

8/12/96 Gold Field  
Beckle MRN

# Deadly struggle for wild horses

■ **Heat, drought take toll:** Group, BLM battle over mismanagement allegations.

By **Tim Anderson**  
RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL

Longtime wild-horse advocate Dawn Lappin is no stranger to dealing with animals in peril.

But what she witnessed last week near Goldfield during an emergency roundup of about 125 horses was disturbing.

"It was pitiful. They were in awful condition. A horse staggered by us and collapsed," Lappin said.

The devastated animal later had to be destroyed.

"They're dying all over out there," said Lappin, director of Reno-based Wild Horse Organized Assistance.

She and others battling to protect Nevada's 24,000 wild horses contend that the Bureau of Land Management has neglected and mismanaged the state's herds.

As a result, Lappin said there's a crisis in the southern end of the state. She said the combination of allowing too many horses on some ranges, a persistent drought and this summer's blistering heat has been deadly.

Lappin said she believes hundreds of the animals — traditional symbol of Western heritage — have perished because of a lack of food and water.

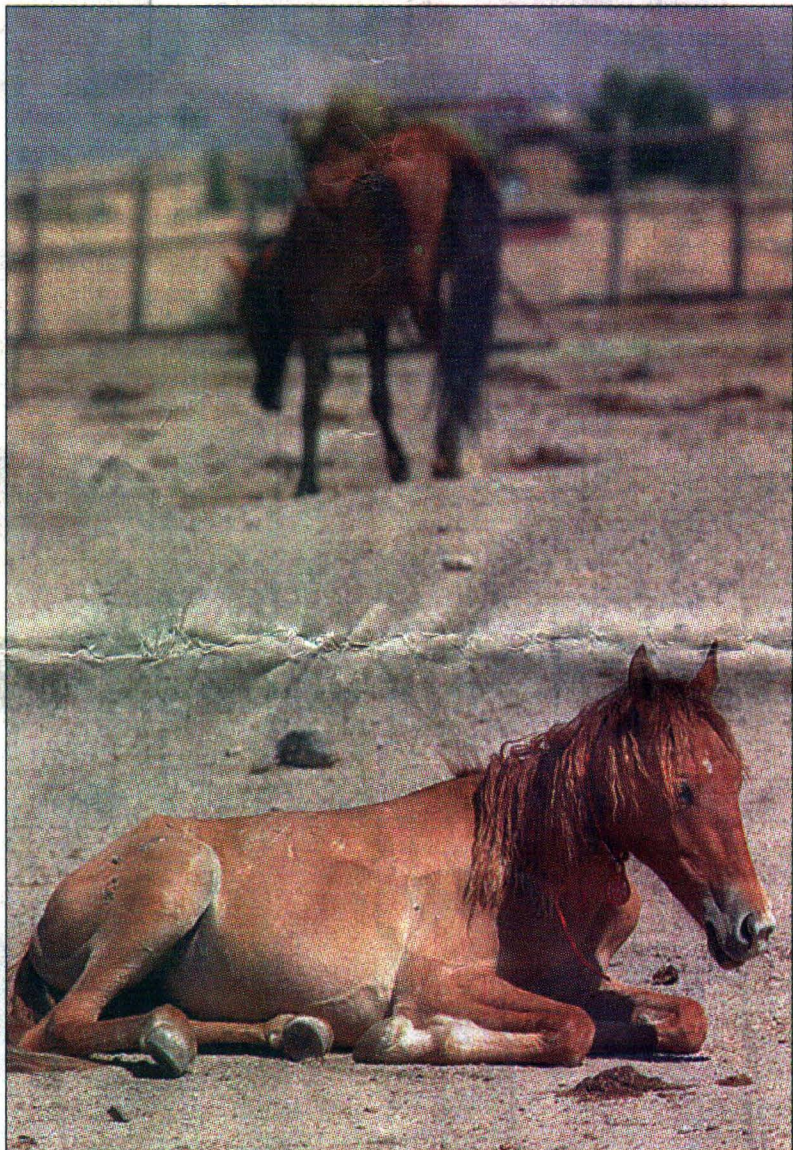
But BLM officials, while acknowledging a severe situation exists, contend that there haven't been large numbers of deaths.

"Not that many have been lost," said Tom Pogacnik, chief of the Reno-headquartered National Wild Horse and Burro Program.

He said the animals that have been rescued are in bad condition but said most targeted for removal have been saved.

Still, the situation in all wild horse areas south of Tonopah has become so troublesome that the agency has mobilized forces to continue with emergency gathers.

"We've got helicopters monitoring these areas and many people in



Joe Gosen/Reno Gazette-Journal

**ADOPTION CENTER:** A mare rests in the Palomino Valley corrals.

## PALOMINO VALLEY ADOPTION CENTER

- **Address:** 15700 Pyramid Lake Highway.
- **Adoption fees:** \$125 for horses and \$75 for burros.
- **Information:** 475-2222.

the field. The Tonopah and Ely offices are focusing all their resources on getting this done," Pogacnik said.

He said the agency moved as quickly as it could after learning in early July that a crisis was at hand.

### More inside

■ **Debate:** Most residents like the small herd of wild horses that wander down from the Pine Nut Mountains, but some don't. **8A**

This led to roundups on the Nellis range — where there's traditionally a sizable herd — then Red Rock, Johnnie, Muddy Mountain, Lake Mead and Goldfield.

Pogacnik confirmed that very few foals have been gathered, fueling speculation that some may



## TODAY'S TOPIC: NEVADA WILDLIFE

### Horses

From 1A

have died at birth or that the mare suffered a miscarriage.

