Treated	Mares Completed	New Foals Survived	% of Treatable Mare Population Completed	Mares as % of Pop
2024 AML	150								
2025		118	64	52	8	6	14	12%	54%
2024	211	223	105	93	54	29	31	31%	47%
2023	192	197	97	85	31	18	21	21%	49%
2022	175	188	87	75	24	16	27	21%	46%
2021	146	170	75	63	5	4	25	6%	44%

*Note 1 - 2025 - 12 mares that we don't dart because of advanced age

Appendix A (Page 2): Population and Darting Data

Spring Creek Basin

Year	Total Population - 20% Growth Estimate	Partner Estimates						
		Total Population	Mare Population	Treatable Mare Population	Mares Completed	New Foals (Survived)	% of Treatable Mare Population Completed	Mares as % of Pop
2024 AML	80							
2024	92	71	43	14	14	0	100%	61%
2023	76	71	43	14	14	0	100%	61%
2022	73	67	37	15	15	0	100%	55%
2021	72	65	38	23	23	0	100%	58%
2020								
2019								

2024 Note: Mares under 2 and over xx & resistant mares should not be darted.

2023 Note: New foals: may have 1 that didn't survive

Appendix A (Page 3): Population and Darting Data

Sandwash

		Partner Estimates						
Year	Total Population (Flight Data)	Total Population	Mare Population	Treatable Mare Population	Mares Completed	New Foals	Percentage of Treatable Mare Population Completed	Mares as % of Pop
2024 AML	362							
2024	344	467	211	158	112	56	71%	45%
2023	375	511	242	181	115	32	64%	47%
2022	291	470	214	160	112	64	70%	46%
2021	818	878	459	344	153	128	44%	52%
2020		811	414	310	224	94	72%	51%
2019		740	374	280	213	96	76%	51%

2024 Note- 30 Mares on Do Not Dart List (too old, infertile etc)

2023 Note- *Winter Kill

2022 Note- *Winter Kill

2021 Note** Mare population pre-gather

Appendix A (Page 4): Population and Darting Data

Piceance

		Partner Estimates						
Year	Total Population (Flight Data)	Mare Population (Estimate 50%)	Treatable Mare Population	Mares Dated	Mares Completed	New Foals	% of Treatable Mare Population Completed	Mares as % of Pop
2024 AML	235							
2024	565	283	TBD	14	TBD	60	TBD	50%
2023	759	380	TBD	21	3	TBD	0.8%	50%
2022	1150	575	TBD	133	63	TBD	11.0%	50%
2021	838	419	TBD	51	1	TBD	0.2%	50%

2024 Note: Treatable Mare population too difficult to count as spread out over entire HMA. New foal count based on limited sample.

2023 Note: Treatable Mare population too difficult to count as spread out over entire HMA. New foal count based on limited sample.

2022 Note: Treatable Mare population too difficult to count as spread out over entire HMA. New foal count based on limited sample.

2021 Note: Treatable Mare population too difficult to count as spread out over entire HMA. New foal count based on limited sample.

Appendix A.1: Population and Darting Data

Federal Herd Populations and Space Needs

SB23-275 Wild Horse Working Group Project Workbook- All Horse Projects Tabs

Topic	Federals				
	Little Bookcliffs	Spring Creek Basin	Sand Wash Basin	Piceance-East Douglas	Total Federals
Approx Population 2025 (Partner Counts)	118	71	467	565	1,221
Max Capacity	150	80	362	235	827
2025 Total Overcapacity	-32	-9	105	330	394
Population Multiplier %	20%	20%	20%	20%	
Current Darting %	-6%	-20%	-14%	-2%	
2026 Total with Current Darting (CD)	135	71	495	667	1,367
Max Darting % - First Year Too Late to Impact Foals	-18%	-20%	-18%	-18%	
2026 Total with Max Darting (MD)	120	71	476	576	1,244
2026 Total Overcapacity CD	-15	-9	133	432	540
Current Darting %	-6%	-20%	-14%	-2%	
2027 Total with Current Darting	153	71	525	787	1,536
2026 Total Overcapacity MD	-30	-9	114	341	417
Max Darting %	-18%	-20%	-18%	-18%	
2027 Total with Max Darting	123	71	486	588	1,267
2026 Total Overcapacity CD	3	-9	163	552	709
Current Darting %	-6%	-20%	-14%	-2%	
2028 Total with Current Darting	175	71	556	928	1,730
2028 Total Overcapacity MD	-27	-9	124	353	440
Max Darting %	-18%	-20%	-18%	-18%	
2029 Total with Max Darting	125	71	496	600	1,291
2028 Total Overcapacity CD	25	-9	194	693	903
Current Darting %	-6%	-20%	-14%	-2%	
2029 Total with Current Darting	199	71	590	1,095	1,955
2028 Total Overcapacity MD	-25	-9	134	365	464
Max Darting %	-18%	-20%	-18%	-18%	
2029 Total with Max Darting	128	71	505	612	1,316
2029 Total Overcapacity CD	49	-9	228	860	1,128
2029 Total Overcapacity MD	-22	-9	143	377	489

