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Comments: The same justifications regarding forage & body condition of WH&B that were found FALSE in the recent Onaqui roundup are being attempted again in this preliminary EA covering the Spring Mountains Complex.

In July 2021, the Bureau of Land Management rounded up the vast majority of Utah's Onaqui wild horse herd. Pressed by a lawsuit, the Bureau's Salt Lake Field Manager testified under oath that an emergency roundup was necessary because wild horses were in poor and declining health and would need to be euthanized if left in the wild. After removing the majority of the Onaqui herd from the federal lands, the agency admitted publicly that its narrative had been false: The captured Onaqui horses were in good body condition; there was plenty of forage on their Herd Management Area (HMA) to sustain the entire herd through the drought.

Under the Wild and Free-roaming Horses and Burros Act, the Bureau of Land Management is required to manage wild horse populations to maintain a "thriving natural ecological balance." For each wild horse population, the agency sets Appropriate Management Levels (AMLs) to meet this goal, levels which the National Academy of Sciences has found have no basis in science. Instead, the agency sets AMLs arbitrarily, typically prioritizing the agency's preference to have domestic cattle and sheep trucked into wild horse HMAs to compete with the horses.

At Onaqui, the Bureau claimed that wild horses were "overpopulated" with an agency-estimated 474 adults in Spring of 2021. According to Bureau's formula, one wild horse grazing for one month is one Animal Unit Month (AUM), equivalent to one cow-calf pair or five domestic sheep grazing public lands for one month. The 474 Onaqui horses totaled 5,688 AUMs year-round. Meanwhile, the Bureau simultaneously authorized domestic livestock totaling 19,592 AUMs - the equivalent of 1,633 wild horses - on the Onaqui Mountain HMA. In other words, the Bureau authorized over three times as many livestock as there were horses on the range, but then claimed that it was the horses that were overpopulated.

In contrast, during the months before the roundup, field visits by WWP and others documented that poor range conditions on parts of the Onaqui Mountain Wild Horse Herd Management Area were caused by Bureau-authorized cattle and sheep overgrazing. Habitats far from water where wild horses grazed remained in good condition, and the horses themselves were healthy. To add insult to injury, the agency authorized cattle grazing on about 32,000 acres of the HMA fenced off for multiple years for post-fire recovery; this "grass bank," unavailable to the wild horse herd, was turned over to livestock industry instead, even as the agency removed wild horses on the pretext of insufficient forage.