

Attachment 1. Cold Creek Range Condition and Wild Horse Assessment – May 6-8, 2018



Forest
Service

Humboldt-Toiyabe
National Forest

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Route To:

Subject: Cold Creek Range Condition and Wild Horse Assessment – May 6-8, 2018

To: File

On Sunday May 6, 2018, Courtney Ghiglieri, Carson Ranger District Range Specialist, and I drove up to the end of Mud Springs Canyon Road 45571 and hiked to the spring at the end of the road. We also hiked east over the ridge to the spring at the end of Road 45571A. There was no sign of horse use in the area. We then drove up the McFarland Canyon Road 45570 and then drove out on Road 25800 to the Cold Creek Ponds. We found about 20 horses in the burn and along Road 25800. Body conditions of the animals ranged from 1.5 to 3 on the Henneke Body Condition Scoring System.

On Monday, May 7, 2018, Courtney Ghiglieri and I drove to the large wash near the end of Willow Creek Road 45565 and into the canyon along Road 45565C. We found about 25 head of horses in 4 bands. We watched all 4 bands leave the area between 0930 and 1100 and trail to Willow Creek to water. The bands trailed between 4 and 6 miles to water. They watered for a brief period (30 minutes to an hour) and then trailed back the way they had come. Water is flowing in Willow Creek 1 mile downstream from the Forest Boundary.

We conducted 2 utilization transects. Utilization levels average 90% throughout the area. There was sign of fresh damage on Joshua trees and other yuccas throughout the areas we visited. The horses have been pulling out yucca leaves to gain access to the roots. We hiked around in the area and found a few perennial grass plants at the upper end of the canyon on Road 45565C. Forage resources in the lower elevations have been exhausted. The area seems to have less red brome than the areas closer to Cold Creek. Body conditions of the horses ranged from BCS 1.5 to 3; however, most were 2 or less due to the extensive trailing between watering and foraging areas and lack of forage. On the way out along the Cold Creek Road, we found a stud eating horse manure.

On Tuesday morning, May 8, 2018, I visited the Cold Creek area. I drove up Road 25800 from the Cold Creek Ponds. I saw five horses along the road. I conducted two utilization transects along the road. The first transect (Road 800 2) was located two miles from the ponds. The transect consisted of 10 plots spaced 6 meters apart. Utilization was 90% on herbaceous species. No herbaceous or woody forage species were encountered in the transect. There were 2 horses at the site. They were attempting to eat red brome, an annual invasive grass with little forage value.

The second transect (Road 800 3) was located 3 miles from the ponds. There were three horses at the site. The transect consisted of 10 plots spaced 6 meters apart. Utilization was 84% on herbaceous species. The area is practically devoid of forage species, either herbaceous or woody. No woody species that would provide forage for horses were encountered along the transect. Only 2 of the plots contained perennial grasses. Body conditions of the horses ranged from BCS 1.5 to 3.



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Since my last inspection of the Cold Creek area on April 11 and 12, 2018, the area received rain and snow. The recent precipitation caused annual forbs and annual grasses to sprout along with a few perennial forbs. The few perennial grass plants we observed are also actively growing. This recent growth is insufficient to support the numbers of horses in the area. The grasses are already being grazed down to the ground again. The annual forbs have already gone to seed and are drying up.

Between mid February and early April, we received several reports from the public regarding the poor condition of the horses. On March 19, we received an email where a member of the public observed a young stud eating manure. An excerpt from the email:

“If this were a domestic horse I'd call animal control... I know feeding is not great idea either but people have already got these guys use to treats or should I say junk. They don't have much of a wild nature. I know the people want them there in neighborhood but this is not a beautiful wild horse experience it makes me cry.”

On March 20, 2018 we received several emails with pictures of horses in poor condition. Below is one of the pictures that was posted on Facebook.



