

Special Report

MUSTANG

Legends and myths. Faith, hope and charity.



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It's personal. The entire question of what to do about wild horses in the West is wrapped in emotion and myth and magic words like "legends." But it's also realistic in an overwhelming number of free-roaming equines that pose a threat to agricultural economy and even federal budget expenditures that reach into billions of dollars.

There is no easy answer, but adding levels of bureaucracy and politics to reach an emotion-driven solution has only made the problem more difficult. Most of the wild horses today were as 75-year-old rancher George Parman described them, "my horses," meaning they

were probably turned loose when they could serve no practical purpose. The cowboy answer to their overbreeding was sometimes harsh, but it was meant to maintain a balance on the range, and not to drive the wild ones to extinction. Now, 40 years after passage of a law to save them from cowboys, the herds have doubled and emotions have become more unreasonable.

What was once a practical answer has been made personal along with every new effort since. In the end, both the horses and the land may have to suffer the politics.

Legends & Myths

Mustangs have become political pawns. They are symbols of freedom to most, useful victims or unwelcome villains to some, and a collective albatross on federal Interior policy that satisfies nobody. By Tim Findley

Mustang. The word alone sings with wild freedom and romance. It is in the bedtime stories of Black Beauty and Flicka, Fury and Silver without the Ranger. It's Marilyn Monroe, knock-kneed on a desert playa screaming through tears at the roughly handled capture of wild horses chased out of a Nevada canyon by an old biplane trainer. And it's the immemorial grit and courage of one unlikely woman to overcome her own frailty and rescue an American legend.

Now, half a century and perhaps half a million horses later, there is another surge to save the wild ones from extinction. This time it's symbolized by a photogenic young white stallion named Cloud, a growing library of new books on the romantic spirit, hours of Internet blogs, and an opulent savior in designer riding togs with a resumé that includes ownership of the great thoroughbred champion Cigar. It is also a hidden agenda of some extremist and opportunistic environmentalists who care less about loving horses than they do about hating cattle and ranchers.

The Hollywood images and the well-done, but Disneyesque, documentaries last a long time with indelible memories of horses given human characteristics. And inevitably that produces the tears to aid a flow of emotion demanding that the horses be returned to "their" wild range where, even without seeing them there, kind hearts will be warmed with just the thought that they are free.

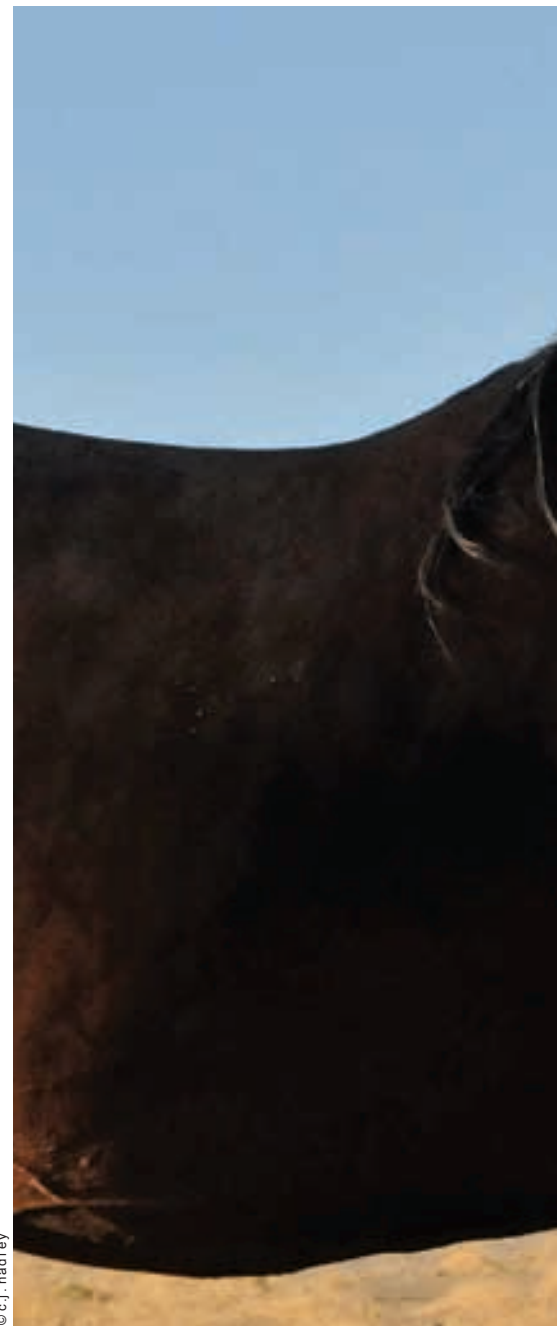
But legends and myths and even movies and videos are also prone to exaggerations and mistakes, tall tales and even lies. Another winter approaches, perhaps another hard one, and for thousands of horses roaming on sparse high-desert land, overpopulation of their herds may lead to disaster untold in gleaming images of dried-out water holes, pounding snow and dead or dying mares and foals. And if that consequence must be mentioned at all, wild-horse advocates will blame the fading numbers of livestock producers for something made to happen beyond their control.

In some ways, the plight of the wild mustang of the West has long been burdened by myth and distortion. Mustang is taken from the Spanish term *mestengo*, meaning a stray animal, but popular belief has always associated mustang with the romantic steeds of conquistadors, and later vaqueros with their lyrical skills as drovers, and beyond that to American Indian ponies carefully bred for speed, endurance and color. While some herds in remote protected areas may still carry the bloodlines of Iberian horses first brought to the American continent in the 16th century, most of the wild horses in the West today are inbred from a variety of other European stock lost or turned loose well into the 20th century by owners who had no further use for them or simply could not afford to feed them. But "feral horses" doesn't quite have that ring to it. So call them wild or even mustang. The truth is that there is no convincing evidence that they are about to go extinct.

This isn't the first time free-roaming horses have been thought to be doomed. Indeed, hardly more than a century after the armies of Hernando Cortés and other Spanish explorers rode their horses north and west into Southern California, missionaries thought the best idea was to eliminate as many as possible by stampeding some 20,000 of them into the sea to drown, or running them off cliffs, or penning them into corrals to starve. It was in part to deny them to the Indians, but also because there were so many of them they were threatening mission crops. There are no accounts of women crying, but surely some did.

In the wars that followed westward expansion, federal cavalry led by Sherman and Custer massacred hundreds of Indian ponies in addition to the tribes themselves as a means of denying the survivors transportation, defense, and hunting. Yet it is still anecdotally noted that President U.S. Grant said the West was overrun with a million wild horses at the end of the 19th century.

On-call environmental scientists today argue that the horse was not an introduced



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species on this continent, but actually the descendants of so-called "dawn" horses that went extinct in America in the last ice age 11,000 years ago. By that account, we should save some range for woolly mammoths and saber-toothed tigers, just in case the radical greens find a couple of surviving specimens to be "reintroduced," as they prefer to describe the wild herds.

But for the horses we have today, you have to blame Columbus, who on his second voyage brought horses as well as other livestock to Hispaniola. After that, the colony-seeking king of Spain directed that every expedition to the New World would carry horses. That may not totally be to blame, but ironically the breed of Andalusian horse is today extinct in



“Thunder,” Mare Tag #9615, came to the Litchfield corrals in Northern California on Sept. 7, 2007. She’s seven years old and available for adoption. She was taken from the Wall Canyon Herd Management Area with 103 other excess horses. In October 2010 there are still close to 100 horses on the Wall Canyon HMA.

Spain. Some private American breeders of the Spanish mustang might, in fact, have the only ones left outside of those few on remote wild ranges in the West.

Now in third-generation family management, the Cayuse Ranch in Oshoto, Wyo., dates its stock from Ferdinand and Robert Brislawn, who in the 1920s set out to capture and save stallions and their bands of mares and foals in Utah and Nevada that displayed the Spanish-mustang traits. True to their perceived intelligence and desire for freedom, the best of those stallions, a buckskin named Monty, slipped the gate and dis-

appeared into the mountains with all his band in 1944, never to be seen again, but adding to the legends.

Still, the truth is that for all their glorious past and incredible colors and traits, nobody seems to want them in their backyard. Private breeders say horses aren’t selling, and the Bureau of Land Management, which might have a few, can’t even give them away. In fact, the BLM is thinking of ways to pay landowners willing to board horses at federal expense in fenced freedom.

So woe is the mustang. And what now?

Sixty years ago Velma Johnston, a Reno

secretary, found herself driving behind a livestock truck she thought was carrying cattle. But when she drove closer, she realized they were horses being hauled to a slaughterhouse. “They were injured and bleeding,” she recounted to many interviewers, “and the only thing keeping them from falling was that they were packed in so tightly.”

The undoubtedly gruesome experience made Velma the secretary into Wild Horse Annie, the tireless advocate for mustangs who spent the next 20 years winning passage of the historic Wild Free-Roaming Horses & Burros Act of 1971. Unique in intent, it not only pro-

tected wild horses from slaughter or even harassment, but also created an entirely new mission for the BLM and the U.S. Forest Service. The BLM had replaced the Department of Interior's Grazing Service in 1946 as a means of modernizing use of federal lands for grazing and mining, but it was hardly even noticed by ranchers in Nevada, especially where the battle for land and water between ranchers and settlers was seldom as much of a problem as it had been elsewhere before the Taylor Grazing Act.

Horses in the arid and sparsely vegetated Silver State were made abundant first by the passage of settlers into California when desperate emigrants facing the desert either turned their horses loose, or, as often, ate them. The population of unclaimed horses grew so great that at one point in the 1870s the state of Nevada put a bounty on them. A story in the *Eureka Sentinel* in 1926 quotes an early federal forestry official, James Gurr, as saying, "The killing off of worthless mustangs is one of the best methods of conserving range feed for cattle and sheep and domestic horses." He told of seeing herds of them as he rode the stage into the old capital at Austin.

But in northern Nevada, the U.S. Army also came to agreements with local ranchers to mingle well-bred Army studs with the ranchers' own grazing horses to produce military remounts for World War I. Incredibly that agreement was in effect well into the 20th century. With so many horses mingling with the ranch stock and with cattle prices unpredictable, many ranchers became part-time mustangers, capturing wild horses and culling the best of them for sale as working or riding stock. The rest they sold the same way they did cattle. It wasn't cruelty, it was economics, and to Wild Horse Annie it was horrifying.

Annie was nobody's fool. She and her husband owned a ranch themselves where they raised horses. In time over the next 20 years, she would tell of hate mail and even threats delivered to her by livestock producers



Arthur Miller wrote "The Misfits" for his girlfriend Marilyn Monroe while he was waiting for a divorce in Reno in 1956. The movie helped get the Wild Free-Roaming Horses & Burros Act passed in 1971. BELOW: Mustangers in the 1950s. This is what Wild Horse Annie wanted to prevent.

all over the West. But, particularly in Nevada, where the largest herds roamed over vast federal land covering 89 percent of the state, many ranchers gave Annie grudging respect. Some sincerely admired her perseverance

even in the face of childhood polio that still seemed to distort her appearance.

Annie did not hate ranchers, and she did not expect that the wild horses should be allowed to overrun and destroy cattle grazing rights on federally controlled land. But she could not bear the cruelty in what she had seen as the cowboy sport of capturing and selling wild horses for extra income. Slowly, and often painfully, she drew support for a step-by-step campaign that would first end the practice of shooting the horses from aircraft.

