

BLM knew of horse slaughter earlier

Carson City reward fund grows to \$3,000 to find killers

By BRIAN MCKENZIE
Appeal Correspondent

The Bureau of Land Management first knew about the shootings of the eight wild mustangs in the Pinion Hills area on Feb. 22, the Nevada Appeal has learned.

The shootings were reported to the Appeal by Susan Lundstrom, who discovered the bodies of six slain mustangs while riding horseback in the Pinion Hills area on March 8, nearly two weeks after the BLM learned of the shootings.

Lundstrom reported the shootings to the Sheriff's Department March 8, and to the BLM on March 9.

On March 16 the BLM confirmed the shooting of the six horses, but failed to confirm to the Appeal they knew more mustangs had already been shot in the same area.

In another development, the National Animal Protection Association in Carson City today announced it will also offer a \$500 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the party or parties responsible for the wild horse killings.

The group advises that anyone

having information should contact the Carson City Animal Control Office at 887-2171 or the Sheriff's Department at 887-2500. The Nevada Humane Society has also added \$1,000 to the reward fund.

This brings the total reward to \$3,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible for the shootings.

BLM investigator George High said Saturday he felt the recent publicity over the shootings had impeded his investigation of the matter.

"This publicity has probably scared off the suspects I had," High said.

High said the BLM received a report on shot horses from a resident of the area on Feb. 22, and that he went to the area and verified the shootings Feb. 27.

He said he then received a second report on additional wild horse slayings in the same area on March 8.

"I went to the second area on March 9 and verified that six more horses had been shot," High said.

When asked why he did not notify area residents about the shootings, High said, "I didn't feel the public

needed to know about this incident."

"I thought it would hinder my investigation if the public knew about the shootings.

"I feel that with all the publicity the case has received it has probably scared off any suspects I had."

Until the Sheriff's Department became involved in the case no effort was made to perform a postmortem on any of the animals to try and remove one or more of the bullets from them.

On this matter High said, "First I want to get the gun then go after one of the slugs in the horses."

Investigators from the Sheriff's Department on Friday performed postmortems on several of the horses and came away with some, "good hard evidence," they said.

Nevada BLM Chief Public Affairs Officer Bob Stewart said today this incident is not typical, in that it happened close to a populated area.

Stewart said, "Our investigators are experienced in these matters, and they approach these issues from an investigative standpoint.

"I would think that with this incident being in a populated area it would have some bearing on telling

the public about it.

"The investigation of these types of matters is very serious, and I feel he (High) is handling this in the way he feels it can best be handled," he said.

"Knowing what we know now we might have taken a different look at this situation."

Residents of the area have expressed their anger about not being told about the shootings, and now fear those responsible may return to the area.

They also accuse the BLM of not taking the matter seriously enough.

One area resident said Saturday, "They didn't seem to take much of an interest in this until we all became aware of what was going on."

On the matter of the mutilation of one horse and an unborn foal, High said, "I did see the mare and the colt, but I couldn't see that there had been any mutilation of either animal."

Lundstrom reported that when she discovered the animals the mare had been slit open and the unborn foal removed and its throat slit.

Three horse-slaying suspects released, two still in jail

Associated Press

RENO — Three of the five ranch hands charged in the slayings of more than 40 wild horses and burros in north central Nevada were released Thursday, while the other two were being held pending bail hearings.

Shannon Brennan, 20, of Lovelock; Eugene John Thacker, 27, of Imlay; and his 22-year-old cousin David Thacker of Unionville were released from federal custody, according to a U.S. Marshal.

David Morehead, 38, of Lovelock

and Ronald Emory Hage, 23, of Winnemucca, were scheduled to return to U.S. District Court today for hearings to set their bail. They currently are held without bail.

The marshal would not say whether the three men had to post bail for their release, but a Reno newspaper reported Thursday that Brennan's bail was reduced from \$50,000 to \$10,000 and the Thackers were released on their own recognizance.

The five men are charged with violating the Wild and Free Roam-

ing Horse and Burro Act, a misdemeanor that could result in one year in prison and a fine of \$2,000 for each conviction, according to Assistant U.S. Attorney Will Matly.

The 1971 law forbids injuring, harassing, capturing or killing a wild horse or burro.

Morehead, a cow boss, was charged with seven counts of killing a wild horse or burro in slayings that occurred between May 15 and the end of June 1988 and one count of selling a mustang

and a burro to a Fallon livestock yard last February.

He and Brennan, a ranch hand, are charged in another count with killing 28 wild horses and in yet another with slaying two wild colts, all in November 1987.

Eugene and David Thacker and Hage, all ranch workers, face five counts each for killing five wild horses in August 1987.

All of the slayings occurred near the sprawling ranches where the men worked in Lander and Pershing counties.

1988-89, 3

Five indicted in killings of 42 wild horses

Associated Press

RENO, Nev. — Five ranch workers have been indicted in the slayings of more than 40 wild horses and burros in Nevada, and officials said the investigation continues into the deaths of 500 more animals.

The men were charged with violating the federal Wild and Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act, Assistant U.S. attorney Will Mattly said Wednesday. Each count carries up to a year in prison and a \$2,000 fine.

Mattly said the slayings occurred on federal land 150 miles

northeast of Reno where the remains of more than 500 mustangs have been found since August.

Many of the animals had been shot, although others may have died of natural causes, officials said. Some of the animals may have been dead for years.

Mattly gave no motive for the killings, and the charges, contained in an indictment handed up Tuesday, did not specify how the animals died.

Indicted were David Morehead and Shannon Brennan of Lovelock, cousins Eugene John Thacker

of Winnemucca and David Thacker, and Ronald Emory Hage of Cosgrave. They were taken into custody Tuesday and Wednesday.

David Thacker's father, John, said, "I don't believe any of them are guilty." Morehead's attorney, Don Hill, said his client is innocent as well.

Maxine Shane, a spokeswoman with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, said the agency considered the case to be far from over.

"It is definitely a continuing investigation," she said.

100-27, 4.

Grand jury indicts 5 Nevada men in wild horse deaths

By Phil Barber/Gazette-Journal

A federal grand jury in Reno indicted five men Wednesday with killing 42 wild horses and burros in Nevada since August 1987.

The five were arrested Wednesday afternoon and Tuesday night. A federal investigator said the 42 slain animals were in addition to the 524 reported killed during the last two years, with which the men were not charged. The parents of one defendant and the lawyer for another claimed the men are innocent.

But Dawn Lappin, director of the Reno-based Wild Horse Organized Assistance (WHOA), said, "I'm obviously pleased that we've gotten some results from a long investigation. I hope it's not the end. I don't feel they've got all of them yet. I hope the horses get some justice out of this."

