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# Governor's horse trip is a blank

## Dead mustangs elude helicopter

By ED VOGEL  
Appeal Capital Bureau

LANDER COUNTY — A Nevada Air National Guard helicopter carrying Gov. Richard Bryan conducted a tree-top search Tuesday but failed to find the remains of any of the nearly 300 wild horses killed in barren central Nevada.

For nearly 45 minutes, the helicopter crisscrossed canyons near Mount Moses where the U.S. Bureau of Land Management discovered skeletal remains of 87 horses in September.

Despite a detailed map, all the two pilots and seven passengers saw were several small bands of live wild horses and a lot of ripe cones on pinon pine trees.

The din of the helicopter prevented talking so Bryan spent part of the time on the 90-minute return trip signing thank you letters to contributors to his U.S. Senate campaign.

"We were in the right church, but we just didn't find the right pew," said Bob Stewart, a BLM spokesman. Stewart said BLM investigators examined the skeletal remains of the horses at Mount Moses as recently as last week.

He doubts that anyone would have removed the bones.

Bryan interrupted his state duties and Senate campaign to accompany Stewart and two members of the state Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses on the flight to Mount Moses, about 180 miles east of Reno.

Earlier in the day, the governor offered the BLM the use of Nevada Department of Wildlife investigators in their search for those responsible for the horse killings.

The governor said he hoped his appearance at Mount Moses will be taken as an example of the state's concern and interest in capturing the culprits. The state wild horse commission has put up a \$10,000 reward for information leading to a conviction.

"You don't know what the motivation might have been," Bryan said. "It might be some deranged person who thinks it is a great sport to go



A NEVADA NATIONAL Guard helicopter ferries Gov. Richard Bryan over the desert in Lander County Tuesday for a look at the areas where almost 300 wild horses have been killed, but no remains were found. In photo at right, Bureau of Land Management spokesman Bob Stewart, far right, talks to Bryan, second from right, and state wild horse commission members Dawn Lappin and Michael Kick.

Appeal photos by Ed Vogel

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out there and kill something. Clearly it looks like a pattern."

Bryan refused to speculate that ranchers might be responsible for the killing. Wild horse advocates have theorized that ranchers may have shot the horses because the animals are competing for the same vegetation as their cattle.

Stewart said he does not expect any immediate arrests. He acknowledged the BLM has received many

tips from citizens with information about the death of the horses but refused to comment on the investigation.

Nevada is home for about 28,000 of the 38,000 wild horses that roam on public lands in the West. Under federal law, the illegal destruction of each wild horse is punishable by one year in prison and-or a \$2,000 fine.

While more than a dozen cases

have been filed against people who allegedly killed or harassed horses in Nevada since 1977, no one ever has received jail time. Federal courts typically have levied \$250 fines for those convicted of wild horse crimes.

BLM officials, however, point out that not since the passage of the wild horse protection act back in

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# Horses

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1971 have so many of the horses been killed. Before the federal act, cowboys routinely rounded up wild horses and sold them to processing plants for use as dog food.

Besides the 87 carcasses at Mount Moses, the BLM discovered the remains of 140 other horses last week near Bald Mountain. In August, the agency discovered the remains of 41 horses at Mount Callaghan. Investigators determined the Mount Callaghan and Mount Moses horses had been shot. A cause has not yet been given for the death of the Bald Mountain horses.

All three areas rest in rocky, sagebrush-covered valleys between Austin and Battle Mountain in remote Lander County. Pinon and juniper trees grow only at the high-

est portions of the mountains. Water sources are not visible from the air.

Except for a few ranches and a mining operation, the area where the horses died is devoid of human life.

Stewart said the BLM discovered the initial horses when a pilot told agency employees he thought he saw some horse carcasses. Later, during the investigation, the BLM was told by an informant to look for additional remains of horses near Mount Moses.

After the two discoveries, the BLM began to fly over more than 100 areas in Nevada where wild horses are known to congregate. During one of those fly-overs last week, the 140 carcasses were sighted near Bald Mountain.

"It is disgusting," said Bryan about the killings. "This is not the

way to resolve the problem. It is a product of a sick mind."

Long-time wild horse advocate Dawn Lappin, a member of the state wild horse commission, is certain the killings are the result of a "battle over who gets the grass."

Nonetheless, Lappin said she never has known a rancher to kill so maliciously a great number of wild horses.

"It was either a rancher or some-

one who would like us to believe it was a rancher," she said.

The publicity generated by the killings may bring national attention to the fact that the horses are not really protected, Lappin said.

At the same time, she said she fears the attention may make people in rural Nevada more close-mouthed and the killers may not be caught.