The good times were just then coming back on the ranching West after grim years of the Great Depression when ranchers were forced by the government to kill their own cattle to prevent a glut on the market, and then World War II, in which even horses were taken by the military to meet its needs for meat as well as transportation.

But now, the war was over. Not only the United States, but Europe was in a period of hopeful recovery. Beef prices were up, and the benefits of new technology and heavy machinery developed during the conflict were appearing in surplus off-road vehicles and tractors. If it was a return to good times,



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though, it was also at a cost to the character of ranching. Both horses and cowboys were gradually becoming excess labor, less valuable and too expensive to maintain. Many cowboys were offered a perk to their low wages with periodic roundups in which they could capture wild horses on the range for their own use and to supplement their wages.

The best of the ponies were culled to become part of the cowboy's own string. Others less desirable, often the descendants of those untaken military remounts, were sold to the processing plants, perhaps for pet food, but more and more as Europe recovered, to meet the demand for what was, and still is, considered a delicacy in France and other countries including Japan. The price per pound of a 1,000-pound horse in Europe and Asia soon matched and exceeded that for 600-pound finished cattle.

The great American playwright, Arthur Miller, spent some time at a divorce resort near Pyramid Lake, northeast of Reno, casting aside memories of his marriage and beginning to pen a screenplay for his new love, Marilyn Monroe. He watched the horse gathers nearby and saw them as a metaphor for the dying West. It was all there in "The Misfits." Monroe was cast as a waitress with her childhood crush Clark Gable playing an aging itinerant cowboy looking to make a few bucks with the help of the younger wrangler Montgomery Clift and Eli Wallach as the pilot of an old biplane trainer. It was a western on the end of the West, and in a strange way became an allusion for tragedy among those involved. Released in 1961, it was the last finished movie for both Marilyn and Clark.

Within short months both Gable (whose insistence on performing his own stunts was considered a contributing factor) and Monroe (whose breakup with Miller may have contributed to her suicide) were dead. Though considered now to be a classic, Montgomery Clift, on his own deathbed a few years later, was asked if he'd like to see "The Misfits" again on TV and was said to have replied "absolutely not." It was recorded as Clift's last words.

But maybe no other film made about the modern West has ever had such a political impact. Annie's rapidly growing legion of support had a cinematic vehicle that was like a psalm to their cause. In 1959, with the help of a former classmate, Nevada Congressman Walter Baring, she won unanimous passage of "Annie's law," making it illegal to use mechanized vehicles or weapons to capture or kill

wild horses and burros. It was a first step, but still far from what she envisioned to save the free-roaming animals.

In the tiny northwestern Colorado town of Maybell where he was born and raised on a family ranch that struggled to survive through the Great Depression, Dave Cattoor had been riding after mustangs on the nearby Red Desert since he was 12. Every slim inch of him was cowboy. He rodeoed as a bronc rider with the legendary Casey Tibbs through another 25 years to the equally memorable Larry Mahan. But Cattoor, who met and married his wife of 46 years, Sue, in Maybell, might deserve to be more legendary than any of them. He and Sue would witness the changes coming in the West as no others possibly could. And he was destined to win the admiration of Wild Horse Annie herself.

It was another 10 years after "The Misfits" and more than that since Annie's law made shooting mustangs illegal that she would achieve passage of the historic Wild Free-Roaming Horses & Burros Act. Even then, it required a flood of letters from schoolchildren to Congress that she engineered as the heaviest mail campaign on the government since the Vietnam War.

Passed easily and signed into law by President Richard Nixon in December of 1971, it declared America's wild horses to be "living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West," putting them in a unique category beyond even the Endangered Species Act. It was a victory for the children, most of whom would likely live their entire lives without ever actually seeing one, and, of course, for Annie, whose entirely grassroots achievement was accomplished without professional help and

with precious little funding. Its grand language, however, didn't mean the pioneer spirit of the West was finished.

Annie was passionate about ending the slaughter of horses, and sometimes almost as emotional as the choir of tearful women who followed her, but she was also a daughter of



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Velma Johnston and husband Charlie owned the Double Lazy Heart horse ranch in Wadsworth, Nev. After starting her crusade to prevent cruelty to feral horses, she became known as Wild Horse Annie.

the West, born to a ranching family whose Double Lazy Heart Ranch was now her and Charlie's home. She understood horses in a practical way, and held no illusions.

"I have never referred to the wild horses as beautiful, noble creatures, because they are neither," she told *Sports Illustrated* in 1975. "Today's wild horse is not the glamorous mustang of long ago. He is, for the most part, underfed, scrubby and inbred." To Annie they were part of the lyric and the melody linking us to our past, but they were not the whole symphony. Before she died in 1977 she admitted that she had even become allergic to them, breaking out in hives when she had any contact with a horse.

The new law on horses and burros, however, carried significance beyond merely the



photos courtesy madeleine pickens

Madeleine Pickens, left, at “Mustangs on the Mall” in Washington, D.C., in May 2010, a tribute to “our American heritage.” She described herself as “over the moon” with joy at achieving “victory” in her campaign to save the American mustang. Not a single strand in her own golden-blond mane seemed disturbed as she made her YouTube announcement to friends in Dallas after a three-day trip to Sacramento and Washington, D.C., last fall. But Pickens was also obviously ahead of the gun in claiming to have come to an agreement with federal authorities to begin a “pilot program” for her fabulous dream of a vast western sanctuary for thousands of “legends” currently under control of the BLM. ABOVE: Madeleine and T. Boone Pickens march through Oklahoma State University’s football field at halftime to celebrate “Saving American Mustangs.”

preservation of two American icons. Beyond protections provided even to endangered species, the singular category of wild equines required constant care and enforcement on their behalf. They could not be simply released into regions only dubiously their “native” habitat unthreatened by any predators except, rarely, mountain lions. More than that, the law assigned to the BLM the task of managing the horses and burros on federally controlled land in 10 states that still supported cattle grazing, hunting and other uses by the public—land that by many years of contracts and agreements was intended for productive use, especially by livestock growers.

Many ranchers could see what was coming from still another level of federal regulation added to the already tense relationship with BLM and Forest Service agents. Taking advantage of a “last chance” offered them, and with support of their county authorities, many ranchers moved to claim every horse on their federal allotments. In some cases, such as the Red Desert in Wyoming or the vast Sorenson Ranch near Elko, Nev., that was a daunting task, covering thousands of square miles of mountains and sage where hundreds of those old Army remounts still roamed. Only one mustanger in the West had the reputation that made him capable of the job. Dave Cattoor.

The BLM at the time was like a group of crossing guards told to protect the wreck of an ice-cream truck at lunchtime. Sixty percent of the horses and virtually all the burros left

loose in a trail of broken dreams by failed prospectors were in Nevada. From the beginning, that was where the BLM would concentrate its efforts. But the federal land officers were under-equipped, underfunded, and lacking training for their assignment. Loose horses had always been the problem of the state or the county or the ranchers themselves. As someone pointed out, there were feral cats overrunning Catalina Island, and goats on an island in the middle of Mono Lake with no federal laws suggesting what to do about them. But horses on federally managed range weren’t even adequately categorized between wild and just free-roaming stock. The BLM was uncertain not only of where to find them, but also of how many there really were.

So like just about everybody else involved in 1975, it just watched Dave Cattoor for a while. Cattoor jumped at the chance when contracts were offered to claim horses while the BLM prepared some plan.

All his life since he could fit a saddle, Cattoor had followed the wild ones, capturing many with a variety of methods that never included shooting them or intentionally harming them. Often, he just watched them, fascinated by their social structure, taking note of their habits. “All those people who think they know so much have pictures in their minds of the herds running, with manes and tails streaming like flags,” he says. “But they don’t run in the wild. They may trot or even gallop, but it’s not normal for them to run, and certainly not far. If you think about

it, even the best thoroughbreds cannot run much more than a mile before they tire out.”

That was key to the most common way he and his crew would gather the horses, by chasing them on saddle mounts until the unshod wild horses would become footsore and slow down to be herded toward disguised pens, often following a domestic “Judas horse” trained to turn aside at the last moment. Cattoor, thrilled by the chase, nevertheless hated to see them arrive so broken down and exhausted in the hidden corral. Often, they would leave behind the foals and older mares that couldn’t keep up and that his cowboys could not circle back for. For them, it might be a struggle to survive. Cattoor knew the airplanes tried by some could not slow down to ease the panic of the horses running before them, risking injury to both the wild ones and saddle mounts. There had to be a better way.

The new law called on the BLM to establish a sustainable balance with its new obligations, finding where the horses and burros were, and designating that with a new bureaucratic acronym, HMA, or herd management area, then dividing that region for the forage it might produce between the AUMs, animal unit monthly, of both cattle and horses. The horses were assigned an AML, or appropriate management level, to share in the forage. When a herd exceeded its AML, the excess horses would be gathered and offered for adoption. The law did not allow just moving

them to areas where they had not been established in 1971. Herd management by the BLM thus became a bean counter's job, trying to keep account of the balance promised on the range. It satisfied no one.

No matter how trendy and politically correct it has become to call ranchers "wild horse haters" and "armchair anarchists generally ignorant of the real world," all the freshly arrived mustang experts with their bigoted views of the rural West have demonstrated again and again that they don't know jack about ranching. Ranchers in Nevada and elsewhere have lived with wild horses for generations, accepting and admiring their inspiring spirit as part of their own life on the range. But horse herds increase rapidly, by as much as 20 percent a year, and even doubling the herd within four years. When too many horses began to deny feed to their cattle, or, even more serious, when the herds began to destroy watering facilities built by the ranchers themselves, the wild-horse herds were culled and reduced. It was a business management decision, not a grudge against wild horses.

But it's true as ever that ranchers greatly trust their own management over that provided by the government. When the BLM first took on the job, it estimated that there were just over 17,000 free-roaming wild horses in the West. By the end of 1971, it had revised that figure up to 24,000, and by the time Dave Cattoor introduced the horses to the helicopter, it was more than 60,000. Most ranchers regarded that as thousands short of the truth.

Arguments still rage over whether horses, with a jaw structure that allows them to bite off grass in root-wrenching clumps, or cattle, which have recessed teeth that pull at the grasses with sometimes the same result, do more damage to the range. Horses will feed on sage and other forage that cows seldom touch. But the horses will also graze over larger areas, selecting the best feed among even grasses and forbs ranchers hope to set aside for winter feed. Both animals will seek the same water sources, but horses will stomp a stream or even a trough seeking water for the herd. The BLM recognized that in allowing more cattle than horses on grazing allotments, but countered the imbalance by allowing free range to the horses throughout the year,

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The only time the helicopter pressures the horses is during the last few seconds before the trap.

while regulating cattle to limited months of grazing.

"I watch the horses bust through gates on my own property to reach water or feed," says Eureka rancher Roy Risi, "and there is nothing I can do. It will put me out of business." Even grain and corn growers were helpless to protect their fields from the wild herds.

