

CONFIDENTIAL HL

12/13/89

At this time, the field position of the research actively being conducted by the University of Minnesota in the Stone Cabin Herd Area and the Clan Alpine Herd Area consists of identifying each collared animal from a helicopter and determining which study mares have foaled; which causes the disruption of every horse in the herd area.

This monitoring of Collared Horses is causing a good deal of stress in the herd. All horses that have been subject to monitoring, collared and uncollared, (which requires getting the helicopter down close enough to read collar numbers) begin to run as soon as they hear a helicopter and continue to run for some time after the helicopter passes out of the area. As a result of this monitoring, the horses are moving outside their normal range and herd area into other herd areas or into non-herd areas and on to Forest Service lands. Many of the foals are newborn at this time of the year, April through June, and an undetermined number are left behind to become orphaned. Those that are too young to keep up are also too young to survive on their own. In the Stone Cabin Area the problem is somewhat less than in the Clan Alpines,

because of the mostly open country and the young colts can keep track of the band for a longer period of time and its easier for the mares to keep track of their colts whereas in the Clan Alpines the terrain is much rougher and tree covered and very young foals can be lost from the band within a few hundred yards. The rugged tree covered terrain also makes it much more difficult for the mares to find their colts if they do come back. Once out of sight the mares have a tendency to forget their foals. At the time of year observations (monitorings) are made, April, May and June, the colts are at the most vulnerable stage (new born to a few weeks old or unborn).

Our own Bureau Policy prohibits the gathering of horses by helicopter during the months of March, April, May or June because of the impacts on foals from the gathering operation. Young foals that can't keep up have been lost, mares will frequently abandon the foals and refuse to claim them even if the colts do make it to the trap site, and mares have also aborted at the trap site. Although the stress is not as great from collar monitoring, the distances these animals are running is causing many of the same problems.

Horses are different from many other animals in the way they care for their young and it's this difference that makes it so critical to assure that they are handled properly. For example, deer, antelope, and cows will hide their young and go off to forage or drink and always come back. The mother will always come back to their young even if driven off, whereas in horses the foal must stay with the mare from birth or the colt has little chance of survival.

Mares with foals are always a part of a band headed by a lead mare and dominant stallion. The lead or dominant mare determines the direction in which a band will move providing the dominant stallion approves. If he doesn't, he determines the direction. Other mares in the band are not allowed to leave the band and must follow the direction set by the lead mare. If a colt is left behind its only chance of being reunited with its mother is if:

1. The colt belongs to the lead mare and she is allowed to take the band back.

2. The lead mare takes them back to the area at random which they usually do if its within their home range. However, it is usually several days to weeks later and too late for the colt.

3. The band is turned back with the helicopter providing they see the colt fall behind (this cannot always be done and is almost impossible in the Clan Alpines).

4. Or occasionally a mare will hang back and wait for her colt, if the pressure from the helicopter isn't too great.

Impacts To Animals in the Herd

The kind of stress put on the herd from research monitoring is far from normal and causes a lot of stress and other impacts to a herd some of which include:

1. Loss of young foals.
2. Disruption of the natural homogenous/family structure of the bands. In many cases the total continuity of the band is lost.
3. Turmoil in rearranging bands during breeding and foaling season.
4. Moving horses outside the herd areas which has other ramifications, such as causing them to be removed.
5. Causing abortions.

Darting/immobilizing of horses to treat severe neck injuries and remove collars has further aggravated the problems. This kind of disruption to a herd raises the question as to how many other, yet to be identified, impacts the herd is experiencing.

Impacts on the Research

Many of the research animals have died or have been lost to the study from one cause or another. For example in Stone Cabin approximately 30 out of 100 implanted mares, in the healthiest most durable age group, were lost from the study and in Clan Alpine, 48 of the control animals were lost at one time before the study got underway. Many have lost their collars and many of the numbers on the collars are no longer legible; taking out of the research project a significant number of animals. The natural habitats of the animals is put in total disarray. The loss of young is unknown in terms of how many but may be significant. There are impacts from injuries caused by collars that were too tight.