Assistant U.S. Attorney Will Mattly described the men as cowboys. The four arrested by Bureau of Land Management investigators Tuesday night were Eugene J. Thacker, 27, of Imlay; David Thacker, 22, of Unionville; David Morehead, 38, of Lovelock; and Shannon Brennan, 20, of Lovelock. Ronald E. Hage, 23, of Winnemucca was arrested Wednesday afternoon.

Although the charges — destruction of wild horses and burros — is a misdemeanor, bail for each initially was set at \$50,000. It later was reduced for three of them, but Morehead and Hage were

See WILD, back page

Wild horses

From page 1A

ordered held without bail.

Leonard Sims, Nevada special agent for the Bureau of Land Management; and Walt Johnson, chief of BLM law enforcement in Washington, D.C., declined to reveal details of their investigation. Sims, however, said the killings reportedly were committed in Lander and Pershing counties.

As has been the case in recent months, the actual number of horses and burros killed is uncertain. Two months ago, a BLM spokesman said 478 were estimated to have been shot in Lander County in the last year.

But in December, officials of Nevada's Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses said they had received anonymous tips that 1,200 more had been found dead in central Nevada.

THE INDICTMENTS were issued Tuesday, but kept sealed until Wednesday to facilitate the arrests. The Thackers, Morehead and Brennan made an initial appearance Wednesday before acting U.S. Magistrate John Kadlic, who was sitting for Phyllis Halsey Atkins, who was unavailable. Kadlic is a Reno justice of the peace.

Morehead, who is charged with 10 counts, was ordered held without bail, pending a detention hearing Friday. Brennan's bail was reduced to a \$10,000 unsecured bond. The Thackers were to be

released on their own recognizance.

David Thacker's father, John, who works on a ranch in Pershing County, said, "I don't believe any of them are guilty. My boy wasn't even in the state."

He said Eugene Thacker, who is opening the Mill City Saloon in Winnemucca, is his nephew. David Thacker's mother, Jill, said her son is an amateur and collegiate rodeo competitor.

Former Assistant U.S. Attorney Don Hill, who now is in private practice in Reno, said his client, Morehead, also is innocent. Hill said he was concerned that people hearing about the arrests might mistakenly believe the men not only killed more than the 42 horses and burros listed in the indictment, but the other animals as well.

Morehead is cowboss at the C-Punch Ranch in Pershing County. "This (the charges) has nothing to do with the horses in Austin and Eureka," Hill said.

MOREHEAD IS charged with selling a wild sorrel horse and a donkey at the Gallagher Livestock Sales Yard in Fallon. He also is charged with killing four horses and three burros.

He and Brennan are charged with killing 30 other horses. The Thackers and Hage are charged with killing five horses.

Mattly said only that the defendants were identified by witnesses. Mattly declined to discuss a possible motive for the alleged killings.

He would not say whether more arrests are anticipated, but said the investigation is continuing.

1988-89, 5.

Reports: 70 carcasses found

1988-89, 6.

Horse deaths probed

By **BRIAN McKENZIE**

Appeal Correspondent

AUSTIN — A Bureau of Land Management official said today he couldn't confirm recent reports that 70 more wild horse carcasses have been found near here, but said "it wouldn't surprise me."

Bob Stewart, a BLM spokesman, said he had heard reports that more wild horses have been found shot to death, but said investigators in the field have not yet reported such a find to the BLM's Reno office.

He said that investigators are now in the Mt. Callaghan area north of here where Stewart said investigators have "inventoried" 451 dead horses.

He said he uses the term inventoried because "every time they (investigators) go out they find carcasses they haven't found before."

"Because there are investigators in the field now, it's reasonable to assume they've found more," he said. "I can't confirm that, but it wouldn't surprise me."

A person who asked not to be identified told the Nevada Appeal Thursday night that BLM investigators have found an additional 70 wild horses killed in the Mt. Cal-

Reward reduced by \$5,000

By **ED VOGEL**

Appeal Capital Bureau

State wild horse commissioners voted 2-1 Thursday to reduce by \$5,000 the share of the reward they will pay for the conviction of the killers of 450 mustangs in rural Nevada.

Commission Chairman Deloyd Satterthwaite complained that Terri Jay, the commission's executive director, had raised the reward from \$5,000 to \$10,000 without first consulting the entire commission.

"I thought the first \$5,000 was very fair," said Satterthwaite, a Tuscarora rancher who also is president of the Nevada Cattlemen's Association.

"Do you have to make the carrot bigger?"

laghan area.

The horse killings were first reported in early September when a helicopter pilot spotted the remains of about a dozen wild horses in the Mt. Callaghan area.

Commissioner Dawn Lappin said she asked Jay to increase the reward as an emergency matter.

Lappin, also a director of WHOA, or Wild Horse Organization Assistance, contended she saw nothing wrong with the increase since the commission has \$200,000 to \$300,000 in its budget to help preserve wild horses.

Both Satterthwaite and Commissioner Mike Kirk, a Reno veterinarian, however, voted to reduce the reward to \$5,000.

A peeved Lappin then declared WHOA will take up the loss. Satterthwaite said Jay could have avoided the problem "by simply making a telephone call."

About \$17,000 has been pledged by

(See REWARD, Page A-10)

BLM investigators who combed the area both on the ground and from helicopters discovered the remains of more horses on almost a

(See HORSES, Page A-10)

Reward

(Continued from Page One)

various humane organizations for information leading to the killers of about 450 horses in Lander County.

The carcasses of horses were discovered in August and September on rugged terrain between Austin and Battle Mountain.

U.S. Bureau of Land Management investigators have interviewed more than 200 people in connection with the killings, but made no arrests.

"We have not ruled out anyone or any group," said Bob Stewart, a BLM spokesman.

Throughout the meeting, Satterthwaite and Lappin frequently clashed in their view of Nevada's wild horses.

Nevada is home for about 28,000 of the nation's 38,000 wild horses.

As a result, Kirk, a newly-appointed commissioner, became the swing vote in settling matters.

He agreed with Satterthwaite that the reward should be reduced.

Later he sided with Lappin in

authorizing Jay to prepare legislation to increase the penalty for killing or harassing a wild horse from a misdemeanor to a felony.

Jay said a stronger penalty is needed to stop wild horse killings. She pointed out that two Las Vegas men, Vern R. and Duane L. Dimick, recently were fined only \$250 although they killed 11 wild horses.

The men actually pleaded guilty to killing only a single horse.

"Those guys in Las Vegas even got their rifles back," Jay said.

"Any crime against a wild horse is treated as a joke."

While Jay was given the authority to have legislation prepared, wild horse commissioners insisted she bring it back to them before it can be forwarded to the 1989 Legislature.

At the beginning of the hearing, Satterthwaite insisted Jay refer to the Lander County horse killings as "horse deaths" not as "horse shootings."

