

53 wild horse deaths near Austin puzzle BLM officials

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The discovery last week of 33 dead wild horses in a rugged area north of Austin continues to puzzle Bureau of Land Management officials investigating the grisly find.

The carcasses of the wild horses were discovered early last week in a remote area north of Austin.

A BLM technician saw what appeared to be the remains of 13 wild horses while flying in the rugged area.

In a flight over the same area Wednesday, BLM officials spotted not only the 13 original carcasses but 20 more.

While the causes of the horses' deaths continues to remain a mystery, BLM investigators have not

ruled out the possibility the horses died as a result of gunshot wounds.

Battle Mountain BLM wild horse and burro specialist Rodger Bryan said investigators will fly to the remote area again today with a metal detector to search both the carcasses and the immediate areas surrounding the carcasses for spent bullets and shell casings.

"At this point, it's hard to say just what caused the horses to die — there are a lot of unanswered questions at this point," Bryan said.

While some of the horses appeared to have died within the last month, several of the carcasses showed indications that some of the horses could have been dead as long as six months, Bryan said.

Bryan flew to the area last week and inspected several of the car-

casses. He said he did not see any indication the horses died from bullet wounds but did not rule out the possibility the horses may have been shot.

Asked if the horses might have died as a result of the ongoing drought Bryan said, "I just can't imagine that these horses died as a result of a lack of water."

Bryan said one group of eight or nine carcasses was found only a short distance from a natural spring that is continuing to flow.

"I also considered the possibility that some of the water sources may have been poisoned but I didn't see the carcasses of any other animals such as rabbits or coyotes that

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Horses

(Continued from Page One) would indicate a poisoned water hole."

Nearly two years ago, BLM investigators found the carcasses of seven wild horses in the same remote

area. In that instance, investigators determined the horses had been shot but no arrests were made and the shootings remain unsolved.

The Nevada Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses, fearing the worst, has already posted a reward of \$250,000 to \$500,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of persons or person responsible for the deaths of the horses near Austin.

Commission Executive Director Terri Jay said today, "From the descriptions I have received concerning the deaths of these horses, it would appear the most logical conclusion is that the horses have been shot. But if it is determined the horses died from some natural cause, obviously there will be no reward paid out."

Jay said she hoped the Lander County Sheriff's Office would become involved in the investigation because of past disappointing results from BLM investigations concerning wild horse deaths.

Wild Horse Organized Assistance Director Dawn Lappin said today, "If the BLM would take these types of events more seriously and worry more about what is continually happening to wild horses, we would be way ahead."

Lappin said that given what she knew about the situation it is very possible that the horses had either been shot or intentionally kept from watering.

"Even though we're in the middle of a drought, water is readily available in many areas where the carcasses have been found.

"I hope the reward money may prompt someone to come forward with information on these deaths."

Judging from past BLM investigations, Lappin said, she didn't hold too much hope that BLM investigators would solve the deaths.

Nevada BLM Public Affairs Chief Bob Stewart said today, "At this point we haven't drawn any conclusions as to why the horses died. Investigators are in the field now working to determine just that.

Stewart said from all indications some of the carcasses appear to be only 2 to 3 weeks old.

Last year, BLM and Carson City sheriff's investigators spearheaded an investigation into the slaying of nearly a dozen wild horses that were found shot in an area east of town off Deer Run Road.