

BLM in the Saddle – Burros Headed for Last Roundup

What do you do if you're the Natural Resources Specialist for a 2,067,793-acre National Monument and you have 4,000-odd feral burros to get rid of within three years?

Hint: You don't sit down at a desk and write a story about it.

Which is how *Park Science* came to do its first telephone interview. The interviewee was Pete Sanchez of Death Valley NM.

"Every time I pick up a copy of *Park Science* I wish I had time to write something for it," Sanchez said on October 17, when the editor called him to ask for a story on the burro roundup.

"I could agree to do it," he said, "but I know I wouldn't have the time, and then we'd *both* be mad."

Would he have time to answer some questions on the phone?

He would. So here's what's happening at Death Valley, mostly in Pete Sanchez's own words.

The last census of Death Valley NM burros, in 1982, showed a count of approximately 2,500 animals. The yearly increase is about 16 percent, factoring in mortality. "I've seen the burro population double since 1969," Sanchez said, "and I hope I'll see the problem solved in the next three years."

The plan calls for total removal of burros from Death Valley, in an operation beginning in FY 1984 and ending at the end of FY 1986. "Our goal is half the animals this year, half the remaining half in the second year, and the remainder the third year," Sanchez said.

The actual roundup work is being done on contract by BLM wranglers, who started the job on October 4

and had shipped out 79 animals as of October 17. "BLM has the expertise, the equipment, and the personnel," according to Sanchez. The eight wranglers on board as of October 17 will work into the spring, rounding up the burros from horseback, trucking them to Ridgecrest, Calif., and there turning them over – at a holding facility – to a consortium of animal protection groups.

The consortium consists so far of the Fund For Animals, NOWAH (National Organization for Wild American Horses), the International Society for the Protection of Mustangs and Burros, and the Humane Society of Southern Nevada. All consortium participants have signed an agreement with NPS to accept the burros removed by the NPS, and find homes for them, nationwide.