



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

NEVADA STATE OFFICE

850 Harvard Way
P.O. Box 12000
Reno, Nevada 89520



IN REPLY REFER TO:

4700
(NV-931.3)

MEMORANDUM

11-10-87

To: Clan Alpine Wild Horse Death Investigation File

From: Lahontan Resource Area Manager, Mike Phillips *mp*

Subject: Report of Actions Taken by Carson City District to Supervise University of Minnesota's Wild Horse Capture

On August 21, 1987, at 9:00 a.m., Tim Reuwsaat and Mike Phillips met with Tom Eagle (University of Minnesota) to discuss the horse gather in the Clan Alpine Herd Use Area associated with the University of Minnesota's research. Although the Carson City District had not been assigned formal COAR or PI duties, we assumed the role and responsibility since the gather was to take place in the Carson City District. Tim and I felt a pre-work conference was appropriate so we could brief the University of Minnesota personnel on the sensitivity of the horse gather operations in Nevada, particularly in light of the recent problems experienced on other gathers in several districts this field season relating to sore feet, i.e., lame animals which were apparently the result of running horses too far in rough terrain by the same contractor as the University of Minnesota was going to use.

Tom Eagle was told that we did not want horses run more than 5 miles under any circumstances, even if it required them to move traps more often. We also asked that checks be made on horse conditions to ensure problems associated with the other gathers did not occur. We emphasized that we could not afford to have animals mis-handled and we also expected visits to the trap site from wild horse interest groups. We discussed the on-going drought conditions in the area and stated that the horses may already be in a stressed condition. Eagle stated that he understood the recent problems experienced in other gathers and knew the BLM was under a lot of pressure. He assured me the research gather would be conducted "by the book" and it certainly wasn't their intent to harm horses. He stated that a vet would be there to observe the condition of the animals.

On August 24, I traveled to the trap site located at Shoshone Meadows. I arrived there at approximately 9:00 a.m., however, the trap was not assembled until approximately 3:00 p.m. Gather operations started at that time and several bands of horses in the immediate area were captured without incident (except roping). The horses were worked and released at approximately 1900 hours. On August 25, capture operation began at approximately 0630 with several bands being captured by 1300, at which time I left and returned to Carson City.

Observations

1. The temperature was in the 90+'s. During construction of the trap, one of the personnel constructing the trap had to stop and lay down due to the heat and over exertion. He complained the rest of the day of being dizzy.

2. The horses brought into the trap appeared to be in good health although were not in real good flesh which I attributed to the drought conditions and lack of adequate feed/water.

3. Several horses spilled from the trap were chased and roped from saddle horses. Once roped, were returned to the trap site for treatment. In all cases, the horses were choked down and in one instance tied up for approximately 15-20 minutes, and when released could not get up for 10-15 minutes and even then staggered for some distance. Due to the heat, the saddle horses were exhausted and finally were unsaddled and cooled down with water.

I question the need for this practice in future gathers and recommend it be discontinued unless absolutely necessary for the horses' health.

4. The attitude of the sub-contractor was displayed to me on several occasions:

a) Made comments that this was the worst place they could have picked to do this since it was the BLM's playground and they were always playing with these horses making them hard to catch.

b) Weren't enough horses in the area.

c) Continually made jokes about sore feet on horses since they were involved with the incident in Winnemucca earlier this year.

5. While water was provided at the trap site, I never saw a horse drink. The area (holding) was small and the horses were continually moving, fighting, etc.




On August 31, I received several phone calls from Dawn Lappin concerning an alleged problem at the trap site at War Canyon. She had received a call from Slick Elmer who accused the BLM of running the horses too far and they were either injured or sore footed when captured. After a lengthy discussion, I assured Dawn that we were not running the horses too far and from my personal observation, everything was going fine. However, I invited her to visit the trap site if she was not convinced.

Immediately following this discussion, I contacted Andy Anderson by radio to inform him that Dawn Lappin had told me she was going to visit the trap site. I stressed that we had to make sure and play "by the book," that she was concerned about sore feet, etc., therefore, make sure the horses weren't being driven more than 3-5 miles and not to let them rope and choke down any horses near the trap.

