



## Sand Springs East Herd Management Area Nye County, Nevada

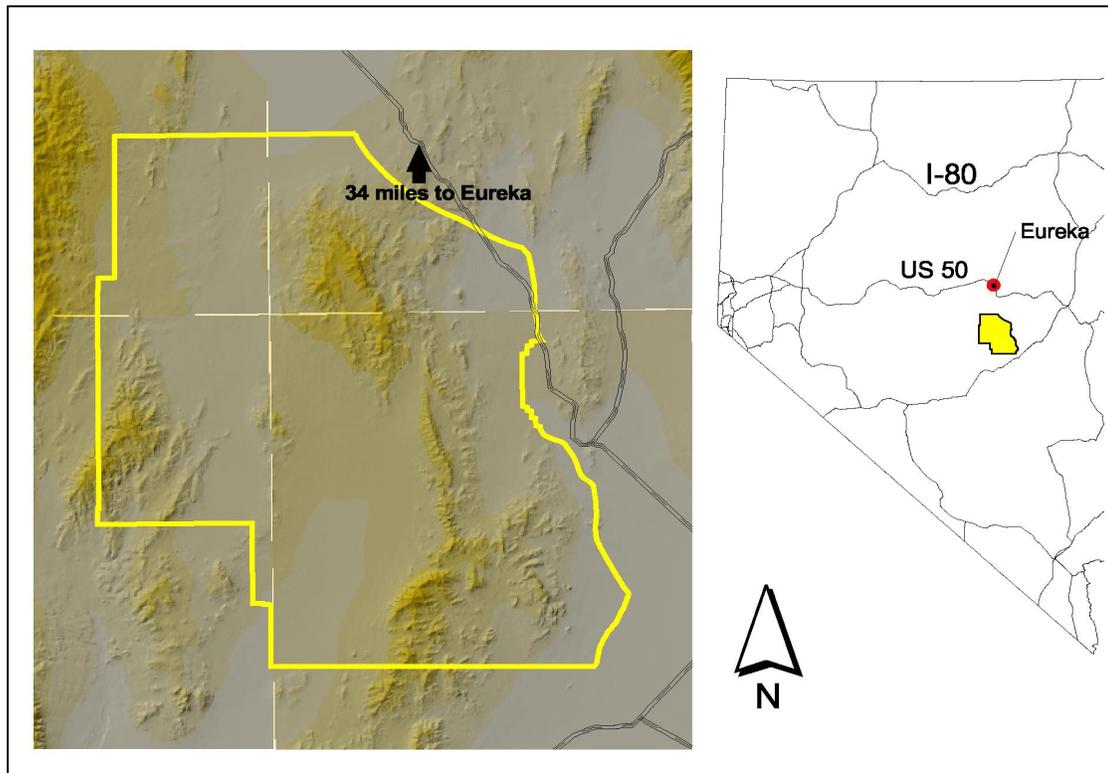


### Location/Habitat

The Herd Management Area (HMA) is located approximately 70 air miles west-southwest of Ely, Nevada. This HMA is bounded on the north, west, and south by the BLM Battle Mountain Field Office boundary which is effectively delineated by either fences or mountainous areas. The east boundary is the east bench of the south Pancake Range and the Duckwater Indian Reservation (Railroad Valley). The HMA encompasses 386,776 acres (386,696 public lands and 80 acres of private land), all within the Ely District. It also lies just south of and adjacent to the Fish Creek HMA in the Battle Mountain District, and east, north and adjacent to the Sand Springs West HMA in the Battle Mountain District. Each BLM field office is responsible for administration of its own HMAs.

The subject area is rural in character. The area is sparsely settled. The primary source of income is from ranching operations and mining in surrounding areas. There are no towns within the area. The Duckwater Indian Reservation community lies adjacent to the HMA. Major population areas are far removed, the nearest town being Eureka, Nevada, which is located approximately 30 miles to the north.

Topography consists of valley floors, alluvial fans, canyons, mountains, steep ridges, and basins. Major valleys in the area are Big Sand Springs, Little Smoky, and North Railroad Valleys. Major mountain ranges are the Pancake and Park Ranges. Portuguese Mountain and Park Mountain are familiar



geographic features in the area. No major streams flow in the HMA, although there are several small, perennial creeks in the extreme northwestern corner of the HMA flowing off the east slope of the Antelope Range. Elevations range from about 6,000 feet in the valleys to the 9,240 foot Portuguese Mountain in the southeast portion of the HMA.