There was another generally ignored reality that gave truth to the lies of wild-horse advocates claiming the BLM steadily reduced

the HMAs established after the law by refusing to turn captive horses out on some areas. The fact was that cattle grazing on western federal lands had been cut in half since 1940. Some of it was due to federal regulations requiring that herds be reduced to numbers of cattle that could be moved to private pasture for several weeks a year. Much of it came from the economic pressure added by BLM regulations reducing the cattle herds. But all over the West, ranches began disappearing, so often marked by old wooden windmills rusted to a stop above empty water troughs, or springs dried up from lack of attention, or acres of dried grass and vanished wildlife in the ghostly memory of those who gave up. More than 30 percent of the reduction in cattle grazing was counted after 1971.

Had the BLM turned excess horses and burros out to those areas, it would have been committing them to thirst and starvation. The ranchers had maintained the springs, reservoirs and water developments and, in most cases, this water had been appropriated from the state and is owned by the ranchers. The government does no maintenance and provides no help to the survival of species in an area returned to the lifeless condition noted by the first explorers in the 18th century. "I've seen it myself," says George Parman, a Nevada rancher for 75 years. "In a bad winter, the horses would group together in a canyon seek-

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Dave and Sue Cattoor. Wild Horse Annie wrote to Dave in 1975, saying, "To the glowing reports of your capabilities given to me...I wish to add the thank yous of this organization (WHOA) and of me personally. Thank you for your expertise and for having the sort of crew of cowboys you had to carry it out."

ing shelter and feed, and we wouldn't find them until spring—colts starved at the bellies of dead mares, even studs broke down and died in the cold. Only the coyotes fed.”

But the horse advocates wouldn't see that. They didn't care how many family ranches failed and gave up in decades of federal pressure to develop a comprehensive, or at least understandable, plan for government management of lands the BLM insisted on calling public, but often treated as some sort of political fiefdom.

What was left was a deeply harbored resentment of many ranchers toward their own federal government, and still steadily growing herds of wild horses more precious than ever to the romantically sensitive people who didn't understand the danger to them or to the ranchers they actually needed to survive. Political activists feeling their oats among them tried to suggest it was a plot by “corporate ranchers,” another obvious lie.

Dave Cattoor was kept working, gathering horses for the BLM like shoveling sand from the beach. In 1982, he met former Vietnam pilot Jim Hicks. They became close friends and partners using older Bell helicopters (which Cattoor learned to fly) in a test to herd cattle, and then employed the method as Cattoor's long-sought solution to gathering wild horses in a more efficient and humane way. The veteran Bells, like those used in the film and TV series “M*A*S*H,” featured a full plastic bubble around the cockpit, allowing the pilot to clearly see everywhere around and beneath him. “Better than a saddle horse,” says Cattoor, not meaning to offend the ponies that got him there.

With the helicopter, it wasn't necessary to run the horses, except in the final moments when they might hesitate outside the gate. The chopper could stay at a relatively unthreatening altitude that would set the horses off at a trot. If mares or foals got left behind, it could hover and backtrack, gently bringing them into the fold. The horses would arrive at the gate uninjured and without sore hooves, all in less time than it had taken with saddle horses.

Even if it took an amendment to Annie's law, it was also just what the BLM needed. There were other contractors, but none were trusted more than Cattoor. Working eight months a year, all over the West, his helicopters gathered an estimated 150,000 horses between 1975 and 2010.

Year after year, through politically changing administrations and unreliable budget priorities, the BLM tried to sell its adoption

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Stud dominates young colt. He doesn't want competition from his own son, but that often happens anyway. OPPOSITE: Battle for the mares—many returned to the range temporarily sterilized with PZP to slow down herd growth. The shot lasts one to two years and then has to be repeated. But how to find the right mares?

program, advertising on billboards and TV, even offering a website with photos, sort of combining the style of used-car sales and impoverished children. There were absurd moments like those in California when suburbanites showed up to adopt a burro with a small U-Haul moving van in tow behind their Ford Mustang. And there were actions by militant environmentalists who broke open corrals in attempts to set the horses free.

Most troubling, however, was the fact that the BLM simply could not keep up with the job. Ranchers complained that a gather in one area would end up releasing horses in another. Attempts to find new cooperation with the help of a state advisory body were disrupted by weeping women from the organization Annie helped form, Wild Horse Organized Assistance (WHOA). Opinions were hardened on both sides, while the population of wild horses steadily increased, both on the range, and in the capture corrals. The living legends were becoming political pawns: symbols of freedom to most, useful victims or unwelcome villains to some, and a collective albatross on federal Interior policy that satisfied nobody. Militants raged as usual, women cried as if on cue, and ranchers appealed for understanding, but none of them really listened long enough to sort out all the lies.

Dave and Sue Cattoor cowboied on through it all. “A lot of it was flying,” says Dave, flashing a sardonic grin and a thumbs-up, “but it was still Wild West, Hi ho, Silver helicopter.” He still found it hard to believe that the government would pay for what many cowboys had enjoyed doing for nothing. By the second Reagan administration, the BLM had corrals scattered around the West holding 10,000 horses that nobody seemed to want for 25 bucks or any price. Pasture refuges established in Oklahoma and Kansas couldn't hold any more, and one desperate plan offering to give away 100 horses to anyone who would take them backfired with nearly scandalous impact when many of the horses turned up at the two remaining horse slaughterhouses in the United States. The BLM had a budget of \$51 million for more gathers that by 1990 totaled more than 40,000 wild horses and burros with almost no place left to go. The price of feed alone threatened to bankrupt it.

It was a perfect setup for anyone wanting to show concern for the environment at almost no risk. A cause just made for celebrities. Who didn't love horses? And who didn't think cowboys were just born mean? “Stop Wild Horse Captures” proclaimed a Hollywood billboard. “Call Bruce Babbitt.” Presi-

dent Clinton's Interior secretary certainly seemed the right guy. With what seemed like a grudge against his own Arizona ranching family, Babbitt vowed to break the "agricultural apparatchiks" he saw as having too much influence. Within months after being approved for the cabinet post, he was touring the West, threatening to raise grazing fees and further cut the numbers of cattle on public ranges. The ranchers, losing their land and their livelihood to one regulation or another, feared they had nowhere to turn except to the courts.

So now, a BLM with already too little experience on the ground was forced to face more and more paperwork in the office. It couldn't stop the gathers and it couldn't just get rid of the horses. It was all part of the stampeding federal law. Ideas to amend the Wild Free-Roaming Horses & Burros Act to allow for destruction of at least older horses or the sale without restriction of horses held for adoption for four years or more were whispered like sacrilege overheard by a swelling congregation demanding their rescue.

In 1995, filmmaker Ginger Kathrens found a pale-colored colt with a herd grazing in the

spectacular Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Refuge of Montana and Wyoming. He was part of the much-valued few horses in isolated areas that could trace their bloodlines to the true Spanish mustang. Kathrens named him Cloud and began filming a much-acclaimed record of his life that today, 15 years later, is periodically revisited for eagerly awaiting viewers on The Nature Channel. Cloud and his band are given human characteristics in the film's narration. They have fan clubs and children's books in which "daddies" and "mommies" produce "babies" with personalities and inevitable tragedies. The BLM's attempts to protect that rapidly growing herd with new water resources were met with shrill cries that the government would "murder" Cloud, making the stallion even more famous.

For more than a quarter century, through the lifetimes of Wild Horse Annie's children's brigade and the administration of dozens of BLM directors, handfuls of Interior secretaries, and seven presidents, the BLM had tried to meet its obligations under the 1971 law and its own 1975 standards to bring balance and peace to the herds of wild horses and burros on federal land. But by the new millennium, there were more wild horses on

the range than when it started, and a nearly equal amount of captured horses held in corrals. More than 200,000 of the wild equines had been adopted for fees of \$25 to \$125 a head. Total cost of the program was in the billions, and there was no end in sight.

There were always critics, and variously well-educated wildlife experts with simple answers and manipulative political motives. The impolite but all too obvious observation produced books speculating about women's love of horses. It couldn't be denied that mustangs' best human friends were usually the ladies, not all of whom burst into tears on cue. Wild Horse Annie seldom cried, and that might be the only characteristic shared with the woman who seemed to want to take her place in American culture. Annie was too tough to cry. Madeleine (Paulson) Pickens was too rich to bother.

Fashionably styled to a silky, almost animalistic appearance of her own, Pickens presents herself with a cultured immigrant accent and a regal attitude that expects attention from waiters and secretaries. There is a telling photo of her with a slightly bemused look as she listens to the coatless and bolted Interior Secretary Ken Salazar at a meeting in his office. Salazar signed the photo,

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It's a challenge to stay ahead of the pack out on the range. Competition is fierce. Scars show this stud has already had many fights. Now he's after a mare. Perhaps he won his last battle.

thanking her “for all your efforts to help wild horses.”

She told a reporter that when she first arrived in the United States in 1969 to reside in a beachfront house at Marina Del Rey, Calif., that she had no idea horses were being slaughtered for food. In fact, if she was even aware of Wild Horse Annie, she didn't mention it. Madeleine Richter—or Madeleine Farris, as she was known then—was born to an English Christian father and a Lebanese mother at a time when Beirut was considered the Paris of the Mideast. What is known of her early life seems both mildly mysterious and exotic, working first as a model and flight attendant on Pan American Airlines and sometime in her 20s capitalizing on that to form her own company providing cabin crews for corporate and private jets. By one account, she left Iraq just before the takeover by Saddam Hussein's Bath Party.

In the United States, her good looks and

cultured cosmopolitan style gave her a place among the young, beautiful and rich in the California new-wave aristocracy. A black belt in the martial art of tae kwon do, she was featured with lavish photos in a 1976 edition of *Black Belt Magazine*. One of her closest friends was diet-entrepreneur Jenny Craig. She was still, though, something of a mystery. Her bio lists her first husband as Mr. Richter, and her daughter, Dominique, was born in 1980 with that last name. The bio offers no further description or dates for Mr. Richter. Madeleine's private jet crew business might surely have brought her in contact with former test pilot and founding president of Gulfstream Aerospace, Allan Paulson, although that is not mentioned.

What is known is that in the 1970s, Paulson started a second career as one of the most successful owners of thoroughbred racehorses in U.S. history. Paulson lived in, and apparently later owned, the Del Mar Country

Club—a lavish and highly exclusive playground founded by Bing Crosby, with its own zip code, and considered among the three wealthiest communities in the United States. It wasn't too far from Marina Del Rey, but even from there, it was a long way up the scale of high living.

It's unclear how or exactly when, but it was Paulson who introduced Madeleine to the greenest grass world of high-stakes horse racing. They were married in 1988, and soon known as the most admired couple in the overdressed paddock, not only for their style, but for their extreme success with 85 stakes' winners and seven champions, none greater than “America's horse,” Cigar, which went on to tie Citation's record with 16 straight wins earning nearly \$10 million.

Paulson died in 2000 at the age of 78. Madeleine was a very well-cared-for widow of only 53. All too soon, however, she found herself in a battle over Paulson's Living Trust directing that her stepson, Michael Paulson, become the sole trustee of the family's 60-horse racing operation. Madeleine claimed that her late husband wanted the racing stock sold off. After more than two years of an acrimonious legal battle, the judge finally sided with Michael, naming him and his two brothers sole trustees. “As part of the settlement,” reports said, “Madeleine Paulson will receive the Del Mar Country Club...and another oceanfront property in Del Mar.”

