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# 48 mustangs died after running into fence

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Bureau of Land Management officials said today 48 horses died in Northeastern Churchill County, possibly from being injured after they were set free from an experiment.

BLM spokesman Bob Stewart said final cause of death has not been

determined.

It appears, however, that the animals may have died from injuries after running into a fence surrounding a grazing allotment as they were released from an agency facility.

The horses were brought into the New Pass area, 60 miles north of Fallon, as part of an experiment to reduce wild horse populations.

Mares were implanted with birth control devices.

Stewart said the horses, upon release, may have tried to find their way back to their home range and ran into barbed wire range fences.

It was first assumed the horses' deaths may have been caused by foul play.

The willingful killing of a wild horse is a violation of federal law.

The Nevada Wild Horse Preservation Commission and a coalition of Southern Nevada animal protection groups still are standing by their

offer of a combined \$1,500 reward for information leading to the arrest and the conviction of individuals who might be involved in foul play.

Terri Jay, executive director of the commission, said her agency had some indications there may be foul play involved.

The director of the BLM said the bureau will "vigorously pursue the investigation of these deaths to the fullest."

If wrongdoing has been commit-

ted, the case will be referred to the U.S. Department of Justice, said Robert Burford, agency director.

A spokesman for the Carson City Sheriff's Office said today no new leads have developed in the March shooting of about a dozen horses east of Carson City.

Local residents were outraged when it was discovered the mustangs had all been shot with a high-powered rifle.

It was alleged one of the wild horses, a colt, had its throat cut after it was shot.

Investigators from both the Carson City Sheriff's Office and the BLM determined the gun used in the shooting was rare and unusual, and it was hoped this would aid in solving the killings.

The Carson City Secret Witness Program received numerous tips into the shooting.

# BLM blames wild horse deaths on lack of clear guidelines

By BRIAN MCKENZIE  
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## Changes urged to improve Wild Horse and Burro Act administration

RENO — The results of a two-month investigation by the Bureau of Land Management into the September deaths of 48 wild horses indicates those deaths came as a result of no clear guidelines being established by those involved in the wild horse roundup.

Researchers from the University of Minnesota along with personnel from the Nevada Bureau of Land Management conducted the roundup in early September as part of a wild horse fertility experiment.

While the report on the roundup and subsequent deaths of the horses lists a dozen recommendations to prevent further injury or deaths to horses during experimental roundups, it fails to state that many federal rules and codes may have been violated during the roundup.

Nevada Public Affairs Director Bob Stewart said, "The question is

RENO — In releasing its report on the deaths of the 48 wild horses involved in the September Clan Alpine fertility experiment, the federal Bureau of Land Management has recommended changes intended to improve the administration of the Wild Horse and Burro Act, especially as it pertains to the ongoing fertility research program.

Many of the recommendations are

do the current rules for the capture of wild horses that will be permanently removed from herd management areas apply to a roundup where horses are not permanently removed?"

Stewart said while this was not the first roundup of this type, it was the first where problems were encountered.

In 1985, Congress authorized \$1

presently mandatory under various federal codes and regulations contained in the Wild Horse and Burro Act.

The recommendations include:

1. In all instances, regardless of circumstances, the BLM in Nevada will assure that a wild horse and burro capture-removal plan and associated environmental assessments are prepared prior to capture. Cap-

million for the BLM study in an attempt to find a new method of controlling the wild horse population while placating both ranchers and animal protection groups.

"The BLM has a great amount of expertise in wild horse roundups, but for some reason we just forgot to use that knowledge in this roundup," Stewart said. "It seems that everybody involved in the roundup

ture efforts must not extend beyond defined boundaries.

2. Whenever contracts are awarded which affect the welfare of wild horses and burros, BLM should designate an on-site project inspector with clear lines of authority and responsibility. If contracts are administered from the BLM's Denver or Washington Offices, there will be a local project inspector.

and fertility experiment just went their own way."

