

# RANGE

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PUBLISHER/EDITOR: *Caroline Joy "CJ" Hadley*  
INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER: *Tim Findley*  
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775-884-2200

FAX: 775-884-2213

1-800-RANGE-4-U (credit card orders)

Publ./Ed.: <cj@rangemagazine.com>

Freelancers: <st@rangemagazine.com>

Advertising: <ads@rangemagazine.com>

Agents: <rangeagents@yahoo.com>

Promos: <promo@rangemagazine.com>

Business: <admin@rangemagazine.com>

The Web: <www.rangemagazine.com>

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RANGE is an award-winning quarterly devoted to the issues that threaten the West, its people, lifestyles, lands and wildlife. No stranger to controversy, RANGE is a leading forum for opposing viewpoints in the search for solutions that will halt the depletion of a national resource—the American cowboy.

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## Up Front

*The heart of reality.*  
By C.J. Hadley



"That's silly. You're lying!" Madeleine Pickens, third wife of billionaire T. Boone, interrupted everyone, including host Barbara Simpson, on Coast to Coast Radio, KSFO San Francisco, last March.

Barbara Simpson handles people well. She hosted Mrs. Pickens on her weekend show several times to talk about saving mustangs and what Mrs. Pickens calls, "America's heritage." Simpson was intrigued by the idea and sent info on The Pickens Plan to RANGE.

I said, "I'm out of sync with Mrs. Pickens," so I was asked to tell the other side of the story. After that show, Simpson suggested a debate. I said yes, and Mrs. Pickens agreed, as long as she could bring an ex-BLM guy with her. Simpson's producer asked me to level the field.

I picked Hank Vogler. This rancher can see hundreds of mustangs from his truck when he's taking supplies to his sheepherders in eastern Nevada. He's in the heart of reality. There are supposed to be 166 horses on his range, but 10,000 have been gathered in the past 20 years, with 800 more ready to roll. Hank mustanged as a kid, before the 1971 Wild Free Roaming Horse & Burro Act (WH&BA) was passed—and just before everything went to hell.

"Old studs are breeding their daughters and young studs are whipping their fathers and breeding their mothers," Hank said. "They're 10 generations inbred now and it's not getting any better."

"You are making stories up," said Mrs. Pickens. "I've seen beautiful horses out there."

There were no "wild" horses out there in 1971. All loose horses were owned by a ranch, and some of the estrays were caught by mus-

tangers to train or sell. It kept the horses healthy and in check. Each spring, ranchers gathered the horses, culled the sick, old, injured or deformed to sell for dog food, and picked the best to train for riding or ranch work. They branded the foals before turning them back out and occasionally added a good stud to improve the quality of the herd.

Mrs. Pickens told Alan Colmes on Fox News last summer that she was going to buy a ranch through a private foundation and take all the horses in holding pens (today, that's 36,000). She only wants a \$500-per-horse taxpayer "stipend" each year to help pay for the ranch, and she also wants the BLM to change the grazing permits from cattle to horses. That's against the law.

The WH&BA states that the managing agency, the BLM: *not designate acreage for wild horses; is mandated to protect the natural ecological balance of all wildlife species; has authority to remove excess animals to achieve appropriate management levels; and should adopt out excess if possible and destroy humanely if no demand exists.*

The problem is not with the law; it's the lack of political will to follow it due to the emotional wails of animal rights activists, country singers and Hollywood celebrities. That's why 36,000 unwanted, unadoptable horses are getting welfare that will cost taxpayers \$89 million per year by 2012—and there's another \$92-million request in Obama's 2010 budget to buy two ranches in the Midwest for 7,000 more unwanted horses.

"We must act now before the BLM has managed these magnificent animals into extinction," said Willie Nelson.

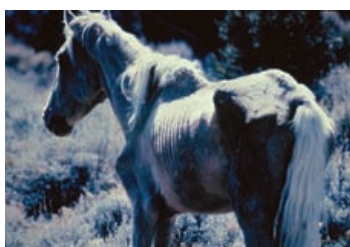
"The information you are getting is skewed," Sheryl Crow, with backing from Lily Tomlin, Bill Maher and Ed Harris, told Interior Secretary Ken Salazar. "I'm pulling for an end to roundups."

"BLM has always been a disaster," said Bo Derek. "They've taken 19 million acres from horses and given it to ranchers to make a profit." The BLM has cut 890,000 animal

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ABOVE: Gen. George S. Patton, CJ's relief from ignorance. BELOW: Stressed mustangs in Nevada. "That's a lie," said Mrs. Pickens. "All the horses I saw were healthy."



## UP FRONT

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units from ranchers since 1946, and economic loss to producers and the states is huge.

Mrs. Pickens thought that was silly, too.

Have these famous and wealthy people been on a family ranch in Nevada that has been destroyed by mustangs? Have they seen what 35-year forest ranger Archie Murchie has witnessed, due to lack of feed: "Mustangs have eaten all the hair off each others' manes and tails.... They've eaten sticks so big they gouged their colons so bad that blood was running out of their rectums."

Mrs. Pickens believes that's fiction.

I wonder if they've seen dehydrated horses lying around a dried-up spring, trying to suck mud. "That's silly," said Mrs. Pickens. "Why are you lying?"

I wonder if they feel good about the bony pregnant mares that abort their foals and starve to death in front of food because, after eating brush and sticks, they don't know how to eat the government's grass hay. "That's a lie," said Mrs. Pickens. "I was at the Calico gather and the horses I saw were healthy."

She was there one day, with an entourage and three helicopters. The gather of 1,922 horses took close to 10 weeks. Pickens' group illegally flew over the herds, delayed the gather three hours, and forced one big mustang bunch to have to be brought in twice.

"That's all fictional," said Mrs. Pickens. "We were at high altitude."

Barbara Simpson asked me, "If Mrs. Pickens buys the ranch, takes all the 36,000 horses in holding pens, would you support her?"

"Absolutely! And I'd donate money to her foundation"—if no tax money is involved and no ranch family is displaced.

BLM estimates that there are 37,000 horses still roaming free (most in Nevada). That's 10,000 more than the resource can take, if it wants to stay in "natural, ecological balance."

"I flew to Battle Mountain in a helicopter, and it took three hours," said Mrs. Pickens. "I saw a total of 200 horses out there."

Horse herds double every four years. If Rep. Nick Rahall's H.R. 1018 Restoring Our American Mustangs (ROAM) bill that passed the House last summer passes in the Senate, and if the "destroy humanely" is still ignored, and if Mrs. Pickens doesn't take the 36,000 imprisoned to date, within 10 years there could be close to 400,000 mustangs destroying everything in the West.

I was waiting to hear, "That's silly. Why are you lying?" ■