Appendix A.1 (Page 2): Population and Darting Data

Non-Federals Herd Populations and Space Needs

SB23-275 Wild Horse Working Group Project Workbook- All Horse Projects Tabs

Herd Populations / Space Needs						
Non-Federals						
Ute Mtn Ute	Southern Ute	CotA	MV	SLV	Total Non Federals	TOTAL
300	95	200	1	500	1,096	2,317
300	-	-	-	-	300	1,127
-	95	200	1	500	796	1,190
20%	20%	20%	20%	20%		
0%	0%	0%	0%	0%		
360	114	240	1	600	1,315	2,682
0%	0%	0%	0%	0%		
360	114	240	1	600	1,315	2,559
60	114	240	1	600	1,015	1,555
0%	0%	0%	0%	0%		
432	137	288	1	720	1,578	3,114
60	114	240	1	600	1,015	1,432
-18%	-18%	-18%	-18%	-20%		
367	116	245	1	600	1,330	2,597
132	137	288	1	720	1,278	1,987
0%	0%	0%	0%	0%		
518	164	346	2	864	1,894	3,624
67	116	245	1	600	1,030	1,470
-18%	-18%	-18%	-18%	-20%		
375	119	250	1	600	1,344	2,635
218	164	346	2	864	1,594	2,497
0%	0%	0%	0%	0%		
622	197	415	2	1,037	2,273	4,228
75	119	250	1	600	1,044	1,508
-18%	-18%	-18%	-18%	-20%		
382	121	255	1	600	1,359	2,675
322	197	415	2	1,037	1,973	3,101
82	121	255	1	600	1,059	1,548

Appendix B (Page 1): Shared Learning Presentations on Preserve Options

Colorado Department of Corrections (CDOC) Preserve Properties

Presenter: Mitch Karstens, CDOC, and Nicole Rosmarino, on behalf of Colorado CDOC

Mitch presented CDOC-owned land near Buena Vista as a potential preserve site, highlighting existing fencing, natural boundaries, and infrastructure. The area could support gentling, training, adoption, and public viewing. The preserve would require supplemental feeding and may use a split model across CDOC parcels north and south of Highway 285.

Nicole later presented a concept for developing a preserve at the existing Cañon City CDOC facility. The model emphasizes low overhead and minimal infrastructure while leveraging existing holding, training, and adoption programs. The proposed preserve would span approximately 10,000 acres and serve both federal and non-federal horses. The plan includes potential for public adoption events outside the secure perimeter, with preliminary costs estimated around \$2.5 million.

The Wild Horse Refuge

Presenter: Pat Craig, Executive Director, The Wild Horse Refuge

Pat Craig described the Refuge's two locations — one in southeast Colorado and one near Craig — which together span approximately 37,000 acres and house around 370 wild horses. The Refuge operates without government funding, using private donations to support care, infrastructure, and land acquisition. The Craig site offers strong natural forage and water, and the organization is exploring conservation easements for long-term protection. Although not open for public tours, site visits are available upon request.

Southern Plains Land Trust (SPLT)

Presenter: Jay Tutchton, Preserve Manager, SPLT

Jay shared SPLT's approach to managing a 45,000-acre preserve for native wildlife, which now includes 67 wild equines. The horses are integrated through a soft release process and treated as wildlife, sharing space with bison and longhorn cattle. The preserve uses minimal fencing and emphasizes natural behavior and low-intervention care. Funding comes from private sources, and SPLT expressed interest in continued collaboration.

Appendix B (Page 2): Shared Learning Presentations on Preserve Options

Public-Private Partnership (P3)

Presenter: Brian Pool, Wild Horse Working Group

Brian shared findings from conversations with Colorado's P3 Office. While wild horse preserves are not a current priority for P3 funding, the Office's process and structure could apply in the future. Brian noted that naming rights, sponsorship tiers, and donor partnerships could be explored as part of a broader funding model. He recommended setting realistic expectations and focusing on alternative mechanisms for now.

Private Land Preserve Strategies

Presenter: Sandra Solin, Wild Horse Working Group

Sandra shared options for establishing preserves on private land using Requests for Information (RFIs), conservation easements, and willing landowner participation. She outlined evaluation criteria, potential funding pathways, and the importance of aligning the effort with conservation values. The group also discussed tax credits, upfront costs of easements, and partnerships with groups like Keep It Colorado.

Creative Funding Models and Naming Rights

Presenter: Brian Pool, Wild Horse Working Group

Brian provided an overview of creative funding options, including donor tiers, horse sponsorships, branded merchandise, and tourism partnerships. He emphasized the need for a business plan and legal clarity, particularly around revenue generation on public versus private land. He also noted the potential value of engaging veterinary schools or land trusts.

Appendix C: Working Group Discussions on Preserve Options

Working Group Discussion: Expansion Opportunities at Existing Facilities

Working Group members reviewed a data sheet summarizing 15 wild horse sites across Colorado, including Herd Management Areas (HMAs), sanctuaries, refuges, and preserves. The sheet outlined each site's opportunities and limitations for expansion, as well as the types of experiences offered — such as passive viewing, education, adoption, and staffed tours. Members noted that while some facilities support adoption or viewing, few offer educational programming or staffed tours. They emphasized that the number of horses taken off the range continues to outpace adoption and holding capacity, underscoring the need for additional facilities. Members discussed the value of expanding existing preserves to accommodate “at-risk” horses and proposed that a centralized facility could raise public awareness, support adoption, and fill gaps in long-term care capacity.

