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Investigating wild horse slayings

Gov. Bryan activates hotline

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Gov. Richard Bryan renewed his pledge Tuesday to provide state support to assist the Bureau of Land Management in finding who slaughtered 450 wild horses in Lander County.

Bryan said he would provide the BLM with investigative resources of the state Department of Wildlife and the state Division of Investigations.

In addition, Bryan activated the "Operation Game Thief" hotline. Hunters are urged to call the hotline if they see anything suspicious or find any wild horse killings.

The hotline number is 1-800-992-3030.

BLM officials on Tuesday confirmed their investigators discovered 110 more dead wild horses the past several days in remote central Nevada.

The horses, like the others, had been shot, officials said.

The latest finding of horse carnage from an on-the-ground search brings the total of dead horses found the past month near Austin to 450.

"I don't want to say that this is the end but we don't expect to find any more large numbers," BLM spokeswoman Maxine Shane said Tuesday.

The BLM's chief spokesman, Bob Stewart, added Tuesday that he wouldn't rule out the possibility of investigators finding more horses in the area.

"They're just difficult to find," he said.

Investigators have received a lot of calls regarding the cases, but have not arrested anyone, Shane said.

She said the calls came from Nevadans outraged by the killings in Lander County.

BLM investigators recently found 85 horses in the Bald Mountain area north of Austin and 25 others near Mt. Moses, located about 30 miles west of Bald Mountain.

The investigators have consolidated two of their cases into one.

That case involves horses found dead in the Bald Mountain and Mt. Callaghan areas.

In the Bald Mountain-Mt. Callaghan area, 345 horses have been found dead. The second case involved Mt.

Moses, where investigators have found a total of 105 dead horses.

Terri Jay, executive director of the Nevada Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses, said Tuesday she wondered how many more dead horses BLM would find.

"Enough is enough," she said. "We're just really frustrated that there hasn't been any indictments but we realize it's going to take time to get solid indictments."

She added she was "95 percent confident" that the BLM would find the killers.

Rewards of more than \$12,000 have been pledged by animal groups for information leading to the arrests of those responsible for shooting the horses.

Shane said she had no idea when the investigators planned to close their cases.

Some of the horses may have been dead for two years.

Others died late last spring. "Whenever you don't have a smoking gun it's a real difficult case," Shane said.

She said investigators have physical evidence, but they could build a stronger case if any witnesses

would come forward.

The horses' remains lay scattered over 102,000 acres.

"Some places there are one" dead horse, she said, and in other areas "there are many more."

"You're talking about a lot of territory, rough territory, not a place where you'd drive your ordinary car or 4-by-4 (truck)."

Shane said her office has discounted the theory that the horses were shot from the air.

"The evidence doesn't point to anything from the air," she said.

Nevada is home to about 27,000 of the 38,000 wild horses in the West.

The theories on how wild horses came to Nevada vary.

Some say the horses came to Nevada as descendants of horses used by Spanish conquistadores.

Others say the wild horse herds came about after ranchers let some of their animals out in the late 1800s, or early 1900s.

Miners and others used the horses to pull wagons and stage coaches.

Settlers and immigrants reported sightings of wild horse herds in the mid-1800s, according to Shane.