Still a prominent figure at the track, but out of colors to race as her own, Madeleine kept her head up, always looking higher. In 2005, she married one of the 900 richest men on earth, Texas oil magnate T. Boone Pickens. Was this an American success story, or what? Their first public act as a couple was to contribute to relief for the people of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. T. Boone donated \$7 million to the Red Cross while Madeleine set off on an unprecedented campaign to rescue hundreds of dogs and cats and other pets left behind by their owners. She hired a full-blown jetliner to carry most of them off to a Marin County, Calif., shelter where they could be either reclaimed or adopted by others. Her reputation as a philanthropist for animal causes soared.

But Madeleine and T. Boone were about to encounter some high-roller reluctance of a kind they just weren't used to hearing in Del Mar or Dallas. By 2007, they had led the fight to shut down the last horse slaughterhouse, and Madeleine was following her dream by managing a bill through the U.S. House of Representatives making it illegal even to

transport horses to Canada or Mexico or anywhere for that purpose. There was the old romantic flame again, saving the horses with an easy ride through the House that suddenly came to a stubborn halt at the gates to the U.S. Senate.

It wasn't just Nevada being overrun by abundant unwanted steeds. Most of the charming bluegrass country people imagined as the playground and retirement home of thoroughbreds was near to capacity, and nobody talked about what might happen even to champions that turned out to be failures as studs, such as Cigar himself. Besides the money horses, there were quarter horses, dray stock, rodeo broncs, pony-ride Shetlands and who knew what put out of work by the ever deeper economic recession. All needing expensive feed and care.

Before closing that last slaughterhouse in 2006, just under 100,000 horses a year were slaughtered in the United States. Some came from Canada, and though the BLM denies it, some may have been taken off the wild range, but most of them belonged to somebody, and more than Pickens wanted to admit once had pedigrees. When Congress wordlessly set the slaughter bill aside, T. Boone blamed his friends in the cattle industry. But it was the thoroughbred breeding industry, the jockeys, and the gamblers who were dragging their feet in support. Madeleine said she got so mad, she took to her bed and cried.

The lady from Lebanon is obviously used to getting her way. Even without T. Boone's help, she didn't need to fool with school kids and letters. It was with her influence that Congressman Nick Rahall then produced the ROAM (Rescue Our American Mustangs) Act in 2008. Rahall (D-WV) was appropriately head of the House Resources Committee, but the only connection he had to the real West seemed to be a DUI in California and a \$60,000 lawsuit from a Las Vegas casino demanding payment of gambling debts. He was, though, also of Lebanese heritage, perhaps just a happy coincidence. His bill, demanding an immediate moratorium on horse gathers, chugged right through the House in 2009 and then was put over on the side track already occupied by the Slaughter Act. Madeleine needed to make the government a deal it couldn't refuse.

Ken Salazar is desperate. The Interior secretary doesn't tell that to country reporters with whom he refuses to meet, but his whole career in a cabinet job that has eaten the future of many men, including Babbitt, may

depend on finding some way out of the wild-horse mess. The serious bottom-line bean counters have warned him that going on the way it has will not be sustainable, and the General Accountability Office pointedly reminded the secretary that a part of the Wild Horse & Burro Act provided for euthanasia of horses that could not be disposed of in any other way.

Salazar brought former Nevada BLM director Bob Abbey back from another position to take charge of the program, as if Abbey's years-long knowledge of the impossible task might produce some solution. Abbey went at it like Gen. George S. Patton finally turned loose, planning to use most of the \$50-million budget to gather as many as 12,000 horses in the next two fiscal years and sort them out from there with the help of birth prevention and sterilization to create a manageable wild-horse population of around 26,000. At least that many would still be held in corrals hopelessly awaiting adoption, but Abbey meant to take it a step at a time.

Abbey called Pickens' plan to establish a huge Nevada refuge for horses alone "untenable," and he was joined by hunting and wildlife groups, scientists concerned about range preservation and even a chapter of the Sierra Club objecting to Pickens' plan to release 20,000 or more horses into a sanctuary that could become like a natural zoo for visitors eager to see the living legends. The concept was called disastrous by some ranchers and, pointedly, "a home for welfare horses" by others.

Salazar's change in policy to allow observers to witness the gather in the Calico range on the northern Nevada/California border at the beginning of this year was no help to his problem. The gather of some 2,400 wild horses resulted in the deaths of a record 34 horses either during the gather or later at holding pens in Fallon, Nev. It was a small percentage of the horses brought in off the range, and due mostly to their condition in the overpopulated herds, but the observers

from an array of activist organizations howled that it was evidence of the BLM's "murder" of the horses.

Dave Cattoor is an easy-going, straight-talking guy who didn't mind it when the BLM used to keep observers at a distance, but he didn't object either to talking to some of them when the rules changed. His wife Sue had always attended to publicity matters with their own website and a willing response to



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For fiscal year 2010 (Oct. 1, 2009, to Sept. 30, 2010), BLM counted 4,673 burros in five states. Most were in Arizona (2,248) and Nevada (1,177).

questions. But now, they had to travel to Abbey's selected HMAs with bleacher-full crowds rooting for the mustangs.

By the cold January of 2010, with the big Calico roundup north of Reno reaching its peak, the horse advocates were accusing Cattoor and the BLM of recklessly overfilling the Fallon holding corrals. Cattoor, however, was struggling with the rainy and foggy weather, waiting for breaks for the safety of the horses and the helicopter pilots he now guided from the ground. Mrs. Pickens had announced her intention to view the gather, and Cattoor assumed the rumble he heard from the area of the private airstrip at the Soldier Meadows Ranch on the Black Rock Desert was where the Pickens entourage would land. But sud-



After a roll in the mud (rare in the desert), mustangs continue to graze the Onaqui herd management area 40 miles southwest of Salt Lake City. This HMA encompasses 43,880 acres and extends from Johnsons Pass south to Lookout Pass. Stock reservoirs for livestock and wildlife and intermittent streams fed by winter snows and spring runoff provide adequate water for the herd. The AML (appropriate management level) for this HMA is from 121 to 210 horses.

denly, and without radio contact, three large helicopters veered off and headed into the Warm Springs gather area, appearing suddenly below and in front of where Cattoor's Bells were gently urging two groups of horses toward the trap.

"One of my pilots was herding some horses and, like always, was way above them just letting them drift toward the trap," Cattoor says. "Madeleine's three helicopters came between him and the horses and caused them a lot of unnecessary extra stress. But more importantly, they put both our pilots in danger of a midair collision. I assume Madeleine wanted pictures."

Cattoor, seeing that the horses had been scattered by the intrusion, aborted the gather, called his two pilots back and went looking for some explanation, but Mrs. Pickens was busy in an interview with "Good Morning America."

T. Boone couldn't have managed her next moves better himself—or maybe he did. Madeleine looked good on TV, and she operated a busy set of websites that served as her own news bureau. Nobody in the media would dare question the Mustang Queen. Even so, things were not all that certain in the

castle. From Del Mar to Saratoga, the money was slowly coming to an end that would keep her slaughter bill and Rahall's moratorium in the realm of impractical good ideas. And even among environmentalists there was open opposition to allowing the horses to overpopulate and drive out native wildlife from the delicate range. Madeleine at least wanted a National Academy of Sciences probe that could produce a national horse show of hearings, but it seemed now less likely to put her in the winners circle.

Still, she had one last potent tool. She had the money and she went shopping.

It is the real tragedy of the American West that so many legendary family ranches continue to fail, either because of unpredictable new laws or regulations, or because new generations decide it is no longer worth the trouble. And Madeleine didn't have to shop for bargains. In two vast ranches reaching across northeastern Nevada, she felt she found the deal Salazar just could not refuse.

"I know what she's after," says Dave Cattoor. "It's the Sorenson property. I've been there before, and, funny thing, it's on our schedule to gather 2,400 horses up there in January. I wonder what Madeleine will say?"

Cattoor was right at least about the ranch. Madeleine purchased the Spruce Mountain section of the Sorenson property along with an adjoining ranch capable of providing feed that together take a big chunk of northeast Nevada. Abbey was reluctant to talk about the offer, but Pickens had already laid out congressional support for a minimum 1,000-horse "pilot program." It would create her vision of an eco-sanctuary where city families and others could drive along carefully controlled access to see for themselves wild horses "running free."

Whether Abbey may still find it untenable, and whether other area ranchers can get used to living near a home for welfare horses, it won't end the tale of the mustang.

They are living legends, after all, hardly suited to theme parks.

Tim Findley has nothing against wild horses, rich ladies, or naïve naturalists. He even feels an unusual sense of empathy in this case for the BLM. "In a way," he says, "they sort of deserve each other." But when he took this assignment last summer, he underestimated the passion of the RANGE boss and discovered he was a long way from San Francisco.

Madeleine's Backyard

Driving north toward Wells, Nev., on U.S. 93, Spruce Mountain seems to slide into view like a fabulous ocean liner crossing a great bay of tawny grasses and deep, green sage. It is easy to imagine them out there, grazing slowly in scattered bands, or following the trails into cool shade of heavy forest covering the 10,000-foot mountain. An ever-changing tableau of a West that perhaps never existed before.

These 600,000 acres of both deeded land and federal allotments, along with another 22,000 acres of federal land attached to the 4,000-acre Warm Springs Ranch are meant by Madeleine Pickens to become her sanctuary for the American mustang.

She claims to have already reached a “handshake agreement” with Bureau of Land Management officials for a “pilot program” that would introduce 1,000 wild horses to the range, but Pickens has said that ultimately she wants to put at least 11,000 horses on the land she imagines as an “eco park” for visitors to see and come close to “American legends” living out their lives in a natural setting.

It is an enchanting idea, easy to sell to Eastern politicians and urban dreamers from whom she is seeking support. But like endings forced on any great epics, it carries the danger of great tragedy. “If you have to ask,” as the old cliché goes, provides some respectful room for questioning how much it cost, but without doubt Pickens has invested a large portion of her wealth and, likely, some of that of her husband, in a concept offering very little possibility of paying for itself, and, according to many critics, a realistic possibility of disaster for both the horses and the range.

Seldom visited by tourists, the Spruce is centered in spectacular high country of northeastern Nevada with mountains, forests, and more-abundant rainfall than most of the state. The property is a combination of sales by two prominent Nevada ranching families. The land contains 26 wells and 17 natural springs. Irrigation on fields at Warm Springs produces grains and other feed to supplement the natural forage. Pickens says it will be entirely fenced.

Even so, it is an expensive proposition to maintain horses indefinitely in unpredictable weather. Pickens has formed a nonprofit foundation to run the sanctuary, but she wants the BLM to pay \$1.25 a day for each horse it takes out of its current holding facili-



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Mrs. Pickens' ranch includes 10,233-foot Spruce Mountain in eastern Nevada, 14,000 deeded acres and half a million acres of federal grazing land, currently permitted to run cows. Madeleine says her horse preserve will be fenced and all studs will be gelded. AT TOP: Sunset in a wild horse eye.

ties. She points out that it would be a savings of over a million dollars a year from the \$5.75 a day the BLM expends for each horse in its holding facilities. Beyond that, Pickens points out, her foundation would use the entire stipend to maintain the project and not draw off any of the money in profit.

New facilities, she says, including a high-tech learning center and recreational opportunities will “cater to the needs and interests of anyone who visits. It will generate significant tax revenues for local government, provide jobs and other revenue associated with tourist travel.”