"To say 451 horses were shot is

wrong," Satterthwaite said. "I feel some possibly were shot."

During the meeting, however, Stewart said BLM investigators determined "the vast majority" of the horses had been shot.

Satterthwaite operates a company that runs sheep in the Carico Lake area, near where some of the horse carcasses were found.

His sheep, however, pass through the area only about two weeks a year, he said.

"The trouble with wild horses is there is no management of their numbers," Satterthwaite said.

While hunters can reduce the numbers of deer and chukar, horses have no predators, he added.

As expected, Lappin later disagreed with Satterthwaite. She said the BLM through a process "done in a democratic way" set appropriate wild horse levels for each herd area in Nevada.

Satterthwaite suggested the commission review its goals during a December meeting.

Technically called the Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses, the organization receives its funds from interest made off the estate of the late Leo Heil.

Heil, of Reno, cut off his relatives in a 1972 will and left his estate of about \$450,000 to the state for the preservation of the wild horses in Nevada.

Assets later grew to about \$1 million and the state Legislature required that \$900,000 be kept permanently in a trust fund.

"Does the preservation of wild horses mean we seek to preserve each and every horse or is there a goal to achieve?" Satterthwaite asked.

Lappin contended the commission's goal clearly had been set in the past, that it must try to preserve the wild horses of Nevada.

The meeting was the first held by the commission in more than a year.

Horses

(Continued from Page One)

daily basis. Horses that had been shot were also found in the Bald Mountain area and around Mt. Moses, near the Lander-Pershing County line and about 40 miles north of Austin.

While BLM investigators have remained tight-lipped since the initial discovery, the killings have caused a round of finger-pointing and inuendos among Austin residents.

U.S. Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., on Tuesday called for a hearing on the Bureau of Land Management's handling of the investigation.

In a letter to Sen. J. Bennett Johnston, D-La., who chairs the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, Reid asked for a hearing on the entire investigation to be held early in 1989.

Reid, in his letter to Johnston, said that he was concerned that the BLM had turned its head so many times before with regard to the mistreatment of horses. Also, Reid asked Secretary of Interior Donald Hodel to send U.S. Fish and Wildlife agents to assist with the investigation.

Reid said he has not received a reply to his request, and BLM spokeswoman Maxine Shane said BLM would not comment on Reid's request without seeing Reid's letter.

BLM officials have said the investigation of the shootings is a top priority with the bureau's enforcement division.

The U.S. Department of the Interior, along with the Nevada Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses and several animal protec-

tion groups had offered a combined reward totaling \$18,000 for information leading to the conviction of the killer or killers.

The Nevada Appeal's source agreed that the numbers may continue to climb as investigators search a wider area but he differed with several points made by the BLM concerning how the horses died and the time frame concerning the deaths.

The source additionally said several days after the initial 41 carcasses were found near Mt. Callaghan several wounded wild horses were found wandering in the area.

"I think the shootings are strictly a product of greed — it's not over the horses but its over the grass

available to cows, sheep and horses and I think some people want more than their fair share," the source said.

In reaction to BLM comments that some of the horses may have died as a result of frigid winter conditions or starvation, the source said, "None of these horses appear to have died from anything less than a bullet."

The source went on to describe how horses suffering from the effects of starvation or winter conditions weaken and fall to the ground.

"They kick big holes in the ground trying and trying to get up but they just can't. It may take them a number of days to finally die and usually the struggle is very evident."

1988-89, 7.

400 mustangs, 200 deer found slain near Ely

Probe yields rifles, possible suspects

By Doug McMillan/Gazette-Journal

Federal and state investigators said Wednesday that they have discovered as many as 400 wild horses and 200 deer slaughtered by rifle fire in eastern White Pine County.

White Pine County Undersheriff Harry Collins, calling the massacre one of the worst crimes against wildlife in recent

Nevada history, said it was unrelated to the killings of more than 500 wild horses discovered north of Austin in Lander County last fall.

Unlike the Austin case, which stymied investigators for months, the White Pine County investigation already has yielded at least one, and possibly two, suspects, and the weapons authorities think were used to shoot the animals.

No one has been charged and the suspects' names have not been released.

A joint team of federal and state investigators, acting on a federal search warrant, seized two rifles from an Ely house on May 31, Collins said. Acting on a state

warrant issued by the Ely justice of the peace, the team also searched a ranch east of Ely where the deer were found.

Investigators think the slayings occurred sometime between last October and March.

A federal grand jury was due to hear testimony on the wild horse killings from six White Pine County residents Wednesday in Las Vegas, White Pine County District Attorney Dan Papez said, but no indictments were returned.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Suzanne Hayden, who presented the case to the grand jury, failed to return repeated phone calls.

Papez said he intends to file state charges in connection with the deer slayings as soon as the investigation is complete, but he refused to speculate when that might be.

Papez said the same suspect or suspects killed both the wild horse and deer.

Killing wild horses is a federal offense, punishable by up to one year in prison and a \$2,000 fine.

Unlawful killing of deer without a tag is a gross misdemeanor under state law and punishable by up to a year in the county jail and a \$500 fine.

See WILDLIFE, back page

Wildlife slayings

From page 1A

Sources said the dead animals were discovered in northern Spring Valley, north of U.S. Highway 50 between Ely and Great Basin National Park, on both public land and a private ranch. They said that many of the animals had been buried, apparently with earth-moving equipment.

Collins refused to pinpoint the location, saying investigators are still combing the site and don't want it disturbed by curiosity-seekers.

"Right now, we would prefer to dig through the carcasses ourselves," he said.

He said initial estimates of 400 horses and 200 deer might prove to be high, but the exact numbers won't be known until the investigation is done.

Collins said there is no known motive for the wildlife killings, but noted that many ranchers think mustangs consume forage that should be available for livestock and some think deer also compete with livestock for food.

There are an estimated 28,000 wild horses and burros on Nevada public lands, compared to about 600,000 cattle and sheep.

Terri Jay, executive secretary of the state Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses, said that if the Legislature would pass SB446, increasing the state penalty for killing wild horses from a gross misdemeanor to a felony, "we wouldn't see any more killings."

MIKE WICKERSHAM, supervising biologist for the state Wildlife Department's Elko office, said he has received no complaints of crop damage by deer or requests for depredation hunts from ranchers in the area where the slaughtered horses and deer were found.

