



The Truth About Horses

Overpopulation is the greatest threat to “wild” horses.

By Sue Wallis

At the height of the Great Depression the cattle market collapsed, and the federal government decided that the reason it did was not because the economy was ruined, but because there were too many cows. Ranchers were forced to sell their livestock to the government for one dollar per head. Government agents dug huge pits, drove in the cattle, shot them all, and covered the pit with lye so that no one could use the meat.

My grandparents remember this. It was a scar on their souls for the rest of their lives. The end result was failure. It didn't fix the cattle market, and when World War II broke out there wasn't enough beef to feed our troops. When the beef ran out, horse meat was used both at home and abroad. Older folks remember it was good and wholesome—high in protein, low in fat, and cheap.

After the war, ranchers increased herds and cattle numbers rose. John Deere was sweeping the country, and with the massive mechanization of farming, there was less need for horses. The overabundance of horses was a threat to the cattlemen. Unscrupulous characters bought up excess horses for pennies, passing the meat off as beef, and made a huge profit. Cattlemen disparaged horse meat as

unfit for consumption; it reminded servicemen of the nasty canned meat they were served in the trenches. States like Texas and Illinois actually passed laws around 1948 that banned its consumption. In the 1940s the issue was not animal rights; it was economics and market share.

In 1946, my husband's grandfather bought a ranch in Ruby Valley, Nev. The outfit included 200 cows and 80 horses. Most of the ranches in the valley ran their horses together. They gathered once a year and each ranch cut out their own haying teams and saddle horses. When they finished the summer's work, they kept a few favorites and turned the rest back out on the range. Soon all those ranchers were using machinery for haying, and they simply quit gathering the horses because they weren't worth the effort to gather and sell.

This happened everywhere in the West. This was the true genesis for the huge population growth of the animals now called mustangs. They are no more, and no less, than a feral invasive species. Unmanaged horse herds double in population every four years. We ought to be looking at them the same way we do feral hogs, zebra mussels and kudzu. Those of us who live in the West have seen the

devastation caused by mustangs. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is caught between a mandate to protect the range and a romantic notion of horses fed by popular literature, animal-rights radicals, and Hollywood. Private horse owners, states and tribes are all caught in a no-win situation where all the tools to manage unusable, unwanted, abandoned, excess horses are eliminated.

In 1880, the horse population of the United States was 6.9 million. Today we have 10 million domestic horses, and another 70,000-plus so-called wild horses either overpopulating the public lands or standing in feedlots and holding pens because the government can't give them away. Who in their right mind would pay \$125 to adopt an inbred, unknown mustang when there are truckloads of high-quality, registered weanlings and yearlings available for practically nothing at any horse sale in the country?

In spite of the fact that we have three million more domestic horses now than we did when we used them for everything—including transportation, farming and meat—a conglomerate of animal-rights organizations led by the Humane Society of the United States and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals succeeded in shutting down the last three horse-processing plants in the United States in 2007, primarily by making those 1948 cattle-industry-driven horse-meat bans stick in the courts.

This action offers no solution to the inevitable glut of unwanted horses and the BLM is prevented from doing what is neces-



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A small band of mustangs that make up part of a roaming herd located on the benches of the east and west side of the Onaqui Mountain Range, Utah.

"Americans," they say, "don't eat horses, and we shouldn't be supplying those who do." Many Americans do eat horse meat, or would if it were available. The majority of world cultures eat horse meat. The Chinese consume 100 million tons per year, the most in the world. Mexicans are close behind. In Europe, Italians consume the most, followed closely by Scan-

American neighbors teach us that all animals are sacred, and horses, just like elk, deer, cattle, and turkeys, should be harvested with gratitude and reverence.