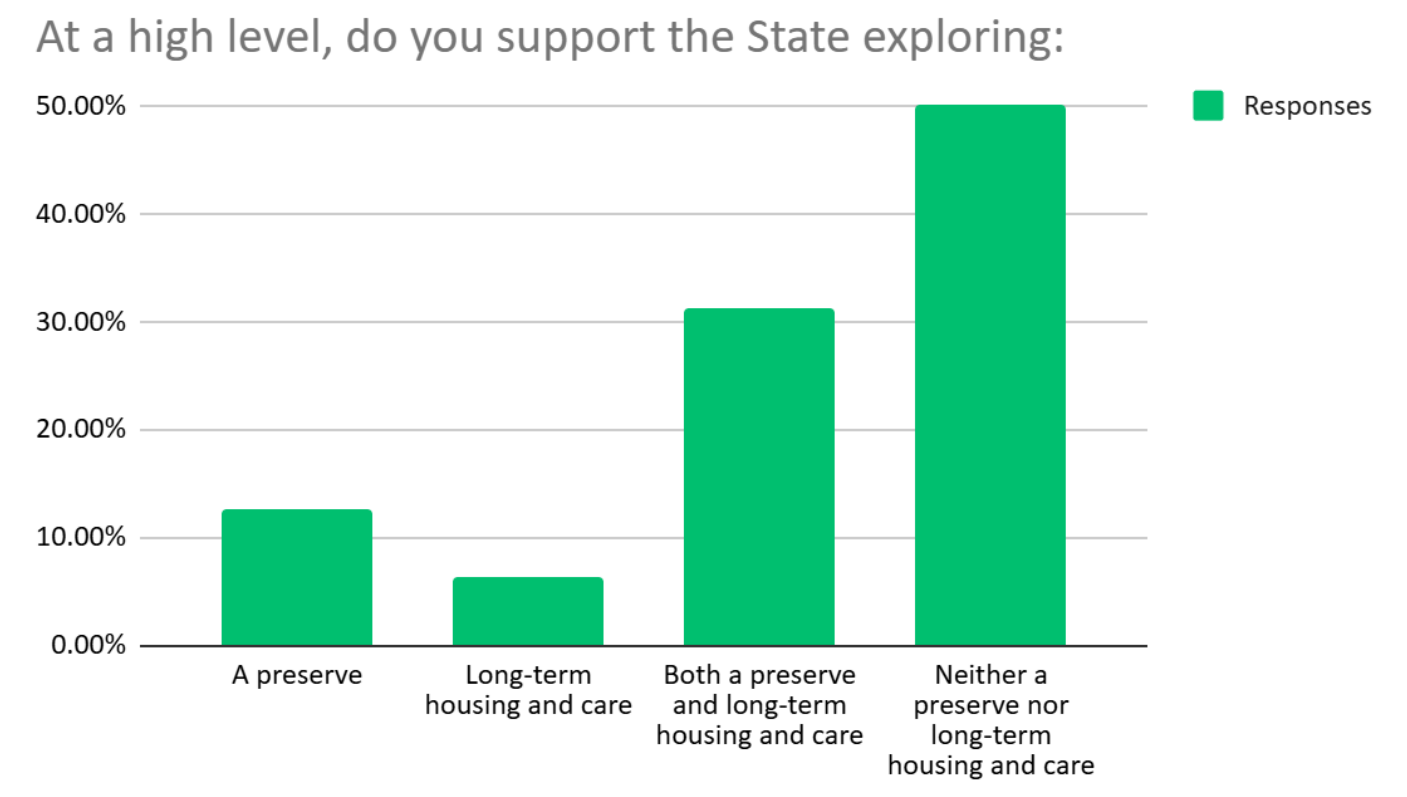
Working Group Discussion: Tourism Considerations

Working Group members consistently emphasized the economic value of preserves, particularly in rural areas. Examples from Moffat County showed that wild horse tourism attracted over 600 visitors in early 2025, benefiting local businesses like hotels, restaurants, and gas stations. Buena Vista and Cañon City were identified as promising tourism hubs due to nearby recreation areas and historical assets. The CDOC's Buena Vista site includes a historic stone structure that could support visitor or educational programming. At Tanner Mesa, while public programming is not part of initial plans, future tourism-related activities, such as viewing or gentling events, were considered. Committee members discussed how combining adoption programming and visitor education at a single site could create a dynamic public destination. They also highlighted the importance of highway access and seasonal planning to support visitation. Several members agreed that wild horse preserves could serve as both conservation tools and tourism assets if planned accordingly.

Appendix D (Page 1): Wild Horse Preserve and Long-Term Care Options Survey Results

Question #1: At a high level, do you support the State exploring:

Answer Choices	Responses	Responses
A preserve	12.50%	2
Long-term housing and care	6.25%	1
Both a preserve and long-term housing and care	31.25%	5
Neither a preserve nor long-term housing and care	50.00%	8
Answered		16
Skipped		0



Appendix D (Page 2): Wild Horse Preserve and Long-Term Care Options Survey Results

Question #2: For each option below, please indicate your level of support.

Options	I can support this option as written		I can support this option with some minor changes		I cannot support this option		Total	Weighted Average
The State should explore opportunities for creation of a new wild horse preserve in Colorado.	43.75%	7	12.50%	2	43.75%	7	16	2
The State should explore opportunities for creation of a new wild horse preserve in Colorado that is owned and operated by the State of Colorado.	37.50%	6	6.25%	1	56.25%	9	16	2.19
The State should explore opportunities for creation of a new wild horse preserve in Colorado that is not owned and operated by the State of Colorado.	25.00%	4	43.75%	7	31.25%	5	16	2.06
The State should explore opportunities for creation of a new wild horse preserve on currently owned Department of Corrections land.	37.50%	6	25.00%	4	37.50%	6	16	2
The State should explore options for providing additional long-term housing and care for wild horses in Colorado.	37.50%	6	12.50%	2	50.00%	8	16	2.13
The State should explore options for providing additional long-term housing and care for wild horses in Colorado through nonprofit organizations or other private entities.	50.00%	8	31.25%	5	18.75%	3	16	1.69
							Answered	16
							Skipped	0
Other (please describe)							5	

Appendix D (Page 3): Wild Horse Preserve and Long-Term Care Options Survey Results

Question #2 (continued): For each option below, please indicate your level of support.

