

3/3/89

Appeared: Las Vegas Review Journal 3/3/89

Wild horses still at risk, official warns

Associated Press

CARSON CITY — The Assembly Ways and Means committee was told Thursday that Nevada's wild horse population is still in danger despite recent national attention over the shootings of more than 500 wild horses.

Terri Jay, executive director of the state Commission for Preservation of Wild Horses, said the attention included a television special on the slayings in isolated central Nevada areas.

"That has resulted in more than 800 calls," said Jay. Prior to the show, five people had been indicted from Pershing County where 48 horses were killed. Jay hopes the show will help bring more indictments out of Lander County, where 527 horses were shot.

Jay told the committee wild horses have been used as scapegoats by some ranchers who feel the horses rob their livestock of food and water. "There are 300,000 head of cattle and 300,000 head of sheep in Nevada and only 25,000 wild horses," Jay said.

She added her agency has been working closely with other groups to solve the wild horse problem. She said one of the most damaging myths about wild horses is that they can't be trained, and are "good for nothing."

Efforts include a mustang-breaking program at prisons in Colorado, New Mexico, California and Wyoming.

Jay said prisoners break and train the horses for adoption. "The horses become more adoptable, and the prisoners learn a good trade," she said, adding that the horse industry is an "\$18 billion industry," and that ex-convicts can get jobs in stables, on ranches, and in the race and show horse business.

While Nevada has one of the largest populations of wild horses in the country, the state has no preserves or prison training programs for the horses.

Jay also said a recent BLM roundup was stopped by a court order that was granted to the Animal Protection Institute. "The roundup was stopped because the BLM couldn't produce and scientific data to prove there was any need to gather the horses," Jay said.

She said that, contrary to the beliefs of many ranchers and environmentalists, wild horses have a "symbiotic relationship" with livestock and wildlife on the open range.

Assemblywoman Myrna Williams, D-Las Vegas, asked about the recent slaughter of horses on the Nevada Test Site in southern Nevada.

In that case, 61 horses died by eating a partially organic substance that was dumped in a stream by a Reynolds Electric Engineering Co. truck. In that case some Test Site employees were rumored to have had a lottery on how many horses would die.

REECO was fined \$15,000 and ordered to maintain three springs to provide water for wild horses in their habitat area nearby.

Wild horse activists long have accused the BLM, Nevada ranchers, and the Legislature of a lack of regard for wild horses. Jay's agency was formed by the Legislature in 1985 to deal with the wild horse problem, but money to fund such a program has been available since 1972.

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United States Wild Horse And Burro Foundation