



Wilson Creek Herd Management Area Lincoln County, Nevada

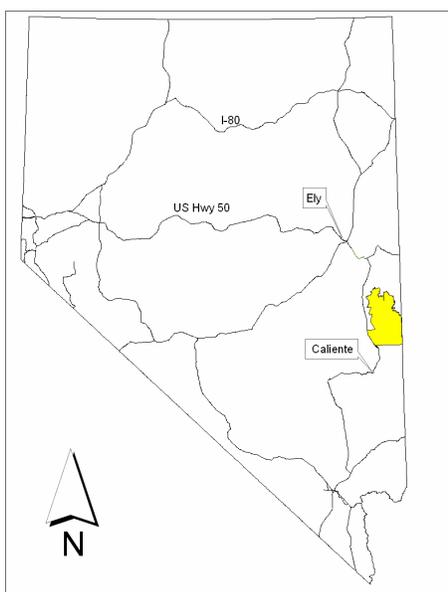
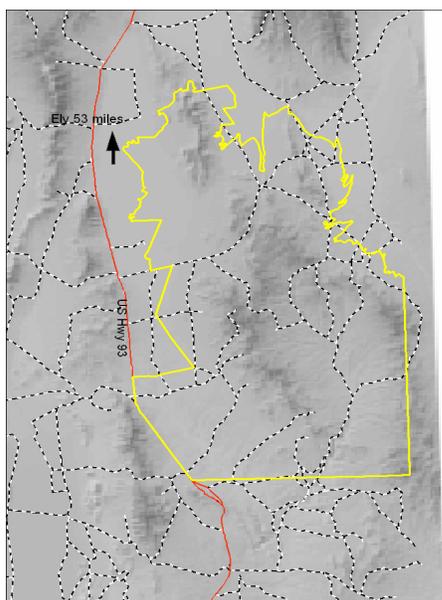


Location/Habitat

The Wilson Creek Herd Management Area (HMA) is located just northeast of Pioche, Nevada, in Lincoln County. Pioche is a frontier mining town established in the mid-1800s. The HMA comprises 687,229 total acres, two percent of which is private land. There is also a 1,151-acre state park, Spring Valley State Park, within the HMA boundaries, but it is not managed for wild horses. The HMA includes Camp Valley, Spring Valley, and Eagle Valley. It is bordered by Lake Valley on the west, Spring Valley to the north, and Hamlin Valley on the east. Mountain ranges within the HMA include the Fortification Range, the Wilson Creek Range, and the White Rock Mountains. Communities within the area include the farming/ranching areas in Eagle and Spring Valleys such as Ursine, the Hermitage, and the mining area of Atlanta. Numerous gravel and two-tracks roads access a majority of the HMA.

Elevation within the Wilson Creek HMA ranges from 9,317 feet on the top of Mount Wilson, to 5,477 feet at the bottom of Lake Valley. Water within the HMA comes from various springs and several small creeks. Water is also available when the livestock operators pump wells in conjunction with livestock grazing.

The climate in Wilson Creek HMA is arid to semiarid, which is typical of the Great Basin. Annual average precipitation varies from approximately 20 inches at the higher elevations to 8 inches or less at the lower elevations. The majority of the precipitation occurs through early spring rains and winter snowfall. Temperatures range from summer maximums in excess of 90 degrees Fahrenheit to winter lows falling below zero.



Wildlife in the area include mule deer, elk, and pronghorn antelope. There are also mountain lions, coyotes, bobcats, kit foxes, and jackrabbits. Sagebrush sites can provide important sage grouse habitat. Bald eagles, golden eagles, ferruginous hawks, and Peregrine Falcons can also be sighted occasionally. Smaller animals common to the area include cottontail rabbits, badgers, and several species of ground squirrels.

The Wilson Creek HMA has traditionally been grazed by domestic livestock including cattle and sheep since the 1800s. Cattle and sheep grazing continues today. Other public land uses include hiking, camping, hunting, firewood cutting, mining, and off-road vehicle use.

Vegetation

Vegetation within the Wilson Creek HMA is varied due to the HMA's large size. In the valley bottoms, salt desert shrub plant communities dominate, followed by white sage. As you rise in elevation, sagebrush dominates the landscape. The sagebrush is then followed by pinyon-juniper woodlands. Stands of pinyon pine and juniper trees vary in density from scattered to closed-canopy stands. At the highest elevations, communities of mountain mahogany, mountain sagebrush, aspen, and fir can be found. Throughout these areas, small riparian areas with their associated plant species occur in conjunction with seeps, springs and creeks.

Herd Description

The Wilson Creek HMA is currently being managed by the Ely BLM District for a population of 160 wild horses. In order to maintain a thriving natural ecological balance, the HMA is periodically gathered to reduce the number of wild horses roaming in the management area. The HMA was gathered in 1993, 1996, and 2002. During those gathers, a total of 457 wild horses were removed and placed into the national wild horse adoption program.

The history of the wild horses in this area has not been well documented. The first wild horses to the area could have been descendants of Spanish Barb horses that escaped from Spanish explorers and settlers. From that time, the wild horses bred with other horses which escaped or were turned loose for various reasons by ranchers, miners, and settlers. Primitive colored horses, such as buckskins and duns with Zebra leg striping, have been caught during wild horse removals in the northern portion of the HMA near the Fortification Range. There is some evidence that the Army Remount Service was active in at least part of the area. When they were in operation during the early 1900s through 1940, remount stallions of various breeds were released on the range to upgrade the existing herd. These stallions were mainly Thoroughbreds or Morgans, but a few draft blood lines were introduced.

Across the Nevada/Utah state line, the Wilson Creek HMA is bordered by Choke Cherry HMA in Utah. North of that herd is the Sulphur HMA. The Sulphur herd is known to be more closely related to the Spanish Barb breed of horse than to other domestic horse breeds of today. Although the HMA has been influenced by more modern domestic

breeds, this herd still retains many Spanish Barb characteristics. Although the mixing of these adjacent herds is minimal, the history of the Wilson Creek herd could be similar to that of the Sulphur herd.

Wild horses in the area possess a variety of colors. Most of the horses are bay, brown, or sorrel in color, but other colors such as buckskin, gray, palomino, black, roan, white, and grulla can also be found. The wild horses average 13 to 15 hands tall, and are of good conformation.