"It is cruel and inhumane to slaughter a horse." There are long-standing humane methods of slaughter for all classes of food animals, and government inspection of meat-processing plants. These laws include the handling of live animals, and veterinarian-approved methods of humane killing. Once

By the Numbers

- U.S. horse herd in 1880—6.9 million
- U.S. horse herd in 1999—6.9 million
- U.S. horse herd in 2008—9.8 million
- Wild horses on public lands in 1971—17,000
- BLM determined in 2009 carrying capacity for horses—24,000
- Wild horses on public lands in 2009—38,000
- Wild horses in feedlots and long-term holding pens in 2009—31,000
- Yearly increase including death loss—20 percent
- 20 percent increase on 69,000 wild horses in a single year—13,800
- Number of wild horses adopted per year—3,500 maximum

A Government Accountability Office study in 2008 shows that BLM counting methodology is flawed and seriously undercounts the number of horses on the range. In instances where all horses are gathered in a Horse Management Area—such as the Trail Springs disaster (111 horses dead of dehydration) and the Jackson Mountain gather in Nevada—there are invariably two to three times more horses than BLM calculates. Informal, unscientific Google Earth photo counts indicate more than 100,000 horses on the public range.

Note that BLM expenses in no way account for the destruction caused by excess feral horses on private lands, tribal lands and public lands not appropriate for wild horses. For example, the Yakama Nation in Washington state has in excess of 12,000 horses destroying the banks of salmon fisheries and obliterating their culturally significant plant life. There are more than 300 abandoned feral horses running between Riverside, Calif., and the mountains east of Los Angeles. State parks in the Midwest have started guarding their entrances to prevent people from going in with six horses, and walking out with none.

What do the numbers add up to? An absolute disaster—ecologically, environmentally, economically, morally, and ethically.—SW

sary to control the overpopulation of feral horses on the western range. The action has also destroyed the horse market, with the value of all domestic horses dropping by 30 percent to 80 percent nationwide. With no market, the only unusable horses that have any economic value whatsoever are those that are big enough and healthy enough to be worth the cost of trucking to Canada or Mexico. There is no option for horse owners who can no longer afford to keep a horse and want to get some value out of it. The result is an explosion of abandoned and neglected animals—an absolute disaster of suffering, starvation and disease for the horses.

In the West, it is easy to dump horses on public or tribal lands. In the East, unwanted horses are turned out in state parks and on roads where they can be hit by cars. The general population is starting to understand that there might be more to this story than what's portrayed in emotional videos and sound bites. There is no sound basis in either science or ethics for the emotional rhetoric of radical groups which seek to destroy the livestock culture and to preempt the rights of horse owners.

"Horses," they say, "are pets, companions, and sporting animals—they are not livestock." Whether horses are pets or livestock, they are still private property. So long as animals are not abused, no one has the right to dictate to horse owners how their horses should be managed, or how they can be disposed of. That fact is the central tenet of private property rights.

dinavians, Belgians and French. You can also find horse in Canadian meat cases. Americans ate a lot of horse meat during and after World War II, and horse sausage can still be found in Scandinavian butcher shops in the upper Midwest. Criminals are butchering other people's horses in Florida and selling horse meat out of coolers on the street for black-market prices. Cultures like the Tongan population in Salt Lake City prize horse meat. And young parents who are struggling to raise healthy kids on limited resources would welcome horse meat as an affordable and delicious choice.

"Horses are a spiritual icon of the West and our heritage." So are longhorn cattle, deer, elk, bear and moose. We eat them all. Our Native

death has occurred, all sensation ends. What happens to the carcass is no longer an issue for animal welfare groups.

Regardless of all this, there is a well-financed and well-orchestrated effort insisting that killing a horse for food is cruel and inhumane. If this can be legally established, then those of us who make a living with livestock know there is really no difference between slaughtering a cow and slaughtering a horse. So next, the radicals will assert that all animal agriculture is cruel and inhumane, destroying our ways of life and our culture.