On September 1, I talked to Anderson by radio and was informed that they were moving the trap from Horse Creek back to Shoshone Meadows.

I asked him why, since Tim had left there due to the shortage of horses. He told me that he knew of an area we hadn't gathered in and there were plenty of horses.

Legend

-  Area of Gather
-  Wild Horse Trap Location
-  Location of Carcasses

AUGUSTA MOUNTAINS HERD AREA

HOLE-IN-THE-WALL ALLOTMENT

CLAN ALPINE HERD AREA

ON ALLOTMENT

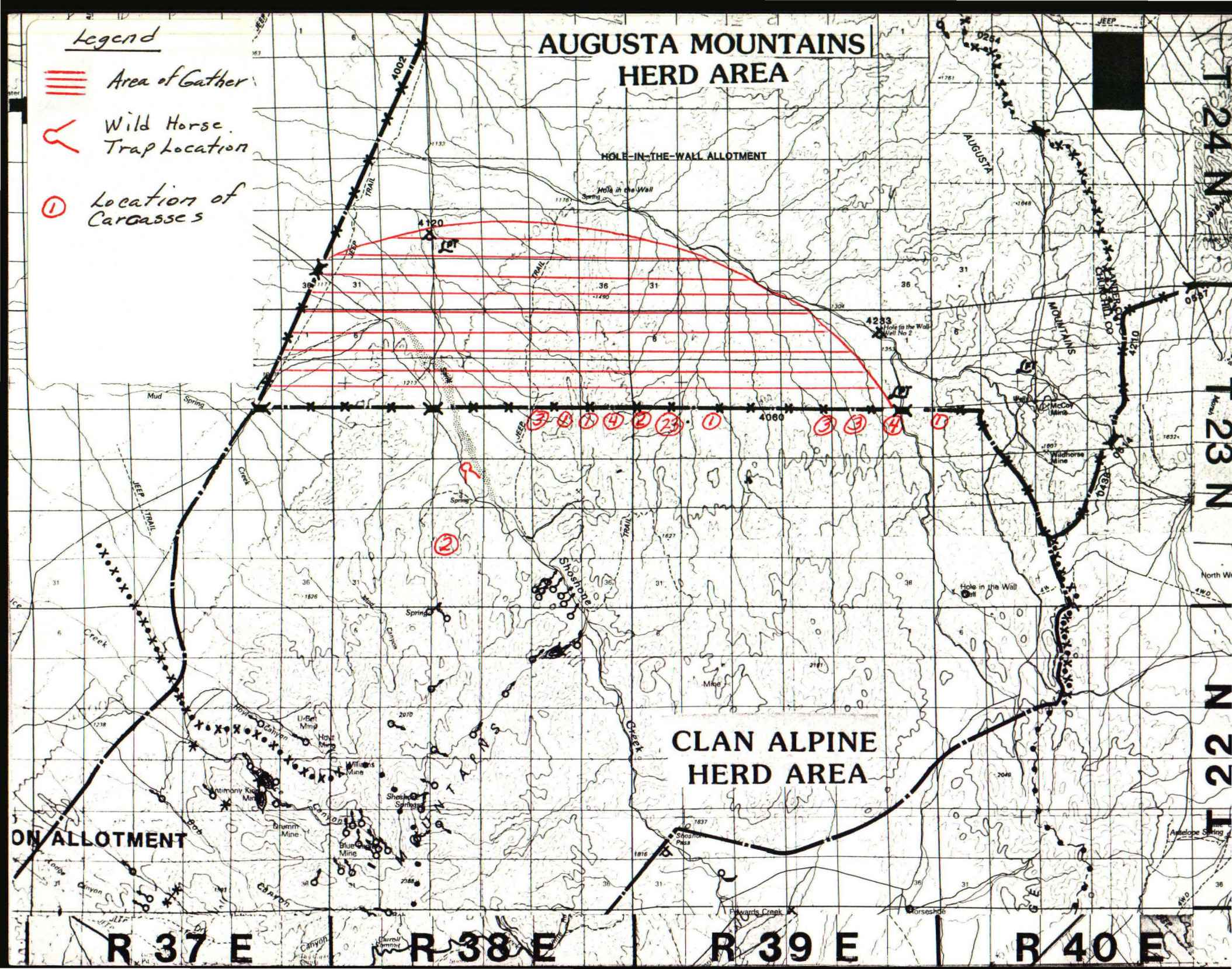
R 37 E

R 38 E

R 39 E

R 40 E

T 24 N
T 23 N
T 22 N



As a part of this study, BLM representatives from the Washington Office, Nevada State Office and several Nevada District Offices met with the University of Minnesota research personnel on numerous occasions to select wild horse herds upon which to conduct the research and to agree upon other terms and conditions of the research. Some of the criteria and conditions which were understood, included the following:

1. The COR for the research contract would be located in the Washington Office of BLM and a project inspector at the state or district level would not be assigned.

2. BLM would make----wild horse herds available for conducting the research and would not conduct any wild horse removals in those areas for three years.

3. The University of Minnesota would work closely with BLM and advise them whenever horses were to be captured for research purposes

4. No capture plan or environmental assessment would be required since the capture of animals would be associated with research rather than the removal of excess animals.

As a result of this understanding between BLM and the University of Minnesota, the Clan Alpine Wild Horse Herd Management Area (HMA) was selected as one of the research areas.

On----Sept. the University of Minnesota contacted the Carson City BLM office and told them that the university intended to capture and attach radio telemetry devices to wild horses in the Clan Alpine HMA on----- . Therefore, on-----the Carson City BLM conducted an informal meeting with representatives from the University of Minnesota to inform them that a district representative would be present at the capture site at all times and to

identify any restrictions which would be placed upon the research/capture effort. As a result, the University of Minnesota personnel were informed that any wild horses captured by them would not be chased any further than 5, all wild horses would be herded by the helicopter in a manner that bands would remain together and wild horses would be herded by the helicopter in a manner that foals would remain with their mothers.