So far, federal officials have been reluctant to jump at the opportunity. Range studies and legal questions on the BLM's obligation to maintain the land for multiple use will certainly follow. Wildlife groups and some environmentalists worry that a single species may

drive others out, and ranchers familiar with the region suggest that Pickens is underestimating the toll taken by heavy winters in the region.

Taking the most extreme of the “deal,” the BLM would still be left with responsibility for some 40,000 horses on the open range and held in pastures and corrals. News of Pickens' offer, meanwhile, has produced similar offers from more or less trustworthy landowners to begin pilot programs of their own.

And there is always that other question: How long would this sanctuary last? Might people get bored after a couple of years and prefer, once again, to imagine the wild ones out there running free? Might they not even come to resent the gesture, well-meaning as it was, of a very rich lady explaining memories of horses to people she doesn't really know?

FROM THE BLM

The real story. By JoLynn Worley, Office of Communications, BLM Nevada state office.

The estimated current free-roaming population of wild horses and burros exceeds by nearly 12,000 the number that the BLM has determined can exist in balance with other public rangeland resources and uses. The appropriate management level (AML) is approximately 26,600. Nevada has the highest number of wild horses and burros: 18,888, which is 6,200 animals over the AML of 12,688.

Off the range, there are more than 34,500 other wild horses and burros that are fed and cared for at short-term corrals and long-term pastures. As of August 2010, there were approximately 8,800 in corrals and 25,700 in Midwestern pastures. All wild horses and burros in holding, like those roaming the public rangelands, are protected by the BLM under the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses & Burros Act.

Wild Horse and Burro Budget

Last fiscal year (October 2008-September 2009), holding costs were approximately \$29 million, or about 70 percent of the entire enacted program budget of \$40.6 million for that year. Money rerouted from other programs increased the amount BLM spent to more than \$50 million in FY'09.

This fiscal year (2010), which ends September 2010, holding costs are expected to exceed \$38 million out of a total wild-horse and burro budget of \$63.9 million (plus an additional \$2.1 million in 2009 "carryover" funding).

Anti-gather Advocates Call for a Moratorium on BLM Gatherings

A moratorium is untenable given the fact that herds grow at an average rate of 20 percent a year and can double in size every four years. The ecosystems of public rangelands are not able to withstand the impacts from overpopulated herds, which include soil erosion, sedimentation of streams, and damage to wildlife habitat.

The 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses & Burros Act, Section 1333, mandates that when it is determined that an overpopulation exists on a given area of the public lands, action is necessary to remove excess animals: "[BLM] shall immediately remove excess animals from the range so as to achieve appropriate management levels."

In the absence of an effective fertility control agent, predators, or other natural population controls, the BLM removes excess horses and burros every year to assure that numbers are in balance with the land's ability to provide sustainable forage and protect rangeland health. By contrast, wildlife population numbers are controlled mainly through hunting while domestic livestock use is strictly controlled through the terms and conditions outlined in grazing permits.

Public Rangeland Vegetation

Most western rangelands produce only a few hundred pounds of vegetation per acre annually, compared to mid- and tall-grass prairies

in the central and eastern United States, which can produce several hundred pounds of vegetation annually.

In Nevada, many areas receive an average of only five inches of precipitation each year. These sites often produce only 50 to 100 pounds of usable forage per acre. The average Nevada mustang needs about 1,000 pounds of forage per month, which would be 12,000 pounds of forage a year. At 50 pounds of forage per acre, a horse would need 240 acres. The actual number of acres needed to support one horse may actually be much greater because much of Nevada is too steep, or has a lot of brush and trees, or is too far from water to be used by wild horses and burros.

Wild Horse and Burro Numbers

Fiscal Year 2010 (Oct. 1, 2009, to Sept. 30, 2010)

Wild Horse & Burro Herd Populations and Appropriate Management Levels (AML) by State

State	Horses	Burros	Total	Total AML
Arizona	400	2,248	2,648	1,676
California	4,079	1,069	5,148	2,190
Colorado	888	0	888	812
Idaho	596	0	596	617
Montana	150	0	150	120
Nevada	17,711	1,177	18,888	12,688
New Mexico	119	0	119	83
Oregon	2,461	15	2,476	2,715
Utah	2,724	164	2,888	1,956
Wyoming	4,564	0	4,564	3,725
Total	33,692	4,673	38,365	26,582



Three BLM employees assist and protect observers during California's Twin Peaks gather. As of August 2010, there were 25,700 horses in "permanent" holding pastures in Oklahoma and the Midwest, and close to 10,000 more in temporary holding facilities in Nevada, California, Oregon and Wyoming. Of 1,799 horses and burros gathered at Twin Peaks, 450 horses and 72 burros remain on the HMA. Law enforcement officers are there because of threats received via the Internet, and the fact that the nearby Litchfield horse corrals have been attacked several times. Fences have been cut, an incendiary device ignited and burned down a barn containing 250 tons of hay, and the BLM's Litchfield office was burned to the ground. Back in 1989, the Litchfield mascot, a burro named Walter, was stolen and beheaded.



BLM experts and Dave Cattoor carefully select safe places to bring in the horses. The helicopter pilot flies high and slow, until they get close to the jute wings which blend into the desert until it's too late. Note the Judas horse leading them into the holding corral just before transport.

NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Bob Abbey, Bureau of Land Management.
Excerpted from an OpEd in *Roll Call*, Aug. 10, 2010, with permission of the BLM.

Because of the BLM's spiraling off-the-range holding costs and the formidable challenge of dealing with unadopted horses, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently found our agency's wild-horse program to be at a "critical crossroads." In response, secretary of the Interior, Ken Salazar, and I announced an initiative last October [2009] as the first step toward putting the Wild Horse and Burro Program on a sustainable course.

The public has been invited to help shape this initiative by offering ideas to a strategy development document that is posted on the BLM's home page. Everything is on the table for discussion except two things: (1) the euthanasia of excess healthy horses for which there is no adoption demand; and (2) the unrestricted sale of unadopted animals. Although these controversial management authorities exist in the 1971 wild-horse law, as amended, the Interior Department and the BLM will not consider those management options as part of the new strategy under development.

As work on this new management strate-

gy unfolds, it is regrettable that false claims, misleading statements and false characterizations about the BLM's actions, motives and intentions relating to wild-horse management are circulated on virtually a daily basis on the Internet by activists seeking a moratorium on wild-horse roundups.

Such a moratorium is untenable. It would be devastating to the health of public rangelands and would be contrary to section 1333 of the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses & Burros Act, which directs the BLM to determine whether an overpopulation of wild horses and burros exists, and, when making such a finding, to "immediately remove excess animals from the range so as to achieve appropriate management levels."

Lawmakers and their constituents concerned about wild-horse issues should visit blm.gov for accurate, timely information on the BLM's management of wild horses and burros. There, they will find a link to detailed information on all aspects of the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program, including real-time information about ongoing or upcoming horse gathers.

One web page, "Myths & Facts," debunks false allegations against the BLM, such as the claim that it is selling or sending wild horses to slaughter. In fact, the GAO noted in an October 2008 report that the BLM is not in compliance with a December 2004 amendment to the 1971 wild-horse law that directs it to sell excess horses or burros "without limitation." The BLM has also established a presence on Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter to maximize our outreach to the American people on wild-horse and other public-land management issues.

The BLM respects the passion shown by activists pushing for a moratorium on wild-horse roundups, but the debate over proper management must not be distorted by allegations and characterizations that have no factual basis.

The BLM is committed to the well-being of America's wild horses and burros, both on and off the range. By working to achieve appropriate management levels on western public rangelands, the BLM will ensure that healthy herds can thrive on healthy public rangelands, both now and for generations to come.



courtesy blm

From the Heart

DISENFRANCHISED & MARGINALIZED

Elyse B. Gardner was interviewed at the Twin Peaks wild-horse gather on Aug. 20, 2010. A certified shorthand reporter from Novato, Calif., and a vegetarian, she has acted as an observer and blogger on many wild-horse gathers.

There are 32,000 AUMs allocated to livestock and between 5,600 and 9,000 allocated to wild horses in this 798,000-acre Twin Peaks HMA. On this HMA they say they counted 2,300 horses. These are BLM figures. They have



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decided their AML (appropriate management level) should be 448 wild horses up to 700-something. This is tragic for us Californians, and I take this personally because I live here, because if I want to go out and see wild horses, it's going to be really hard to find them. Do you know that the wild burros, which get so left out, number only 282 in this HMA? Do you know how many they want to leave? The AML for wild burros as set by BLM is 72 burros. How are we going to see them? Remember that BLM has 160 million acres of federal land that it manages for livestock grazing. Out of that 160 million acres, only 26.6 million are set aside for wild horses. The horses are disenfranchised, marginalized.

I'm not the numbers person, but I believe horses should have a fair, equitable share, on their own home range. Look where wild horses are left. The most harsh, sparse, wild stark places in Nevada and they are thriving because they are native. They did evolve here.

They are not feral.

Horses are nomadic. They discipline and teach manners. Horses are very social, their lives are social structures, so this is why these roundups are particularly cruel and inhumane for them.

I'm from New York originally, Long Island. I've always been sensitive to animals and other people as well. I empathize with things and people. I want my life to count for something. Things for the horses got so bad that they actually had to pass a congressional act unanimously to protect our wild horses because they were at a minimum, fast disappearing—that's the first paragraph of the act—which means they were going extinct by the hand of man.

Horses are a national treasure—amazing animals. They are not dogs, they are not cats, they are unique in what they do. As frightened as they are of everything, they are prey animals, they trust us as their leader and they bond to us and they will carry us into war and the mustangs are amazing horses. During these gathers, this is the last moment of their life as a family. Their free lives are just about over. As far as they are concerned right now, they are running for their lives. The babies are struggling to keep up. The ground is hard. The lava rock is really hard on babies' feet that aren't even hard yet. We are running these animals with a helicopter. This is wrong. I'm out here because the suffering is going on and the fear, which is even worse than pain for an animal. I feel it and I feel like it's almost blasphemous for us to sit here and chitchat about the cost to taxpayers while my friends are being run. It is a violent running out of their home. The helicopter might try to keep them in a walk, which is all very polite, but the fact of the matter is you don't have to have a bleeding heart to want to keep the animals healthy. A man I met on a plane when I was coming back from Washington, D.C., watched some of my mustang videos on my computer and said, "This is government-subsidized animal abuse."

This is my state of California, this is Twin Peaks. It's 798,000 acres, there are thousands of cows and sheep, they are not taking them, they are taking my horses, they are taking my wild horses in disproportionate numbers. I go every day after this roundup activity is done to the Litchfield holding corrals and they may

be saying there aren't many injuries but you stand there and you look. Imagine you are in your living room, you got your grandchildren, your son and daughter and maybe your parents, you got multiple generations and some invader comes along and makes you leave, and you are running and you are scared. You might be able to go three miles, but your little kids won't and your parents won't. These are families—people say, oh, horses are healthy, these are healthy horses, they can do it, but these are whole generations in these bands. They are families. We are brutalizing these animals. They are losing everything right now. You see them running in, that's the last time they are ever going to see their family again. They hit that trap, the stallion is taken out, the mares, if the foals are six months or older, are separated right now from their mothers, never to see them again.