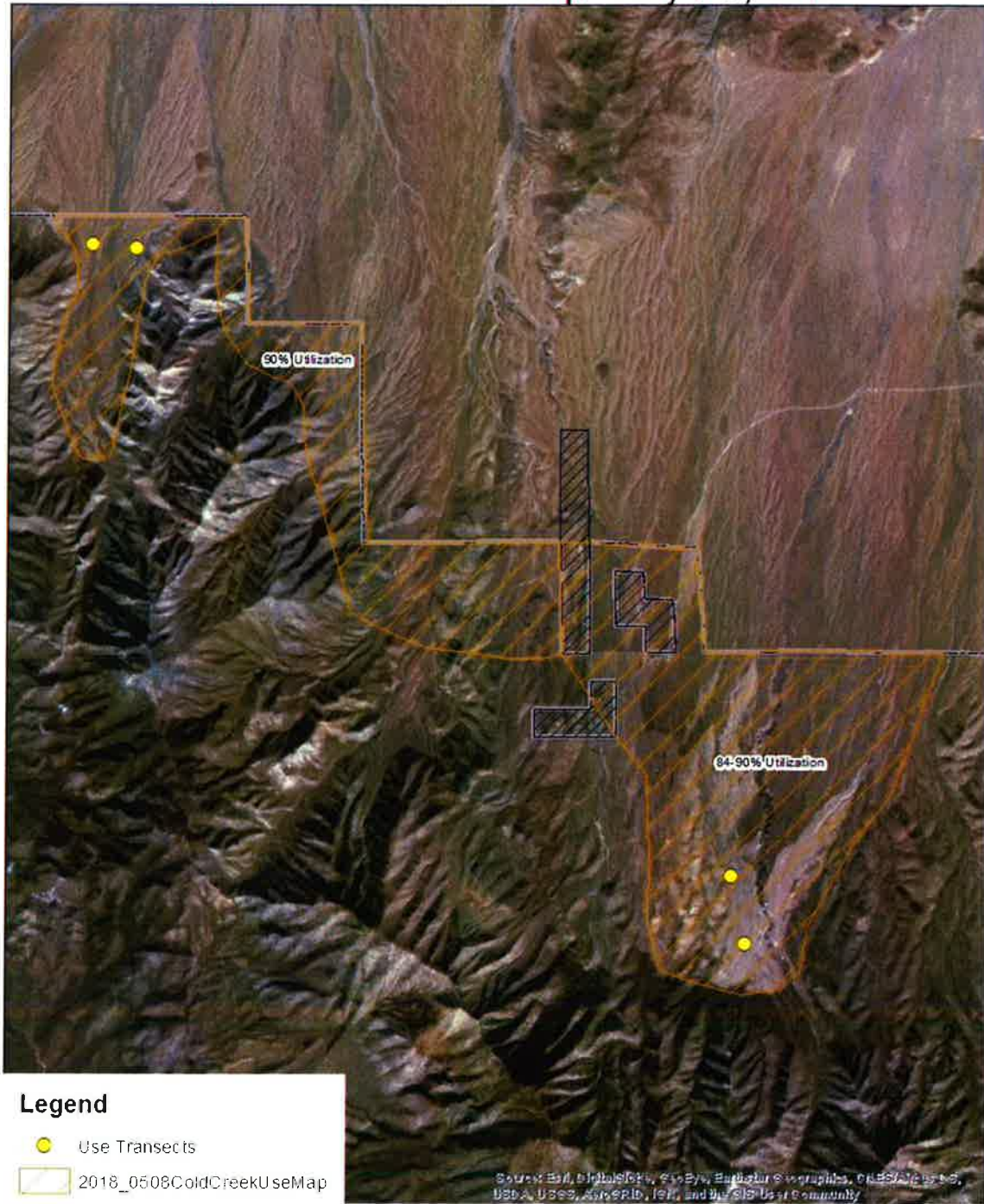
On April 3, 2018 we received another email from a member of the public stating *“I just reviewed some photographs taken within the last couple of days. They showed very thin...even emaciated...horses in the Cold Creek area.”*

The horses show no improvement in body condition since my April inspection or from the photos and reports we received from the public between mid February and early April. If anything, the recent precipitation and growth of annual plants served to maintain the horses' body conditions between the 1.5 to 3 range. Since the annual forbs are already drying up and the annual grasses are already being grazed to the ground, body conditions will continue to degrade. As temperatures continue to climb, animals will be under increased stress as they are forced to trail long distances between foraging areas and the water sources.