To complete the experiment concerning wild horse fertility control in the Clan Alpine Herd Management Area, 150 mares between 3 and 12 years old had to be implanted with silicone capsules. Of these 150 mares, 100 were to receive capsules impregnated with hormones (estrogen or progesterone) and the remaining 50 received plain (control) silicone capsules.

Capture and treatments began 24 August 1987 and continued through 3 September 1987. During that period 493 horses were captured and handled (205 males, 288 females). Of these horses, 301 were marked with numbered collars, 149 of which were equipped with radio transmitters and were attached to the implanted mares. The other 152 collars were attached to males and females too old for inclusion among experimental animals. One hundred ninety-two horses were not collared because they were less than 3 years old and considered too young to be fitted with permanent collars.

The following table depicts a summary of the University of Minnesota's wild horse captures and trap locations in the Clan Alpine study area:

<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>START DATE</u>	<u>END DATE</u>	<u>NUMBER OF ANIMALS CAPTURED</u>
Shoshone Meadows	8/24/87	8/26/87	165
War Canyon	8/28/87	8/30/87	125

Horse Creek	8/31/87	9/1/87	70
Shoshone Meadows	9/2/87	9/3/87	192

On 31 August 1987 after moving the trap to Horse Creek, 70 horses were caught in the Clan Alpine HMA and processed. At that time the gathering sub-contractor stated he was having difficulty locating unmarked horses. Some were present but were widely scattered and ran immediately when the helicopter was in the general area.

On 1 September the representative from BLM drove to the Hole-in-the-Wall spring, north of the boundary fence between the Augusta and Clan Alpine HMA's. Several bands of horses were seen watering, and 3-5 collared horses were present. These marked horses could have come only from south of the fence in the Clan Alpine HMA, having been marked during the first 3 days of the capture effort. The horses at the spring were in very poor condition and flow from the spring was low.

Upon inspection of the fence separating the two allotments, several large (20-40 foot) gaps were found. There was a horse trail going through one of the gaps to a spring on the south side of the fence. The trails to the spring were well travelled from north to south of the fence. Similar trails occurred in two other locations indicating regular movement of horses between the two HMA's.