All solutions regarding excess horses come down to the answer to this question: Is it moral for human beings to eat horses? If the answer is no, we'd better figure out how to



The herd stallion scent-marks his territory by urinating on manure piles in order to make his position clear to other opposing males.

sanitarily, environmentally and economically dispose of up to 200,000 toxic, drug-ridden domestic and wild-horse carcasses every year at an average of 1,000 pounds per horse. If the answer is yes, then that same 100,000 tons of wholesome meat represent a decent return to the owners that they can reinvest, and it also represents high-quality protein that will nourish millions who will appreciate it and who are willing to pay a fair price, both here and abroad.

Aristotle encouraged moderation and saw extremes as degraded and immoral. The animal-rights argument to ban horses as human food is an example of one of those degraded and immoral extremes. Here is why: Humans are omnivores, but we evolved as meat eaters. We have eyes in the front of our heads to hunt, teeth in our mouths designed to tear and chew meat. We can survive, and be healthy, on a diet of nothing but meat, while a totally vegan diet requires knowing exactly what, when, and how to eat, and for long-term health requires synthetic nutrients that can only naturally be found in animal products. No society on earth is now, or ever has been, completely vegan.

It is ethical for human beings to keep live-

stock so long as animals are provided adequate feed and water, and killed humanely. This is not only a moral imperative, but a product-quality and economic consideration. A stressed animal will have a system full of adrenaline, its meat will be tough and the flavor poor.

It is unethical to allow any species to become so overpopulated that it destroys what it needs to survive. Wildlife managers constantly monitor the interaction of plants,

predators and prey, the condition of the land, water, erosion and invasive species. They use lethal means to control wildlife populations, including intensified hunting seasons and predator controls, but cities, towns and counties also use extreme measures to control feral dogs and cats. Unadoptable, unwanted animals are humanely killed when necessary.

It is arrogant and insensitive for animal rights advocates to disrespect the culinary traditions of others. And why should they put off-limits a vast, renewable source of high-quality protein that could be used to feed 17,000 children a day who die from malnutrition around the world?

The contention that taxpayers must pay for a welfare-entitlement program so that every feral and domestic horse can live out its 30 or more years in government-supported old-horse homes is ludicrous. You may find the eating of horse meat objectionable. I find the eating of lima beans repulsive. But neither one of us has the right to enforce our prejudice on others. It is as simple as that. ■

Sue Wallis is a rancher and a Wyoming state representative who founded and leads the United Organizations of the Horse, <http://www.unitedorgsofthehorse.org>.

The Costs

The BLM estimates that it takes \$15,000 per horse in tax dollars over its lifetime in capture and holding costs. In Fiscal Year 2007, it spent \$38.8 million on its wild-horse and burro program. The cost for holding these animals in short- and long-term facilities was \$21 million of that. This level of funding needed to support necessary removals from the range while maintaining lifetime holding for older unadoptable animals will be at least \$85 million in 2012.—SW

Ethics, Morals and the Ancient Greek Philosophers

Morality has three principal meanings.

First, it means a code of conduct or belief that is held to be authoritative in matters of right and wrong. For the most part, immoral acts are classified as such because they cause harm. In regard to the horse problem, Dr. Terry Whiting, chair of the Canadian Veterinary Medicine Association's Animal Welfare Committee, probably articulates this best in an article he wrote for the *Canadian Veterinary Journal*:

"In liberal democracies, governments are usually reluctant to limit personal freedom unless there is an objective, demonstrated public good.... I would argue that good laws are written in a way to protect the innocent from injuries that they could not be protected from in the absence of a statute." He adds: "In application of this principle of liberal democracy to the horse-meat discussion, the U.S.A. is a major exporter of poultry, pork, and beef products, so the export of other meat is not offensive. Provided horses born in the U.S.A. are raised, transported, and slaughtered under conditions similar to those for beef cattle or pigs, in what way is an American injured by Canadians or Europeans or Asians consuming horse meat? If a claim of injury is made, what is the nature and severity of that injury? There is agreement that horse slaughter is offensive to some; however, when is personal offense sufficient cause in a liberal democracy for state-enforced

prohibition or the use of force to deny personal choice to other citizens?...It is an immense expansion of government powers to extend into the regulation of the average citizen's diet or, apparently, to attempt to alter the diet patterns of other nations."