Rixey R Jenkins
HTNF Range/WHB Program Manager

Cold Creek Utilization Map - May 7-8, 2018



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Picture of utilization cage taken on April 16, 2018 along Road 25800.



Picture of the same cage taken on May 8, 2018. The area received rain and snow between the two photos. Note the lack of forage growth outside of the cage.

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Stud horse eating manure on the Cold Creek Road. 5/7/2018



Band of horses near the end of Willow Creek Road. 5/7/2018

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Joshua tree damage from horses at utilization transect 45565. 5/7/2018



Horses trailing to water from the end of Willow Creek Road. 5/7/2018

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Typical height of the red brome grass plants in the area west of Willow Creek. 5/7/2018.



Some of the tallest red brome grass plants found in the area west of Willow Creek. 5/7/2018

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Damage to Yucca plants from horses pulling out the leaves to get to the roots. Many of the Yuccas in the area have similar damage. 5/7/2018



Damage to Joshua trees from horses near Willow Creek. 5/7/2018

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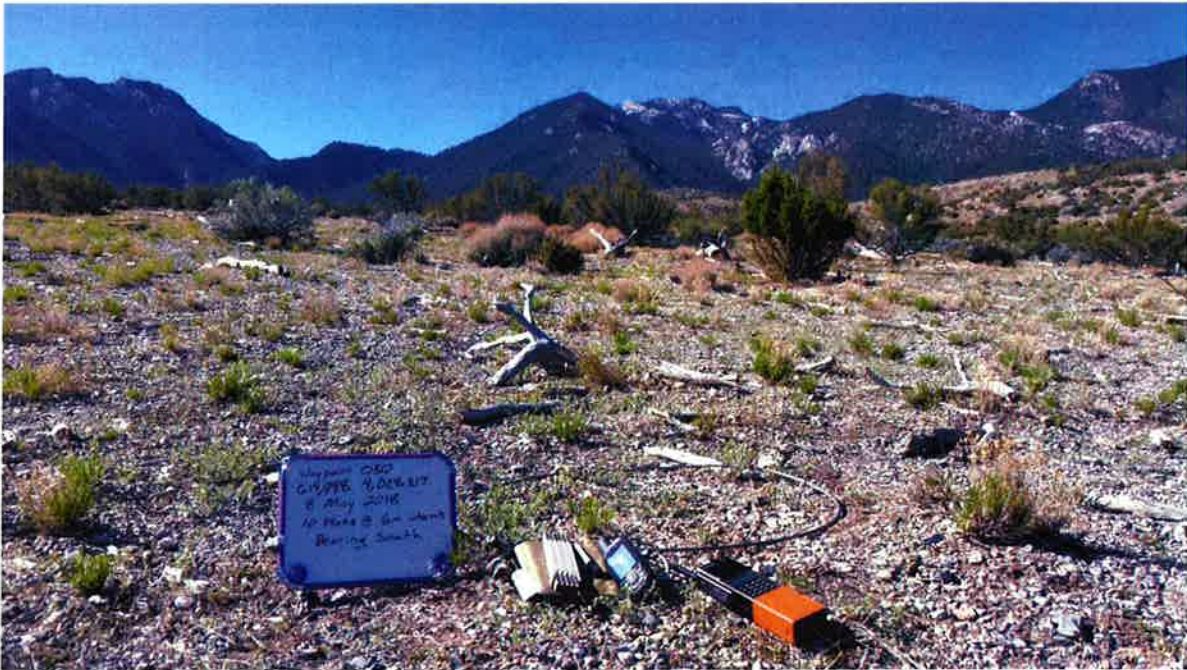


View down utilization transect Road 800 2. 5/8/2018



Heavily grazed perennial grass plant along the transect.

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View of utilization transect Road 800 3. 5/8/2018



Typical plot along the transect containing several inedible snakeweed shrubs, a few annual forbs and a couple of annual grass plants that have been heavily used. 5/8/2018

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All grasses along the transect were heavily grazed. 5/8/2018.



Although all available forage has been used, horses are still in the area, repeatedly grazing the same plants