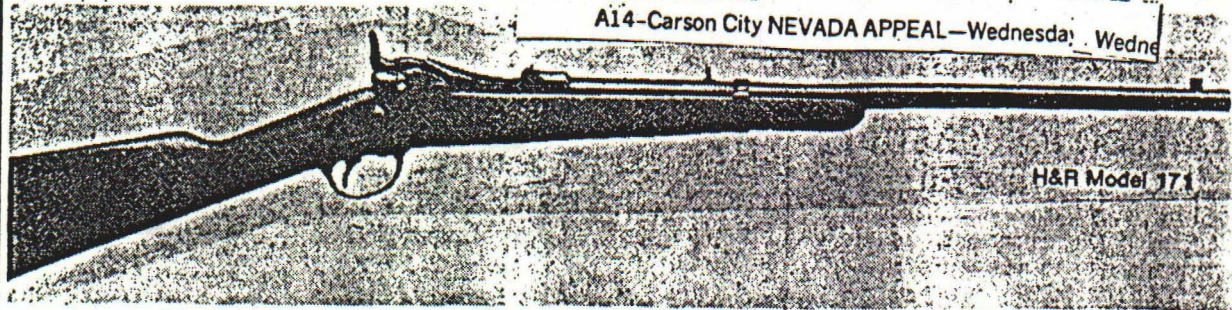
Depredation hunts, in which state wildlife officials issue special tags to hunters to shoot both does and bucks, is one tool state wildlife officials use to control herds raiding alfalfa fields or haystacks.

The special hunts are held, subject to an investigation and approval by wildlife officials, at the request of farmers and ranchers who complain of sustained losses.

"We have had depredation hunts in almost all the valleys around Ely in the past three to five years," Wickersham said, but none near the northern end of Spring Valley.

"It's not uncommon for these kinds of deer populations to build up," he said, "because often private landowners close their land to hunting and two things happen: Alfalfa and other crops are sought by deer, particularly if the outside ranges are dry or overused by livestock, and it sets up a refuge."

Two men are tentatively scheduled to go on trial Tuesday for shooting five of the 90 wild horses found dead on Mount Moses in northern Lander County. The deaths of more than 400 mustangs found scattered across the slopes of Mount Callaghan, about 25 miles south of the site, remain unsolved.



H&R Model 171

This photo is of a weapon similar to that used

Mustang slayer sought

Two guns used in shooting

By BRIAN MCKENZIE
Appeal Correspondent

Sheriff Paul McGrath, in a news release this morning, said it has been determined two weapons were used in the shooting of 10 wild mustangs in the Pinion Hills area.

"Our investigation has now disclosed a 45-70 caliber large bore rifle, and a .44 magnum caliber handgun were used in the shootings," McGrath said.

McGrath said the weapon used is not a commonly used rifle and is generally used by professional hunters and guides for the shooting of large animals.

"If we can find the rifle used in these shootings I'm sure we can solve this case," McGrath said.

McGrath said the investigation has run out of new leads.

"At this point I am asking the public for their help," McGrath said.

"If anyone has any information concerning this case I am asking

them to contact either the Secret Witness Program at 883-8400, or our office, at 887-2233."

Although numerous leads provided by local residents poured into the local Secret Witness program during the first several weeks of the investigation, no suspects have been arrested.

Several reward funds, established by local animal rights organizations and the Secret Witness Program for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible for the shootings totals \$7,000.

A two-month investigation by the Carson City Sheriff's Department, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Carson City Animal Control Office did turn up nine suspects.

With seven of the nine suspects already cleared, McGrath said the investigation will continue.

He declined to comment on the remaining two suspects.

Postmortems on several of the

horses produced the first hard evidence in the case.

BLM Public Affairs Specialist Maxine Shane said this morning the BLM's investigation is being coordinated with the Carson City Sheriff's Office.

Local resident Susan Lundstrom discovered six of the slain mustangs on March 8 while horseback riding in the Pinion Hills area.

She reported the incident to both the Sheriff's Office and the BLM.

It was later learned the BLM had been investigating the shooting of two other wild mustangs in the Pinion Hills area in mid-February.

Several weeks later the carcasses of two more horses were found in the Mexican Dam area.

Residents of the Pinion Hills area continue to fear that whoever is responsible for the shootings may return to the area and shoot not only wild horses but domestic horses.

Bryan: State will support probe of wild horse killings

By Brendan Riley/AP

CARSON CITY — Gov. Richard Bryan pledged full state support Tuesday to help the federal Bureau of Land Management in its investigation of the rifle killings of nearly 300 wild horses in remote central Nevada.

"The indiscriminate slaughter of wild horses must stop," the governor said. "No matter how people feel about wild horses, they simply cannot take the law into their own hands. Killing wild horses is a crime under both federal and state law."

Bryan directed the state Wildlife Department to offer its investigators to the BLM, which is in charge of the probe into the wild horse killings on federal land. He also urged hunters to report any suspicious activities.

BLM spokesman Bob Stewart said the investigation has been given "an extremely high priority" by agency Director Robert Burford. He said literally all of the agency's investigative resources are available for the Nevada probe.

Stewart also said that since the horse slaughter has grown in magnitude following the first discoveries of 41 horse carcasses in August, investigators have become "extremely closed-mouthed" and aren't providing information.

The investigators have interviewed more than 100 people, including one person who provided a tip that sent agency staffers to a second central Nevada area last month where 87 horses were found shot to death.

As part of the investigation, BLM staffers throughout the state were advised to step up surveillance of rangeland they oversee. That resulted in last weekend's discovery of another 140 wild horse carcasses.

All the shootings occurred within a 40-mile stretch north of Austin, an isolated Nevada town on U.S. Highway 50. The BLM said the horses died during a six-month period starting about a year ago.

In addition, the BLM was advised of recent shootings of several wild horses at Silverpeak in southern Nevada.

Terri Jay, director of the Nevada Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses, says rewards totaling \$12,000 are being offered for information leading to the arrest and conviction of anyone involved in the shootings.

More than 38,000 wild horses roam the rangeland in 10 western states, including up to 28,000 in Nevada.

Four suspects charged in the killing of nearly forty horses are scheduled for trial in U.S. Federal court in Reno in June.

The latest development in the case came last Tuesday, March 21, 1989 when a Federal Grand Jury handed down an indictment against C-Punch Ranch, co-owner Betty Ivrin. Irvin is charged with turning a wild baby burro into a pet. New charges were also filed against two C-Punch ranch employees already charged with killing wild horses and burros.

David Morehead, 38, and Shannon Brennan, 20, both of Lovelock, who were originally charged in a January 25th indictment for violating federal regulations with the destruction of wild horses were again charged with the killing of five additional animals. The new indictment also alleges that Brennan and Morehead converted four wild horses and burros for their own use.

In the original Grand Jury indictment, Morehead, was charged with ten counts of killing wild horses, Brennan, was charged with twenty counts of killing wild horses, two counts of selling wild horses.

John Eugene Thacker, 23 and David Thacker, 22, his cousin, were each charged with five counts of illegally killing wild horses. Ronald Emory Hage, 23, was charged with five counts of illegally killing wild horses.

Currently, all suspects are free on bail.

