

# The Ethics and Philosophy of Wild Horse Management

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Pictures were taken by Daniela Soto Cabrera

	Salt River Management Group (SRMG)	Wild Horse Fire Brigade (WHFB)	U.S. Forest Service Apache-Sitgreaves Wild Horses (USFS)
<b>Management practice</b>	State protected & on public land (partnership with Department of Agriculture)	Private group (possible partnership with an Oregon Wildfire Insurance Company)	Hands-off management (Federally protected by the Wild-Free roaming Horses and Burros Act/ Federal Land Policy management act)
<b>Philosophical approach</b>	Animal welfare - use of Porcine Zona Pellucida (PZP –a birth control vaccine) to reduce population growth (rather than culling the herds). → Animal welfare is the focus on the well-being and treatment of animals within human care.  Use supplemental feeding to reduce starvation during drought periods	Animal rights - rescuing and rewilding rounded up wild horses → Animal rights advocates for the inherent rights of animals, asserts their own intrinsic value, and independence/free from exploitation of human use.  Compassionate conservation - focus on how the herds effect the ecosystem → Compassionate conservation aims to minimize harm to individuals while pursuing conservation objectives.	Traditional conservation - focus on population ecology and how herds effect the ecosystem → Traditional conservation prioritizes biodiversity conservation and ecosystem over welfare of individuals.  Multiple Use of Public Land - Adaptive management - (implementing decisions, monitoring, and reassessing with changes).
<b>Ethical concerns</b>	Fertility control can affect herd structure/dynamics and supplemental feeding can affect forage behavior	Rewild horses are not completely staying 'wild' due to close contact with property owner and supplemental feeding	Abide by government policies for multiple use including all decisions affecting ecosystem/wildlife) can prolong management proposals that need quick decisions.

## Methods:

- Ecological and behavioral observations
  - SRMG: Witnessed their darting methods for fertility control; supplemental feeding program and observed the wild horses eating eelgrass from the riverbank.
  - WHFB: Witnessed the release of rescued BLM horses; Observed the private lands that the rewilded horses roamed and how they can serve as possible ecosystem engineers to reduce fire fuel grasses.
  - USFS: Observed and discussed their hands-off approach of managing the herds across the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest and the dilemmas they have with different stakeholders.
- Ethnographic approach - conducted open interviews with each management group's manager and joined them on ride alongs.

## Results:

- Ecosystem engineers
  - In all three management groups I witnessed how wild horses can serve as ecosystem engineers through reducing fire fuel invasive grasses - (WHFB), distributing mesquite beans - (SRWG), and migrate to different watering holes to not compete with cattle (don't damage water banks (less soil erosion)) – (USFS)
- Meetings / Ride alongs
  - Learned the responsibilities of each manager and the top-down processes when it comes to governance / management decisions of each group.
  - Got an inside look at the ups and downs of managing the wild horse herds (politics, activist groups, and the debates of the terms 'wild' and 'feral').

## Conclusion:

- This is important because management practices of any species becomes complicated with different governance and affects policies, ethical viewpoints, and overall, the species and ecosystem.
- Should manage herds on a case-by-case basis due to different jurisdictions.

## Literature references:

- Using Science to Improve the BLM Wild Horse and Burro Program: A Way Forward, pp 239-259. The National Academies Press. (2013).
- Bhattacharyya, Jonaki. et al. (2011). The "Wild" or "Feral" Distraction: Effects of Cultural Understandings on Management Controversy Over Free-Ranging Horses (Equus ferus caballus). Human Ecology.
- Boyce, P. N. et al. (2021). Causes and consequences of lags in basic and applied research into feral wildlife ecology: the case for feral horses. Basic and Applied Ecology.



Salt River herd (Left – Eating eelgrass in Salt River // Right – Eating supplemental feed)



Heber herd – U.S. Forest Service



Wild Horse Fire Brigade herd (Left – Professor Murphree & I with Deb Ferns (President of WHFB group) // Right – Rewilded horses foraging)