In all, nearly 1,000 horses have been removed in southern Nevada, about half from Nellis and with at least several hundred more targeted for capture.

They are ultimately brought to the national program's Palomino Valley corrals northeast of Reno where they can recover and be prepared for adoption.

Some of the horses to be rounded up in the near future should come from the Caliente herd area, which wild horse groups contend hasn't been reviewed for years.

"Things (in the bureau) are starting to change — finally. But if proper monitoring had been done all along, we wouldn't be in this situation," said Cathy Barcomb, executive director of the state Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses.

Barcomb conceded that once the agency realized it was facing a serious situation, it acted quickly to mount a rescue effort.

"But what were they doing before that? These are areas that don't have sufficient forage. They have to constantly be examined so the proper number of grazing animals are allowed," Barcomb said.

The situation caught the attention Friday of national BLM officials. Acting Director Mike Dombeck said an emergency review team would begin examining operations of the agency's wild horse and burro program.

Dombeck said he was prompted to act by reports of animals in distress throughout the West and said the review team will focus on Nevada, home to about 60 percent of the nation's wild horses.



Joe Gosen/Reno Gazette-Journal

**PALOMINO VALLEY CORRALS:** These are some roundup last week near Goldfield. At the corrals the horses recover and are prepared for adoption.

Barcomb has been pushing for this kind of attention, along with a thorough examination of how federal funds for wild horse programs are administered.

"There has to be better accountability. And there certainly has to be better monitoring of conditions," Barcomb said.

She said the agency acted at Goldfield only after it was alerted by area residents.

Pogacnik admitted officials were tardy in getting into Goldfield, and said conditions throughout Esmeralda County have been especially

cruel to wild horses and burros.

He said the gathers in other regions this year have been handled efficiently.

"We carefully monitor the herds and weather conditions. You have to remember that these areas have been in a prolonged drought. In some places, there hasn't been any measurable precipitation for more than a year," Pogacnik said.

And where there has been some rain, Pogacnik said it has come via thunderstorms and has quickly washed away and not been absorbed into the ground to help sus-

tain rangeland grasses.

"This shouldn't be a surprise. It's common knowledge that the southern half of the state has been in a prolonged drought," Lappin said. "And the agency always talks about lack of money and manpower. But the fact is that they didn't do their job properly."

It's particularly frustrating to see horses suffer in such a way because there are plenty of people willing to adopt, Lappin said.

"The (wild horse) program is regressing. It takes one step forward and two back," Lappin said.



Battle Mtn Dist  
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September 20, 1993

Mr. James D. Currivan  
Battle Mountain District  
50 Baistian Road  
P.O. Box 1420  
Battle Mountain, NV 89820

Subject: Goldfield Wild Horse Herd Removal Plan/EA

Dear Mr. Currivan:

The Nevada Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses appreciates the notification of an after-the-fact decision and removal of wild horses and burros from the Goldfield Herd Management Area. Determination of carrying capacities and allocation of forage to wildlife, wild horses and livestock are the primary duties of the Bureau of Land Management. Broad application of the Strategic Plan, without proper planning and decisions, have lead to some serious questions concerning the welfare of Nevada's wild horse resource.

We would like to provide the following comments to these documents:

Removal Plan

Page 2, Introduction

An appropriate management level has not be established through proper monitoring data and analysis. The 1989 IBLA Decision required the Bureau to present monitoring data and prove damage caused by wild horses to support any reduction in the herd. The purpose of this gather is to adjust wild horses to a level that forage production and water will support in poor years. The introduction does not establish an "emergency" to exempt management actions from administrative appeal.

Implementation of the Strategic Plan to re-structure and not gather older age class wild horses and burros may defeat the purpose of the gather. The 1990 gather of 305 wild horses should provide the District the necessary age, sex, production and genetic data to support an appropriate management level with proper composition of horses to assure its viability.



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#### Page 3, Population Data

Wild horse dependence of three waters is critical to the survival of this herd. Ownership and maintenance of these waters directly affects the welfare of the herd. The document does not disclose or discuss the solution to current problems. No forage production data was presented as a criteria for the reduction of this herd.

#### Page 4, Management Action

A significant reduction of the existing herd may be in order to protect the herd and their habitat. However, the proposed action cannot assure that carrying capacity will be met or the composition of the herd will allow it to survive. Data collected in the 1990 gather was not used to address these two critical issues.

#### Page, 7 Administrative Remedies

District Manager Decision was September 2, 1994 with a plan gather on September 6, 1994. Failure to establish an emergency in the Decision should allow for affected interests to appeal in accordance to 43 CFR 4.21. Obviously, the decision was implemented prior to the 30 day time frame for appeal or stay of action.

#### Environmental Assessment NV65-EA94-74

#### Page 2, Introduction

The environmental assessment provides no criteria to establish an "emergency" status to exempt administrative review and appeal for the affected interests. Range suitability studies to determine carrying capacities in the late 1970's considered the amount and distribution of water in relationship to livestock stocking rates. These studies were abandoned by the Bureau and replaced with rangeland monitoring and evaluation procedures. Your actions to reduce these herds are contrary to current policies and bias against wild horses.

#### Page 3, Domestic Livestock

Livestock were not subject to range suitability analysis presented in this environmental assessment. An allotment evaluation and multiple use decision should establish a carrying capacity and then allocate the forage to wildlife, wild horses and livestock.

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Page 4, Wild Horses

Programmatic EA No. N66-EA8-42 could not have assessed all available data to support the management action. Re-structuring of the herd and releasing older aged horse back into the herd area above the carrying capacity could jeopardize the herd. Specific data collected in the 1990 could not have been in a programmatic EA prepare in 1988.

Sincerely,

Catherine Barcomb  
Director