Listen to them crying out to each other. Tell me that they are not talking to each other. I heard it. I saw it. I see it over and over again. If you believe that and you choose to do nothing about it, then you are lacking a compassion gene.

WHERE ARE OUR BABIES?

Carla Bowers was interviewed at the Twin Peaks wild-horse gather on Aug. 20, 2010. A part-time rental property manager, wife of a Bay Area general contractor, she says she's "semiretired" and lives in Volcano, Calif.

I'm an independent and I work with all the major wild-horse organizations in the United States. I'm known as a numbers person and I've been involved in wild-horse advocacy for 10 months. I'm a newbie at this.

I knew that we had wild-horse roundups in the past but I didn't realize until last September when I learned kind of accidentally on purpose that the Pryor herd in Montana was being rounded up by the BLM. When I investigated further about that, I was appalled that the BLM would go in and gut such a small herd already of less than 200.

Congress found horses to be an integral part of our American way of life, and that they enrich the lives of the American people. They do. I think the wild horse should be our national mascot, not the eagle. This is my first roundup, but I've reviewed and seen all the videos that are on the Internet, but in order to be able to see this in person I had to work with myself mentally and emotionally to build myself up to handle this.

I am grateful that the roundup personnel are doing their best to minimize the trauma



Carla Bowers shoots video of Sue Cattoor, as Sue explains the gather process. BLM staff and observers look on. OPPOSITE: Elyse Gardner makes a point.

on these animals but I am against the whole policy in Congress, land management the way it is done, the way the AUMs are figured. I go back way before we even get to a roundup stage, so when we've gotten to the roundup stage, it tears my heart out that all the wild horses are being so marginalized and so minimized.

The BLM is taking more than 2,000 horses off this HMA and when a few horses are released back onto the range, they wonder where are our babies? And then the other thing I think is very important to realize is that when we do these massive numbers of removals from one area, like Twin Peaks, compensatory reproduction will kick in. The 458 horses that are left out here are going to go, whoa, where is everybody? Where did everybody go? And they are going to go, uh

oh, let's make babies, let's make babies, but then we are putting in PZP mares, temporarily sterilized mares, which is going to upset the structural integrity of the herds.

I feel that the way that we are rounding up our wild horses, the process, is not really acknowledging or respecting or honoring the social fabric and social integrity of the

bands and the herds. Due to massive removals of the majority, if not all, of the foals, compensatory reproduction kicks in and that is something that the BLM needs to learn a little bit more about.

We have 654 million acres of federal lands in the United States. Of that, the BLM manages around 250 million acres and we have cattle grazing on approximately 160 million acres of BLM land, and our wild horses are now only allocated 32 million acres. Out of that 32 million, 26 million are managed by BLM and six million are private lands that are interspersed within the HMAs.

I have a very strong spiritual connection with these animals. The horses know we are fighting for them, and 10 months ago I realized it's time for Carla to get involved. The horses need Carla.

VIOLATING CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS

Laura Leigh was interviewed at the Twin Peaks wild-horse gather on Sept. 4, 2010. Laura is a production artist, writer, photographer and blogger from Bainbridge Island, Wash.

My grandfather was an original teamster. He drove a team of Percherons and delivered milk in Brooklyn. My dad was a police officer and my first horse was a retired officer. That horse was amazing. He worked in Essex County, N.J.

I like horses. For the last year and a half, I have followed the wild horses. The only way to really learn what's happening is to be here and observe the gathers. I pretty much live out here. I'm driving a little SUV but I have a pickup with a cab and a big dog. I am a production artist and a journalist, so I sell artwork and write about the horses.

I think that one day this will be gone, which is one of the reasons that drove me out here. We have a public lands grab and a resource grab that's happening here right now. We have corporations like BP, like Barrick Gold. It depends on which HMA you are talking about. Out here, we have an issue with Nevada where, because of mining, the water down there is really bad.

I've been in Colorado, Montana, all over, and driven 70,000 miles in an old pickup truck in five months so I'm living on the road. I went to the Tuscarora gather in northern Nevada. It's a 225-square-mile HMA. They never moved the trap once. Gathered this whole area from one corner. They said the water emergency was right in the south fork of the Owyhee Desert and horses could not get down for water and that other water sources were dry. They are dry all the time.

BLEEDING FROM NOSES...

The BLM, responsible for managing most of the remaining wild horses and burros in 10 western states, [is] now running horses 10 miles or more over rough volcanic terrain with helicopters. Horses bleeding from their noses in the thick dust, very young foals separated from their mothers, a mare with a broken leg and a colicking mare have been observed by a dedicated team of advocates observing the Twin Peaks roundup.—R.T. FITCH, "STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSE'S HEART" BLOGGER, AUG. 17, 2010

DON'T FORGET THE BASICS

Our problem is that no one is listening and the Obama administration has decided to focus on BIG issues (health care, finance reform) and is not going to chase after teeny-tiny issues like wild equines. Big mistake, Mr. President. The ecology, cap and trade, unemployment are all highly interconnected. This is about keeping the big-money business people somewhat satisfied. Sadly, Mr. President, you have forgotten the basic idea that to let injustice and immorality thrive, you jeopardize EVERYTHING noble you hope to achieve.—DENISE, "STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSE'S HEART" BLOGGER, AUG. 15, 2010

There was water down on the river. This is where the 228 horses were gathered in two hours and left in the trap site and when they came back in the morning, they found dead horses. That's how they discovered the water emergency. They discovered their water emergency after I filed the lawsuit, not before. The document that supported it by their five-panel team was dated the day we went to court.

One of my issues with Nevada is that the BLM was closing public land during the Tuscarora gather. They were only going to allow people down in the three HMAs—Owyhee, Rock Creek, and Little Humboldt—for two days to watch. Well these are the horses I'm afraid for because it's right in the beginning of foaling season. It was their first gather of the year and I know these horses really well. I was up there five weeks before the gather and I



© J. Hadley

Laura Leigh has a degree in wildlife biology. She considers wild horses a huge spiritual resource and a reminder of what it is to be an American. For months, she has been following the horses all across the West.

know what it looks like. They closed public land [around the gather] and inhibited my even getting near it, to get in there and photograph. With private property to cross before

you can get to the public land, there's no way to get anywhere near their trap. They were violating my constitutional rights, they can't close public land like that, so we took it to court and the judge said, no, it is a violation of the Constitution. They opened it.

Later, I observed at Twin Peaks, 11 days in all. I was there with *The New York Times* and they put the *Times* guy right in the jute [the wings coming into the trap] but they wouldn't let me down there. I brought a guy from CBS out and I've been telling the BLM he needs access. You learn something new every time. Today they added my name to accredited press and let me closer so I could see some more of the gather.

The only way to really know what's going on at a BLM gather is to experience it. You

FORTY YEARS EXPERIENCE

Compensatory reproduction and reproductive self-regulation among wild-horse populations are similar theoretical ideas that are not borne out on the ground, particularly in wild-horse herds that are grossly overpopulated for the amount of available forage and water.

After the BLM gathers and reduces a herd management area to its appropriate management level, there is less pressure for available forage and water which results in healthier mares and foals and subsequent increased survival. Based on BLM's 40 years of experience in managing wild horses, except due to significant environmental factors, foaling rates appear to have stayed fairly consistent with no significant increases or decreases observed in relation to the number of horses within the herd. s hould additional and improved empirical knowledge about compensatory reproduction evolve, the BLM could consider developing a research strategy to evaluate the theory on wild-horse populations.—Jo LyNN WorLey, Office of CoMMuNICATIONs, BLM Nevada sTATE office

LET'S GET MORE LAWYERS

Many moral causes had masses that didn't give a rat's butt and those that gave their hearts in counter-insurgency efforts never gave up. We will not give up. The pain is knowing how our American icons are being brutalized, murdered and thrown on the human-decided dump heaps of this life. That is hard to live with because we know the truth about the evil. Never give up!!! But we do need some very, very smart litigants.... No more showing our hand to equine butchers.... Let's get some more lawyers.—DeNise, "STrighT frOm The hor se's heAr T" Blogger, Aug. 15, 2010

have to be there. The data of this whole system of the Wild Horse and Burro Program is based on guesswork. They've now finally admitted it and asked for a \$1.5 million study to be done by the National Academy of Sciences, so they are now finally admitting that we didn't know what we were managing. In October 2008, BLM did its own internal review of how they assess the range, how they do data, and found that it was inadequate and sometimes nonexistent and again based on guesswork. So you've got a framework based on guesswork and data plugged into it that is inadequate or inaccurate by their own admission. OK, you don't even know if the brakes work and you're stepping on the gas.

I consider wild horses a huge spiritual resource and a reminder of what it is to be an American and what's important that doesn't have a dollar sign and that's the greatest resource. I've heard we have 33,000 to 38,000 in long-term holding. There are more horses in long-term holding than there are on the range. It's different than cows. Horses are easier on the range. A cow uses its tongue and pulls plants up by the roots. Horses have incisors and they cut low, so when a cow comes in you need to reseed and when a horse comes through you don't have to.

Right now we've got 262 million acres managed by BLM and 66 percent of that land open to grazing. Only 10 percent of that land is open to wild horses under law. Within that 10 percent, horses are supposed to be given their fair share of the resource. In 1971 they said here's the boundaries. Well, horses, they move. Here's the HMA and every spring they come off that HMA. Within that 10 percent, that's the only place wild horses are so I'm actually talking about a bigger picture within multiple use, within fair share. Right now, [mineral] leases are being given out on public land at such a rate that, by BLM's own assessment, they can't even get personnel to the ground. We need to slow down on some of these extractive industries and make sure that the other interests that are on that land—that includes wild horses and livestock—don't get wiped away, because this is our land and it belongs to all of us, and not just extractive industries, not just natural gas, and not just the guys making money off the stimulus package because all their new projects need to be pushed through. We need to join together to figure out a way to get an accountable system of management on this land before the resources and the land is gone.

DESPERATE CRIES

Lisa LeBlanc, blogger, excerpted from "Diary of a First Time Wild Horse Stampede Observer," SFHH, Aug. 16, 2010.

We walked, finally, to the furthest point we were allowed—an area marked by pink plastic ribbon festooned around scrub brush, about a two-minute walk. As we walked over shards of shattered lava rock, I noticed the area was covered with piles of fresh horse manure and hoofprints of all sizes, very distinct, not having been softened by the constant breeze on the desert floor. It was heartbreaking for me, knowing that in the previous 12 hours, this place had hosted a

herd of wild horses, unaware their freedom was nearly at an end, most likely forever. Perhaps the trap site was chosen for its proximity to where horses gathered to socialize.

As we approached the line, the helicopter was already pushing the first group of horses down from the hill above the trap site, which may have been as much as a half-mile away from where we were allowed to watch. The mouth of the trap fell below the area; while we could see the helicopter pressuring the group of perhaps 30 horses into the trap, we could not see them enter it. We could see wranglers, in white shirts and red shirts, and we could see whip sticks flapping occasionally. We could not hear them, the horses; perhaps their desperate cries were also carried away on the desert breeze....

