

Nellis

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NELLIS

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Dear Cathy,

We just wanted update you regarding our tour of the Nellis Test and Training Range. On Friday, November 19, 2004, Commissioners Gleason and Brehm toured the four main waters that the horses have used in the past or are currently using, Cedar, Cactus, Corral, and Rose. All water sources are currently in need of attention for one reason or another. We did not tour Silver bow or Antelope, but focused on those areas in need of attention. This is the status.

Cedar Springs:

Water level low. It appears that this water level is low due to the time of year. As we historically know this well seems to produce various amounts of water at different times of the year. There was some water on the bottom of the troughs as of yesterday. According to Air Force, the trough was almost dry approximately 2 weeks ago but the recent rains have seemed to replenish it to some degree. The holding ponds were dry; just wet mud on the bottom of the ponds, probably due to recent rain and not due to the spring's production of water. The water line in the header box is below the below the intake pipe. This water source has been down since August of this year. BLM had water hauled to Corral, but not to this site.

There appeared to be a few horses still using this water source. Most of the horses on the Kawich side of the mountain have moved south for the winter. This is typical as they usually go south and utilize the snowmelt and rainwater out of Lamb's ponds. We did not see any horses on the Kawich side of the mountain but Air Force said that what they have seen appears to be in good shape.

There needs to needs a good analysis and documentation of this spring. It seems that after the spring run off, production is strong and then tapers off as summer goes along. A suggestion would be to establish some sort of water storage for the time when the spring is less productive. The Air Force, BLM and the Commission have already discussed this on previous tours.

Cactus Flat

We traveled through Trailer Pass and saw quite a few horses in Cactus Flat and Cactus Valley. All appeared to be healthy and were in normal bands of five to ten horses. All the foals we saw looked good and we did not observe any clubfeet or foals with foot problems at this time.

Cactus Springs

Water was overflowing out of the troughs to outside the fence area. The other water source seems to be slower than earlier this year, but still overflowing down to the tree at the fence line. This site is in need of examination and maintenance, as there appears to be a separate starting place for each water source. Examination could show which would be more logical to use for consistent, year-round flow as well as what improvements could help eliminate the runoff and excess water waste.

Corral

Water is not traveling from the header box into the troughs. Apparently a new line was laid in October 30th and 31st by BLM with assistance from the Air Force and the line seems to be clogged from past debris in the low spots. The water is backing up in the header box from the reservoir and overflowing from the header box onto the surrounding ground. The Air Force feels that the water is overflowing from the header box due the inability of the water to move through the piping to the trough and the twenty thousand gallon reservoir is full. The spring itself is not producing that much water. There is no water in the troughs at this time and the only water available for horses at this site is from the overflow of the header box. In addition, the float is broken and needs to be repaired. This is the site where water was hauled during the summer months by the BLM. Repairs to the spring source were made, incorrectly, and in the process a wildlife guzzler was shut off that has yet to be reopened by BLM.

Quarry

Air Force is using overflow from the quarry to water animals in this area. Not very many animals were sited near Corral. Most were south on the winter range near Antelope and Cactus Springs. There were lots of antelope sited at the quarry and very few recent horse piles.

Rose Springs

This was a desolate site, no horses, no coyotes, no antelope, and no water. This is the site where the four water troughs are boxed together and where we typically see lots of horses and other forms of wildlife at this watering spot. There were only a few inches of water at the bottom of the troughs and a very slow dribble coming out of the pipe. This watering area is the site that Air Force would like to have moved further away from the highway. We tried to track the spring source but could not find it. What we did find was an area in the mountains with lots of moisture in the ground, old and new pipe laying on the ground, water trickling out of the old exposed broken pipe, recent tire tracks for some sort of equipment, bobcat or otherwise, a new pile of rocks, tracks that went approximately 150' above the pile of rock, and cut trees as if someone was up there recently and did work and needed to cut limbs for access.

This spring had been down since late summer and is still not operative. Horses in this area were using the quarry and Corral but now Corral is down. This is a major watering source for horses, as well as other animals on the range. I think it would be safe to say that this has typically been the most reliable source of water on the range in the past. Air Force comments that this source has not been down since 1990.

According to our research on the history of Rose, this spring may be improved with a pipe, gravel, and paper system rather than a header box. If this is the case, it could be that the paper has deteriorated and the pipe is clogged. It has also been reported to us that Rose does not typically have a large amount of surface water which is the reason why sources remember it being developed with the paper system. This method would access the subsurface moisture and runoff better than a header box in this type of spring. Although we are not experts on spring developments, this theory makes the most sense and would explain the excess water coming out of the exposed pipe and the abundant moisture in the area. This is an area that needs to be analyzed by a hydrologist and the horse specialist. There may be historical records within the BLM office which can answer some of these questions.

In summary, on our tour, Air Force asked:

1. GPS the spring source and pipeline at Rose and all water sources. Find out for certain how the spring was developed and what the problem may be at Rose. Now is the time. No animals in danger right now as they are south for the winter. In spring, if this water source is not up and running we will have problems.
2. Air Force would like to have BLM bring out a hydrologist with the horse specialists to look at all the watering sources and determine the best way to manage and maintain these waters.
3. Determine what repairs need to be made and have them done ASAP.
4. Military mission is first and foremost, put this in writing and implement watering maintenance schedule for certain times of the year. I.e.: for example, we know the horses go south for the winter. Before their summer migration back to the northern range, blow out all the pipes and service Rose, Cedar and Corral before the summer hits and not after or during the hot months with potential horse mortality.
5. Before the fall rains came, Air Force was asked to haul water again for BLM. Air Force is happy to do that but their manpower on the range is low right now and there is just not the manpower to haul water to horses. Of course, if necessary, they will pull away from other areas to haul water and keep horses in good health as they have done in the past. The hauling of water by Air Force has been repetitive year after year and really is the responsibility of the BLM. Air Force would like to see BLM act proactively and have the water areas mainlined on a regular basis, not just when the water supply stops.
6. Also, Air Force requests more regular census. Currently there are no plans by BLM to census Nellis until the third year of the PZP trials, which would be 2007. The Air Force would like horse numbers reduced to the lower range of AML (300-600) due to consistent water and maintenance issues with BLM.

We would like to add that a number of groups have worked to improve the conditions on the Nellis Range and overall the horses and the range are in excellent condition. If one looks back to the days when horses numbered in the tens of thousands on the range, we have come a long way. This has been the result of a lot of hard work from individuals from the BLM, Air Force, Commission and NDOW. We would like to us all come together to finish making the Nellis Range a good habitat for horses and wildlife and have all coexist under the first and foremost purpose of the range which is the military mission. I think this is completely possible. Furthermore, We want to add that we do not want the aforementioned comments to be construed as BLM bashing. As we stated, we have all worked hard in our individual ways, especially many BLM individuals, to get where we are. We just need to push a little more to try to work together and complete common goal we all want: healthy range, healthy habitat, and healthy animals.

If you have any questions, you know how to find us.

Sincerely,

Julie Von Tobel Gleason

Christine Brehm

CC: All Wild Horse Commissioners