



# A SENTIMENT AND CONTENT ANALYSIS OF FACEBOOK POSTS REGARDING WILD HORSE MANAGEMENT

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Journalism & Communication



# INTRO: MY WILD HORSE



04/17/2015

2015



2016



2020



# THE CURRENT CONTROVERSY

- Current levels: 86,189 wild horses  
Recommended level: 26,785 wild horses
- 177 Herd Management Areas (HMA)  
26.9 million acres  
10 western states



# EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION: FRAMING

Effective communication is when a message is perceived and gets a response by the receiver **as it was intended** by the original source. <sup>(13)</sup>

How information is framed can have an impact on both the **volume** and how issues are **perceived**. <sup>(12)</sup>

# EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION: FRAMING

## Agricultural Literacy



The “ability to think critically and make value judgments about the impact of agriculture as an economic and environmental activity” and the pressures that result from those judgments.<sup>(1)</sup>



# PURPOSE AND NEED

## Ecological Impact



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## Policy



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## Public Lands



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## Public Concern



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# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How many total mentions of “fertility control,” “contraception,” “roundup,” “gather,” “adoption,” and “management” as they pertained to wild horses occurred throughout the organizations’ Facebook posts?

How did the organizations frame the discussion about wild horse management?

What was the social media engagement frequency by content frame?

What was the sentiment of posts regarding wild horse management practices, including adoption, roundups, and fertility control?

# RESEARCH DESIGN

- Social media monitoring & quantitative content analysis
- Time frame: June. 1, 2021 - Jan. 31, 2022
- 690 Facebook posts analyzed

## Nonprofits



**Return To Freedom, Wild Horse Conservation** ✓

Page · Nonprofit Organization · 4.5 out of 5 · 271K like this



**American Wild Horse Campaign**

\$ · Nonprofit Organization · 4.7 out of 5 · 575K like this



**Wild Horse Education**

\$ · Nonprofit Organization · 4.8 out of 5 · 120K like this

## Government



**BLM Wild Horse & Burro Program**

Page · 109,355 followers



# RESEARCH DESIGN

## Boolean Searches

(Contraception OR "birth control" OR "fertility control" OR "herd population") NEAR/10 "wild horse\*"

("wild horse management") OR ("wild horse" NEAR/10 management)

("Wild mustang\*" OR "Wild Horse\*") AND adoption\*

(roundup\* OR gather\*) NEAR/10 "wild horse\*"



Meltwater uses a Natural Language Process to determine sentiment of posts, coding content for positive, negative or neutral content



Coded for: keywords, engagement function (# of comments, # of shares, # of reactions & engagement) and sentiment



Data analyzed using IBM® SPSS Statistics version 28





# DATA & FINDINGS

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**RQ1: HOW MANY TOTAL MENTIONS OF “FERTILITY CONTROL,” “CONTRACEPTION,” “ROUNDUP,” “GATHER,” “ADOPTION,” AND “MANAGEMENT” AS THEY PERTAINED TO WILD HORSES OCURRED?**

Table 1. Total Mentions of Keywords in Facebook Posts from June 1, 2021, to January 31, 2022

Organization	Contraception	Fertility Control	Roundup	Gather	Adoption	Wild Horse Management
Return To Freedom, Wild Horse Conservation	0 (0.0%)	<b>108 (84.4%)</b>	235 (65.5%)	0 (0.0%)	21 (23.6%)	78 (72.2%)
American Wild Horse Campaign	1 (0.1%)	7 (5.5%)	87 (24.2%)	0 (0.0%)	27 (30.3%)	11 (10.2%)
Wild Horse Education	0 (0.0%)	6 (4.7%)	37 (10.3%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.1%)	0 (0.0%)
BLM Wild Horse & Burro Program	0 (0.0%)	7 (5.5%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (0.7%)	40 (44.9%)	19 (17.6%)

# RQ2: WHAT WERE THE ORGANIZATIONS' NOTICEABLE MESSAGES WITHIN EACH FRAME DISCUSSING WILD HORSE MANAGEMENT?

## Frame: Roundups



### BLM Wild Horse & Burro Program

October 19, 2021 · 🌐

Neutral ○

Did you know? Injuries to wild horses and burros during gathers are rare. A recent study published in the *Journal of Equine Veterinary Science* found that BLM's wild horse and burro gathers are considered much safer than similar gather operations (usually for scientific research projects) of elk, deer, and caribou. Nevertheless, the BLM always seeks to improve the safety of its gathers and takes any incident that results in an injury to an animal very seriously.

Learn more about this fact and more in our latest Tales from the Trails blog: Top 5 things to know about wild horse and burro gathers



### Return To Freedom, Wild Horse Conservation

October 2, 2021 · 🌐

Neutral ○

The Bureau of Land Management on Friday captured 65 wild horses on the fourth day of a helicopter roundup on the Surprise Complex of Herd Management Areas in Washoe and Humboldt Counties in Nevada.

One wild horse died: "Foal, 1-month-old orphan. Colt showing obvious signs of poor nutrition and dehydration, died," BLM wrote in its gather report.

A total of 372 wild horses have been captured, so far. Six other wild horses have been put down, all for poor body conditions.

The BLM plans to capture 1,220 wild horses and permanently remove 1,050 from the Surprise Complex.

