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Mustang shootings reported in Washoe, White Pine, BLM says

Agency keeping details to itself

By Michael Phillis/Gazette-Journal

An undisclosed number of wild horses were recently shot to death in northern Washoe County and there are reports of more mustang killings in White Pine County, the Bureau of Land Management said Thursday.

The horses in Washoe County were found in an isolated area north of Gerlach, about 100 miles north of Reno. BLM spokesman Bob Stewart said the agency is not putting out any information about the number of dead horses or when they were killed other than to say it was believed to be recent.

"Law enforcement told us there was a number of horses and that's all they would tell us," Stewart said.

Acting BLM State Director Fred Wolf confirmed the bureau is conducting a criminal investigation into the killings but would not release information on the progress of the probe for fear of jeopardizing possible future prosecution of the case.

Hundreds of mustangs and burros, protected by federal law, have been found dead in northern Nevada over the last couple of years. BLM law enforcement agents arrested five men and a woman on charges of killing or taking the animals, but all of the defendants were either acquitted at trial or had the charges dismissed for lack of evidence in 1989.

One defense argument in the cases that went to trial was that informants looking for reward money used information gained in media coverage of the wild horse deaths to point the finger at inno-

cent suspects. Defense lawyers also claimed the great majority of the horses actually died of natural causes.

But Stewart said the recent killings in Washoe County were recent and there was convincing evidence the animals were shot to death. He said the killings in White Pine County have not been confirmed.

White Pine County Sheriff Bernie Romero said he had been told nothing about wild horse killings in the county by either the BLM or any citizens. The Washoe County Sheriff's Office also said they had no reports about wild horse killings in the county.

Killing wild horses or burros on public lands is a federal crime punishable by up to a year in prison and a \$2,000 fine.

Stewart said the BLM is offering a \$5,000 reward for the arrest and conviction of those responsible for the Washoe County killings.