Second, morality refers to an ideal code of belief and conduct, one which would be espoused in preference to other alternatives by the sane "moral" person.

Third, morality is synonymous with ethics, ethics being the systematic philosophical study of the moral domain. Ethics seek to address questions such as how a moral outcome can be achieved in a specific situation, how moral values should be determined, what morals people actually abide by, the fundamental nature of ethics or morality, and how moral capacity or moral agency develops.

Socrates thought that people will naturally do what is good, if they know what is right. Aristotle, on the other hand, encouraged moderation and saw extremes as degraded and immoral. For example, courage is the moderate virtue between the extremes of cowardice and recklessness. Man should not simply live, but live well with conduct governed by moderate virtue. Moderate virtue is difficult—it denotes doing the right thing, to the right person, at the right time, to the proper extent, in the correct fashion, for the right reason.—SW

Madeleine Pickens' Bad Plan

Reinventing horse heaven. By Rod McQueary

Madeleine Pickens thinks she can leverage her fortune to co-opt even more millions of taxpayer dollars for a fantasy "solution" that is bad for horses, bad for people, and bad for the environment.

Madeleine A. Pickens is British-Lebanese, born in Iraq. She modeled and worked as a flight attendant for Pan American Airlines before going into business for herself, providing cabin services for corporate jets and special charter flights. She moved to the United States in the 1970s where she made her home in Marina del Rey, Calif.

In 1988 she married Gulfstream Aerospace founder, Allen E. Paulson. An astute businessman, Paulson introduced her to Thoroughbred horse racing, a sport in which the couple achieved enormous success. Reflecting a remarkable investment, they owned famed runner, Cigar, among other memorable racing legends. Fraise won the Breeders Cup Turf in 1992; Yokohama won the Prix Foy, in Paris in 1997; Rock Hard Ten won the Santa Anita Handicap in 2005.

Widowed in 2000, Madeleine Paulson

married Texas oilman and corporate raider, T. Boone Pickens in 2005. While she maintains her home at the Del Mar Country Club in California, she and Pickens live in the Preston Hollow neighborhood of north Dallas and own a ranch along the Canadian River in the Texas Panhandle where they keep riding horses and entertain.

In 2005, Madeleine Pickens provided substantial funding to allow Old Friends Equine to purchase Fraise from Japanese owners and bring him back to retirement at the Old Friends facility in Georgetown, Ky. Among others, Old Friends also keep Ogygian, winner of the 1985 Belmont Futurity, and Popcorn Deelites, who performed the title role in the movie "Seabiscuit."

Following her marriage to Pickens, she said she was amazed, despite being in the horse business for 10 years, that she never knew that American horses were processed for human consumption. This is especially astounding since Old Friends Equine was started over outrage that 1986 Kentucky Derby winner, Ferdinand, was exported to



Oil and gas developer T. Boone Pickens and wife, Madeleine, attend the Time 100 Gala, a celebration of TIME magazine's 100 most influential people in the world, on May 5, 2009, in New York.



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Before the 1940s there was no such thing as a wild horse. They were all claimed by someone. This photo, taken on the Onaqui Mountains in Utah, shows ritual posturing and snorts often resolve a confrontation between stallions. This is typical body language of horses, especially those that rely on survival in the wild.

Japan, then slaughtered and eaten, reportedly because he was sterile. The Pickenses financed the fight and, with the Humane Society of the United States and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, closed the last horse processing plant in the United States in 2007.

The Bureau of Land Management announced in 2008 that the United States government was considering euthanasia and/or selling more than 30,000 wild horses without restrictive title, under the authority of the Burns Amendment, the law which forbids the BLM from holding a horse more than 90 days. Madeleine Pickens had testified to Congress in support of H.R. 1018, the Restoring Our American Mustangs (ROAM) Act, and she publicly entered the world of inventing a horse heaven. She announced plans to finance and develop a one-million-acre sanctuary for wild horses in the West. Later, during a recent Fox News report, she claimed to need a \$500 per horse "stipend," annually, less than the government's current costs for uncaptured horses. Apparently, she wants the government to buy—or help buy—the ranch, then waive all grazing fees and local property taxes. She also

said "the horses would own the ranch." No animal can or should ever be awarded the constitutional human rights to own and manage property.

