

Groups rounding up aid for orphaned foals

By Michael Phillis
GAZETTE-JOURNAL

Abandoned by starving mares, rescued from hungry coyotes and shipped 500 miles to Reno, growing numbers of baby horses are looking for local foster homes.

"We're not looking for people to adopt these foals permanently, just for people willing to take care of them and bottle-feed them until they can be turned over to the BLM," said Cathy Barcomb, executive director for the Nevada Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses.

"If you don't have a place where you could keep a foal, we also need volunteers to bottle-feed them," Barcomb said.

The younger foals — some are just days old — need to be bottle-fed every two hours, she said.

With up to 300 expected to arrive by the end of June, Barcomb said it will be impossible for her

and Dawn Lappin, director of the Wild Horse Organized Assistance, to feed them all.

The foals are from the Nellis Range in southern Nevada, where drought has magnified the growing problem of overpopulation. The BLM says there is enough water to support 1,024 horses, but there are an estimated 4,300 horses on the range.

To supplement the water, U.S. Air Force personnel at Nellis Air Base are hauling 14,000 to 17,000 gallons a day to the horses.

Barcomb said the horses have eaten so much of the forage that they have to travel up to 15 miles from watering holes to ranges where they feed. She said the lack of water and feed is causing mares to dry up their milk. Many get disoriented and leave the foals.

When the mares try to make it from water to feed, the foals sometimes can't keep up and get left behind. She said coyotes prowl the



David Parker/Gazette-Journal
HELPING: Cathy Barcomb, left, and Karen Shields, both of Washoe Valley.

route looking for stranded foals.

The BLM is now conducting a roundup of 2,000 of the Nellis horses to thin the herd.

Anyone wishing to make a tem-

porary home for the foals, volunteer to work feeding shifts or to donate money may call Lappin at 851-4817 or Barcomb at her office at 687-5589, or home at 849-1357.

NELLIS

Marines bring orphaned foals to Reno stable

By Michael Phillips
GAZETTE-JOURNAL

Organizers of an effort to save orphaned foals from death in the southern Nevada desert got help from a few good men Tuesday.

The U.S. Marines Mounted Color Guard, based in Barstow, Calif., delivered 14 of the baby horses to a stable in Reno that has been donated to temporarily house them. The horses are from 1 to 8 weeks old.

"These will make the best horses you can get anywhere when they get older," Staff Sgt. S.K. Moertl said.

Moertl should know. The 15-member Marine color guard rides all palomino horses taken from wild horse herds in Nevada. In 1989, they won the national championship in competition for mounted color guards.

The young colts and fillies are being abandoned by their mares on the Nellis test and bombing range southeast of Tonopah because of a lack of water and food to support the 4,000 horses there.