After discussing the lack of available horses in the Clan Alpines and the evidence suggesting regular movement between the two HMA's, BLM and University of Minnesota personnel decided the best alternative would be to move back to the north end of the Clan Alpine HMA and bring horses from the Augusta HMA through the gaps in the fence to the formerly used trap site in Shoshone Meadow. It appeared that such a decision would have limited affect on either

the welfare of the horses, which appeared to cross the fence regularly, or on the study being conducted by the University of Minnesota. Accordingly, the trap was moved back to the Shoshone Meadows location during the afternoon of 1 Sept.

On 2 and 3 September 1987, a total of 133 horses were captured from the Augusta Mountains HMA and brought through an opening in the fence separating that HMA from the Clan Alpine HMA, to the trap located in the northern part of the Clan Alpine HMA (86 on 2 Sep. and 47 on 3 Sep.) to complete treatment of mares for fertility control. All of the horses were taken from the area between Hole-in-the-Wall spring and the fence between the two HMA's. Thus, the maximum distance horses were moved was approximately 12 miles to the trap site (4-5 straight line miles). The path to the trap site was relatively flat with only one ridge, approximately 500 feet high, between the horses original position and the trap (Map 1). Air temperatures were in the 90 plus degree range which was unusually warm for that particular time of year.

Of the 133 horses captured, 75 were tagged with numbered collars. Of the 75 tagged animals, silicone rubber capsules were implanted into 42 mares between 3 and 12 years old, and these 42 equipped with radio collars. The additional 33 marked horses were males or females too old to include in the fertility experiment. The remaining 58 animals were not marked.

Eighty-one of the 86 horses captured on 2 Sept. were released together approximately 7:30 that evening following appropriate experimental treatments. These animals were provided free access to water. The 5 horses retained (3 young females and 2 young males) overnight in the corral were provided hay and water. These 5 horses were held over night because there was not enough time remaining in the day to process them with the others and were released together on the morning of 3 Sep after handling. The 47 horses captured on 3 Sep were

kept together until treatments were complete and all could be released at once on the same day.

DISCOVERY

On 17 September 1987, during a routine aerial census of the Augusta Mountain Herd Management Area (which includes the Hole-in-the-Wall allotment north of the Clan Alpine Herd Management Area), three dead horses were sighted along the fence near the cattleguard in T.23N, R.39E, Sec.13. Later that afternoon, an additional five carcasses were sighted from the helicopter at T.23N, R.38E, Sec. 13. cursory examinations of the carcasses, which were bloated, revealed no direct evidence of the cause of death, such as bullet wounds. However, the aggregation of the carcasses and their proximity to the fence, suggested a possibility the animals were shot.

On 18 September the Lahontan Resource Area Manager was briefed on the discovery of the dead animals. Also, the University of Minnesota was notified and the investigation was turned over to the Nevada State Office law enforcement staff for investigation into what was assumed at that time to be a case of wild horses being shot illegally by a person or persons unknown.

The NSO law enforcement staff began investigating the possibility of violations of the wild horse and burro act. This investigation is continuing because during the capture operations, one yearling with a fresh brand and one yearling with a rope around it's neck were observed.

On 8 October research personnel from the University of Minnesota drove to the research area to inspect the previously located horse carcasses. During that visit, 5 additional carcasses were discovered while walking the fenceline.

These animals were scattered westerly along the fenceline within 3 miles of the cattleguard located in Section 12 T.23 N. R. 39 E. Each animal showed no obvious sign of cause of death, but like the 8 carcasses found earlier, were grouped together. Marker collars on several of the dead horses identified them as part of the University's research project on fertility control in wild horses. All of the marked horses had been captured on 2 or 3 September 1987 as part of groups brought across the fence separating the Augusta Mountain and Clan Alpine HMA's. On ----- Oct. 1987, the University of Minnesota notified the Carson City BLM Office of this discovery.

