

2-22-79

## Grazing area stripped

# Wild horses starving

By Joe Merica  
Ely Daily Times Editor

ELY — Wild horses are starting to die in the northeast regions of White Pine County where the Ely and Elko Bureau of Land Management districts meet.

Many more will die with the first heavy snows, unable to fight the cold because they are simply too weak from lack of feed.

Visiting the area off Highway 93 is like stepping into the Sahara desert.

Anything and everything edible has been stripped away by the roving bands of Mustangs. BLM reseeding, once the backbone of grazing for area livestockmen, has been stripped bare, the crested wheat crowns eaten and re-eaten each time a tender shoot comes up. Too many horses have simply destroyed the area by overgrazing and, in turn, they will be destroyed, particularly if it is a tough winter.

One person who is mighty upset about it is Shirley Robison, the state brand inspector in this area for the past two decades. He is now retired.

"It's a (expletive deleted) crime," Robison says as his temperature starts to rise. "It'd be one thing if this had happened just this year. But it didn't. It's been like this for the past three or four years and there hasn't been one damn thing done about it."

He lays the blame for the devastation of about 400,000 acres of once productive range land squarely on the BLM.

"They have the manpower. They'll tell you they don't, but that's not right. They've known about the problem, they've been asked to do something about it and haven't," he said.

Robison points out that his cousin, Reed Robison, hasn't grazed his sheep on the area for two years, and yet the damage is so total it looks as if the absolute worst of the range barrens of old just pulled millions of head off the land, leaving it bare and desolate.

The white sage is gone. Driving for hundreds of miles on dirt roads, not one single full clump of grass can be found. Horse manure is everywhere, along with horse carcasses. The springs and reservoirs have been destroyed, trampled into a muddy morass by too many hungry and thirsty wild horses.

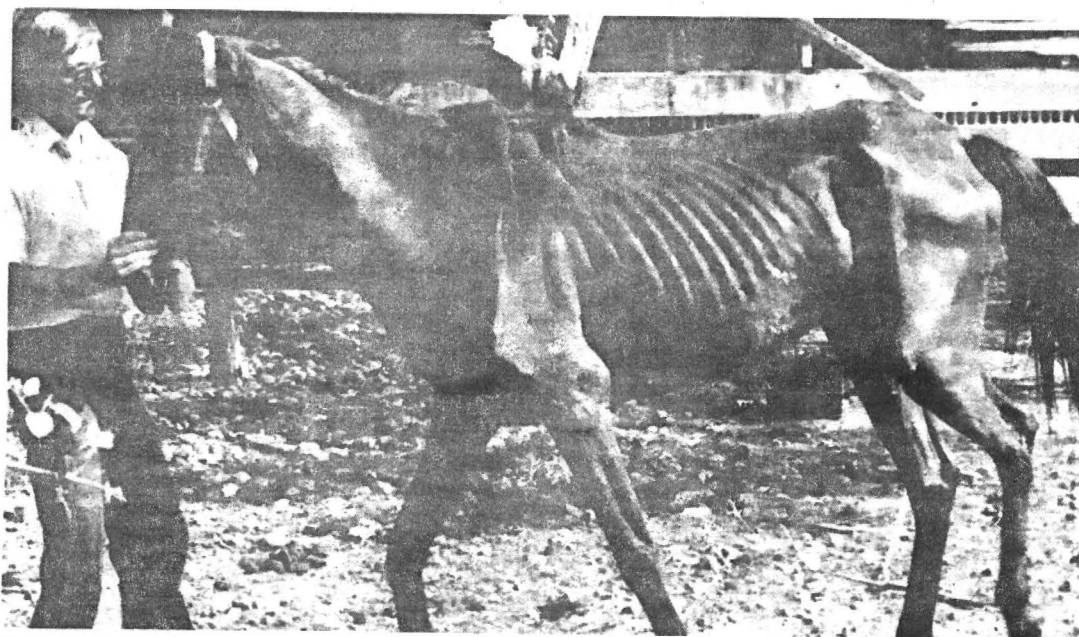
The biggest problem is that the horses would ordinarily stay in the higher country throughout the hotter months, close to water to avoid long travels to the existing springs, and then move into the lowlands for the winter. This year, they're not going to be able to winter in the valley; the feed in those areas is absolutely gone.