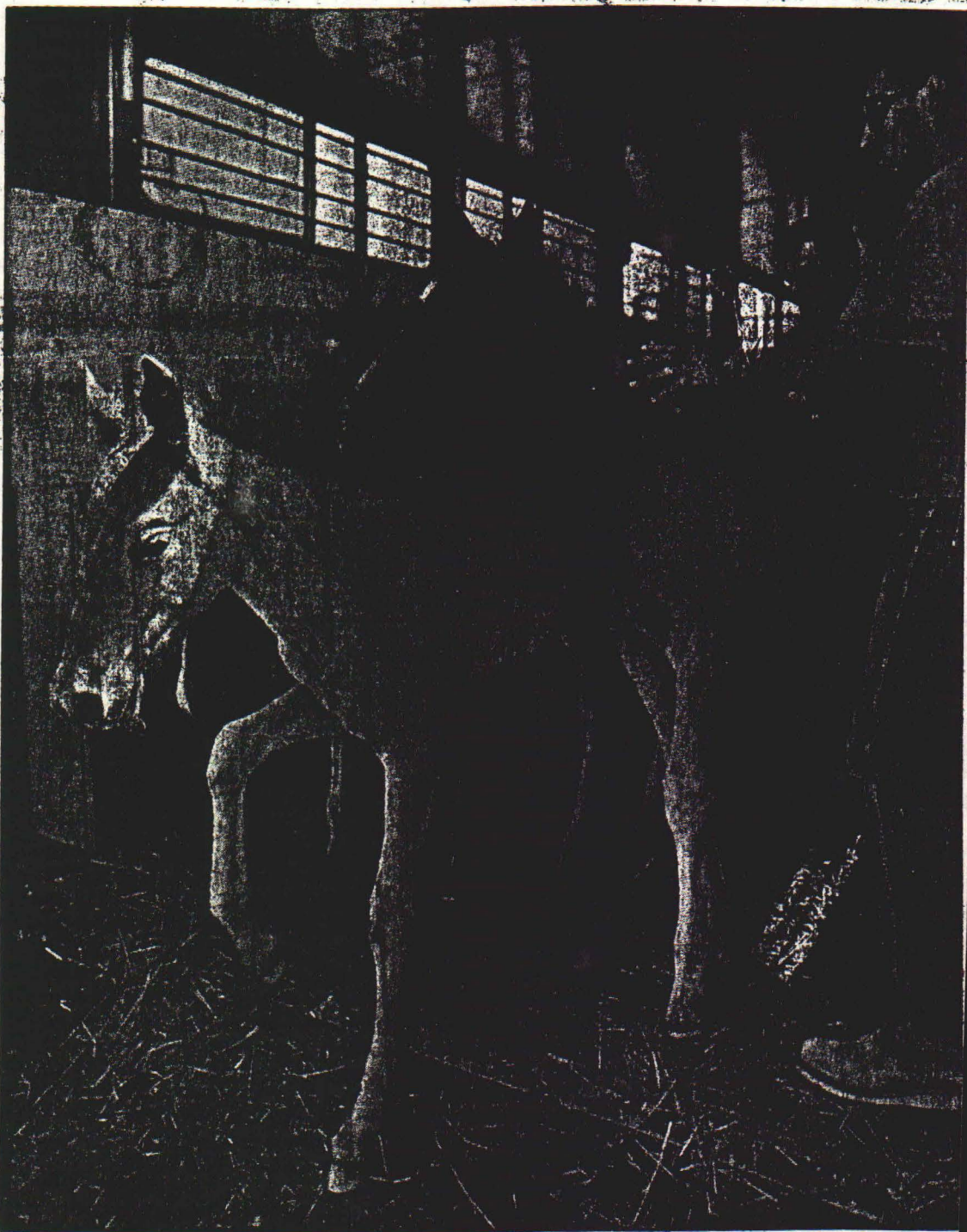
The Bureau of Land Management is thinning the herd by capturing 2,000 and bringing them to Palomino Valley north of Reno, but does not have the facilities to care for the foals.

Moertl said the color guard performed in a parade in Silver City, Nev., and learned of the need.

Moertl and two other marine volunteers drove seven hours Monday to Tonopah to pick up 18 foals, then another five hours to Palomino Valley, where the BLM processed them. Four of the colts were old enough to stay with the adults and the other 14 were delivered to the stable Tuesday.

In the afternoon, the Marines were off to Tonopah to pick up another load.

Marines help a few good foals



RESCUE MISSION: U.S. Marine Mounted Color Guard members Rafael Delgado, front, and S.K. Moertl deliver 14 orphans to a Reno stable,

Tuesday. The California-based Marines volunteered to drive the wild foals abandoned by their mares from Tonopah to Reno. **Story, 3B**

Tim Dunn/Gazette-Journal



SANDIA CORPORATION

Battle-scarred hides: An emaciated herd fights for scarce resources at Nellis Air Force Range in southern Nevada

Death on the Range

Too many wild horses, too little food or water

Two vultures circle low over the parched range. Below them, just yards from a dried-up watering hole, is the rotting carcass of a wild horse. The mare had kicked her newborn foal away. Then, as her stallion stood guard, the weakened horse lay down to die, the latest victim of a punishing drought—and of the arcane politics of land management in the West.

The Nellis Air Force Range in southern Nevada is home to the country's largest herd of wild horses. Soon it could become their graveyard. These days the depleted range 175 miles northwest of Las Vegas is dotted with emaciated mustangs. Their ribs are barely concealed by hides that are scarred from battles fought over the dwindling supply of food and water. Mares, no longer able to produce milk, have abandoned their young. And stallions have worn down their front hooves digging for water in dried-up mudholes. Just to keep the animals alive, the Air Force has been trucking 18,000 gallons of water a day onto the range since April 1. "We've got one helluva mess out here," says Harley Dickensheets, chief of facilities on the Air Force range. "We've got too many horses [and] not enough water. This range is beat. It couldn't sustain a herd of jack rabbits. A lot of these horses are walking dead."