Following these discoveries, University researchers chartered a helicopter on 19 October to locate and assess the status of all horses radio-tagged on 2 and 3 Sep. This search revealed additional dead horses and brought the total number of deaths recorded to 40. Included in these were two radio-tagged mares located by telemetry approximately one-half mile south of the trap site. The University of Minnesota notified Tim Reuwsaat, Wild Horse Specialist, Carson City District Office on or about 21 Oct. 1987. need to explain here what happened between 10/19 and 10/28

FORMAL INVESTIGATION

On 28-30 October 1987 an investigation team composed of a veterinarian and BLM personnel, from law enforcement and management divisions, searched the entire fence line between the two allotments and examined the carcasses located there. In addition, a thorough search of areas north and south of the fence was conducted. A total of 46 dead horses was located, all of which were proximate to the fence. The two mares located south of the trap site found by University of Minnesota personnel through radio telemetry were the only horses that were

not included in the search by the investigation team. Thus, a total of 48 dead horses was discovered.

Examination of each of 46 carcasses by BLM's law enforcement agent on 30 Oct. produced no evidence of shooting. Thus, no criminal activity was indicated in the deaths of the wild horses.

The 48 dead horses included 28 collared and 20 unmarked horses. Age and sex of the unmarked horses were not determined. Among the 28 collared horses were 8 males and 20 females, 16 of which had been treated with implants and fitted with radio collars.

VETERINARIANS STATEMENT - CAUSE OF DEATH

The 46 dead horses were found along the south side of the fence line between the Clan Alpine and Hole-in-the-Wall management areas. When I first viewed the dead animals, they had been dead approximately 6-8 weeks and the carcasses were in advanced decomposition. Because of this condition, no laboratory tests (ie. tissue samples and blood samples) could be used. All the dead horses were found in lateral recumbency without any signs of struggle before death. They were found in a few groups of 2 or 3 or as single horses with the exception of one large group of 22 horses. No sex or age group seems to predominate. Many were collared in the study but about 40% were not marked.

Various causes of death (ie. gunshot, poisoning, or toxic plants) were ruled

out by physical examination of the carcasses and by finding no other horses or any type of animal affected in the same area.

In my best professional opinion, the cause of death was dehydration coupled with exhaustion and hyperthermia. From the history of the capture and release of the horses, it seems likely that they tried at great effort to return to the north side of the fence. Even though they were given water at the trap site before being released, the intense physical effort of trying to return to their home range along with an already quite poor body condition, the high environmental temperature at the time, and the lack of water in the area of the fenceline, these horses became dehydrated to the point of exhaustion. The horses then collapsed or stayed with the collapsed horses until they too collapsed from the stress of dehydration and hyperthermia.

Dehydration is a very rapidly debilitating condition. Once this condition is present, reversal would require intravenous electrolyte solutions, rest, and shade to cool the animals. Therefore, even supplying water orally to these horses probably would not be able to correct the electrolyte imbalance already present.

signed: Gerald R. Peck, DVM

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon analysis of the above information, it is the consensus of the

INVESTIGATION REPORT
INTO THE
DEATHS OF WILD HORSES
IN THE
CLAN ALPINE HERD MANAGEMENT AREA

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to present findings and conclusions regarding investigations into the cause of death of at least 46 wild horses in the North end of the Clan Alpine Herd Management Area (HMA) of the Carson City District. The death of these wild horses was discovered initially on 17 September 1987 and the investigation into the cause of death was concluded on 30 Oct. 1987.

Members of the investigation team included the following:

Andy Anderson, Carson City District Office
Len Sims, Nevada State Office
Milt Frei, Nevada State Office
Jerry Peck, Carson-Tahoe Veterinary Hospital
Tom Eagle, University of Minnesota
Tim Reuwsaat, Carson City District Office

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the Fiscal Year 1985, as a part of the Appropriation Act for the Bureau of Land Management, Congress directed the BLM to expend one million dollars in the research of wild horses on public lands. Pursuant to that Congressional direction, the BLM, in cooperation with the National Academy of Sciences, contracted with the University of Minnesota to undertake a scientific investigation into the area of fertility control in wild horse populations.