As the horses were pushed further toward the trap, other observers made their way back to the viewing area. I stayed behind, to record my notes on my blue-black friend. One of the political activists stayed behind to prepare her video cameras. Minutes later, I looked up in time to see a small family—perhaps five or six, a black bay, four or five blue blacks and a tiny blue-black foal no more than two or three weeks old—trotting toward me, no more than 30 feet away. The activist was walking toward the viewing area; I whisper to her loudly. She turned toward me, still not seeing them. I pointed at them; she pointed her camera. As they approached us, stupidly, I pointed up the road. They turned in that direction, trotting away from the helicopter and the trap. The activist and I watched them as long as we could until they disappeared into a gully, then up the mountain beyond. We held each other and teared up the way women do when witnessing a remarkable

event. And it was the most joyful and gratifying moment of the day—an oath of silence between co-conspirators, two humans and a small band of horses. We would never tell.

But because fair isn't fair in the realm of the roundup, the joy did not last. An hour later, the helicopter had found them and, again, drove them down the side of the mountain. I ranted and raved, concerned for the foal traveling over that great distance twice in one day, when I was firmly but quietly reminded by another advocate there would be no reprieve—for any of them. And my anger would serve no useful purpose.

To their credit, this tiny family drove the helicopter hard, repeatedly testing the pilot's skill. It took as long or longer to finally get them to the trap site. And it was there my courage failed; I could not bring myself to witness for them their final step into that trap....

ICONIC SYMBOLS

Wild horses are such an iconic symbol of the wild west they can tug on American heartstrings like no other animal can. So nationwide protests against the roundups got plenty of public support. There are even now moves in congress to have the whole programme [sic] stopped.

Bill phillips is 83 years old. you can tell by the date of birth he has engraved on his silver belt buckle. As he took me off into the range to find mustangs grazing wild, he explained that it is essential to reduce their numbers in order for the herd to survive. "There is such meager vegetation and so little water the land can't support the numbers of wild horses currently living on it. unless they are rounded up and captured, a slow death from starvation or dehydration awaits many of these beasts."

For 2,000 formerly wild horses here in Northern California, a different fate awaits. Some will be adopted for just \$125 and either put to work or kept as pets. But adoption rates are falling just as roundup numbers are increasing. So more than a few of these animals will end up in early retirement in the Midwest, grazing fertile pasture at taxpayers' expense for the rest of their days.—SARAH SMITH, CHANNEL 4, UNITED KINGDOM, AUG. 15, 2010, AT THE TWIN PEAKS, CALIF., GATHER



This image is of a woman observing a gather in the west Utah desert. The photographer took hours to combine three layers in Photoshop—the woman, the clouds, and the horses.

IT'S ALL ABOUT MONEY

Give me a break, the BLM could not manage their way out of a wet paper bag let alone treat wild horses in a humane manner. Not only can't they count they are so sold out to big-time special interests that they have fully lost sight of their mission and the law. And you, the contractor, are right there in the middle of the mix violating our constitutional rights while you stuff your pockets

full of our money. That's what it is all about, isn't it? Money. Both with the BLM and with you, neither of you give a gnat's ass about the horses and you will concoct lies and untruths just to justify your skewed position and opinion. All of you lost your way a long time ago and between yourself and the BLM the truth now means what you want it to be on an hourly basis.—R.T. FITCH, "IN MY HUMBLE OPINION" BLOGGER, JULY 10, 2010

From the Head

THE VALUE OF HORSES

Patricia A. Evans, Ed.D., director, equine science, Scottsdale Community College.

The wild-horse issue is one of the most pressing in range management today. Unfortunately, the issue is so political that many people in agencies are remaining quiet. There is not a whole lot out there in the scientific literature on horses and range. There are, however, some well-known, science-based facts:

A horse (depending on size) eats 1.2-1.5 more (in AUMs, animal unit months) than a cow/calf pair. Horses eat continuously—about 14 to 20 hours a day as opposed to cattle that generally eat in the morning and evening with time in between for rumination.

Feral horses can survive on poorer quality forage than cattle because of their constant consumption and dietary needs.

Horses, due to their dentition, impact plants much more aggressively than cattle. They also tend to “spot graze,” which can be detrimental to some plant communities.

The ever-growing number of horses on the range is one of the most pressing issues the BLM deals with annually.

Over the past several years, unwanted and abandoned horse numbers have been on the rise for several reasons including the economic downturn, which has affected horse owners’ ability to maintain their horses, and the lack of horse processing. The closing of the horse-processing facilities has hurt the equine industry with lower horse prices and a flood

of horses that are not marketable. Horse owners now facing tighter budgets have to be realistic about paying for the upkeep of an animal that can run from \$2,000 per year to many times that number. On the low side, the horse is managed at the owner’s home with no labor costs and minimum values for veterinary and farrier care. This annual cost can rise dramatically with a horse that needs extensive veterinary intervention, corrective farrier work and stabling at a boarding facility.

With the closure of the horse-processing facilities, horse owners lost the ability to take a horse to an auction and expect a reasonable sale price. With the market flooded and no outlet for the lower-end horses, the price for almost all horses has declined dramatically. Horses that would have brought \$700 at auction, now bring as little as \$50, or do not sell at all. The horse-processing facilities brought about a humane end of a horse’s life and used the 300 or more pounds of meat to feed zoo animals and people around the world. Without processing, horses can suffer an extended death through starvation or thirst.

No horse owners want to see these animals suffer, but this is what has occurred since the processing facilities closed. Instead, the facilities need to be established here in the United States again with good oversight on transportation and handling in them. Once a horse is dead, the environmentally smart thing to do is use its remains as best we can.

NOTES FROM '98

Anthony L. Lesperance, commissioner, Elko County, Nev., testimony for House Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, July 13, 1998.

It is obvious that the Wild Horse & Burro Act will never be able to accomplish the AML goal of 27,000 head without significantly increasing congressional funding. Further, it is also obvious that maintenance of the AML will not be accomplished, if obtained, without significant long-standing financial support from Congress. The cost of the program, based on the removal of a single horse since the inception of the program, is in excess of an average of \$1,392 per head. Based on the above facts, the per-head cost can only continue to escalate. At some point the patience of the average American taxpayer must be considered. As a taxpayer, as well as a county commissioner, I must strongly urge you to realistically consider alternative concepts, such as privatizing the gather, and simply using the BLM for licensing and overseeing. Provisions could readily be made for a dual program of adoption and humane disposal to cover the cost of the operation. It is possible to convert a growing tax liability into at least a financially self-sustaining program.

The congressional management of the Wild Horse & Burro Program is typical of the many resource problems faced in the West today. It represents an attempt by Congress, dealing with a multitrillion-dollar budget, to micromanage a few-million-dollar problem that could in fact be managed far more effectively at the local or state level. A very effective argument can and has been made over the very ownership of these animals, and that argument does not support federal ownership; they are wildlife within the state, and in Nevada wildlife is the property of the state. Perhaps the real question for Congress to resolve is not the management or the cost of the management of these animals, but, in fact, what truly constitutes a federal feral horse or burro. Correctly resolving that issue will go a long way in removing the frustration of this program from the hands of Congress.

Regardless of what path Congress takes on this issue, it is for certain that continuation of the present program will not accomplish the stated goal of obtaining 27,000 animals. Furthermore, the cost of an effective program will only continue to escalate under the present set of circumstances. Additionally, not controlling the wild horse and burro population will only continue to add to the degradation of the western ranges, the consequences of which are unacceptable, and a fact which only Congress can ultimately be held responsible for.



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In the Litchfield, Calif., temporary holding corrals, above, there are currently 1,000 horses—the maximum for space available. At the Palomino Valley corrals north of Reno, Nev.—capacity 1,650—there are 1,500. There are tens of thousands more on “permanent pastures” on Midwestern ranches and farms.

LACK OF MANAGEMENT DOESN'T WORK

Barry L. Perryman, Ph.D., is an associate professor of rangeland ecology, Department of Animal Biotechnology at the University of Nevada, Reno.

The Free-Roaming Wild Horses & Burros Act (1971) and the Public Rangelands Improvement Act (1978) require the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service to manage wild horse and burro herds in a manner that allows for a thriving, natural ecological balance. The legislation designates specific areas (herd management area or HMA) that will support the animals, based on where they occurred when the law was enacted. The legislation also requires that an appropriate management level (AML) or herd size be determined for each HMA. The AML allows the population to vary within a range that has an upper and lower herd size, and provides authorization for removal of excess animals.

Wild horse and burro populations generally increase quite rapidly, growing at an average rate of 18 to 25 percent per year. In reality this means that herd size can double about every four years. As herd numbers increase, a greater burden is placed on the resource base within an HMA; that is, as herd numbers increase, forage demand also increases. This is why wild horses and burros are often found outside of their designated HMA in search of feed, and why their physical condition is often less than desirable. In fact, they are frequently emaciated and starving during drought situations.

When there are more horses and burros than the forage base can support, all kinds of

problems result. Habitat degradation occurs when grazing intensity from horses and burros is unchecked. When there is no forage for horses and burros, there is also no forage available for other herbivores like pronghorn antelope, jackrabbits, and other small mammals such as mice and voles, as well as granivorous bird species. Wildlife without forage equals starvation. Habitat degradation also reduces or eliminates hiding and thermo-regulation cover for any number of species. As



Barry Perryman on assignment in Turkmenistan.

plant cover and density decreases, soil erosion potential increases along with the potential for invasive species proliferation. All of these negative effects have occurred on HMAs where horse and burro numbers have been uncontrolled for a number of years. During times of drought, the effects of horse- and burro-caused habitat degradation can become even more acute. It is impossible to manage public lands for multiple use when horse and burro numbers are out of control.

Wild horses and burros exist today with no large predators to control their populations. There are isolated incidences where mountain lions and grizzly bears have taken wild horses as prey, but it is very uncommon

and only occurs in a few places where the habitat of both prey and predator overlap. The only way resource managers have to control horse and burro populations is through the gather process authorized by the legislation.

Resource managers control the population levels of every other large grazing animal in the West. Domestic cattle and sheep numbers are controlled through stocking rate authorizations and have been cut almost in half over the past 20 years. The populations of large, wild grazers and browsers such as antelope, elk, bighorn sheep, mule deer, and in some cases bison, are controlled through the hunting process. Appropriate population levels are determined through scientific methodologies and excess animals are harvested on an annual basis. Why should wild horses and burros get a pass?

Many so-called wild horse and burro advocacy groups oppose any management of population numbers. This no-management scenario has not worked and will not work. The natural regulation theory espoused for decades by the National Park Service in Yellowstone was an abject failure. That is why we have wolves in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem now. The proponents of this self-regulation, no-management concept must be stopped. If successful, their efforts will produce ecological disasters that will last for decades—even for hundreds of years. Currently, we do not have the technology and funding to fix these potential disasters if indeed they can be fixed at all. We should stop these efforts now rather than face the consequences of their folly.

COME SEE THE TRUTH

Tony Diebold is an experienced wildlife photographer and an outfitter in Nevada's high desert.

Once again the hypocritical horse lobby's ignorance of the true situation is epic! The Warm Springs Canyon HMA in the Calico Hills Horse Management Area has not had cows for over three years due to lack of adequate feed and water. The Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge has not had cattle in almost 20 years. Both have serious environmental damage, and horse foals as well as native wildlife are dying. Most of the feral horses in Nevada are living on 10 percent of the best land we have. The situation will not just go away without intervention.