The Winecup/Gamble Ranches near Montello, Nev., seemed the perfect fit. At 25,000 acres of deeded land and 75,000 acres of BLM-permitted land for grazing, it might run 10,000 wild horses, or about a third of those in captivity. She failed to mention the other two thirds. At an annual increase (not birth rate, annual increase) of 20 percent, wild horses have already outgrown her dream.

BLM Horse Management Areas, HMAs, are scattered across the West with most in Nevada. Many of these are hundreds of percent over carrying capacity. The Calico HMA in Nevada is 500 percent over carrying capacity today. This includes hundreds of abandoned domestic pets. Just to continue the insufficient removal levels that they are currently projecting, the BLM will need \$85 million by 2012.

Madeleine Pickens needs your tax dollars to pull off this scam. Further, the fact is that it will be far more expensive with her "solution" than without it. The ROAM Act and other

misguided legislation would create a welfare entitlement program so that every single domestic and wild horse in this country gets set up at government-blessed taxpayer expense.

Inherent in this plan is the loss of private property rights for all horse owners and loss of the ability to use and manage private and public lands for productive purposes. It means the wholesale slaughter of our rights and freedoms. On a dry summer or cold winter, the Pickens plan without skilled management would consign thousands of horses to miserable, painful deaths of starvation and disease, a total waste as opposed to a humane end that provides wholesome food to a market that is willing to pay a return to horse owners. Mrs. Pickens and her supporters ask America to take better care of wild horses and burros than we take care of our aged and disabled citizens, our beloved American veterans and our hugely courageous code-talking Navajo heroes.

Answer me kindly, citizen, to whom do you owe your freedom? ■

Rod McQueary is a Vietnam vet, a rancher, and a friend of good horses. Semiretired by a horse wreck, he writes part-time, and collects firewood.

**Within a year,
wild horses will
have already
outgrown Mrs.
Pickens' dream.**

Herds Need to be Culled

An easy answer. By Johnny Gunn

There appears to be at least one argument in the current debates over unwanted, wild, stray, and feral horses that isn't being discussed, and it relates directly to the ban on the use of horse meat for human or animal consumption and the closing of equine slaughterhouses in the United States. It has been pointed out by many sources that the wild horse herds in the western states are out of control, overgrazing is having a detrimental effect on grazing lands in the West, and current federal management practices are not working. My suggestions in this debate may not sit well with those who harbor only romantic notions of the "noble wild mustang," but the truth is, these wild and feral horses are eating themselves out of house and home along with every other animal that shares their table.

In the early 1900s, there was considerable overgrazing by domestic cows and sheep when most ranchers simply were in business for a fast buck and, coupled with a lack of hunting regulations, the wild animal populations were very low. Later, animal husbandry

and land management practices by ranchers and farmers had a very positive effect on the grazing lands in the western states. That was attached firmly to effective hunting regulations, including seasons and bag limits. Wild animal populations increased dramatically.

The herds of domestic animals were controlled by creating grazing districts and allotting grazing rights, and high desert pastures and meadows responded. Uncontrolled hunting ended and herds of deer, antelope, wild sheep, elk and other game animals thrived under the new system. Wild horses were involved in this but not by way of regulation, which is what is lacking today.

Wild horse herds were controlled to a degree by men and women called mustangers who gathered in the older, more feeble unclaimed horses and sold them for slaughter, for horse meat and dog food. Remember glue factories? Because the herds were thinned, they survived, and the animals left behind were generally healthy. In some cases, the mustangers selected a few, and broke them for ranch work or pleasure riding, even for showing. Prior to the misguided regulations that exist today, the wild horse herds in the western states were in very good condition.