The drought has caused the immediate crisis at Nellis, but managing America's wild horses has been a problem ever since

the West was won. In 1971, under pressure from animal-rights groups, Congress enacted special legislation to protect wild free-roaming horses, declaring them "living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West." The law worked all too well; no longer subject to capture, sale or slaughter, the horses thrived. In the past two decades, the number of wild horses in the United States has grown from an estimated 85,000 to between 50,000 and 75,000.

The job of protecting the horses—while maintaining an ecological equilibrium on the ranges where they roam—belongs to the federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Balancing the demands of wildlife activists, cattle ranchers, wild-horse advocates and an impassioned public has not been easy for the cash-strapped bureau. Popular sentiment makes it impossible to sell or destroy the animals, so the BLM has tried to control the population's growth by rounding up horses and putting them up for "adoption." But there are more horses than the adoption system can absorb. And animal-rights groups have sometimes disrupted the program by convincing judges that the BLM failed to provide sufficient evidence that the range was overburdened. At Nellis, a two-year interdiction against roundups in the late '80s may have added 2,000 horses to the range.

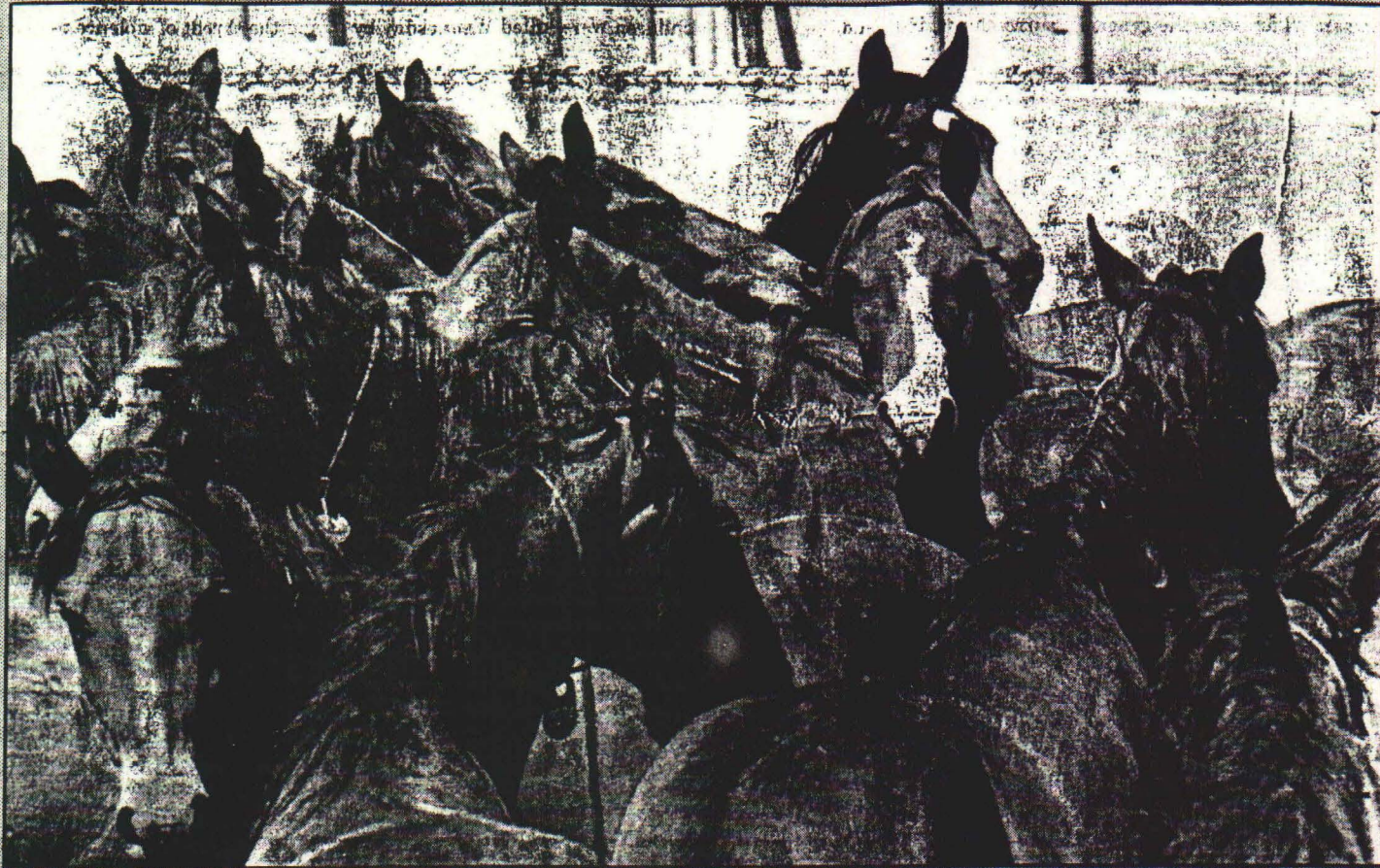
During the recent sustained drought, as many as 6,000 horses have been searching

