



# White River Herd Management Area Nye County, Nevada



## Location/Habitat

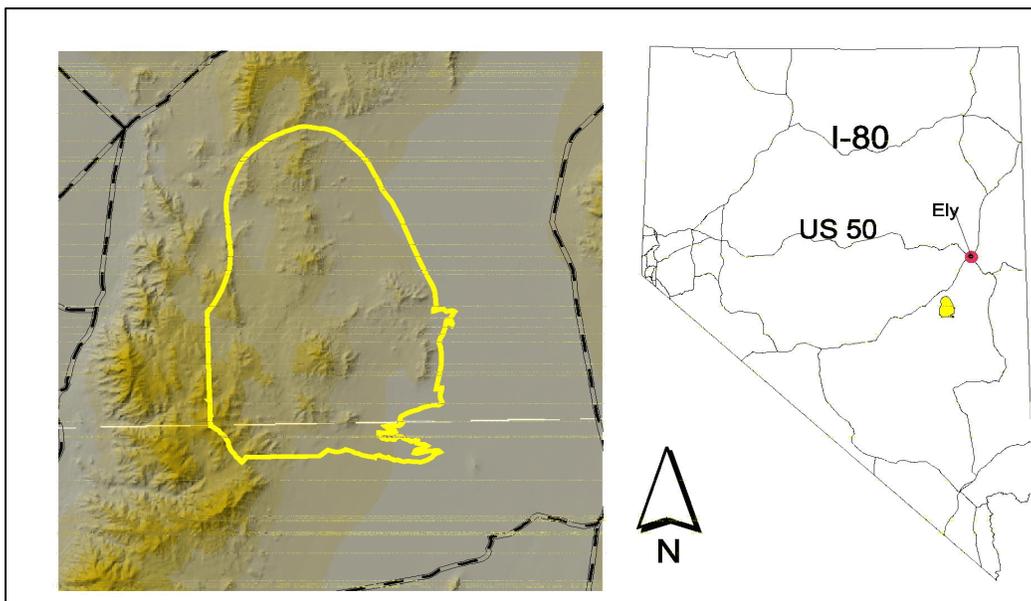
The White River Herd Management Area (HMA) is located in Nye County, approximately 20 air miles southwest of Lund, Nevada. The HMA encompasses 98,534 acres of public land and is currently being managed for wild horses by the Ely Field Office to maintain a viable healthy population of 90 wild horses. The White River HMA lies on the east slopes and foothills of the Grant Range and extends east into the White River Valley.

The climate is arid to semi-arid. Annual average precipitation varies from 20 inches at the higher elevations to 8 inches or less at the lower elevations. The bulk of the precipitation occurs through early spring rains and winter snows. Temperatures range from summer maximums in excess of 90 degrees to winter lows falling well below zero. The topography of the area consists of valley floors, alluvial fans, canyons, mountains, and steep ridges. Elevations range from 8,710 feet at Bald Mountain in the Grant Range to 5,500 feet in the White River Valley.

Springs, wells and reservoirs provide a limited water supply of generally fair to good quality. There are no perennial streams or creeks in the herd area. The White River HMA sustains many uses of the public lands within it. These uses include: camping, hunting, firewood cutting, off-road vehicle touring, pine nut harvesting, livestock grazing and mining. The herd area supports a variety of wildlife. This region provides yearlong range for pronghorn antelope and mule deer. Sage grouse, Hungarian partridge, quail and chukar are known to exist in the herd area. One of the highest nesting densities of prairie falcons in the State of Nevada occurs just east of the herd area. Amphibians, reptiles, mammals, rodents, raptors, and passerine bird species common to the Great Basin can also be found here. Federally threatened bald eagles winter annually in the White River Valley between November and April. Peregrine falcons may also be found year-round throughout the area, as can ferruginous hawks.

Wild horses use the area on a yearlong basis. Their summer range encompasses the Grant Mountains and they winter in the White River Valley and the low lying foothills. Wild horses prefer to graze grasses and grass-like species found throughout the area. In the winter, they will shift their diet to one consisting

mostly shrubs as sage. sage



of such white White

(winterfat) is a highly nutritious, low-growing shrub which inhabits the saline valley bottoms.

### **Vegetation**

Major ecosystems/plant communities in the area are the pinyon-juniper woodland in the mountains and the salt desert shrub communities in the valleys. The salt desert shrub community is composed of two major vegetative zones: the shadscale and the sagebrush.

The pinyon-juniper zone, scattered throughout the area, generally occurs above 6,000 feet within and surrounding the mountain ranges. Stands of these pinyon pine and juniper trees vary in density from scattered trees to closed (solid) stands. Several aspen groves dot the higher elevations. This zone provides summer range for wild horses and elk.

The shadscale zone is found mostly in the bottoms of the valleys. Plants in this zone have adapted to the very arid saline soils of the valleys. Important plants are shadscale, winterfat, black sagebrush and black greasewood. This zone serves as important winter range for wild horses, livestock, and a year-round population of pronghorn antelope.

The sagebrush zone is scattered throughout the area, occurring between 5,500 feet and 7,000 feet where soils are less salty and more gravelly in nature. The sagebrush zone provides an important source of perennial grasses and forbs for wildlife in the area.

### **Herd Description**

In order to maintain a thriving natural ecological balance, the White River HMA is gathered periodically to reduce the number of wild horses roaming the management area. The White River HMA was gathered for the first time in September 1996. Between 1985 and 1999, a total of 277 wild horses have been removed from the HMA and placed into the BLM's National Wild Horse and Burro Adoption program.

White River wild horses are all descendants of ranch stock or horses lost by miners during the 1800s. Wild horses in the area possess a variety of colors with variations from white to black and all shades in between. The herd contains a preponderance of sorrels and bays, as well as a high percentage of grays and roans. Buckskins, duns, blacks and whites can be readily seen throughout the area, and even an occasional pinto can be observed.

White River wild horses on the range today are well adapted to the harsh environment they inhabit. In general, wild horses are slightly smaller and sturdier than domestic horses, however, very large specimens are encountered during every gather. Foals are generally born in the spring when new green grass is plentiful. Wild horses are sound and healthy, for the most part, having been subjected to the rigors of natural selection which sorted out only the toughest animals.

The herd is comprised of numerous smaller bands ranging in size from one animal (rare) to bands of more than twenty. Wild horses exhibit a fairly complex social structure. Typically a band will consist of one stallion and one to several mares with their offspring. Bands are stable family units, and are known to reunite after a wild horse gather although they do interact and change members regularly. The stud horse (stallion) will vigorously defend his mares against other studs through a complex series of gestures, body stances and physical combat. A young colt will generally stay in its family band until it reaches two to three years of age. It may then be driven out of the band by the dominant stud or will choose to leave the band to search for its own harem of mares. Often young studs will form bachelor bands. Bachelor bands are very loose associations of young stud horses. These bands apparently form to satisfy the need for social contact and mutual protection. Young studs may remain in bachelor bands until they mature enough to gain control over their own mares. Young studs will sometimes be tolerated by other bands but have low social status. Young fillies will often stay in their natal bands for longer periods of time than

the colts, but they will typically either wander off to seek a new band or will be actively taken by a different stud horse into a new band.