The Wild Horse & Burro Act was enacted for the purpose of protecting wild horses and burros as part of the natural system of the pub-

lic lands. In it, Congress gave the secretary of the Interior the authority to manage populations of wild horses and burros "in a manner that is designed to achieve and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance on the public lands." Nevada's wildlife, including wild horses, are starving because of zealots, and anybody who argues that the Calico Hills complex or the Sheldon Refuge can support as many horses as it currently does should get out of the house more. Do not let your hatred for the cattle industry and your ignorance overshadow the most important issue—our great state's wildlands and the native wildlife in them.

There are no horses in Yellowstone or Yosemite national parks because they would destroy the parks like they are destroying Nevada's high desert and its native wildlife. I have never owned a cow, but I have owned over 20

horses in my 65 years. The difference is that I managed mine. Too many people want to make decisions from warm and fuzzy San Francisco townhouses that affect many animal and bird species in our state. How do you know more than the BLM range biologists and local residents who are out there every day? When was the last time you got out to Nevada's high sage country to see or be shown the obvious damage done by the overpopulated feral horses?

Come on up to the Black Rock Desert and see what you are helping to destroy. I will show [you] the truth. I live in the Black Rock Desert, and we see the resource being destroyed bite by bite every day. Nevada is one of the most environmentally sensitive states in our great country and deserves better than to be turned into a horse corral.

Q&A with The Wildlife Society

The Wildlife Society was founded in 1937 and represents over 9,000 wildlife professionals. It is committed to science-based policy and the highest standards of scientific integrity.

America's free-ranging horses are a beloved western icon—and a potentially destructive nonnative species that threaten native species and habitats.

In the late 1500s, Spanish explorers introduced domestic horses to North America. Over time, some of those horses escaped or were turned out, creating a population of feral horses. In recent decades, the population on public Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands has soared from 25,000 in 1971 to 69,000 today. More than half of these feral horses—about 37,000—range freely on public land, while 32,000 are maintained in government-run corrals and pastures at a cost of about \$40 million annually.

Current management practices are severely restricted by popular opinion, which has failed to consider the devastating impact of feral horses on native species and natural ecosystems or the growing and substantial cost to taxpayers.

The Wildlife Society hopes to educate the public about this increasingly critical problem. As an advocate of science-based management of feral horses, it has compiled answers to some common questions:

What's the difference between wild and feral horses?

Wild animals' ancestors have never been domesticated—modified by selective breeding—whereas feral animals' ancestors were once domesticated but are now free-ranging in the absence of human care. The “wild” horses in America are actually feral, the descendants of domestic horses introduced to North America by the Spanish in the 1500s.

Didn't horses live in North America thousands of years ago, and doesn't that make them native?

Although many now-extinct horse species evolved in North America, modern feral horses are descendants of horses that were domesticated in Europe. There are similarities between certain genes in modern horses and fossil horses from North America, but geneticists do not believe that they are identical or members of the same species. Horses were absent from North America for 10,000 years after going extinct during the Pleistocene. Since then, the western United States has become more arid and many of the horses' natural predators, like the American lion and

saber-toothed cat, have disappeared, changing the ecosystem and the role horses play. In *Beever & Herrick 2006*, the authors state that “horses should be considered ecologically as part of a novel disturbance regime in the Great Basin (rather than as a native species).” Feral horses are not a natural part of the existing western ecosystem.

How do feral horses affect native habitats and wildlife?

Free-roaming herds currently range across 18.6 million hectares [45.96 million acres]. Feral horses damage landscapes by trampling vegetation, hard-packing the soil, and overgrazing. Areas inhabited by feral horses tend to have fewer plant species, less plant cover, and more invasive cheatgrass, and this can have a pervasive influence on the entire ecosystem. The small reptiles and mammals that depend on burrows and brush cover to survive and breed are less abundant in horse-occupied sites (except for deer mice, a species known to thrive in disturbed landscapes). Desert snakes, lizards, and amphibians occupy a wide range of ecological and trophic niches, and often serve as a link between trophic levels. If their populations are severely reduced or disappear entirely, larger ecosystem simplifications may follow. Another study found that bighorn sheep, a native ungulate with populations in decline, avoid water sources when horses are using them. Feral herds aren't restricted to lower eleva-



NOT LIKE IT SEEMS

By Eric Reid, wild horse and burro specialist, Delta Wild Horse Facility manager, Fillmore Field Office, Utah.

The horse found dead at Skunk Springs last summer (photo #1) was most likely kicked in the head by another horse competing for the water and space. If death was not immediate then his injuries and the situation he was in were the causes of death. His demise was not drought-related (photo #2) even though limited available water attributed to the outcome.

Skunk Springs is in the Conger Mountain



HMA on the Utah/Nevada border. It consists of 151,506 acres of public and state lands. The AML is 40 to 80 horses, based on limited available water sources. There are no cows on the allotment but noncompeting sheep graze the same country.

Population in September 2010 was 290 horses—four times over forage allocations. After 218 horses were removed, within three days this spring came back (photo #3) and was able to provide more water than the needs of the remaining horses.

Forage and water in desert regions are limited and must provide basic needs for wildlife, wild horses and permitted livestock. As popula-



tion numbers exceed that to which the land can support, reductions need to be made with all users to protect the loss of vegetation from high levels of utilization. If the land (vegetation and water) is not managed properly with long-term goals, then there will be no resources for wildlife, wild horses or livestock.

BLM's goal is to manage the resources for the long-term sustainability of wild horses within the HMAs. If the BLM is not focused on this goal and the resource is lost, nature will take care of itself and the public will lose the wild horses due to starvation and/or dehydration and the land will need years to recover.

photos courtesy of Eric Reid, BLM

tions like cattle, and often range to higher elevations to graze. That means that when horses are added to an ecosystem, little habitat is left undisturbed, from the grassy plains to steeper, rockier areas.

What can the BLM do to manage the feral-horse population?

A variety of management policies have been used since the 1970s. Efforts are made to adopt out the horses, and under the Wild Free-Roaming Horses & Burros Act, it is legal to euthanize unadoptable horses. However, this option isn't used, and horses that aren't adopted by the public are held in temporary or permanent enclosures.

The animals removed from ranges now far outnumber the ones adopted or sold as demand for feral horses has dwindled. In 1998, all but 14 percent of horses offered for adoption found homes. In 2008, the most recent year for which BLM data is available, nearly a third of those horses were not adopted. Secretary Salazar's new plan proposes fertility control and moving some captive herds to the Midwest or East. However, it remains to be seen if this plan will be effective in controlling feral-horse populations. The BLM and the Department of Interior must work with wildlife professionals and others to develop a plan to manage feral horses in an ecologically responsible manner. Lethal management options may need to be considered if the BLM's and DOI's new plans for population control fail to curb feral-horse numbers.



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Western rangelands cannot continue to sustain an ever-expanding population of feral horses.

How much does it cost the taxpayers to support feral horses in captivity?

The total cost of rounding up and maintaining feral horses has been rising rapidly, from \$38.8 million in FY'07 to \$63.9 million in FY'10. President Obama's budget request for the BLM in FY'11 includes \$75.7 million for the program and \$42.5 million from the Land and Water Conservation Fund to buy land for a preserve in the East or Midwest. The number of short-term holding facilities rose from 14 in 2001 to 24 in 2008, while the number of

long-term holding facilities has increased from one in 1988 to 11 in 2008. The cost of these holding facilities is \$34 million out of the total FY'10 budget of \$63.9 million. Costs are projected to increase in the coming years if the program does not change, especially as adoption rates are slowing. Given continuing feral-horse population growth, looming federal deficits, budget reductions, and other priority needs for conservation, this program is likely unsustainable.

Are the roundup methods currently used to remove horses humane?

When the BLM determines that rangeland is deteriorating due to overpopulation, it removes feral horses by herding them into holding pens, usually with the use of helicopters. The animals sometimes run for long distances, and animal-welfare activists have raised concerns about such treatment. However, roundups do not seem to have any negative effects on feral horses. In one study, horses that were herded, but not captured, showed the same reproductive success and daily activities as horses that never experienced a roundup. BLM reports less than one percent mortality directly caused by roundups. These findings suggest that roundups are a humane way to remove horses from rangelands and the only viable method of population control if lethal measures are not considered as a management option.

THE CALICO COALITION

Joint press release regarding the Calico Complex wild-horse gather dated Jan. 14, 2010, from Jeremy Drew, president, northern Nevada chapter of Safari Club International; Shaaron Netherton, executive director, Friends of Nevada Wilderness; Tina Nappe, wildlife co-chair, Toiyabe chapter of Sierra Club; and Larry Johnson, president, Coalition for Nevada's Wildlife.

The above-listed groups (Calico Coalition) have produced this joint press release regarding the Calico Complex horse gather that is currently ongoing in northern Nevada. Members and leaders from all four groups made on-the-ground observations of the problems

associated with the overpopulation of horses within the complex well before the gather was scheduled. The groups have and continue to publicly support the gather to get horse populations within appropriate management levels.

The Calico Coalition fully supports the presence of horses on public lands. However, active management of horse and burro herds must be conducted in accordance with the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses & Burros Act. The Act requires that the BLM manage horses in a "thriving ecological balance" and in accordance with other multiple-use mandates. This includes keeping an inventory of horse populations on public lands and immediate removal of excess animals.

A recent ruling against an injunction on the Calico gather reaffirmed the BLM's authority and duty to gather excess horses.

Since the ruling there has been a very well-orchestrated public campaign to halt the gather despite its accordance with applicable laws and reaffirmation by a federal District Court. The subsequent media campaign has produced a public outcry that has not always been based on factual information. Furthermore, the debate has wrongly been narrowed and framed as a clash between the horse advocates and public-lands ranchers.

The Calico Coalition was formed to assert what we believe matters most in this debate! That is the health and long-term sustainability of the native wildlife and ecosystems within the Calico Complex. These four groups have united in order to call everyone's attention to doing what is best for our public lands that we collectively treasure.

TOO MANY HORSES

Art DiGrazia is manager of the BLM Ridgecrest Wild Horse & Burro Corrals, Ridgecrest, Calif.

In September 2010, there were 400 horses and burros at the Ridgecrest Wild Horse and Burro Corrals in Ridgecrest, Calif., with 400 more expected from the Tonopah Reveille gather in Nevada a few weeks later.

In the past, the adoptions, especially in the Midwest and East, were good. People really liked the wild horse as a companion animal and still do but what happens now is that, of course, with the economy the way it is, folks

have to put their money into other things. The adoption fee for the horse itself is \$125 but that's just the tip of the iceberg. Horses are vaccinated and blood-tested and dewormed when you adopt them but you have to buy a facility for the animal, a trailer to transport, and pay for feed and vet bills.

There are a glut of horses in the United States and with no slaughterhouses,



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very few choices for sick, old or lame horses. I used to run wild-horse sales in the Midwest where they would be able to adopt almost 200 head of animals in a weekend. The best weekend we ever had was 1986 or 1987, and that was in Kearney, Neb., when we adopted 320 horses in one weekend. Now, any place we go, whether it's California, Nevada or even the Midwest in certain areas, we're lucky to sell two or three.



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Mustang dance, east of Reno, Nev. There are about 38,365 horses on the western range, with a capacity for 26,582. Close to the same number are in temporary or permanent holding facilities. Contrary to what kindhearted animal lovers, bloggers, Hollywood actors and Willie Nelson say, there is no danger of extinction.

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