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FYI - NBC AND NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC WILL BE COVERING THE NELLIS AIR FORCE BASE WILD HORSE PROBLEM

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900 words

July 21, 1991 fast approaches, bringing with it the end of funding for a wild horse round-up and a death sentence for hundreds of wild horses on the Nellis Air Force Base in Southern Nevada. Their deaths will become part of a eulogy for the thousands of Nellis wild horses that have already died senselessly.

As Nevada trudges through it's fifth year of drought, most of Nevada's estimated 35,000 wild horses are forced to go great distances from forage points to watering areas. However, survival rates of the horses on Nellis are by far the bleakest.

Standing around mud holes and empty water troughs, under intense desert sun, are the strongest stallions and mares who still have enough strength to hold there place at the front, behind them are the weaker adults and last are foals who barely stand on sore, cracked hooves without a chance to moisten their tongues. Usually alarmed by the arrival of humans, these horses begin to mill around

excitedly when trucks come into view as fear gives way to hope that once again these vehicles mean the arrival of water. Military personnel try in vain to keep up with the water demands of thousands of thirsty horses, but the 20,000 gallons they haul to the horses each day simply isn't enough to animals that must hobble ten miles away from the water to find food. Traveling such distances is requiring the horses already depleted body to utilize most of it's body nutrients.

300,000+ acres on the Nellis range were declared a wild horse refuge in 1962. With the capacity of comfortably sustaining 1,000 horses, the Nellis horse population swelled to 4,000 by 1984 spilling over into the range itself. By July 1990 it had reached 7,000. A January 1991 count found only 4,000 live horses, with no evidence of a colt crop and very few sightings of yearlings. Horse carcasses and skeletons made up for most of the missing population.

Why has Nellis become a range of tragedy? Horses on Nellis have an unnatural boundary forcing them to go out of the refuge to try and find food and water. By moving across the boundary they seemingly become invisible to our government....out of sight and out of mind. Pressure brought by wild horse organizations have not been heeded, due in part to the missing voice of ranchers. Ranchers can usually force the Bureau of Land Management to react to wild horses because most often their cattle compete with wild horses on grazing lands. Although wild horse groups and cattlemen don't have a great affection for each other, wild horse advocates have missed the politically powerful voice of the ranchers in this circumstance. Without the power which comes from being big land

controllers; Wild Horse Organized Assistance (W.H.O.A.) and Nevada's Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses have watched helplessly as BLM funds go to other state programs.

BLM funding for monitoring of the wild horse populations on Nellis have been grossly insufficient. With a budget which allows for only 1 person to monitor a million plus acres, Nevada's BLM can not uphold what was mandated by Congress - protection of wild horses. Very few government officials, especially those from Washington, have come to see for themselves what is happening on Nellis. Far too many bureaucrats have relied on papered facts and figures and are not getting a clear picture of what's happening on the range. As mentioned previously, Nevada has 35,000+ wild horses, but little attention has been given to the fact that Nevada receives only 18% of the national wild horse budget. Several states, which receive a much higher percentage of the available funds, have less than 1,000 horses. At a recent budget hearing, one of these states actually named their horses. Nevada can scarcely count theirs.

Due to the unwavering insistence of Dawn Lappin, of W.H.O.A. and Cathy Barcomb, of Nevada's Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses and a handful of Nevada BLM employees, Nevada's BLM officials scrambled to find \$80,000 for the current round-up on Nellis. Washington's BLM recently released \$150,000 for the purchase of hay to feed already captured horses. None of it was appropriated specifically for Nellis.

Public support of this round-up is critical. Wild horse organizations in Nevada plead with Americans to write to their

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congressmen immediately asking them to apply pressure to the Washington, D.C. Bureau of Land Management for the appropriations of special funds to Nellis. (Anyone wanting to donate to the Nellis round-up are asked to state that in their correspondence and mail it to W.H.O.A. 15640 Sylvester Rd. Reno, Nevada 89511.)

On the home front, hundred of Nevadans have come forward to help the Foster Foal Program, which is a direct result of the hundreds of foals which have been orphaned or abandoned by their mothers, whose struggle to survive does not include young ones unable to keep up. Many have stayed up around the clock to bottle feed and medicate the babies. Others have dug into their own pockets to buy foal milk, while still others adopt or foster the young. Unfortunately, it isn't enough. If money runs out for this round-up the desert floor at Nellis will be thick with dead horses. Nevada needs more money to thin Nellis herds and move them through the Palomino Valley adoption facilities. We need it now.

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