

Apply now for your wild horse eco-sanctuary



Some of the captive wild horses that could be coming to your eco-sanctuary

The BLM is calling for eco-sanctuary proposals. If you are interested in providing a home for captive wild horses, read on. A funding proposal issued on March 15 called for using private lands, a process that is fairly easy and your horses (a minimum order of 200) could be delivered as early as this fall. But a newer funding opportunity, released on March 25, calls for using a combination of your private land (or tribal or state land), and public land. This one is going to be more difficult and if your proposal is approved, your first horses likely will not arrive for two years.

The opportunity calls for using public land located within Herd Management Areas, since the 1971 *Wild Free-roaming Horse and Burro Act* states only these areas may contain wild horses. If you want to use different public lands, a change in the law will be needed, not impossible but it will take congressional action.

Actually, the funding opportunity document uses the term Herd Areas for possible eco-sanctuary locations. Herd Areas were defined as areas containing wild horse herds in 1971, when the act was created. Later, many of these Herd Areas were deemed unsuitable for long-term use and their wild horses were removed. The remaining areas were re-named Herd Management Areas and still contain wild horse herds.

Since the document uses the specific term Herd Areas, this opens the door to re-use some of the abandoned Herd Areas. Expect some of your neighbors to be less than thrilled to learn horses have returned.

A wrinkle is every Herd Management Area or Herd Area is already within at least one grazing allotment. It is difficult to envision eco-sanctuary horses coexisting with someone else's cattle. So the concept is really only available if you hold a grazing lease for a grazing allotment that includes a Herd Management Area or what was once a Herd Area, where you could replace your cattle with eco-sanctuary horses.

Another wrinkle is wild horses obviously cannot mingle with your eco-sanctuary horses so the Herd Management Area's wild horses will probably be removed. This puzzles me, since I imagine if the BLM were to announce they plan to zero out an existing Herd Management Area, the public would be outraged at losing these wild horses. But since they will be replaced with your eco-sanctuary horses, you probably will not get any protestors.

If you are still interested in the eco-sanctuary concept, there are a few other things to keep in mind. Your horse herd will be non-reproducing, perhaps made up entirely of geldings. After all, if the BLM is going to pay you to maintain these horses, no fair breeding more horses for more money.

Your proposal will need to include plans for public access since one of the main goals for these eco-sanctuaries will be educating the public. Your proposal will also need to include plans for a proactive fund-raising campaign to help pay for things like visitor infrastructure. Any plans for adoption centers or horse training centers will be pluses.

Of course, you will need to include a management plan, including monitoring of your horses, fencing, veterinarian services and descriptions of the infrastructure you will build. You will need to show how you will protect the ecological integrity of the public land and ensure the land will remain available to the public for other uses.

If you are still interested, submit your proposal by May 25.

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