



Sand Springs West Herd Management Area Nye County, Nevada

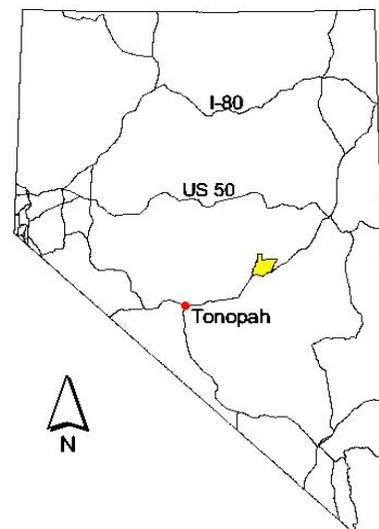
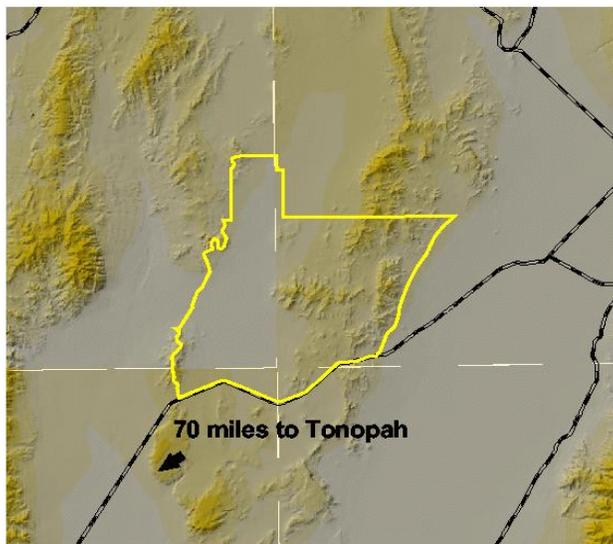


Location/Habitat

The Sand Springs West Herd Management Area (HMA) is located west of the settlement of Lockes, Nevada, along Highway 6 between the towns of Tonopah and Ely, in Nye County. The area consists of 203,903 acres which encompasses an area 17 miles wide and 15 miles long. This HMA is bordered on the west by the Hot Creek Mountain Range and on the east by the Pancake Mountain Range. Both mountain ranges trend north-south and are separated by the Hot Creek and Big Sand Springs valleys, with elevations ranging from 4,800 feet at its lowest point north of Lockes Ranch, to the Pancake Range at over 8,000 feet. The precipitation ranges between 8 and 12 inches.

The soils of the Sand Springs area are not very conducive to holding water at or near the surface. This has led to a lack of perennial water sources. When conditions begin to dry, horses wander to the perennial riparian areas around Moores Station (private land) and Moray Bench which are many miles outside of the HMA. As horse numbers become higher than the carrying capacity of their water, they begin to cross Highway 6 to the south of the HMA to find additional water. This could create a life-threatening situation for motorists as well as wild horses.

Successive years of drought have left this area suffering for water. Many of the reservoirs, springs, and wells are seasonal or in need of repair. Additionally, when the livestock permittee is not grazing cattle in the area, water is not pumped from wells. By the end of each July, water is often in short supply and the wild horses will move to areas outside of the HMA. These events were documented in the 1994 gather of wild horses and again during the 1996 emergency gather.



Vegetation

Vegetation is typically winterfat, bud sage, Indian ricegrass, bottlebrush squirreltail, galleta grass, fourwing saltbush, needle-and-thread grass, and a scattering of Utah juniper at higher elevations. Weeds include halogeton and Russian-thistle.

Herd Description

During previous gathers, Curly horses have been captured and placed into the adoption program. It is believed these animals came from the Fish Creek or Sand Springs East HMAs.

Observations have shown over the years that Sand Springs East HMA horses (managed by the Ely Field Office) travel back and forth into the Sand Springs West HMA and vice versa. This results in difficulties in accurate census numbers and in gathers. These horses are fearful of vehicles and aircraft, so during census or gather operations, they may run to the opposite side of the administrative boundary where there is much less activity. These animals are essentially part of one large “metapopulation” and should be managed as such. In order to manage the Sand Springs East HMA and Sand Springs West HMA as a single population unit, all wild horses in this area must be gathered at one time.