the Nellis range for food and water. That has upset the delicate balance between flora and fauna, turning a once thriving ecosystem into an environmental nightmare. The horses' overgrazing has forced deer and antelope off their habitat at Nellis in search of better forage. Their natural predators, mountain lions, have come down from the hills in search of other prey: orphan foals and mares too weak to trek long distances in search of vegetation. "The wildlife is just about gone," says Curtis Tucker, BLM area manager in charge of Nellis. "Now what's left are predators and carrion eaters. I've just seen one of the fattest, surliest coyotes of my life out there. He acted like he owned the range."

No money: In Senate hearings last month, Nevada Sen. Harry Reid called the government's management of wild horses "an outright failure and total disaster" but refused to blame the crisis on the land-management agency. "We've asked BLM to perform miracles without any money," he said. Reid proposed a series of measures to ease the crisis, including appropriation of \$1.4 million in emergency funding. In the meantime, the BLM has earmarked \$230,000 to restart a roundup of adoptable horses that foundered last month for lack of funds. Since May wranglers have shipped 1,182 horses off the range for adoption, including 225 orphan foals. With the BLM's cash injection, up to 800 more horses could be saved by August. But that won't answer the long-term question of how to handle America's wild horses—a debate that must be resolved before the mustang, once a living symbol of the Western range, becomes one of its casualties.

DONNA FOOTE on the Nellis Air Force Range

Wild horse woes



Appeal photo by Jennifer Whitehair

Wild horses huddle together in corrals at the Bureau of Land Management's horse facility in Palomino Valley this week. BLM officials and area horse lovers are working to help save

the drought-stricken animals which are dying on the Nevada range from starvation and dehydration. Baby foals, abandoned by their starving mothers, are available for adoption

Horse lovers and officials try to save wild foals

By JENNIFER WHITEHAIR
Appeal Staff Writer

The walk is dry and dusty. The scarce desert grasses are nearly gone.

It is a 15-20 mile walk between patches of forage and the little bit of water in the mud around almost-dry springs.

The animals walk relentlessly between the mudholes and the feed until exhaustion forces them to drop and predators overtake them.

It is a walk that is killing Nevada's wild horses.

But in a statewide effort to stymie the cycle of death, area horse lovers and federal officials with the Bureau of Land management are taking steps to save

the animals that have become a strong symbol of the West.

The Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses has taken over care of wild foals that have been abandoned by their drought-stricken mothers, while the BLM continues to take adult horses from the range and place the animals into adoption centers in Northern Nevada.

"Each week, it seems like the ones coming off (the range) are getting worse and worse," says Cathy Barcomb, director of the Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses.

Streams and pools normally full on the 300,000-acre wild horse range at Nellis Air Force range near Las Vegas have been dried up by the drought.

Air Force officials are hauling 17,000 gallons of water a day just to keep the deteriorated wild horses alive.

But hauling water does not solve all of the horses' problems.

The horses are still forced to walk more than 16 miles between water and suitable forage.

It has become survival of the fittest in the harsh desert conditions.

The strongest male horses keep the weaker males and females away from the muddy bogs where the animals drink out of the indentations in the mud left by their hooves.

Slowly, the weak animals die of starvation and dehydration.

In this survival walk, many young foals are unable to keep

up the pace and are abandoned by their mothers.

The BLM collects the foals and brings them to the Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses for care.

Danny, a young foal who was brought in three weeks ago, nearly died on the trip up Reno.