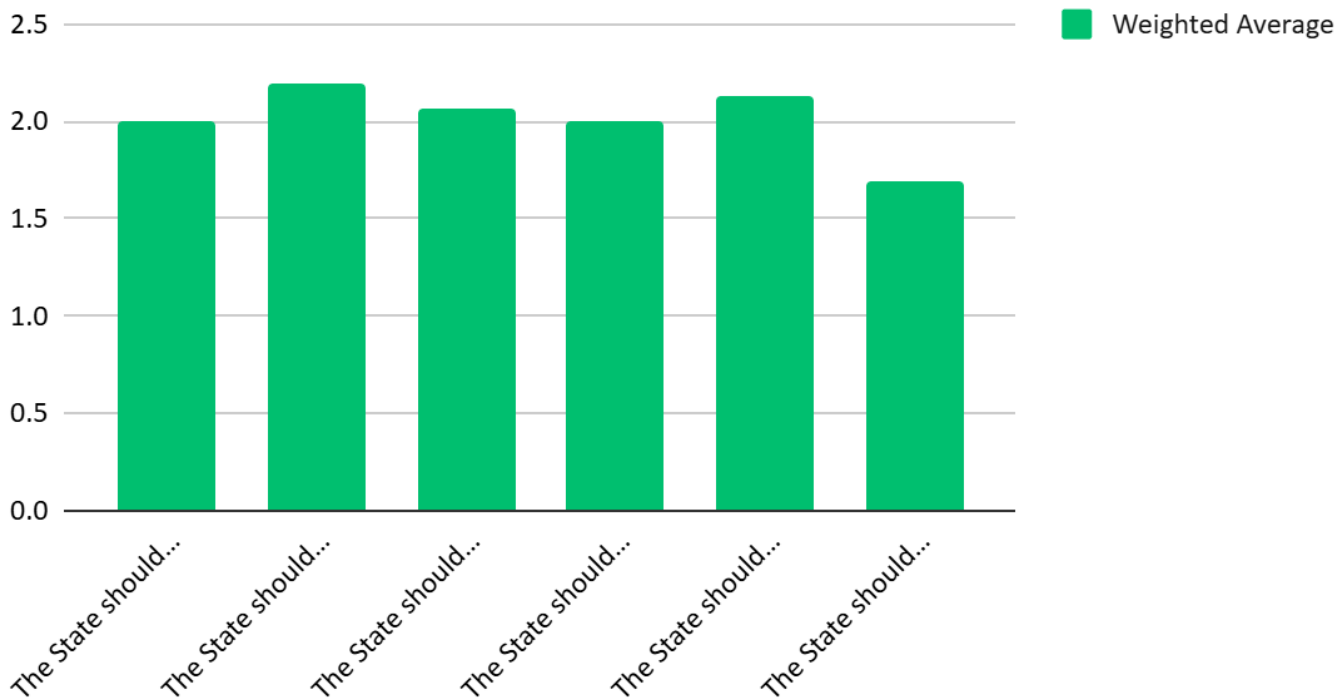
Respondent ID	Response Date	Other (please describe)
118858465392	May 05 2025 04:13 PM	If AWHC wants to purchase land to create/own/manage/staff/support a new wild horse sanctuary/refuge/preserve within the state of Colorado, go for it. I do not support the state having anything to do with owning/managing such an entity because I've seen too many fail ... and then where do those horses go and/or what responsibility would the state have? With no money now, it's hard to envision a *certain* future for horses on a state-owned preserve that will/maybe/sometime-in-the-future/possibly/potentially have money for the long-term (???) support of horses that are unhandled/unhandleable. I simply can't support something with so many question marks for horses' well-being, especially in the \$\$ category. The only group of wild/feral horses in Colorado that *might* fall under state authority - those in the San Luis Valley - have been the *least* discussed. Would this be a safety net for those horses? BLM horses? Tribal horses? Any wild/feral (?) horse anyone no longer wanted to or could care for? If funding becomes available (in the future?), as previously stated, I would much prefer to see the state help existing sanctuaries/refuges/preserves, etc. I'm a pretty hard no on the state being responsible for wild horses; politics at the federal level is difficult enough. The last option might be supportable, if "may" is used instead of "should."
118856460590	May 02 2025 07:44 AM	I don't believe the State needs to fund or operate any preserve or long-term care facility in Colorado, the BLM is already tasked with this and federal funds are allocated.
118854258972	Apr 29 2025 02:17 PM	On all of the above options you say the State, should it not be the Colorado Wild Horse Council? The State won't be doing the research they may act on the Council/ Board's recommendations is that not true?

Appendix D (Page 4): Wild Horse Preserve and Long-Term Care Options Survey Results

Question 2 (continued): For each option below, please indicate your level of support.

Respondent ID	Response Date	Other (please describe)
118854306798	Apr 29 2025 01:46 PM	I am not completely clear what is meant by "wild horses" but I take it to mean any horses gathered in Colorado. Of course, if they are federal, then the WFRHBA applies. The BLM in Colorado is interested in a west slope preparation center that is used temporarily between bait trap gathers and adoption events. A long-term preserve is not needed and long-term pastures already have a contracting process within BLM HQ.
118854170960	Apr 29 2025 12:41 PM	The state of colorado can not afford to support the long term housing and care of wild horses.

For each option below, please indicate your level of support.



Appendix D (Page 5): Wild Horse Preserve and Long-Term Care Options Survey Results

Question 3: If you indicated "minor changes" for any of the above options, please briefly describe what changes you would suggest. (If not, you may skip this question.)