"Look at this," Robison says disgustingly as he stops his pickup on a back road in Spring Valley. Everywhere there's evidence of too many horses, piles of manure, fresh and old tracks and a total absence of feed to sustain the animals. On a nearby hillside a group of 11 mustangs watch.

On close examinations, even a novice observer can see where the horses have eaten everything available, with the grass gone even far back under the sagebrush, as far back as a horse can stretch its neck.

What in the world are these animals going to eat this winter?" Robison asks. "Nothing, that's what. There's nothing here."

After examining the spring along Middle Creek, and seeing that even the basically unpalatable wire grass and rye grass have been stripped away, Robison returns to the subject of his wrath.



HUMANE SOCIETY Insp. Neil Trent examines one of the 100 horses left to starve at a Bahamas

racetrack. Ten of the animals died and others were saved from malnutrition and starvation by

—London Sunday Times Photo animal welfare workers. Some of the horses are reported to be owned by top Bahamian officials.

Ever get a closeup of a starving horse? This has happened in our own neighborhood and it may happen this winter.

Wayne Lowman, manager of the Schell Resource Area which includes the devastated acreage says he has no excuses to offer.

"We're partly at fault," Lowman admits. "We knew there was a problem last year. But right now, there's not much the BLM can do about it."

In addition, Lowman explained, his staff of 10 individuals for the Schell Resource area, is tied up on preparing a grazing environmental impact statement, a massive task compelled by a suit from the National Resource Defense Council.

"Nobody will believe it, but part of the problem is lack of people. Three of my range conservationists are doing nothing but the statement, and we've got a wilderness study to contend with," he says.

Rich Watts, who until recently was the Ely BLM District Wild Horse specialist, but who is now in watershed management, pointed out perhaps the most illuminating feature of the wild horse debate.

"Because of these lawsuits all money for wild horse management for this fiscal year was withdrawn from the budget. The thinking was that we weren't going to be able to do much in the way of removal so the money was used elsewhere. As it now stands, there just isn't any money for any kind of removal operation."

Nevada had approximately 35,500 wild horses in 1977, according to BLM statistics. They account for 60 percent of all wild horses in the U.S., but the state gets only 25 percent of the wild horse operating budget.

Watts says the only way there could be immediate action at Chin Creek is for the BLM to address the situation as an emergency, something he says isn't likely to happen unless wild horse protection groups visit the area and get a first hand understanding of the magnitude of the suffering that will take place this winter.

In the event an emergency of removal isn't planned and funded it will be at least a year before corrective action is taken, Lowman says.

"In order for us to justify large scale removal, we have to have supporting data. Without it, we'd get laughed out of court."

How long does it take to develop "supporting data?"

"We started our studies in August and it takes at least a year to get information on the one-year cycle. So the earliest we could act would be next fall," he explained.

Lowman, one of the longer term local BLM employees with four years under his belt in Ely, says if the money were available a removal could be started within a few weeks. But first, an environmental assessment report would have to be prepared (taking about two weeks), followed by public involvement. The public involvement stage is what would halt the removal Lowman predicted.



February 22, 1979

Mr. Rich Watts, Manager Egan Resource  
Bureau of Land Management  
Star Route 5, Box 1  
Ely, Nevada 89301

Dear Mr. Watts:

I was advised while in Ely that you were to be Steve Sherman's replacement, hence the letter. Due to prior commitments I will cover several topics in this one letter.

The capture operation at Monte Cristo was excellent for many reasons, and we are definitely pleased with the results. Hopefully this attitude will be reflected in other resource area plans in the future. Despite minor incidents which were handled effectively on the ground at the time, we will do everything possible to show the quality of the work and to dispute any claims, if any, to the contrary.

I have received the enclosed report and query why I was not informed of any serious threat against wild horses within the District, even though not in your area, you were aware of it. I have read the enclosed report and have delved quite extensively into the background of grazing in that area, and question the data that would support any theory that it is solely wild horses that are damaging the resource. Several field reports in the past several weeks, substantiate heavy sheep use. We are quite aware that former adjudication of allotments were not judged on the carrying capacity but rather from historical numbers. Certainly we would be redundant in your jobs if we did not expect supporting data, before wild horses were reduced. If the problem has been known for quite some time as the article infers then why has not the data been collected before now? Due to the report and the seemingly acceptance of yourself and Mr. Lowman, I request under the Freedom of Information Act, copies of permissess licensed in this area and their prescribed use and trespass, if any. We would be more than happy to absorb the costs of those copies if you will let us know the charges.