For more information about this roundup, please click the image below.

TAKE ACTION: Demand transparency and accountability for the humane handling of wild horses and burros: <https://bit.ly/3D6gTQB>



### Wild Horse Education

November 5, 2021 · 🌐

Neutral ○

100 more wild horses captured at the ongoing Owyhee Complex roundup. Our team member is the only observer on-site >> <https://bit.ly/3bQ12K8>

So far 842 have been captured, 260 released after PZP treatment and 19 have died.

Background info, on-site reports, video and a word about the complaints we file at roundups, at the link.



### American Wild Horse Campaign

January 26 · ⚙️

Neutral ○

So far 188 wild horses have been captured in the Desatoya roundup. Three have lost their lives at the hands of the BLM.

Read AWHC's report--> [wildhor.se/DesatoyaHMA](http://wildhor.se/DesatoyaHMA)



## Frame: Fertility Control



American Wild Horse Campaign

July 29, 2021 · 🌐



!! Action Alert !!

The House Interior Appropriations Committee has released a draft bill that includes important language, championed by AWHC and [Congressman Steve Cohen](#) and [Congresswoman Dina Titus](#), and over 40 other House members, that would implement a substantial humane reversible fertility control program to manage wild horses in the wild! Now we need YOUR help to ensure the Senate follows the House's lead. Take action now! 📢

## Frame: Adoption



BLM Wild Horse & Burro Program

August 13, 2021 · 🌐



Head out to Hugo, Oklahoma for your next chance to adopt a wild horse or burro! [Bureau of Land Management - New Mexico](#) will be at the Hugo Rodeo Arena (415 E Rena St.) August 27-28 with up to 120 wild horses and burros available to qualified homes.

Learn about BLM's adoption requirements and find additional details on upcoming wild horse and burro adoption events: [blm.gov/whb/events](https://blm.gov/whb/events)

Learn about how you can earn up to \$1,000 when you give an untrained wild horse or burro a good home. Learn more: [blm.gov/adoption-incentive](https://blm.gov/adoption-incentive)

## Frame: Wild Horse Management



Return To Freedom, Wild Horse Conservation

April 4 at 5:24 PM · 🌐



Congress should require that the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service consider higher population goals for wild horses and burros, known as "Appropriate Management Levels," on Herd Management Areas and Wild Horse Territories. Sign our petition: <https://bit.ly/2Yne8XZ>

# RQ3: WHAT IS THE SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT FREQUENCY BY CONTENT FRAME?

Table 3. Engagement Statistics by Frame				
	Min	Max	M	SD
<b>Fertility Control</b>				
Shares	6	9238	207.38	816.69
Comments	3	620	45.99	73.36
Reactions	33	12804	674.05	1718.98
<b>Roundup</b>				
Shares	1	9147	225.09	538.73
Comments	0	1100	65.51	108.45
Reactions	33	9077	636.97	905.31




# RQ3: WHAT IS THE SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT FREQUENCY BY CONTENT FRAME?

Table 4. Engagement Statistics by Frame				
	Min	Max	M	SD
<b>Adoption</b>				
Shares	1	3158.00	397.67	646.76
Comments	0	592	93.25	129.79
Reactions	9	7190	1308.56	1928.93
<b>Wild Horse Management</b>				
Shares	1	9147	251.69	969.87
Comments	2	620	47.43	95.48
Reactions	37	12804	643.97	1710.9

# RQ4: WHAT WAS THE SENTIMENT OF POSTS REGARDING WILD HORSE AND BURRO MANAGEMENT PRACTICES, INCLUDING ADOPTION, ROUNDUPS, AND FERTILITY CONTROL?

Table 5. Sentiment of Facebook Posts by Meltwater (N = 690)

Sentiment	n	%
Positive	14	2.0%
Negative	18	2.6%
Neutral	658	95.4%


**Wild Horse Education**  
 August 5, 2021 · 🌐
 Negative ○

A 2 week old baby has died at the ongoing Antelope Complex roundup in NV. 190 of the 2200 wild horses targeted have been captured; 2 wild horses have died.  
 Learn more about this roundup, and action links, HERE >> <https://bit.ly/37noX1w>


**American Wild Horse Campaign**  
 January 26 · ⚙️
 Neutral ○

So far 188 wild horses have been captured in the Desatoya roundup. Three have lost their lives at the hands of the BLM.  
 Read AWHC's report--> [wildhor.se/DesatoyaHMA](http://wildhor.se/DesatoyaHMA)





**CONCLUSIONS  
AND KEY  
TAKEAWAYS**

- ❑ Terminology regarding capturing wild horses differs depending on how different organizations want to frame the issue.
- ❑ Roundups, fertility control, adoption and management all yield high engagement in online Facebook conversations
- ❑ Wild horse management can be written about in a neutral manner for the audience to interpret its meaning

**AWHC: Had the most negative posts (18)  
and positive posts (8)**

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES

Only analyzed the posts of organizations with public Facebook pages

Conduct a content analysis of the social media content using human coders to analyze sentiment

Analyze comments of individuals for deeper understanding about sentiment of organizations' online media



# FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Contact Libbie Anderson: [libbie.anderson@aggies.usu.edu](mailto:libbie.anderson@aggies.usu.edu)

Visit the following references



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