Executive Chairman for the Committee for the Preservation of Wild Horses Terri Jay said the BLM report skirts several of the main issues concerning the deaths of the horses.

"The deaths of these horses comes from pure negligence on the part of those involved and was

3. When helicopters are used to manipulate horses or burros, a BLM employee will visually monitor the operation of the aircraft.

4. Whenever the capture is conducted by persons other than BLM employees (contractors, researchers, ect.), Nevada BLM must remain responsible for maintaining

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caused by a total lack of planning," Jay said. "First, there were no written plans submitted for the roundup.

"They didn't submit an environmental assessment report or impact statement.

"Secondly, while BLM figures show there are supposed to be 1,400 wild horses in the Clan Alpine herd management area, they couldn't

find any. Why? Where are all those horses at and why when using a helicopter can't the BLM find them?

"Then they drive horses from another area into the Clan Alpine area in order to get enough horses to do the study.

"This action went directly against the agency's policy of driving wild horses from one management area to another and meant the horses now had to run three times the established distance.

"I think this action violates several federal regulations on the rounding up of wild horses," she said.

"Third, why didn't the BLM take down the fence closer to where the horses were released? If that one thing had been done, the horses might still be alive," Jay said.

"Just because these horses were not being permanently removed all the policies were ignored."

While current BLM figures show

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# Horses

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1,400 wild horses within the Clan Alpine herd management area, located north of Reno, where the roundup was to have taken place, researchers found only a few wild horses.

Further inspection by the researchers found a boundary fence between the Clan Alpine herd management area and Augusta herd management area, located north of Clan Alpine area, had four large gaps in it allowing the horses to

travel between the two areas.

The report cites that after a discussion over the lack of available horses in the Clan Alpine area it was decided to drive horses from the neighboring Augusta herd management area through the gaps in the fence to a trap site within the Clan Alpine area.

The report continues, "It appeared to those individuals that such a decision would have a limited effect on either the welfare of the horses, which appeared to cross the fence regularly, or on the study itself."

This meant the horses would need to be driven between 15-20 miles to the capture site when originally researchers were told the horses would not be run any further than five miles.

The report states the weather was hot, 90 degrees plus, and was abnormally dry and the physical condition of the horses was relatively poor.

"Considering both the condition of the horses and the environmental factors, the horses could be easily stressed by a long or fast run, by separation from water or by intensive handling — yet the horses were subjected to all of these conditions," the report states.

On Sept. 2 and 3 a total of 133 horses were run nearly 20 miles with the use of a helicopter and

captured at a trap located in the northern part of the Clan Alpine herd management area.

Twenty-eight of the horses were fitted with radio collars for tracking and 16 mares were implanted with capsules containing birth control hormones.

All the horses were released soon after capture, but as researchers would later discover, many could not find an opening in the fence they had been herded through.

Subsequently, four dozen of the horses died from lack of water.

By mid-September researchers had found eight of the dead horses.

BLM, at first thinking someone may have wantonly killed the animals, tried to hush up the grisly find.

As investigators from the BLM, University of Minnesota and Nevada State Office law enforcement staff began to search the area it quickly became apparent the horses had not been shot, but had died from thirst.

During the next several weeks researchers found the carcasses of 48 wild horses.

Jay said there were five solid reasons why this capture shouldn't have been done in the first place.

These included poor condition of the horses, the 20 mile distance the horses ran before they were captured, the temperature at the time

of the capture, the lack of available water due to drought conditions and the fact they could not locate any horses in the Clan Alpine area.

"If they would have looked at what they were doing they would have stopped," Jay said.

Stewart said he feels the recommendations contained in the report should set guidelines for future roundups where the horses are released after capture.

Stewart said there are no charges currently pending against anyone involved in the roundup.

"Charges imply criminal activity and no criminal activities occurred in this roundup."

Stewart said if a criminal investigation was done, the investigation or charges resulting from it would not be made public.