In addition, the military is becoming even more uncooperative in providing windows in their training schedule to allow for safe aircraft operations in both the Stone Cabin Area and Clan Alpines.

In conclusion, we are separating a number of foals from their mothers. The problem is particularly of concern in the Clan Alpine area where we can be losing 3 to 6 per flight.

The Stone Cabin portion of the study was extended one year and doesn't appear, in my opinion, to warrant this extension when weighed against the loss of young foals. One more years information can't provide a significant amount of additional information especially when tainted by loss of animals and other unnatural impacts.

Military cooperation to allow flights to be safely and effectively scheduled in these two areas is practically nonexistent.

I therefore highly recommend the Stone Cabin portion research activity be discontinued and the collars removed.

U of M should be notified of the gathering, to remove collars, so that they have the opportunity to draw blood samples and make other observations while the animals are restrained for branding and collar removal.

I also recommend the Clan Alpine study be discontinued and the collars removed or at the very least an evaluation made as to the impacts to research and the justification of the loss of such a large number of foals.



United States Department of the Interior

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IN REPLY REFER TO:
4700 (NV-014)

GOVERNMENT MEMORANDUM

To: State Director, Nevada (NV-910)
Chief Division of Wild Horses and Burros (WO-250)
Contracting Officer for the University of Minnesota Research
Contract (WO 852)

From: Les Sweeney, Contracting Officer's Representative

Subject: Recommendation to Terminate the U of M Research Contract on
Fertility Control in Wild Horses

Bureau Policy prohibits the gathering of horses by helicopter during the months of March, April, May or June because of the impacts on foals from helicopter gathering operations. The reasoning for this foaling season "shutdown" is that young foals that can't keep up have been lost, mares will frequently abandon the foals and refuse to claim them even if the colts do make it to the trap site, and mares have also aborted at the trap site.

Horses are different from many other animals in the way they care for their young and it's this difference that makes it so critical to assure that they are handled properly. For example, deer, antelope, and cows will hide their young and go off to forage or drink and always come back. The mother will always come back to their young even if driven off, whereas in horses the foal must stay with the mare from birth or the colt has little chance of survival.

Mares with foals are always a part of a band controlled by a lead mare and dominant stallion. The lead or dominant mare determines the direction in which a band will move providing the dominant stallion approves. If he doesn't, he determines the direction. Other mares in the band are not allowed to leave the band and must follow the direction set by the lead mare. If a colt is left behind its only chance of being reunited with its mother is if:

1. The colt belongs to the lead mare and she is allowed to take the band back.
2. The lead mare takes the band back to the area at random, which they normally do if the area is within their home range. However, it is usually several days to weeks later and too late for the colt.
3. The band is turned back with the helicopter providing they see the colt fall behind (this cannot always be done and is almost impossible in most portions of the Clan Alpines).
4. Or occasionally a mare will hang back and wait for her colt, if the pressure from the helicopter isn't too great.

At this time, the field portion of the research actively being conducted by the University of Minnesota in the Stone Cabin Herd Area and the Clan Alpine Herd Area consists of the use of a helicopter to locate bands of wild horses with collars and flying close to the band in order to identify each collared animal to determine which study mares have foaled. This activity causes the disruption of every horse in the herd area during the period of the flights.

