

Death of the West?

By
Terri Farley

The thunder of galloping hooves and neighs
of mustangs may be silenced this year.

In 2010, a full third of Nevada's wild horses were taken off the range in million-dollar, mechanized round-ups funded by the Bureau of Land Management. Half of California's mustangs met the same fate and thousands more wild horses were taken from their homes on the range in Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Oregon, Wyoming and Washington.

BLM's 2011 schedule shows another year of huge round-ups even though federal law says BLM is to remove only "excess" horses for which they have adopters. With over 37,000 wild equines already corralled at a cost of \$36 million a year, what becomes of the wild equines?

"BLM does not sell or send any horses or burros to slaughter," says BLM

Director Robert Abbey, "Killing healthy horses is not on the table."

But horsemeat was on the agenda for the January "Summit of the Horse," in Las Vegas and Abbey was a featured speaker. Convention organizers claimed to be "a unified voice for horses and horse people" seeking final solutions for unwanted horses. The Summit was attended by BLM staff and contractors, and supporters of U.S. horse slaughter factories.

Wyoming Senator Sue Wallis, a proponent of feeding unwanted horses to school children and the poor was the event's primary organizer. Wallis is under investigation for fraud and ethics violations.

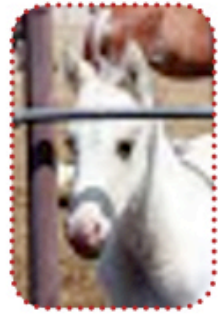
January marked the anniversary of Nevada's Calico Mountains round-up, which advocates of humane treatment of animals see as a case study of wild horse mismanagement.

BLM press releases said the public was welcome at round-ups, but visitors from around the world were greeted by armed Federal rangers and instructed to obey rules set by independent contractor, Dave Cattoor.

Cattoor's process includes helicopter herding, and immediate separation of mares from foals and stallions

from mares before branding, vaccination and transport to holding corrals.

BLM listed 113 deaths among 1922 captured Calico mustangs, resulting from broken pelvic bones, necks, skulls, and spines, hoof slough and 40 spontaneous abortions.



Those deaths were attributed to pre-existing conditions caused by poor forage and vanishing water, not the stress of round-ups and captivity, even though Nevada—home to most of the West's wild horses—enjoyed 120% of normal annual rainfall in 2010. Refreshed rangelands resulted in bigger deer and antelope herds, more hunting tags and increased public lands grazing permits for millions of sheep and cattle.

Despite improved conditions on most of the 542,100 acres of public "herd management" land, BLM leases private land for mustang management and has been slow to respond to offers from Madeleine Pickens and Return to Freedom to free the horses in sanctuaries. The press and public are not allowed inside.

Faced with mounting evidence of bureau mismanagement, bipartisan members of Congress urged to BLM comply with an investigation of its wild horse program by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS).

Among those applauding this investigation is the American Wild Horse Preservation Campaign (AWHPC), a coalition of over 40 conservation, horse advocacy and public interest organizations dedicated to preserving wild horses in free-roaming herds for generations to come, as part of our national heritage. AWHPC has urged the Senate to prevent tax dollars from being wasted on a broken federal program that lacks scientific validation.

This legislation is still under consideration. The NAS review will take at least two years. In the meantime, BLM has refused a moratorium on round-ups. Current law allows BLM to destroy any wild equines they deem "excess." 🐾

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