Respondent ID	Response Date	Responses
118858465392	May 05 2025 04:13 PM	The last option might be supportable, if "may" is used instead of "should."
118858312652	May 05 2025 01:14 PM	need to allow language to support a tiered approach to establishing one or more state-managed preserves and include the identified revenue generation/ return-on-investments we suggested.
118858280658	May 05 2025 12:41 PM	I do not favor the State exploring options for providing long-term housing and care for wild horses in Colorado. As with current BLM programs, long-term housing and care are not viable options for managing wild horses in Colorado.
118856483363	May 02 2025 08:07 AM	Private/non-profits should be encouraged to provide additional long-term housing and care for wild horses in Colorado.
118856460590	May 02 2025 07:44 AM	If a private funded entity was to fund and operate a preserve and the State was not funding the program I could be in support. I feel that the State needs to let the BLM handle these horses as they are instructed to.
118855965675	May 01 2025 01:56 PM	With exception of land owned and operated through the Department of Corrections, the state should explore a new wild horse preserve in Colorado on land not owned by and operated by the state. DOC is a willing and capable operator. Most other state agencies would not have this capacity.
118854258972	Apr 29 2025 02:17 PM	On all of the above options you say the State, should it not be the Colorado Wild Horse Council? The State won't be doing the research they may act on the Council/ Board's recommendations is that not true?
118854306798	Apr 29 2025 01:46 PM	Any options that the state might consider has to be defined as to whether any federally protected horses are there which would then trigger compliance with law/regs.

Appendix D (Page 6): Wild Horse Preserve and Long-Term Care Options Survey Results

Question 3 (continued): If you indicated "minor changes" for any of the above options, please briefly describe what changes you would suggest. (If not, you may skip this question.)

Respondent ID	Response Date	Responses
118854194820	Apr 29 2025 12:52 PM	1) We have yet to define the goal for the preserve 2) We have yet to be able to show how/why the use of limited state funding available for a preserve (state run or not) is an optimal way to sustainably manage horse populations at AML 3) A cost benefit analysis should be done... a preserve will cost \$XX to be established and \$XX to operate...if that money were spent on a preserve vs. darting we could expect XX results over time in each scenario. 4) The group already voted NOT to proceed with a preserve - if some legislators don't like that they are free to do their own thing though I don't think the group should be forced to take a position counter to this general agreement 5) I feel the greatest value of the group is to provide assistance to the BLM in managing populations of their horses - BLM have told us repeatedly they don't need or want a preserve - we should listen to them.
118854174793	Apr 29 2025 12:39 PM	1.) State should explore opportunities NOT owned by the State: such preserve should minimize the net loss of agricultural land use and should not remove funds from the local/state tax base. 2.) Question: does the Dept of Corrections have enough land available to make a difference to a substantial enough number of horses? If so, let's look into it. If not, let's don't waste already limited resources
		<div> <div>Answered</div> <div>10</div> </div> <div> <div>Skipped</div> <div>6</div> </div>

Appendix D (Page 7): Wild Horse Preserve and Long-Term Care Options Survey Results

Question #4: Which of the following options is MOST consistent with what you would like to recommend? Please choose as many as apply.

Answer Choices	Responses (%)	Responses (#)
The State should explore opportunities for creation of a new wild horse preserve in Colorado.	31.25%	5
The State should explore opportunities for creation of a new wild horse preserve in Colorado that is owned and operated by the State of Colorado.	25.00%	4
The State should explore opportunities for creation of a new wild horse preserve in Colorado that is not owned and operated by the State of Colorado.	31.25%	5
The State should explore opportunities for creation of a new wild horse preserve on currently owned Department of Corrections land.	31.25%	5
The State should explore options for providing additional long-term housing and care for wild horses in Colorado.	25.00%	4
The State should explore options for providing additional long-term housing and care for wild horses in Colorado through nonprofit organizations or other private entities.	25.00%	4
Other (please describe)	43.75%	7

Answered	16
Skipped	0

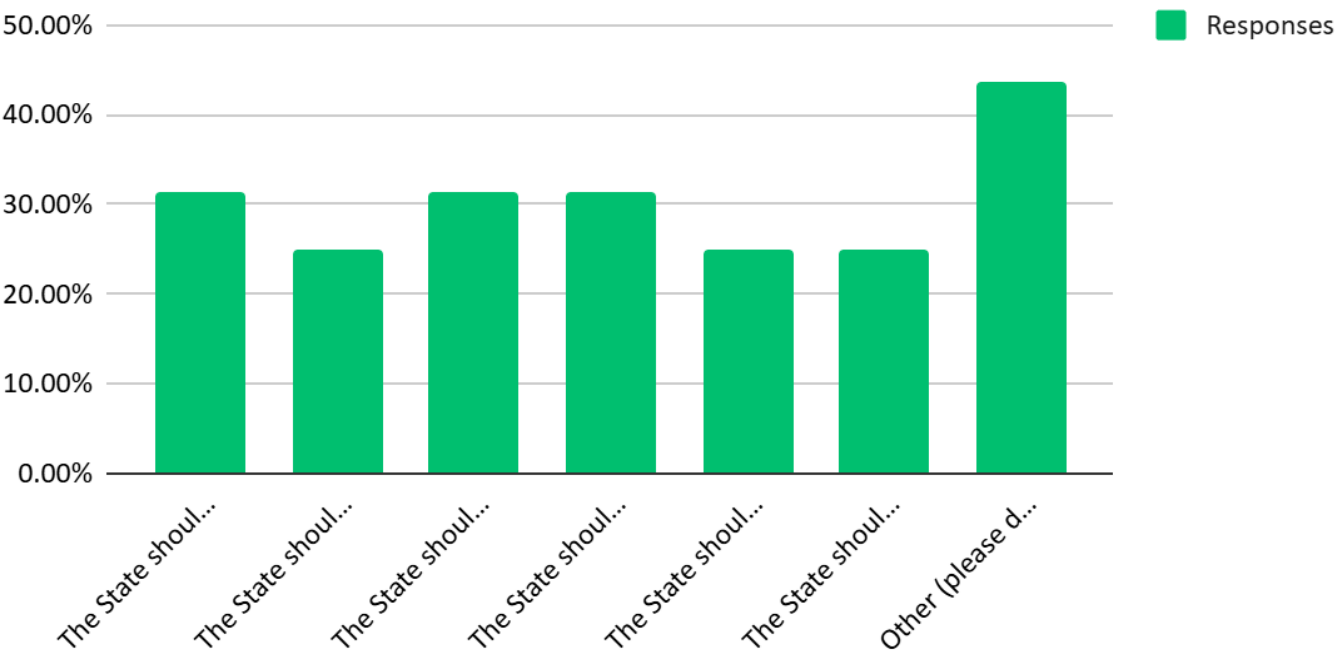
Appendix D (Page 8): Wild Horse Preserve and Long-Term Care Options Survey Results

