



Appeal file photo by Jennifer Whitehair

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A wild colt removed from the Nellis Air Force Range in Southern Nevada several weeks ago noses about in welcome fodder at the the Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horse's facility in Washoe Valley. More than 2,000 horses

were removed from the Nellis Range in Southern Nevada, including a number of foals like this one that were abandoned by their mothers due to the drought, and will be adopted out by the Bureau of Land Management.

2,000 state wild horses to find adoptive homes

By **ROBERT MACY**
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PALOMINO VALLEY — Nearly 2,000 wild horses who escaped death in the parched Nevada desert are destined for adoptive homes across America after a stopover at this picturesque ranch.

"The sad thing is that the little ones were just abandoned," Mike Rockingham, a Bureau of Land Management employee, said as she checked a pen holding seven spirited colts captured earlier this summer.

The colts were among some 200 taken off the Nellis Air Force Bombing and Gunnery Range north of Las Vegas. Many

were near death from lack of food and water on the drought-ravaged range. Most had been kicked away by mares who were unable to fend for themselves, much less care for their offspring.

"In some areas of the range, the food and water are 15 miles apart," Rockingham said.

"The babies just can't do it; they can't get from one place to the other. So the little ones are just abandoned."

Some 80 colts, ages 3 to 6 months, will be placed for adoption Friday through Sunday at the BLM's wild horse and burro placement center at this sprawling ranch, 19 miles north of Sparks. Also up for adoption are

50 mares who have baby colts at their side.

Other horses of all ages — some 800 in all — will be offered for adoption this weekend at Palomino Valley.

A total of 75 colts will be adopted Aug. 17 in Las Vegas, with adoptions following in Elko Aug. 22-23, Ely Aug. 24-25 and Winnemucca Sept. 20-22.

Another adoption is planned in Las Vegas in early December, to coincide with the National Finals Rodeo.

BLM officials are stepping up adoptions across the country in efforts to place the 2,000 horses taken from the Nellis range this summer.

The massive effort was made

to thin what has become the nation's largest wild horse herd.

BLM officials estimate some 6,000 horses inhabit the 2.2 million acres of the Nellis range, where droughts have dried ponds and streams, and growing herds have left land overgrazed.

Satellite adoption centers have been set up by the BLM in more than a dozen states at locations ranging from Cherry Hills, N.J., to Manchester, Mich., to Ridgecrest, Calif.

Horses are trucked here from the Nellis range and sorted by age: yearlings, 2-5 years, 5-9 years and over 10 years old.

Veterinarians draw blood to

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Appeal file photo by Jennifer Whitehair

A FOAL TAKES A well deserved nap at the Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horse's facility in Washoe Valley.

Horses

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check for any diseases and check their teeth to determine their age. They are tagged and branded with a number that is entered in BLM records.

"It's part of the government registration, just like their own Social Security number," Rockingham explained as veterinarian Rich Sanford and BLM workers Buck Mangus and Jim Cannon freeze branded another colt. The frightened colt grunted softly as he was branded with the liquid nitrogen.

Rockingham, who has adopt-

ed three horses and two burros over the past five years, says many people mistakenly believe adopting a colt is like obtaining a dog or cat.

"There's a lot more expense involved and a lot more care needed," she said. "And you've got to have plenty of room."

"People who want to adopt are screened before they can get a horse," said Maxine Shane, a BLM spokeswoman in Reno. "They must have the proper facilities at home. And they need to bring the proper trailer. They can't just drive up in a pickup truck and expect to take one of

the horses."

Some of the wild horses are also provided to prisons throughout the West. Supervised programs allow inmates to gentle the animals, which are later offered for adoption.

Congress passed legislation in 1971 to protect, manage and control wild horses and burros on public lands, declaring them to be "living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West."

In the first 15 years after the declaration, the BLM adopted out more than 91,000 horses and burros, with the most horses

going to Texas, followed by South Dakota, Oklahoma and Oregon. Californians have adopted the most burros.

A fee of \$125 per horse and \$75 per burro is charged for each animal.

Although most horses have found their way to ranches or residences with oversized lots, some have made the spotlight. Four palominos adopted in Nevada are now with the Marine Corps Mounted Color Guard and have appeared in parades throughout the West, including the Rose Parade in Pasadena, Calif.