The indictments came as part of a continuing investigation into the killings of more than five hundred wild horses in Nevada's open range land.

Wild horses, deer killed in White Pine

By ED VOGEL
Appeal Capital Bureau

ELY — As many as 400 wild horses and 200 deer have been wantonly killed in a remote area near here, a White Pine County deputy sheriff said today.

Six Ely area residents are scheduled to testify on what they know about the killings Wednesday before a federal grand jury in Las Vegas.

"We know who shot them," said Harry Collins, White Pine County undersheriff. "There will be indictments without a doubt."

Some of the killed deer may have even been covered with dirt by a bulldozer to prevent their detection, Collins said. Others even were found in piles.

The killings apparently started last October and continued into March.

Ironically last October was the same month when central Nevada became the subject of national attention after more than 500 mustangs were found slaughtered.

"We had been suspecting there would be more killings," said Maxine Shane, a Bureau of Land Management spokeswoman in Reno.

"The area under investigation has gotten wider and wider."

The White Pine County killings are about 200 miles east of the kill sites in central Nevada's Lander County.

Two men are scheduled to go on trial June 13 in federal court in Reno in connection with some of the Lander County mustang deaths. Three others face a similar trial July 18.

Shane said the investigation team into the White Pine killings was led by BLM agents Jim Rogers of Las

Vegas and Len Sims of Reno.

Sims also was the chief investigator for the central Nevada killings last fall.

Collins refused to pinpoint where the horses and deer were killed. He did say, however, the animals were found over a wide area apparently near Baker and the Great Basin National Park.

"We are still going through the carcasses and we don't want the public out tampering with them," Collins said.

Search warrants were executed, and two rifles were taken last Wednesday from an Ely residence.

Collins also said a search warrant was issued to allow investigators to go onto a private ranch where the deer were found.

The killing of deer is a state offense, a gross misdemeanor punishable by a year in jail.

Collins said the state Department of Wildlife is expected to press charges in district court.

The slaying of wild horses, however, is a federal offense since free-roaming horses and burros are protected under federal law.

Killing of each animal is punishable by a fine of as much as \$2,000 and a year in prison.

All of the dead animals were shot, Collins said.

While not identifying any of the accused, Collins said White Pine ranchers are concerned because thousands of mustangs and deer take forage they believe should be reserved for their cattle. Many are upset because the BLM does not remove horses from the range as quickly as they consider appropriate.

(See HORSES, Page A-8)

(Continued from Page One)

"It is the worst case of animal killings that ever has come to light in White Pine County," he added.

Collins said informants brought the killings to the attention of BLM

investigators, who in turn contacted the Sheriff's Department.

"We knew where to look because of the information we had," Collins said.

Even the FBI is involved in the investigation, he added.

Two ranchers face trial in horse killings

By Laura Myers/AP

A federal judge refused on Wednesday to dismiss the criminal indictment against two rural Nevada ranchers charged with killing wild horses and burros, clearing the way for an Aug. 8 trial for the pair.

With no explanation, U.S. District Court Judge Howard McKibben signed a minute order denying a defense motion to dismiss charges against Dave Morehead and Shannon Brennan.

The two are the only remaining defendants out of six originally indicted in a case in which prosecutors have failed to gain a single conviction.

The original indictment was handed up in January after months of investigation following the discovery by the Bureau of Land Management of some 600 dead mustangs in central Nevada. The BLM believes the wild horses were slaughtered by rifle fire over a period of about two years.

Morehead, 38, a foreman at the C-Punch Ranch 70 miles north of Lovelock, and ranchhand Brennan, 21, are charged with killing about 40 horses and burros, misdemeanor violations of the federal Wild, Free Roaming Horse and Burro Protection Act.

Don Hill, a Reno attorney defending the case, said he's confident Morehead and Brennan will be acquitted, handing federal prosecutors a 100 percent failure rate in the case.

Hill was in court Wednesday and couldn't immediately comment on the judge's refusal to dismiss the indictment on its face.

But he said earlier the credibility of the government's witnesses in the case has been hurt in previous trials and the charges against his clients don't make sense.

"I've hunted throughout almost every area of northern Nevada, and I'll tell you something, there are no box canyons out there," he said, referring to the accusation that Morehead and Shannon killed 23 mustangs by cornering them in such a canyon. "There are no such canyons in the area where a horse could not go up the side of the hill to escape."

A jury returned an innocent verdict last week favoring Betty Irwin, a 63-year-old California woman who's part owner of the sprawling C-Punch Ranch.

Jury members said there wasn't enough evidence to convict her of misdemeanor charges of attempting to convert a wild burro into a pet.

Nearly a month ago, U.S. District Court Judge Edward Reed dismissed charges against cousins Eugene "Skeeter" Thacker, a 27-year-old cowboy, and Ronald Hage, a 23-year-old miner. They were accused of killing five mustangs.

After a three-day trial, Reed said the government didn't specify exactly which horses the pair allegedly killed,

Suspects arrested in horse killings

By BRIAN MCKENZIE
Appeal Correspondent

Federal grand jury hands down indictments

RENO — Four suspects in the killings of more than 500 wild horses were arrested late Tuesday just hours after a 22-member federal grand jury handed down two sealed indictments in connection with the case.

Federal marshals and county law enforcement officials arrested David Moorhead, 45. He is charged with 10 counts of violating federal regulations dealing with the destruction of wild horses.

Shannon Brennan is charged with 20 counts of violating federal regulations. Brennan, whose age was not immediately available, is also charged with two counts of selling wild and free-roaming horses.

John Eugene ("Skeeter") Thacker, 23, and, David Thacker, 22, his cousin, are each charged with five counts of illegally killing wild horses. They are said to be from the Battle Mountain area.

As of press time today there was one additional arrest warrant that remained unfilled, and because of the closed indictment officials would not release the suspect's name.

Authorities said early today they hoped to have the fifth suspect in custody by late afternoon.

The four suspects in custody were scheduled for arraignment at 4 p.m. today.

Bail for the suspects was set at

\$50,000 each but a spokesman for the U.S. Attorney's office said a no-bail request would be made during the initial court appearance because of the severity of the crimes.

Investigators who have been on the case for the past several months and officials at the U.S. Attorney's office remained tight-lipped about many of the facts surrounding the suspects.

A source told the Nevada Appeal

this morning that Moorhead was a foreman for the C-Punch Ranch located in Lovelock. The source said Brennan had worked for Moorhead at the ranch for some time. Little else is known about the suspects at this time.

Federal statutes call for a \$2,000 fine and one year in jail on each count.

The investigation into the horse killings began five months ago after

a helicopter pilot spotted what he thought were the remains of about a dozen wild horses in a remote area about 50 miles north of the tiny mining town of Austin.