Question #4 Comments

Respondent ID	Response Date	Other (please describe)
118858465392	May 05 2025 04:13 PM	None, really. The funding issue is too hard to nail down for any kind of commitment.
118856483363	May 02 2025 08:07 AM	Private/non-profits should be encouraged to provide additional long-term housing and care for wild horses in Colorado.
118856460590	May 02 2025 07:44 AM	Let the BLM do their job.
118854258972	Apr 29 2025 02:17 PM	Once again the use of the word State is troubling.As long as somewhere the term State is explicitly explained I am somewhat Ok with it,I still Question if it should say the State asks the Wild Horse Board to explore ...The State may then act on those recommendations.Maybe I am splitting hairs. I just want the responsibility of each party clearly defined.
118854306798	Apr 29 2025 01:46 PM	A preserve is not needed in Colorado. The purpose/need for a preserve needs to be defined first. There already is a private place with the private Wild Horse Refuge.
118854194820	Apr 29 2025 12:52 PM	None
118854170960	Apr 29 2025 12:41 PM	The State should not explore options for providing additional long term housing and care for wild horses in Colorado.

Appendix D (Page 9): Wild Horse Preserve and Long-Term Care Options Survey Results

Which of the following options is MOST consistent with what you would like to recommend? Please choose as many as apply.



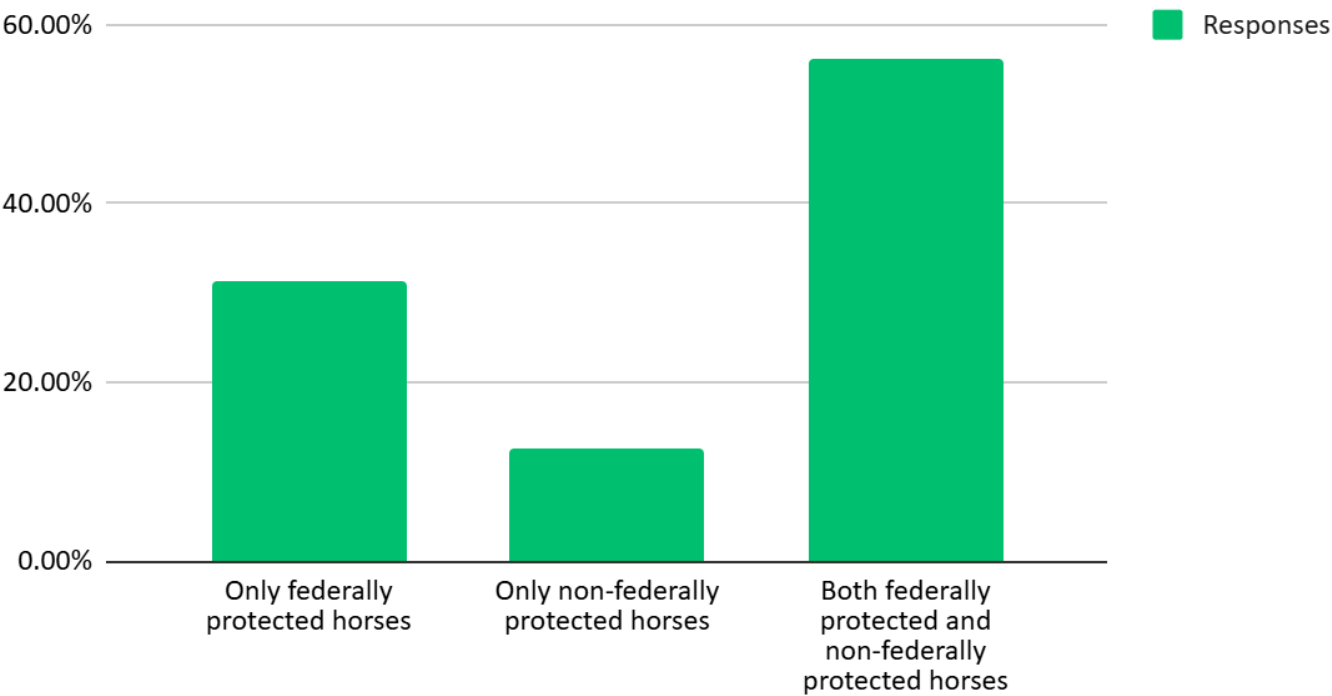
Appendix D (Page 10): Wild Horse Preserve and Long-Term Care Options Survey Results

Question #5: Should future efforts accommodate:

Answer Choices	Responses (%)	Responses (#)
Only federally protected horses	31.25%	5
Only non-federally protected horses	12.50%	2
Both federally protected and non-federally protected horses	56.25%	9

Answered	16
Skipped	0

Should future efforts accommodate:



Appendix D (Page 11): Wild Horse Preserve and Long-Term Care Options Survey Results

Question #6: Please share any additional thoughts or ideas you have related to potential preserve recommendations in our final report.

