

BLM begins roundup of Dannels' horses

By Don Cox

RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL

Federal range managers began a controversial roundup Thursday of about 500 horses claimed by two Western Shoshone sisters whose battle against the government over their ancestral lands in northern Nevada has attracted worldwide attention.

The early stages of the operation proceeded without incident, the Bureau of Land Management said. Opponents of the roundup observed the horse gathering, which is expected to last two or three days.

INSIDE

The government will charge ranchers less in the coming year to graze their herds on Western federal lands.

Details, 4C

BLM officials maintain that the horses must be removed to restore overgrazed habitat in the high desert Crescent Valley region, about 60 miles southwest of Elko.

But Mary and Carrie Dann, citing a 140-year-old treaty between the United States and Western Shoshone, say the BLM has no jurisdiction over the horses or the land.

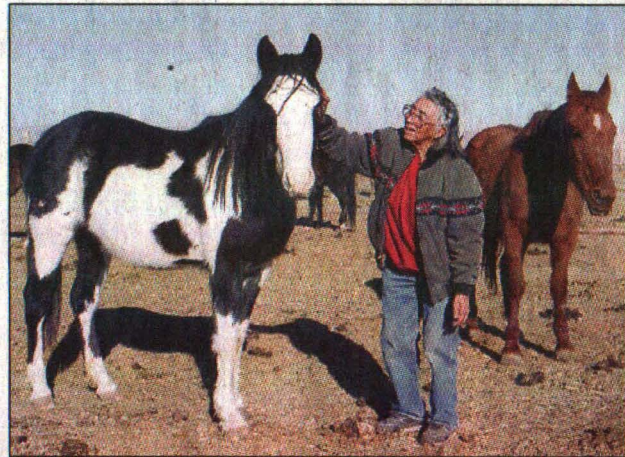
BLM officials, who impounded 227 head of Dann cattle in September, said the sisters haven't paid federal grazing fees since the mid-1990s, and their livestock is trespassing on public land.

"The BLM has tried to work with the Dannels and local interests in every possible fashion over a number of years to resolve their unauthorized use of the public lands," said Helen Hankins, head of the agency's Elko office. "Removing these horses is critical to restoring the damaged range lands."

Supporters of the Dann

sisters called the roundup a government "attack" on Western Shoshone homelands.

The Dann sisters live on an 800-acre ranch founded in Crescent Valley by their father in the early 1900s and have taken their case to the United Nations and other world bodies. They and some tribal leaders have said the Treaty of Ruby Valley in 1863 allowed white settlers to cross 26 million acres of Western Shoshone territory in Nevada, but the tribe didn't surrender land to the United States.



Associated Press file

AT HOME: Shoshone rancher Mary Dann visits some her horses at the Dann ranch in Crescent Valley on Jan. 8.

See **HORSES** on 4C

Horses

From 1C

"The United States needs to recognize its obligations to the Western Shoshone," said Julie Fishel, a lawyer and spokeswoman for the Dann sisters.

The Danns rounded up about 400 horses and placed them in corrals during the past several weeks, Fishel said.

But BLM administrators said they had to finish gathering the horses remaining on range before the mares start giving birth next month.

"Foaling season is coming," said Jo Simpson, a Reno-based BLM spokeswoman. "After that, it gets hot. The next opportune time (for a roundup) is September, but the herd will have grown."

Although Fishel said most of the horses are unbranded, the Dann sisters have said the animals belong to them.

"Everybody knows these are our horses," Carrie Dann said recently. "These horses have always been here."

Simpson said any horses claimed by the Danns after the roundup will be impounded by the BLM for nonpayment of \$3 million in grazing fees and fines the agency says the sisters owe.

Horses deemed "estrays," without brands or identifiable owners, will be turned over to the state, which has reserved 700 animals, more than the BLM expects to gather, for adoption groups.

"The horses aren't the issue," said Shawn Collins, a Western Shoshone. "This has always been about the land. This is just another intimidation tactic by the United States government to break these ladies down."

In January, the International American Commission, part of the Organization of American States, found the United States in violation of international law with its treatment of the Western Shoshone.