Bureau of Land Management personnel investigating that report made two startling discoveries when they arrived at the remote site. Not only did they find the carcasses of more than 40 wild horses that had been shot with a high-powered rifle, but they also found two horses that had been shot

(See HORSES, Page A-8)

Horses

(Continued from Page One)

but had not died.

The investigators managed to recover a rifle slug from one of the horses after it was humanely destroyed.

After the initial discovery, the BLM put numerous planes and helicopters in the sky in a search that produced an additional 500 horse carcasses spread across several hundred thousand square acres of remote brush-covered land in the Austin area.

Almost weekly, new reports of

additional finds of more dead horses were reported.

The BLM called in additional investigators from the U.S. Forest Service and Fish and Wildlife departments of Nevada and surrounding states in an effort to sift through the carcasses and turn up any evidence.

The U.S. Attorney's office and the FBI were then informed about the killings.

Humane agencies within Nevada and across the United States chipped in money to provide a

reward fund for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible for the shootings.

By November, the reward fund topped \$18,000. Also, a toll-free hotline number for those wanting to provide tips on the killings was activated with the help of then-Nevada Gov. Richard Bryan.

In Austin, the shootings sparked controversy and finger-pointing between many local residents.

While nearly all the discovered carcasses have been found on public lands leased by the BLM to cattle

and sheep ranchers, the ranchers have denied any involvement in the shootings.

For years as many as two million wild horses roamed the West; now only about 50,000 remain in 11 Western states. Nevada currently has nearly 75 percent or about 28,000 wild horses.

The horses are scattered among 120 herd management areas that were established when Congress, in 1971, passed the Wild Horse and Burro Act.

Wild horse shootings' set for federal trial

A Reno federal judge refused to dismiss an indictment Friday against two men accused of killing wild horses near Battle Mountain despite defense arguments that the charges were too vague.

The ruling clears the way for the trial of Ronald Emory Hage and Eugene "Skeeter" Thacker, which is expected to begin Wednesday.

Assistant Public Defender Patrick Flanagan complained Friday that the criminal indictment only says that Hage and Thacker killed five wild horses somewhere in Nevada between Aug. 1 and 15, 1977. He said it left no clue as to the identity of the horses or where they were killed.

"We have as many dead horses in Nevada as lillies in the field," said Flanagan, who is defending Hage. He said it would be difficult to mount a defense at trial next Wednesday if he did not know specifically what the government was talking about.

"In a homicide, at least the government has to name the victim," Flanagan said. "I guess Trigger or Silver won't do in this case, but there should be some specificity as to which carcasses they are talking about."

Assistant U.S. Attorney Will Mattly said the charges referred to five horses found dead at Mount Moses, 50 miles southwest of Battle Mountain. He also said he would be able to narrow the time frame to within two days.

Reed agreed the indictment met legal standards, but ordered Mattly to provide the defense team with a description of the horses, their exact location and the two-day time period of their deaths by Monday.

Hage, a 23-year-old miner, and Thacker, a 27-year-old cowboy, are cousins and have denied any involvement with the killing of wild horses.

4 plead innocent to killing 43 horses

By Mike Henderson/Gazette-Journal

Four men pleaded innocent Friday in Reno federal court to charges of killing 43 wild horses and burros in rural Nevada.

A fifth man charged in the killings did not appear in court.

Several federal agencies are continuing their investigation of the killings of more than 500 wild horses in Nevada's open ranges and more indictments are expected, according to sources close to the case.

U.S. Magistrate Phyllis Halsey Atkins scheduled a March 27 trial for David Morehead, 38, and Shannon Brennan, 20, both of Lovelock and both charged in an indictment with killing 34 wild horses and four burros last year. Both are employees of the C-Punch Ranch, located in Pershing County 100 miles northeast of Reno.

Three other men charged in a separate and unrelated indictment with killing five mustangs in the Mount Moses area of Lander County were scheduled for an April 4 trial. Two of those men, David Thacker, 22, of Unionville, and Ronald Emory Hage, 23, of Winnemucca, also pleaded innocent Friday.

A third man charged in that indictment, Eugene John Thacker, 27, of Cosgrove, 20 miles south of Winnemucca, is scheduled to be arraigned next week. He tried to take a bus from Winnemucca to Reno Friday morning but was told the buses were not running because of snowstorms, a defense lawyer said.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Will Mattly, scheduled to prosecute both cases, said the C-Punch Ranch case has "no connection whatsoever" to the Mount Moses killings.

Attorney Don C. Hill, representing Morehead and Brennan, said outside the courtroom that it was not the ranch's policy to shoot wild horses, "and obviously they aren't guilty. In fact, we're looking forward to going to trial."

However, preparation for that trial might have to wait for the spring thaw, Hill said.

"You can't investigate a wild horse case in the snow," he said, "and there's more than 4 feet of snow on the ground out there."

The C-Punch Ranch sprawls across more than 1.5 million acres, including public range, between Lovelock and Gerlach.

Pat Flanagan, assistant federal public defender, said the large amount of publicity surrounding the slayings of the wild horses and burros should not pose a problem in selecting a jury to try the cases. The wild-horse killings in Nevada have received nationwide media attention.

Flanagan pleaded Friday for the magistrate to reduce the \$10,000 bail, requiring a \$1,000 cash deposit, for his client, Hage.

But Atkins, citing a number of skirmishes Hage has had with the law, including failure to appear in court on motor vehicle violations, said that reduction of his bail is unwarranted.

Atkins, at times shaking her finger at Hage, told him:

"It looks like you need a lot better self-control, a lot better respect for the law and a lot better respect for the courts' orders.

"You need to keep out of trouble."

Trial opens in slaying of Nevada mustangs

By Michael Phillis/Gazette-Journal

A government witness testified Wednesday in Reno that he saw three men shooting at logs in the back country of Lander County one day before he discovered five recently killed mustangs.

But John Claypool did not testify that he actually saw anyone shoot the wild horses.

Eugene "Skeeter" Thacker, a 27-year-old cowboy, and Ronald Hage, a 23-year-old miner, are charged in a five-count federal indictment with killing five horses in 1987 near Mount Moses, about 50 miles southwest of Battle Mountain. Each count is a misdemeanor carrying the possibility of six months in jail and a \$1,000 fine.

The trial in U.S. District Court, which opened Wednesday, resumes today before Judge Edward Reed.

Claypool, a 47-year-old truck driver who formerly was in law enforcement for nine years, said he was in the area on horseback Aug. 14, 1987, looking for land to lease for his family's cattle ranch when he heard shooting ahead of him.

"I yelled a couple of times because I didn't want to get shot, but I did want to proceed past that point," he said.