Respondent ID	Response Date	Responses
118858312652	May 05 2025 01:14 PM	<p>In light of budget constraints, i thought we recommended a tiered approach to establishing one or more state-managed preserves. This phased strategy allows Colorado to pilot a cost-effective model while exploring long-term revenue generation—an element that has not yet been fully integrated into current discussions.</p> <p>A state-run preserve would serve multiple strategic purposes:</p> <p>Wildlife Protection: It would provide a critical refuge not only for wild horses, but also for other native and threatened species that Colorado is already working to protect. This aligns with existing biodiversity and climate resilience goals.</p> <p>Economic Development: By situating the preserve to leverage eco-tourism and educational programming, the state could generate sustainable revenue. Comparable models—such as wolf tourism in Yellowstone—demonstrate strong returns on investment for rural economies.</p> <p>Asset Optimization: Utilizing not-for-profit partnerships or lands managed by the Department of Corrections presents innovative options for reducing costs and accelerating implementation.</p> <p>This initiative positions Colorado as a national leader in species conservation, responsible land stewardship, and rural economic revitalization—all while addressing public demand for humane and science-based wild</p>

Appendix D (Page 12): Wild Horse Preserve and Long-Term Care Options Survey Results

Question #6: Please share any additional thoughts or ideas you have related to potential preserve recommendations in our final report.

Respondent ID	Response Date	Responses
118859909085	May 06 2025 04:30 PM	In other recommendations, we have offered the "high level" with suggestions of ideas of how it could be implemented. The "high level" I chose "The State should explore opportunities for creation of a new wild horse preserve in Colorado." All the other options seem like different ways to implement this idea (the "opportunities").
118858465392	May 05 2025 04:13 PM	Regarding No. 6 above, which really isn't an answer, once federally protected wild horses are removed from BLM responsibility - under the care/ownership/responsibility of a new owner/adopter - or state - they're no longer federally protected. So No. 6 assumes a state preserve, which, as stated, I don't support. That said, if the state is involved, can it really discriminate? Where IS the line?
118856483363	May 02 2025 08:07 AM	Any State involvement in long-term holding/preserve is a long-term commitment of State taxpayer funds for many years to come. Given the State is indicating that next year's budget will be facing even greater deficits, there is no room for funding care of horses.
118854258972	Apr 29 2025 02:17 PM	This does not mention tribal horses. So I assume all of the suggestions above exclude the tribal horses.

Appendix D (Page 13): Wild Horse Preserve and Long-Term Care Options Survey Results

Question #6: Please share any additional thoughts or ideas you have related to potential preserve recommendations in our final report.

Respondent ID	Response Date	Responses		
118854306798	Apr 29 2025 01:46 PM	A preserve does not gain anything substantial for the BLM in terms of maintaining appropriate numbers of horses on public land. A preserve can be filled quickly with horses that then need care for the rest of their lives. Once the BLM has their HMAs at appropriate levels, the BLM might be interested in the education and training aspects of a preserve but until we are there nationwide, there is little utility to the BLM.		
118854194820	Apr 29 2025 12:52 PM	1) We have yet to define the goal for the preserve 2) We have yet to be able to show how/why the use of limited state funding available for a preserve (state run or not) is an optimal way to sustainably manage horse populations at AML 3) A cost benefit analysis should be done... a preserve will cost \$XX to be established and \$XX to operate...if that money were spent on a preserve vs. darting we could expect XX results over time in each scenario. 4) The group already voted NOT to proceed with a preserve - if some legislators don't like that they are free to do their own thing though I don't think the group should be forced to take a position counter to this general agreement 5) I feel the greatest value of the group is to provide assistance to the BLM in managing populations of their horses - BLM have told us repeatedly they don't need or want a preserve - we should listen to them.		
118854174793	Apr 29 2025 12:39 PM	No net loss of ag land and no loss of tax base on property used for proposed preserve	Answered	8
			Skipped	8

Appendix E: Types of Wild Horse Experiences Currently Available

Working Group Discussion: Expansion Opportunities at Existing Facilities

Site Name	Passive Viewing (Wild)	Guided Tours (Wild)	Passive Viewing (Fenced Pastures)	Staffed Tours or Education (Fenced)	Adoption Available
Little Book Cliffs Wild Horse Range	Yes	No	No	No	No
Piceance-East Douglas HMA	Yes	No	No	No	No
Spring Creek Basin HMA	Yes	Informal	No	No	No
Sandwash Basin HMA	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Cañon City Facility	No	No	No	No	Yes
Steadfast Steeds	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Wild Horse Refuge	Yes	Yes	Yes	Coming	Not Yet
Great Escape	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
Burro Basecamp	No	No	No	No	Yes
Engler Canyon Ranch	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Rocky Mountain Mustang	No	No	Yes and No	Yes and No	Yes
Colorado Wild Horse Foundation	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
Eagles and Wild Horses	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
The Middle Way	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
Banditas Wild Horse Promise	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

Appendix F (Page 1): Shared Learning Presentations on Adoption Events and Improved Success

Northern Nevada Correctional Center Adoption Events

Presenter: Alan Bittner, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

Alan shared details about adoption events held at the Northern Nevada Correctional Center in Carson City. Inmates train wild horses for three to four months, leading up to public auctions facilitated by a professional auctioneer. Visitors can observe horse handling and speak with trainers through facility fences. The event includes booths from partner organizations. This model, funded by BLM, was noted for its accessibility and engaging structure.

Cañon City Holding Facility and Event Potential

Presenter: Mitch Karstens, Colorado Department of Corrections (CDOC)

Mitch provided an overview of the Cañon City wild horse and burro holding facility, highlighting potential opportunities for adoption events and expanded use of CDOC-owned land. CDOC is exploring the idea of building an adoption space near the visitation parking lot, which could be constructed by inmates and benefit from visibility along Highway 50. Of the 5,000 acres CDOC owns, 3,500 are associated with the wild horse program, and partnerships with neighboring landowners could be possible. CDOC is preparing to respond to BLM's requests for proposals (RFPs) to position Cañon City as a holding and training facility and may propose an additional short-term holding site.