This monitoring of collared horses is causing stress in the herd. All horses, collared and uncollared, that have been subject to monitoring (which requires getting the helicopter down close enough to read collar numbers) begin to run as soon as they hear a helicopter and continue to run for some time after the helicopter passes out of the area. As a result of this monitoring, the horses are moving outside their normal home ranges and herd area into other herd areas or into non-herd areas and on to Forest Service lands. Many of the foals are newborn during this time of the year in which the University

conducts repeated flights, (April through June) and an undetermined number are left behind to become orphaned. Those that are too young to keep up with the older horses when running from the helicopter are also too young to survive on their own. In the Stone Cabin Area the problem is somewhat less than in the Clan Alpines, because of the mostly open country and the young colts can keep the band in sight for a longer period of time and its easier for the mares to keep track of their colts. However, in the Clan Alpines the terrain is broken and tree-covered and very young foals can be lost from sight of the band within a few hundred yards. Once out of sight the mares have a tendency to forget their foals. The rugged, tree-covered terrain also makes it much more difficult for the mares to find their colts if they do come back. At the time of year observations (monitorings) are made, April, May and June, the colts are at the most vulnerable stage (new born to a few weeks old or unborn).

The stress from collar monitoring is as impacting as from gathering or more so since collar monitoring entails the disturbance of the herd on four separate occasions and during the most critical period, April through June. The distance these animals are running, even when not directly pursued, is causing the same problems as encountered during gathering operations.

Impacts To Animals in the Herd

The types of stress put on the herd from research monitoring is far from normal. The stress and impacts to a herd from this activity includes:

1. Loss of young foals. After the monitoring flights began the horses have become so stirred up and flighty that a mare will seldom leave the band to wait for her foal.
2. Disruption of the natural homogenous/family structure of the bands. In many cases the total continuity of the band is lost.
3. Turmoil in rearranging bands during breeding and foaling season. This also may be contributing to the loss of foals.
4. Moving horses outside the herd areas which has other ramifications, such as causing them to be removed.
5. Causing abortions.

Darting/immobilizing of horses to treat severe neck injuries and remove collars has further aggravated the problems. This kind of disruption to a herd raises the question as to how many other, yet to be identified, impacts the herd is experiencing.

Impacts on the Research

Many of the research animals have died or have been lost to the study from one cause or another. For example in Stone Cabin approximately 30 out of 100 implanted mares, in the healthiest most durable age group, were lost from the study and in Clan Alpine, 48 of the control animals were lost at one time before the study got underway. Many have lost their collars and many of the numbers on the collars are no longer legible; taking out of the research project a significant number of animals. The natural habitats of the animals are put in total disarray potentially affecting the breeding behavior and conception rates. The loss of young is unknown in terms of exact numbers but may be significant to the research results. There are impacts from injuries caused by collars that were too tight. The severity of the injuries may be affecting cycling or other natural behavior.

Other Impacts

The military is becoming even more uncooperative in providing windows in their training schedule to allow for safe aircraft operations in both the Stone Cabin Area and Clan Alpines.

Since none of the mares with hormone implants were identified with markings other than a collar, the loss of collars has made it impossible to track and/or identify those mares. However remote, the possibility now exists for a mare with hormone implants to surface in the human or pet food chain. This is the reason we are freeze marking all mares with hormone implants. During gathering operations they will be returned to the herd area.

In conclusion, the research activities 1) are separating foals from their mothers, and 2) have caused loss of sample animals. The problem is particularly of concern in the Clan Alpine area where we may be losing 3 to 6 foals per flight.

The Stone Cabin portion of the study was extended one year and doesn't appear, in my opinion, to warrant this extension when weighed against the loss of young foals and injury (and/or death) from collars. One more years information can't provide a significant amount of additional information especially when tainted by loss of adults and foals, abortions and fetus absorptions, and other unnatural impacts.

Military cooperation to allow flights to be safely and effectively scheduled in these two areas is practically nonexistent.

I therefore highly recommend the Stone Cabin portion research activity be discontinued and the collars removed.

I also recommend the Clan Alpine study be discontinued and the collars removed or at the very least an evaluation made as to the impacts of foal loss to the research results and the justification of the loss of such a large number of foals.

U of M should be notified of the gathering to remove the collars, so that they have the opportunity to draw blood samples and make other observations while the animals are restrained for freeze marking and collar removal.