It might surprise some to learn that Monty Roberts, known as a "horse whisperer," worked as a mustanger when he was a young man. He provided wild horses right off the Nevada range for rodeo producers in Salinas, Calif. In his book, "The Man Who Listens to

Horses," Roberts goes into great detail about his adventures capturing wild horses.

Every rancher worth his brand understands culling a herd. Every game warden or biologist drawing a paycheck understands the concept of managing a herd. So what's the answer? Open the wild horse herds to culling, allow for a return of the mustangers, approve the slaughter of horses for human and animal consumption, put limits on those who would be mustanging, license them, charge them a fee to do their work, and the overstocked grazing lands would once again thrive. There has been room in the West for wild horses from the time the Spanish brought modern horses to the Americas in the 1500s, and there is still room, but there must be controls.

Game animals would breed themselves right off the map if allowed to do so, but by controlling the herds through hunting, the land they live on thrives as do the herds. Horses need to be managed equally well.

Wild horses will probably not become game animals, but if mustangers could be given an opportunity to round up a specifically regulated number each year, and if they could then put those horses on the market, today's pitiful wild horses would be restored to the magnificence not seen since the 1950s and '60s, when ranchers and others automatically took care of the herds. ■

Retired journalist/active writer Johnny Gunn lives in Reno, Nev.

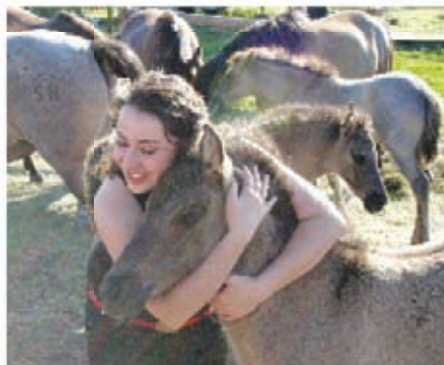
A Real Mustang Rescue

Assuring the survival of the Spanish mustang. By Lucia Roda

A new 501(c)(3) is born around a kitchen table in South Dakota as this country is undergoing a crisis with its unwanted horse population. Current uncontrolled feral horse populations create more than a little budgetary strain and taxpayer commitment. The horse industry is now under pressure to create better standards for breeding practices and to have solutions for unwanted domestic horses. So in the midst of all this, why another horse project?

The Windcross Conservancy's stated mission is the preservation of the endangered Spanish mustang, the first colonial horse of the Old West. Survival of the breed needed less talk and more action and it was through the efforts of everyday people wanting to make a difference that Windcross was born.

Windcross is not a sanctuary or rescue



VISITOR FROM UKRAINE © LUCIA RODA

outfit. It doesn't take in feral horses paid for with tax dollars. It is supported only by private funding, grants and donor gifts.

What Windcross does as part of its educational mission is to give seminars on breeding, breed type and standards. The goal is purpose-driven breeding of excellent specimens of the breed. The rule is if you can't commit to a lifetime of care, don't make more. The Spanish mustang is listed by the Equus Survival Trust and the American Livestock Breed

Conservancy as endangered with a breeding-mare population of 300 or less. The reality is that, as with many breeds, some horses are bred that should not be.

Public outreach is part of the Windcross program, too, with ambassador horses in private hands across the United States, Canada, Britain, Australia and Switzerland, with another planned for France.

Current projects of Windcross Conservancy include 440 acres of preserve in Buffalo Gap, S.D., dedicated to the Spanish mustang. In addition, ongoing efforts in the area include acquisition of a historic building to house the Museum of the Horse and the West, the historical library, learning center and visitor center. It is the goal of Windcross not only to preserve the horse itself but also to ensure its role in the history of the American West and to assure its survival. ■

Lucia Roda has her roots in South Dakota farm country. A refugee of California, she lives in the Black Hills with her husband, Matthew. For info go to www.windcrossconservancy.org or email at windcross@mac.com.