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# Treatment of arrested cattle boss troubles livestock operators

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LOVELOCK — What troubled the people here the most seemed not to be the crime so much as how their friend David Morehead, a cattle boss on the vast C-Punch Ranch, was treated after his arrest.

As Hugh Montrose, the mayor of the town, says, "A lot of us were appalled that Dave Morehead was picked up, put in chains, paraded on television in an orange monkey suit and held without bail, on a misdemeanor. ... that I view in the same light as a game violation, like if somebody shot a deer out of season or caught too many fish."

Morehead's crime, according to federal prosecutors and U.S. Bu-

reau of Land Management investigators in Reno, was killing wild horses, 34 of them. His arrest late last month, along with four other men, drew attention across the country, for it was the first big case to develop since the BLM began finding wild horse carcasses scattered over the rangelands of central Nevada last summer.

Before the search was over, more than 500 dead horses were found, all presumed to have been shot during the past two years.

The discoveries outraged people around the nation and brought notable embarrassment to the BLM, whose job is to manage the estimated 38,000 wild horses that roam 10 western states.

But they also sharpened an argument over those horse herds that already had been going on for decades — an argument pitting city vs. country, East vs. West, aesthetics vs. economics, sentiment vs. practicality, preservation vs. profits, government vs. individual and most of all — horse vs. cow.

The nation's wild horses have been under federal protection since 1971, when Congress declared them to be "living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West" and "an integral part of the natural system of the public lands." Those words and the legislation they accompanied were the culmination of a years-long crusade by wild-horse lobbyists, led by Reno's

legendary "Wild Horse Annie" Johnston, to save the western herds from mistreatment and even eventual elimination.

But for livestock operators, who viewed the horses less as inspiring symbols than as competitors for grass and water on western ranges, the law protecting them has been an irritation and an affront.

Larry Irvin, president of the corporation that runs the C-Punch Ranch on 1.5 million mostly government-owned, leased acres west of Lovelock, says a powerful irony has emerged from government restrictions on the way ranchers deal with wild horses.

Irvin won't talk about Morehead's case, pending his March 27

trial, but he does say: "The buckaroos feel they've got as much right on the land as the horses. Many of them view the wild horse as being a symbol of their lost freedom."

Before 1971, that was the freedom to round up, keep or sell the horses, often for slaughter, sometimes to kill off poorly bred wild stallions and replace them with better quality studs; in short, to do with the land what they had always done — run it as they saw fit.

But then the BLM took over the herds, set up regular roundups to hold the numbers down, created adoption programs to dispose of desirable excess horses and developed holding sites for captive horses considered unadoptable because

of age or condition.

The stock people believe they have lost far more than they have won. And so they argue that urbanites and animal advocates are sentimentalists who really don't know wild horses, don't know ranching and don't know when the needs of people should prevail over animals.

BLM spokesman Bob Stewart describes the perspective he encounters in rural Nevada: "The horse in the minds of most of America east of the Mississippi is a very special thing. The horse in the minds of Nevadans outside Reno and Las Vegas is that it is more of a ranch animal."

In fact, advocates and antagonists  
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## Horses

From 1B

nists alike agree that many of the wild horses are inbred, small, ugly animals that bear little resemblance to the wild horses of story and sentiment, and that almost all are the descendants of modern strays, not the fabled Spanish mustangs of the 1500s.

How such animals can be valued so highly, how their deaths can command so much sympathetic attention, leaves people like Montrose baffled. "I guess it's what you get used to," he says. "It reminds me of my first trip to the (San Francisco) Bay Area, when I saw all those street people. I couldn't believe people would be living that way, but I didn't see too many people who seemed to be concerned about that. I guess it's what you're used to."

Montrose wants to make clear, though, that "I don't think anyone wants to see the wild horses gone. Part of Nevada is to have wild horses out there."

But undeniably there are big differences in outlook between urban and rural, horse lover and cattle rancher, those who view the land for its beauty and those who view it as a livelihood.

The gap shows perhaps most sharply in the separate passions of two Nevadans who both know the wild horses well. Says Terri Jay, executive director of the Nevada Commission for the Preservation of the Wild Horse: "I think of all those personalities snuffed out, that nobody got to know. You can see it watching the herds. There's the boss, there's the dominant female, there's the horse bucking up and down just because he feels good, there are the babies beginning to learn herding. That's a loss we can never replace."

Steve Ceresola, speaks just as fervently, but from the perspective of a four-generation family that has ranches in western Nevada since the mid-1800s.

Now 39, Ceresola recalls the spe-

cial thrill of going into wild horse country as a teen-ager. "You always rode your best horse," he says. "Coming down a hill behind one of those horses, knowing you were going to catch him. ... It was almost as good as sex. Of course, that was before the law."

No one captures wild horses legally anymore unless they work for the BLM. The days when ranch hands controlled the wild horse population have gone away, partly because the notorious "mustangers" of earlier years developed such reputations for brutality while rounding up horses destined for slaughterhouses.

But regularly over the years, and to this day, mostly in small numbers, horses have continued to be

killed. "I've heard of some ranchers who've taken quite a few and shot them," Ceresola says. "And hunters and miners, too. It's spur-of-the-moment. If you gathered everybody in Nevada who had shot a horse, you'd need a pretty big place."

Publicly, almost everyone on both sides of the wild-horse debate condemns the mass killings discovered since last summer. Few contend that it is part of some organized conspiracy of cattle operators to thwart the government. And some say that Morehead, who eventually was released after the government took control of his \$12,000 savings account, is simply being made an example by federal authorities under pressure

to act.

Livestock people say it doesn't make economic sense to break the law by killing a few hundred horses when there still are about 28,000 wild horses in the state. They purport to be as puzzled as anyone else, especially in such areas as the

C-Punch Ranch, where Irvin says big wild-horse roundups and continuing BLM vigilance have reduced the horse population to what he considers an acceptable level.

He's inclined to blame some of the horse killings on random epide-

mic events.  
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## Horses

From 3B

little heat off their back. If (Morehead) and the other accused are convicted, people here won't condone what they did, but they won't think it's a very big deal."

Among horse protectionists, the common sentiment is that the wild-horse killings have risen out of attitudes as old as the taming of the range when stockmen planted hybrid grasses, diverted water and tried to eradicate everything that wasn't a cow.

Ceresola, whose family was among those who opened the range, takes a middle ground, if there is such a thing: "The BLM

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