Tour Directions

High clearance, 4wd recommended. Plan one-half day minimum.

From the West End Visitor Center, drive east 4 miles on highway 141 and keep right at the "Y". Travel 22 miles through Dry Creek Basin and Big Gypsum Valley to Mile Marker 33, Just beyond is CR19 Q. Turn left over the cattle guard for *Suckla Ranches*. Continue about 5 miles to Road K20E. You will see a brown BLM sign: "Spring Creek Basin 3". Turn left. This road passes through private property. You may see horses here; please respect them and this right of way.

This road may be rutted and it is very slick in wet weather. In a few miles you will drive over a rise and approach the informative kiosk for the Spring Creek Basin Herd Management Area.

Please stay on the roads with your vehicle as you explore the area, or park and hike along the trails. Camping is permitted, however respect the horses and other wildlife; do not camp near watering areas or attempt to approach the animals.

Photo: TJ Holmes

RIMROCKER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Of Western Montrose County

Promoting Awareness, Understanding, Appreciation, and Preservation of our area's Past & Present.

Rimrocker Historical Society Museum & Office

470 Main Street Nucla, CO 970.864.7438

rimrockerhs@gmail.com www.rimrocker.org

UNAWEEP-TABEGUACHE
HISTORIC & SCENIC BYWAY
INTERPRETIVE CENTER
230 W. Main Street Naturita, CO
UTBywayCO@gmail.com
www.UTBywayCO.com

NUCLA NATURITA
Area Chamber of Commerce

West End Visitors
Center & the Nucla Naturita Area
Chamber of Commerce
NNACCDirector1@gmail.com
www.nucla-naturita.com

www.westendcolorado.com

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Self Guided Tour

The Wild Horses Of Disappointment Valley

Photo: TJ Holmes

Discover America's Living Legends

America's Wild Horses

"...wild free-roaming horses and burros are living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West; that they contribute to the diversity of life forms within the Nation and enrich the lives of the American people..."
Wild Free-Roaming Horses & Burros Act, 1971

Horses originated in North America at least 2 million years ago. The accepted theory is that they left during the last ice age, showed up in Europe, and returned to this continent via the Spanish Expeditions. However, recent discoveries of horse petroglyphs dating 1,000 to 3,000 years ago, and uncovering horse skeletons in Montana that date between 1,270 and 1,745 years before present, are challenging this theory.

Many of the Spanish horses were either stolen by Indians or wandered off or were released into the western landscape where they flourished, and became the foundation of today's herds.

As the West became settled, mined, grazed, fenced, and farmed, the wild horses were forced off the lands they once freely roamed.

In the 1950s and '60s the American public, enraged by the atrocities aimed at eliminating the wild horses, launched into a single-minded campaign to protect these animals "...considered where presently found as an integral part of the natural system of public lands."

Spring Creek Basin Wild Horses

Spring Creek Basin Herd Management Area (HMA)

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) gives the history of this herd as originating in the late 1800s, and belonging to a Montana rancher. This sturdy ranch stock was used by the US cavalry for their remount program. In 1940, local residents removed most of the horses; the few uncaptured horses formed the present day herd.

The horses roam in small, colorful bands, each protected by a dominant stallion. They are generally around 14 hands (56 inches) and weigh 700-800 pounds.

Several years after the passage of the *Wild Free-Roaming Horses & Burros Act,* two local herd areas were formed: the Naturita Ridge Herd Area, comprising 63,293 acres; and the Spring Creek Basin Herd Area, with 52,687 acres. Special interests soon found ways to bend the law for their own benefit. In 1985 the Naturita Ridge Herd Area was eliminated, and the Spring Creek Basin Area was cut by more than half.

At present, the herd consists of about 60 horses, fenced into 21,932 acres. Their range is shared with numerous wildlife including deer, elk, and pronghorn antelope

In September 2011, the BLM ordered a very controversial gather of the Spring Creek Basin herd in order to reduce the numbers from 82 horses to an *Area Management Level (AML)* of 35-65 adults. 52 horses were rounded up by helicopter, 25 horses were shipped to Cortez for immediate adoption, 17 went to Canon City and held for adoption; of the 10 that were released, 5 mares were treated with contraceptives .

Educating and involving the public in decisions concerning the future of these horses will help to guarantee that they remain as *"...living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West."*

Photo: TJ Holmes

2018 BLM FACTS
Spring Creek Basin Herd:

Est. Horse Population: 69

BLM Herd Mgt. Area: 21,043 acres

BLM Website: https://www.blm.gov/programs/wild-horse-and-burro/herd-management/herd-management-areas/colorado/spring-creek