



The Denver Post / Karl Gehring

STARVING FOALS: Catherine Barcomb, above, feeds a high-protein formula to a foal after roundup at Nellis Air Force base. Below, a herd is grouped near Rock Springs, Wyo. **RELATED STORIES, 15A**

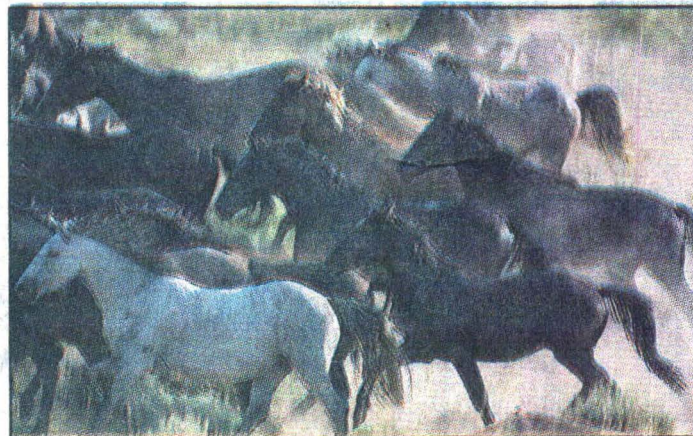
BLM gets blame for die-off

By Jim Carrier
Denver Post Staff Writer

TONOPAHA, Nev. — About 2,000 foals and hundreds of mares and stallions have died of hunger and thirst on a federal range in one of the worst disasters of the nation's troubled 20-year-old wild horse program.

A combination of deep drought, range mismanagement, drawn-out appeals and bureaucratic neglect has left fillies and colts half-eaten by coyotes, abandoned by their hungry mothers and crippled by maladies that circle the dried-up waterholes like buzzards. Horse skulls litter the high desert.

In an emergency action, federal teams have been rounding up hundreds of weak adult horses from Nellis Air Force Base — home to one of the nation's largest herds — while female volunteers in Reno nurse dozens of sick foals back to life in backyard nurseries.



The Denver Post / Karl Gehring

"We've managed to save 300 colts," said Dawn Lappin, who has 31 horses in her yard and is director of Wild Horse Organized Assistance (WHOA). "For the last two years, we've had nearly 100 percent die-off of colts."

Every morning, Lappin and colleagues feed milk to the motherless foals, dress their wounds and arrange adoptions.

"We've lost six," said the husky-voiced, grandmotherly Lappin in the makeshift corrals behind her suburban house. "This one, a coyote

chewed his hind legs clear to the bone. We didn't understand the magnitude of this."

All sides in the issue are trying to use the horse die-off to gain support for themselves. But the horses poignantly represent all that is wrong with the program and its players.