On January 19th I requested from Steve Sherman, information pertaining to the Portuguese Springs area that had been reported as being illegally fenced. He had promised this information by the time I reached Ely, but I have yet to obtain it. I am told that the fencing incident was reported to BLM some months ago, so certainly there should be some type of follow-up report on it.

Page two

By implication the enclosed report puts the burden of wild horses and their management or lack of at the foot of the protectionists. While I don't feel it necessary to defend the reasons behind our concerns, I most certainly feel that as Wild Horse Specialist, at one time, you are not a very positive spokesman for the wild horse. Anyone who did not envision the tragedy at Palomino from October 77-January 78 and subsequent deaths of many wild horses should not question the lawsuit. While I did not support the lawsuit and in fact testified against it, the Bureau's handling of the wild horses was grotesque to say the least. If the Districts do not have the funds because of lawsuits they brought it upon themselves by their attitudes. It is most distressing to us to see a wild horse specialist condemn the wild horse when he doesn't even have facts to support reduction. I am quite sure the livestock industry would be up in arms if you had proposed such if the positions were reversed.

We have yet to block a reduction in wild horses given supporting data to substantiate the need....as it should be. I would greatly appreciate the information requested and any comment you may wish to make on the remainder of the letter.

Most sincerely,

Dawn Y. Lappin (Mrs.)  
Chairman

cc: Neil McKleery  
Wayne Lowman

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February 22, 1979

Mr. Neil McKleery, District Manager  
Bureau of Land Management  
Star Route 5, Box 1  
Ely, Nevada 89301

Dear Mr. McKleery:

Please let me compliment the Bureau for it's part in the inter-agency gathering at Monte Cristo on January 22nd and 23rd. Hopefully this type of operation will be reflected in future plans and attitudes within the District. The Monte Cristo was only one of several plans attacked in the lawsuit brought against the Bureau by ANPA & HSUS. It would have indeed been sad had this plan and all the work that went into it had been scrapped.

I am slightly concerned about several other incidents in the Ely District which at the moment I am not sure whether the lack of response is intentional or whether caused by Mr. Shermans transfer. I reported previous to the Ely capture, that a report had come in pertaining to the Portuguese Springs illegal fencing. Enclosed letter to Mr. Watts refers in general to that report. I have yet to receive the report on this.

Also as the enclosed report will show, I am slightly miffed at excuses, with either the wild horses or protectionists be the fallguy. Supposedly Mr. Watts was wild horse specialist, and I don't consider his attitude as quoted in the Ely Times to be a positive attitude on the management of wild horses. It seems that the Wild Horse Specialist position has become just a stepping stone to other job vacancies. It is interesting to note how anyone could become a specialist within this short time span and then have the audacity to get irritated because there is a lack of data to support that claim. Somehow we have assumed that the wild horse specialist makes his proposal with a tunnel vision attitude, combining his in-puut with that of other resource users....however we do not see this reflected in the present. Field reports support horse activity and not just a little, but it also shows high concentration of sheep use. So yes, we would expect, and rightfully so, that the District could provide data to support this claim.

Now that Mr. Watts is now area resource manager, may I inquire as to who is the new Wild Horse Specialist in your area? We are truly concerned with the wild horses for a number of reasons, forage, water, shootings and illegal capture which have all come from the District in the past few months. I am sure that we would be most interested to support the need for reduction had we been advised of the problem and if it can be substantiated.

Page two

We wish to maintain a working relationship with all Districts and I believe we have sufficiently proven this in the past. But we will continue to assert pressure when the attitudes of the individuals delegated the management and protection of wild horses seems to be lacking.

There is no need for reply of this letter because I have already inquired of Mr. Watts and Mr. Lowman the same questions. But needless to state that just as the Bureau gets tired of defending themselves, we also get tired of defending the horses rights and our concerns to those who should also share some of the same concerns.

Most sincerely,

Dawn Y. Lappin (Mrs.)  
Chairman

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