Barcomb said the group was forced to stop in Tonopah and rush Danny to the local hospital because his condition was extreme.

At the hospital, nurses rushed to save Danny from death. The baby horse was suffering from severe dehydration and starvation.

(See HORSES, Page A-8)

Horses

(Continued from Page One)

"They had to tie his leg off, get a vein pumped up and put in an intravenous," Barcomb said.

Danny's fight for survival was only beginning.

Intravenous solution kept Danny alive for the trip, but shortly after arriving at the commission's facilities in Washoe Valley, Danny was stricken with pneumonia.

But three weeks later, little Danny is on the road back to health, but more foals continue to arrive each day needing medical care.

Two foals at the facility can barely walk. They have literally worn their hooves off during their painful 15-mile treks from water to food on the Nellis range.

Other horses are mauled by coyotes when they became too weak to stand.

"They must have been down, and they were chewed alive," Barcomb said.

Despite the destruction that has ravaged these foals, only four out the 194 transported here have died.

Barcomb said the numbers would have been far more tragic if her group, along with federal officials, had not taken action.

"All the babies would have been dead if we had not done a gather," Barcomb said.

Foals are not the only victims of the drought.

According to Fred Wyatt, the assistant district manager of the BLM's Palomino Valley Wild

Horse and Burro Placement Center, mares are also being ravaged by the drought.

"The mares will stay with the colts until they don't make it," Wyatt said.

Wyatt predicts that a total of approximately 2,000 horses will be shipped off of the Nellis range into holding corrals and adoption centers.

Some 1,408 have already been shipped.

After the first 2,000 are transported off the range, BLM officials will conduct an evaluation to determine how many wild horses the drought-ravaged range can continue to support.

Nevada has more than 80 percent of the nation's 50,000 estimated wild horses, but federal officials have been unable to control the 20 percent annual growth in their population.

"Now, there are more horses on the range than it can support," Wyatt said.

"There's not enough forage and natural water to accommodate them."

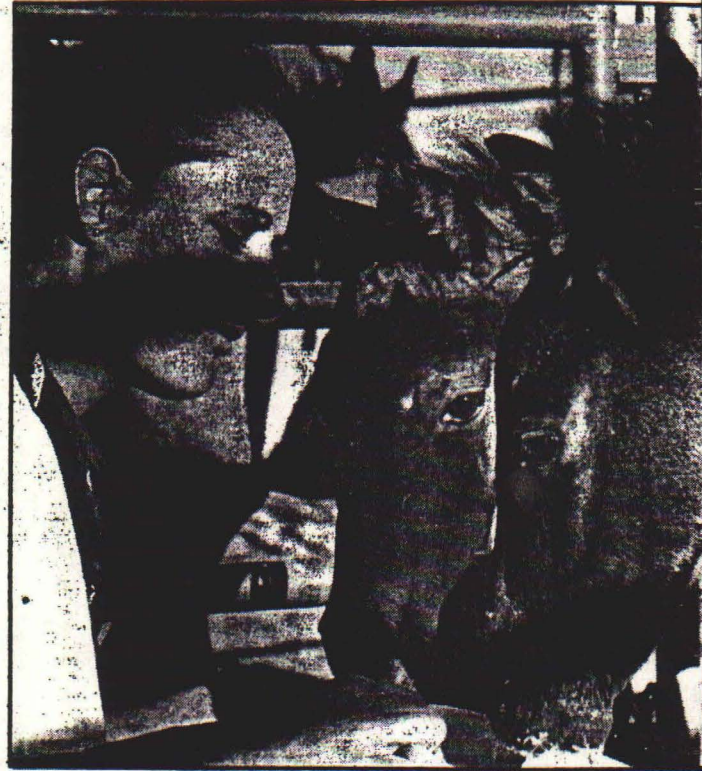
Wyatt said the assistance of the wild horse commission with the foals has allowed the Palomino Valley facility the time to medicate the older horses.

"They saved our bacon helping out," Wyatt said of the commission's efforts.

Saving the foals requires hours of work.

Barcomb and other volunteers spend hours feeding and treating the foals.

Some are so young, they must be bottle-fed and all need a spe-



Appeal photo by Jennifer Whiteha

VOLUNTEER GINNY ORCUTT feeds a baby foal at a facility in Washoe Valley operated by the Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses. The foals have been abandoned by their wild mothers due to harsh drought conditions on the range.

cial baby formula.