BLM Perspective on Adoption Success

Presenter: Alan Bittner, BLM

Alan shared the BLM's perspective on adoption success, highlighting both challenges and ongoing efforts. BLM's national adoption goal was doubled last year, but limited resources and the sensitive nature of adoptions remain hurdles. Strategies to improve adoption outcomes include expanded events, increased promotion, new partnerships, and an emphasis on training programs to support successful placements. While most adoptions are now through the online corral, repossessions are rare (under 2%). The BLM lacks a formal matching process and loses oversight once a horse receives its title. They are open to recommendations from the Working Group but cannot make formal commitments.

Appendix F (Page 2): Shared Learning Presentations on Adoption Events and Improved Success, continued

Understanding and Supporting Adopters

Presenter: Tracy Scott, Steadfast Steeds, and Kathy Degonia, Piceance Mustangs

Tracy and Kathy shared insights into why adoptions can fail and how to improve their success. Tracy emphasized that while adoption programs are not inherently flawed, outcomes often falter due to mismatched expectations, inadequate adopter support, and a lack of understanding about wild horse behavior and care. Kathy expanded on this by recommending greater adopter education, including clinics at events, online resources, and check-ins after adoption to encourage early help-seeking. Both highlighted the importance of preparing adopters for the reality of caring for wild horses and ensuring that training timelines and promotional materials reflect the horse's actual needs and readiness.

Adoption Incentive Program (AIP)

Presenter: Amelia Perrin, American Wild Horse Conservation (AWHC)

Amelia presented findings about the AIP. While many adoptions are successful, she raised concerns about fraud linked to the cash incentive structure. AWHC advocates for replacing the cash incentive with veterinary vouchers, improving compliance monitoring, supporting fertility control, and strengthening partnerships with rescues and volunteers.

Best Practices in Adoption Matching

Presenter: Jen Reid and Ann Hepworth, Best Friends Animal Society

Jen and Ann described Best Friends' approach to adoption support. Their model emphasizes thorough adopter screening, developing long-term communication with adopters, and using trained volunteers for compliance checks. They treat each animal as adoptable and maintain relationships post-placement to offer support.

Appendix F (Page 3): Shared Learning Presentations on Adoption Events and Improved Success

Forever Branded's Approach

Presenter: Amanda Mills, Forever Branded

Amanda introduced Forever Branded, a new national partner of the BLM Wild Horse and Burro Program. She outlined the organization's three program areas: Branded Partnerships (trainer network), Branded Adoption Centers, and Branded Bonanza (training competition). Each program includes a structured application and oversight process, with monthly reporting and minimum training requirements. Trainers and operators must meet facility standards, commit to public education and adopter support, and help promote responsible placements. Forever Branded also plans to launch a searchable adoption match website and is exploring future roles in compliance support and expanded services beyond BLM horses.

Colorado Horse Council (CHC) and Colorado Horse Development Authority (CHDA)

Presenter: Bill Scebbi, President at Equine Heritage Foundation, CEO at CHC, and Executive Director at CHDA

Bill shared insights from his 45 years in the equine industry and introduced several organizations and tools that could support adoption-related outreach and coordination. These included the CHC, the CHDA, and Equine City Hall, a digital platform that supports membership, event coordination, and public engagement. Bill emphasized the need for sustained infrastructure to reduce burnout and maintain momentum in horse adoption efforts. He also encouraged the Working Group to consider using CHC's platforms for outreach campaigns and discussed the potential return of the Rocky Mountain Horse Expo as a venue for adoptions and public education.

Appendix G: Working Group Discussions on Improving Adoption Events and Outcomes

Division of Animal Welfare

Presenter: Joe Stafford, Director, Division of Animal Welfare

Joe provided an overview of the Division's efforts to support at-risk equines, particularly during transitional phases such as post-adoption or seizure. He highlighted the Equine Welfare Assistance Grant, current partnerships with humane societies, and the importance of preemptive support and early intervention. Joe also clarified the legal classification of titled horses as domestic livestock and discussed the challenges of managing horses that fall into grey areas of jurisdiction. The Working Group used this information to better define the role of wellness checks, community care networks, and interagency coordination in supporting successful adoptions.

Working Group Discussion: Improving Adoption Events

Working Group members discussed ways to improve adoption events. They reviewed horse selection criteria—such as age, temperament, and trainability—and noted that horses may be fostered or adopted during training, then reassigned or adopted at events. Members referenced funding for BLM partners to help place horses and shared ideas for new event locations like Castle Rock or the State Capitol lawn.

Working Group Discussion: Improving Adoption Outcomes

The Working Group explored the complexities of wild horse adoptions and brainstormed ideas to improve outcomes. Participants noted the challenges of tracking online adoptions, especially when adopters are out of state, and discussed the limitations of sale authority adoptions and gaps in compliance checks. Suggestions included providing new adopters with a thumb drive of training materials, sending a regular newsletter, and expanding BLM's capacity for compliance checks through partner or peer-to-peer support. Members emphasized the role of human psychology in adoption success and the need to create a welcoming environment for adopters to seek help. Other ideas included post-adoption training opportunities at Cañon City, involving local agricultural agents in remote compliance support, and developing a set of best practices to guide horse care and dispute resolution.

A Future Forged Together

The Wild Horse Working Group extends its deepest gratitude to all partners, stakeholders, and citizens whose dedication and insights shaped this report.

Our shared commitment to Colorado's wild horses is a testament to what we can achieve together. We look forward to continuing this vital work, ensuring a compassionate and sustainable future for these iconic animals.



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