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FEATURED

Ochoco National Forest pumps brakes on removing wild horses

By MICHAEL KOHN The Bulletin

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Members of a herd of wild horses graze in the Ochoco National Forest near Prineville in 2018.

Ryan Brennecke/Bulletin file

The planned removal of several wild horses from the Ochoco National Forest has been delayed and is not expected to start until early next year. Forest Service officials say supply chain disruptions are causing the slowdown.

The Forest Service uses metal panels to corral the gathered horses, but the panels, which are used to make corrals, have been difficult to acquire due to the disruptions in the supply chain, said Kassidy Kern, public affairs officer

for the Ochoco National Forest and Crooked River National Grassland.

“We have been waiting for the equipment we need in order to accomplish this safely and efficiently and the panels we need are on backorder,” said Kern.

“We will be looking for opportunities in January.”

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Wild horses roam free in many parts of the Western United States, usually on land managed by the Bureau of Land Management. The [Big Summit herd in the Ochocos](#) is the only one in Oregon and Washington to be managed solely by the U.S. Forest Service.

The horses in the Ochocos are the descendants of Spanish horses that were freed or escaped from ranches in the early 1900s. The herd is located around 25 to 30 miles east of Prineville and grazes on land located at 4,000 to 7,000 feet in elevation.

In May, the U.S. Forest Service [announced plans to slash the number of wild horses](#) from the current level of around 120 individuals down to a management level of 47 to 57 horses. The horses chew grass in areas near streams, damaging these ecosystems, but a smaller number of animals is sustainable.

October had been targeted as the original date to start the gathering of horses.

Reduction of the herd won't happen all at once. Forest Service officials plan to remove just five to seven animals at a time, and expect to get down to the

management level over a five-year period.

Horses that are removed will be taken to a holding facility and prepared for adoption. Fertility control will be used on some of the horses that will remain in the herd in order to slow population growth.

Reporter: 541-617-7818,

mkohn@bendbulletin.com

Michael Kohn

Michael Kohn has been public lands and environment reporter with The Bulletin since 2019. He enjoys hiking in the hills and forests near Bend with his family and exploring the state of Oregon.