Barcomb estimates that thousands of dollars have already been spent on mare's milk to this date.

For Barcomb, all the time and effort is worth it.

Volunteers at the commission's facility feel the same way.

"If I could take them all home

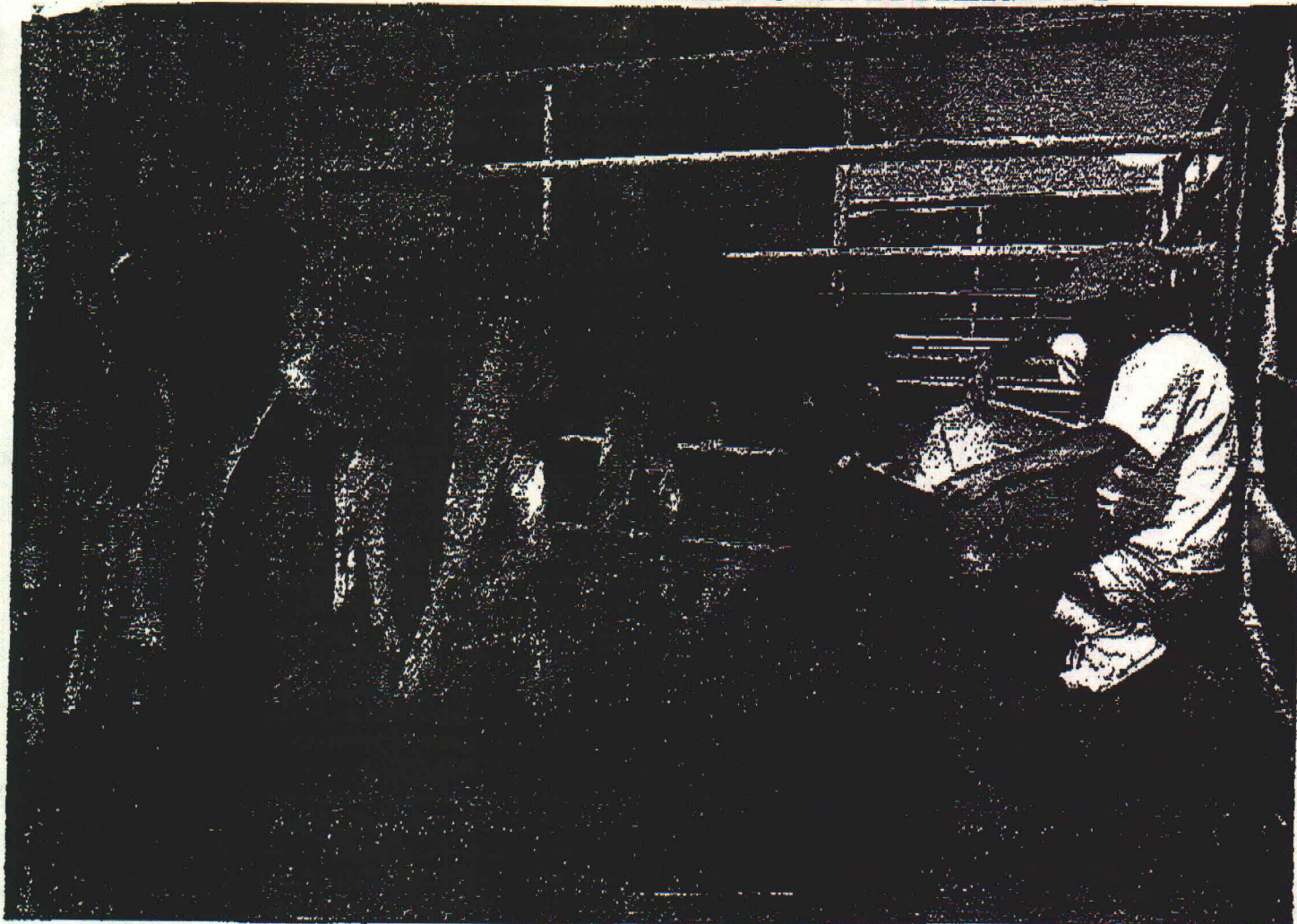
I would," Ginny Orcutt, a volunteer, said.

When the horses have returned to health, they are put up for adoption.