Claypool said he came across three men shooting at a log with a .243-caliber rifle. The weapon was fitted with a scope. "They were trying to sight in the

See TRIAL, back page

More dismissals in horse case eyed; feds red-faced

By LAURA MYERS
Associated Press Writer

RENO — A federal judge has given prosecutors permission to drop charges against two rural Nevada ranchers accused of killing wild horses and burros, handing the government another embarrassing defeat in the well-publicized case.

U.S. District Judge Howard McKibben on Wednesday had refused a request from defense attorneys for Dave Morehead and Shannon Brennan to dismiss the criminal indictment of the pair, clearing the way for an Aug. 8 trial.

But in a surprise move late Wednesday, U.S. Attorney Bill Maddox asked McKibben permission to dismiss the charges against the two. They were the only remaining defendants out of six originally indicted in the case in which the government hasn't won a single conviction.

Maddox said he would take over the case from Assistant U.S. Attorney Will Mattley, and the government might seek a new indictment later with more specific charges.

Maddox said he isn't blaming anyone involved in the case which he said was very difficult to prosecute and should be treated like a homicide.

During an impromptu court hearing, McKibben granted Maddox's request to dismiss, calling it "a very responsible approach to the case."

The two attorneys for Morehead and Brennan, Don Hill and Don Coppa, expressed surprise with the government move, but were pleased.

Hill, representing Morehead, said the government would have been wasting the court's time to go forward. He commended Maddox for "having the courage to

(See MUSTANG, Page A-10)

Mustang shooting suspect out on bail

By BRIAN MCKENZIE
Appeal Correspondent

David Morehead, one of five suspects arrested Tuesday and charged in connection with the killing of 42 wild horses and burros, was freed on \$12,000 cash bond Friday following a detention hearing in federal court in Reno.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Will Mattly said he had hoped to have Morehead remain in the Washoe County Jail without bail after two of Morehead's former co-workers at the C Punch Ranch testified during Friday's hearing that Morehead had threatened to kill them if they told about his involvement in the horse shootings.

During much of Friday's hearing Morehead, dressed in dark green jail clothes, sat slouched in his chair resting one elbow on the chair's edge while cradling his chin in the palm of his hand.

Several times Morehead leaned to one side and whispered to his attorney Ron Hill, as two former employees of the ranch, Mark and John Claypool testified how Morehead had told them he did not like wild horses and wanted to rid the range of them.

Morehead's wife Vina sat in the back row of the crowded hearing chambers and appeared extremely nervous. Throughout much of the hearing her nervousness was apparent as she pulled and twisted a small flowered kerchief she held in her lap.

Several times during the testimony she seemed visibly shaken and on the verge of tears by what she had just heard.

Mark Claypool, who worked with Morehead at the C Punch Ranch from October 1987 to April 1988 testified during Friday's hearing that Morehead told him that if he saw wild horses on the ranch property to shoot them and drag them out of sight.

Claypool also testified that Morehead had told him that what went on at the ranch stayed on the ranch and that he (Morehead) would kill anyone who violated this.

John Claypool, Mark Claypool's nephew, testified that during his employment at the ranch he was ordered by Morehead to shoot wild horses.

Under questioning by Morehead's attorney Claypool acknowledged he had shot three wild horses but, had been given immunity from prosecution for his involvement in the shootings.

When Mattly asked Claypool if he had ever seen Morehead shoot a wild horse Claypool answered he had. Claypool said he eventually quit his job at the ranch because he didn't like the horse killings and how Morehead talked him and to other people.

During the hearing Morehead's attorney put several Lovelock citizens and business owners, including C Punch Ranch owner Larry Irvin, on the stand to vouch for

Morehead. Although they did not take the stand Lovelock Mayor Hugh Montrose and Pershing County Commissioner Steve Ceresola were present at the hearing and prepared to also vouch for Morehead.

In a final defense move Morehead told the court, I don't intend to mistreat anyone or to bodily harm anyone. I won't commit a felony to get out of a misdemeanor.

At the conclusion of the hearing acting Magistrate John Kadlic ordered Morehead released on the cash bond and instructed Morehead not to contact witnesses or to handle any firearms.

Kadlic also ordered Morehead to surrender any firearms in his possession, including a .270 caliber rifle and a .357 handgun.

Morehead, the ranch foreman at C Punch Ranch, located about 100 miles North of Reno, was one of five suspects arrested Tuesday after a federal grand jury handed down two indictments in connection with the killing of 42 wild horses and burrows in Northern Nevada.

Morehead is charged with 10 counts of allegedly killing wild horses, including one count of alleged illegal sale of a wild horse and a burro at the Fallon Livestock Sales Yard.

Just hours after the grand jury issued the indictments, late Tuesday, Bureau of Land Management law enforcement officers and federal marshals arrested Morehead, 38, of Lovelock; Shannon Brennan, 20, of Lovelock; David Thacker, 22, of Unionville; Eugene J. Thacker, 27, of Imlay and Ronald E. Hage, 23, of Winnemucca.

John and David Thacker were released on their own recognizance, and Brennan was released on a \$10,000 unsecured bond Thursday after a bail hearing before Kadlic.

Hage was ordered held in Washoe County Jail after a records search showed he was wanted on an outstanding arrest warrant on an unrelated matter.

BLM officials have said the five suspects have not been charged with the reported killings of nearly 550 other wild horses in Lander County.

Those shootings were first discovered in August by a helicopter pilot who spotted the remains of about 40 wild horses that had been shot in a canyon North of Austin.

A subsequent search of the surrounding area turned up a total of over 520 wild horses that had been shot.

Investigators in the case have interviewed over 200 people in connection with the shootings but will not say how much evidence they have collected or when arrest will be made.

Currently the penalty for killing a wild horse or burro is a gross misdemeanor punishable by a \$1,000 fine and one year in jail. But both state and federal legislators are considering possible action to make the crime a felony.

Slaughter of Wild Horses Draws Outrage in Nevada

By ROBERT A. JONES, *Times Staff Writer*

AUSTIN, Nev.—Far back into an empty mountain range in central Nevada, the horse carcasses are scattered along a wash. A small herd of wild mustangs had come here, in the heat of the summer, to catch a drink at a small spring. As they came near the water, or as they left, someone began to shoot.

At the sound of the first shot, almost certainly, the horses spooked and ran. But the shooters—were ready for this, and one by one they picked off the herd. In all about 15 horses were killed here, their decaying bodies now marking the line of their attempted retreat.

The wash and its spring, many miles from the nearest paved road, are so little visited by humans that they have no name. Jimmy Wil-

liams, a local rancher, has lived his entire life in this region of sage-covered mountains and never visited the wash until he heard of the killings. Last week he came to take a look, and his first thought was how good a spot the killers had picked.

"They thought no one would come by this place for years," Williams said. "By that time the horses would just be a pile of old bones, something to kick your boot at."