The climate of the area is arid to semiarid. Temperatures range from summer maximums as high as 100 degrees to winter lows falling well below zero. The growing season is between 90 and 120 days. Prevailing winds are from the south-southwest in the summer and from the north in the winter. Average humidity is from 40-50 percent. Annual average precipitation varies from 20 inches in the higher elevations to 6 inches in the extreme valley bottoms. The bulk of the precipitation occurs through early spring rains and winter snows. Some localized storms are quite intense and have caused flash flooding in the valleys. Desert shrubs which tap deep moisture reserves are dependent on the winter moisture, whereas grasses and forbs are dependent on spring moisture available at shallow depths. Benefits from the precipitation are limited by a rapid evaporation rate. Annual free water evaporation rates range from 46-48 inches.

Soils vary with the extremes of landscape, topography, and geology. Soil textures are generally loams, clay loams, and silt loams, most of which are capable of supporting desirable species of vegetation.

Water in the valley bottoms and benchlands is presently provided by reservoirs, wells, rain, and primarily by snow. Water in the mountains is provided mainly by spring sources although there are a couple of small streams in the extreme northwest corner of the area. Small riparian areas occur with seeps, springs, and creeks throughout the HMA. Vegetation found in these areas need wetter conditions than surrounding plants. Rushes, sedges, forbs, and deciduous trees that rarely occur elsewhere are found on these sites. All large ungulates (mule deer, wild horses, and livestock) use these areas for water, shade, succulent forage, and to pick up trace minerals from vegetation.

Livestock grazing is an important resource use within the area. The HMA encompasses a portion of one common use allotment (Duckwater) in the Ely District. Both cattle and sheep are permitted to graze the area.

The HMA supports a variety of wildlife. This region provides limited summer and winter habitat for mule deer. There are an estimated 100-150 pronghorn antelope found yearlong in Little Smoky and Big Sand Springs Valleys. Sage grouse can also be found throughout the area. Small riparian areas are scattered throughout the area around the springs, seeps, and small creeks. Amphibians, reptiles, mammals, rodents, raptors, and passerine bird species common to the Great Basin can be found. Federally threatened bald eagles winter annually just outside the area near the Duckwater Indian Reservation (November and April). Bald eagles have been observed in other portions of the area including Big Sand Springs Valley. Endangered peregrine falcons may occur in or near the HMA, but there have been no recent sightings. Another species under consideration for threatened or endangered status and listed as a Nevada sensitive species by the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service is the ferruginous hawk (one known nesting site in the area).

Other uses of the area are primarily for recreational purposes. It is believed that some recreational use of horses, either by viewing or photography, is made by visitors to the area. Deer, antelope, and upland game hunting occur throughout the area. Trapping activities are moderate. Firewood gathering and pine nut harvesting also occur. The Park Range Wilderness Study Area (WSA) lies in the southwest corner of the HMA. This WSA is a limited recreational use area for hikers and backpackers. There are a few significant cultural resource sites in the area. Typical prehistoric sites are open lithic and debitage scatters, although more unusual sites such as rock shelters with preserved perishable artifacts, rock art sites, and hunting blinds occur.

## **Vegetation**

Major plant associations may be generally characterized as big sagebrush-grass, mid sagebrush-grass, pinyon pine-juniper, and winterfat-saltbush flats. Stands of aspen and fir trees with open grassy meadows may be found at the higher elevations.

### **Herd Description**

There is no specific information regarding the breed of horse that resides in this herd area. It is known that these horses are descendants of ranch stock and horses that belonged to miners in the area. These animals were released or escaped and became wild. They are probably descended from quarterhorse, thoroughbred, Morgan and other draft breeds, based on the history of the area. Curly horses are also a breed known to reside in the area. This HMA is one of only a few in which Curly horses are known to exist in the wild.

Wild horses in the Sand Springs East HMA possess a variety of colors although there is a preponderance of brown, bay, and sorrel horses. The field office has received comments from wild horse advocates favorable to maintaining or enhancing the color diversity of this herd, as well as the Curly horse characteristics,. Other colors present within the HMA are strawberry, red and blue roan, dun, gray, white, chestnut, grulla, black, pinto, and sevina.

The horses exhibit generally good conformation and good size (14 to 16 hands). They are relatively healthy, exhibiting no disease problems or genetic defects. Many of the horses exhibit traits of horses from local ranches prior to the passage of the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971.