

# Federal Court Halts BLM Roundup of Carter Reservoir, Buckhorn, and Coppersmith Wild Horses

*U.S. District Court finds the Bureau of Land Management likely acted arbitrarily; September gathers enjoined pending further proceedings*

SACRAMENTO, CA, UNITED STATES, July 8, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The United States District Court for the Eastern District of California granted a preliminary injunction halting the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) planned removal of wild horses from the Carter Reservoir, Buckhorn, and Coppersmith Herd Management Areas (HMAs) in northeastern California. [The order](#) was issued by United States District Judge William B. Shubb. (No. 2:25-cv-3252).



Carter Reservoir Mustangs

The decision blocks the September 2026 Gathers, under which BLM had scheduled the removal of 470 wild horses from the Carter Reservoir HMA, 273 from the Buckhorn HMA, and 113 from the Coppersmith HMA between September 1 and September 30, 2026.

"I have no words for the relief and joy I feel today. For decades I have documented and loved these wild horses — I know them by name, and I have watched over them across the seasons of my life. To know they are protected, that they will remain on the range where they belong, is a joy I have prayed for. This is a day of pure joy." ~ Darice Massey, President, [Carter Reservoir Mustangs, Inc.](#)

In its Memorandum and Order, the court concluded that the plaintiffs are likely to succeed on the merits under the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act (WHA) and the Administrative Procedure Act (APA). The court found that BLM relied on an assumed annual population growth rate to support its overpopulation determination, while the agency's own 2025 Gather Plan Environmental Assessment showed that actual growth rates in these herds had departed significantly from that figure over the past fifteen years — and in many years had in fact been



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negative. Because BLM “failed to consider the actual growth rates of the horse populations at issue,” the court held that the agency “acted arbitrarily and capriciously in violation of the APA.”

“So often the work we do is filled with frustration and sadness. But in the words of this order I read something rare — a recognition that the deficits in the underlying planning, the sheer lack of data and logic, actually matter under the law. After years of carrying that weight, the word for what lifts in the spirit today is elation. Today we have the taste of a justice that is too often elusive.” ~ Laura Leigh, President, Wild Horse Education

The plaintiffs’ challenge reaches back to decades-old planning documents that set the boundaries and population limits still used to manage the Carter Reservoir herd. As described in the order, the “Appropriate Management Levels” (AMLs) governing these herds were “set, modified, or reaffirmed” through older plans dating to 1981, and BLM reduced the Carter Reservoir HMA to 23,200 acres in 1985 “without any analysis, rationale, or discussion,” while leaving the herd’s low AML unchanged. The court held that plaintiffs may challenge those earlier decisions as components of their challenge to the 2025 Gather Plan, because the current plan relies on them; it declined, however, to vacate the older plans on a standalone basis at this stage, finding that doing so — divorced from the 2025 Gather Plan — would not redress the plaintiffs’ present injury.

The court further found that the plaintiffs demonstrated a likelihood of irreparable harm, and that the balance of equities and the public interest weighed in favor of relief, noting that “[t]he public interest favors injunctions against unlawful agency practices.” The ruling addresses the preliminary injunction only and does not represent a final decision on the merits, which remains pending.

Judge Shubb ordered that, pending further proceedings, the defendants “are hereby ENJOINED from implementing the 2025 Gather Plan to remove horses in the Carter Reservoir, Buckhorn, and Coppersmith Herd Management Areas.”

“We are honored to represent these plaintiffs and these very special wild horses in such an important case. The court’s careful review affirms that federal agencies must ground their decisions in real data and sound reasoning — and that the law, in fact, protects these irreplaceable herds.” ~ Jessica Blome, [Greenfire Law](#), PC, of Berkley.

The plaintiffs are Carter Reservoir Mustangs, Inc. (CRMI); its president and founder, Darice Massey; Wild Horse Education (WHE); its president and founder, Laura Leigh; and Billo Michael Comola. The plaintiffs are represented by Greenfire Law, PC, of Berkeley, California.

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