But someone did see them. In late August a helicopter pilot was flying over these slopes when he saw the sprawled bodies, and then noticed even more in other washes. He called the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, which has jurisdic-

Please see HORSES, Page 34

Wild horse witnesses reportedly threatened

One of five men charged with killing 42 wild horses and burros in northern Nevada has threatened witnesses against him, a prosecutor said Thursday.

Because of that, Assistant U.S. Attorney Will Mattly planned to oppose any bail at today's detention hearing for David Morehead, 38, a foreman of the C Punch Ranch in Lovelock. Three of the other suspects have been released, pending court proceedings.

The men were indicted by a federal grand jury Tuesday on the basis of an investigation by the Bureau of Land Management. The indictment alleges they killed 39 horses and three burros since August 1987.

According to an investigator, the animals were shot in Lander and Pershing counties.

Mattly did not provide details of Morehead's alleged threats.

Story, page 1C.

Prosecutor wants to shield witnesses from defendant

By Phil Barber/Gazette-Journal

A prosecutor said Thursday that one of five men charged with killing 42 wild horses and burros in northern Nevada has threatened witnesses against him.

For that reason, Assistant U.S. Attorney Will Mattly planned to oppose any bail at a noon detention hearing today for David Morehead, 38, a foreman of the C Punch Ranch in Lovelock. Three of the others have been released, pending court proceedings.

A federal grand jury indicted the men Tuesday on the basis of an investigation by the Bureau of Land Management. The indictment alleges they killed 39 horses and three burros since August 1987.

An investigator said the animals were shot in Lander and Pershing counties.

Acting U.S. Magistrate John Kadlic warned the men at their initial court appearances Wednesday and Thursday that if released from custody they were not to contact witnesses nor handle any guns.

Mattly did not give details of Morehead's alleged threats. But on Wednesday, Mattly said the men were identified by witnesses.

John Eugene Thacker, a 27-year-old horse trainer from Imlay, and David Thacker, a 22-year-old unemployed rancher from Unionville, were released from the Washoe County Jail on their own recognizance. Shannon Brennan, a 20-year-old C Punch ranch hand, was released on a \$10,000 unsecured bond.

The fifth defendant, Ronald E. Hage, a 23-year-old gold-mine equipment operator from Winnemucca, appeared in court Thursday. Although bail was established at \$10,000 bond, he remained in jail Thursday night.

BLM spokesman Bob Stewart said the agency will now focus its attention on the reported killings of about 478 wild horses this year in Lander County. Investigators said the arrested men have not been charged with those killings. Officials also remained tight-lipped about possible motives for the shootings.

"This resolves for the time being the Pershing County case," Stewart said. "Our focus of attention now goes back to the larger case in Lander County."

In addition to the charges of killing horses, Morehead is charged with selling a wild horse and a wild burro at the Gallagher Livestock Yard in Fallon on or about Feb. 3, 1988. Tim Gallagher on Thursday said his yard merely acts as a middleman in livestock sales.

He said animals are consigned there, and must be checked by a brand inspector before sale. He said the two animals in question were released by the brand inspector to Morehead.

AG's office continues probe of horse killings

By **BRENDAN RILEY**
Associated Press Writer

The U.S. attorney for Nevada said Monday his office is continuing an investigation into the killings of some 600 hundred wild horses and burros in rural Nevada.

Charges recently were dropped against remaining defendants in the case at the request of U.S. Attorney Bill Maddox. But Maddox said, "We're still investigating other people. We still are receiving information."

"We're going to proceed a lot more cautiously in the prosecution, but we're continuing to investigate statewide," added Maddox, who is stepping down as Nevada's top federal attorney in mid-October.

"We've never stopped investigating the shootings," he said. "All I

can say is, the problems we had here in Northern Nevada indicate we will certainly have to have our ducks in a row better than we did before."

Maddox has conceded the government failed to build a strong case against six rural Nevadans accused of taking or killing wild horses and burros but who escaped conviction.

Maddox last month personally took over two remaining cases from a deputy and asked U.S. District Judge Howard McKibben to let him drop charges while leaving the door open for a possible new indictment later.

The original indictment was handed up in January after months of investigation following the discovery by the Bureau of Land Management of the dead mustangs. The BLM believes the wild horses were

slaughtered by rifle fire over a period of about two years.

Prosecutors wound up dropping charges against three defendants, including one who proved he wasn't in Nevada at the time he allegedly killed mustangs. A judge dismissed charges against two others.

In a sixth case, a jury returned an innocent verdict favoring a woman charged with illegally catching a wild burro and trying to turn the animal into a pet.

Terri Jay, executive director of the state Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses, said she was "confident the U.S. attorney will put (a case) together again."

Jay commented after suggesting the commission not pursue an earlier plan to seek a congressional investigation into the wild horse

shootings. "There are more and better things to come," she said of the expected action from federal prosecutors.

She also noted U.S. Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., has proposed legislation making it a felony to kill wild horses.

Maddox said he had spoken with Jay and he told her, "If we get a provable case, we'll pursue it."

Pershing man cleared in wild horse slayings

Federal officials say ranch hand had alibi

By Mike Henderson/Gazette-Journal

The U.S. Attorney's Office moved Friday to dismiss charges against one of five men indicted on charges of slaying horses and burros in rural Nevada.

Charges against David Thacker, 22, of Unionville, are being dropped because Thacker was not involved in the horse shootings, according to Assistant U.S. Attorney Will Mattly.

"It appears that David Thacker had a

complete, airtight alibi," Mattly said. "He was in Idaho working on a ranch."

Mattly declined to elaborate.

Thacker and two of his cousins, Eugene John Thacker, 27, and Ronald Emory Hage, 23, were charged with destroying five wild horses in 1987. Hage and Eugene Thacker are scheduled to stand trial June 13 before U.S. District Judge Edward C. Reed.

Two other men are charged in separate and apparently unrelated horse deaths and a woman is charged with appropriating a wild baby burro for her own purposes — trying to turn it into a pet.

"I'm relieved that everyone knows the

truth now, that's for sure," said David Thacker when told of Mattly's action.

Thacker said he also feels relieved that he does not have to pay \$10,000 to an attorney to represent him at the trial.

He has already paid \$5,000 in legal fees and has incurred other expenses, such as telephone bills, time off from work for trips to Reno and a trip to Idaho to talk to people who would verify that he was in Idaho at the time the horse



D. Thacker

killings allegedly took place.

A defense fund established by ranchers and friends raised about \$1,200 to offset litigation costs, Thacker said.

Since his indictment in January, he said, he has missed a number of rodeos he would like to have participated in.

A strapping 6-footer, Thacker has been working for much of his life to become a rodeo cowboy. He transferred from Pershing County to Battle Mountain High School in his senior year because Battle Mountain had a better rodeo team, and he attended the College of Southern Idaho at Twin Falls because it has one of the best college rodeo programs in the country.