Each Sunday, the commission sponsors adoptions for the foals.

Adoptions for adult horses are conducted through the Palomino Valley facility.

WEST'S WILD HORSES WITHERING



The Denver Post / Karl Gehring

STARVING FOALS: Catherine Barcomb, above, feeds a high-protein formula to a foal after roundup at Nel-

lis 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 7/21/91

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 (WFOA). "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.

Please see HORSES on 14A

BLM program culprit in wild horse die-off?

HORSES from Page 1A

"I think it's been more or less a failure," conceded Cy Jamison, director of the Bureau of Land Management, which has run the program since it was established in 1971. "We've put Band-Aids on problems hoping they'd go away, and they've only gotten worse."

In 10 western states, the BLM has spent \$177 million to manage 30,000 to 50,000 horses sanctified by Congress as "living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West."

The problem is that these symbols keep producing 9,000 babies a year. The Nellis herd of 6,000 produced about 1,200 foals last year. None survived. The BLM estimates that the beat-out range could support only 1,500 horses.

Prevented by law from shooting the steeds, the BLM has rounded them up at the rate of 4,000 to 5,000 a year region-wide. In the late 1980s, it corralled up to 17,000 a year at a cost of \$1,500 per horse.

Since 1973, about 60,000 horses have been adopted by individuals, 60 percent of them east of the Mississippi. Some 15,000 to 20,000 were illegally slaughtered for meat, the program's biggest failure; 3,800 have been placed in old-age sanctuaries, and thousands more have been held in feedlots and pens.

But, says BLM horse chief John Boyles, "The population is still growing. The lesson of Nellis is, horses will absolutely destroy the habitat if left to their own devices, and Mother Nature will regulate on its own."

The BLM sits in a circle of critics that includes ranchers, wildlife agencies, horse advocacy groups, humane societies, tourism promoters — and last but not least, children who read about "wild and free" mustangs in "My Weekly Reader."

The Nevada case has involved nearly all these groups. Frustrated, each now advocates birth control for the horses. Tests show it could cut costs by half and birth

rates by 75 percent. But methods still are being tested and debated, and implementation could be five years and 45,000 horses away.

"Until we can get to that point, I'm discouraged," said Jamison.

Horses once were native to North America but disappeared 9,000 years ago, only to reappear in 1493 on Columbus's second trip.

Along with cattle, Spanish horses ate and bred their way into the heart of America, reaching perhaps 2 million at the beginning of the 20th century. They were

shot in large numbers, culled for ranch work and slaughtered for dog food.

By 1950, when WEOA founder Velma "Wild Horse Annie" Johnston of Reno saw blood dripping from a horse trailer and followed it to a rendering plant, the number had dropped to about 10,000.

Johnston's campaign climaxed in the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act, requiring preservation and control to "restore a thriving natural ecological balance to the range and protect the range from the deterioration associated with overpopulation."

The 270 herds in 10 western states gradually increased under federal protection. The 1989 BLM census counted 41,774 horses, with nearly 75 percent in Nevada and 10 percent in Wyoming. One percent — or 500 horses — are in four herds in north-west Colorado.

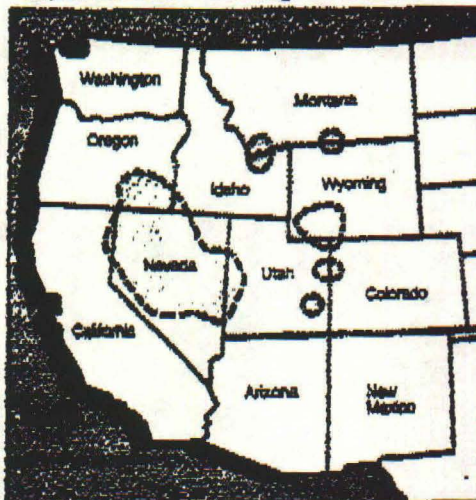
The BLM says the ideal herd is 30,000 to 33,000, but horse groups say the BLM is bowing to cattle and sheep ranchers.

"For years we have questioned the need for large removals," said Robin Lohmes, executive director of the American Horse Protection Association. "We are not convinced that damage comes solely from wild horses."

While Congress lauded the horse's heritage, and contemporary accounts still speak of Spanish blood pounding in their veins, recent genetic studies show that the Arabian and Barb bloodlines have disap-

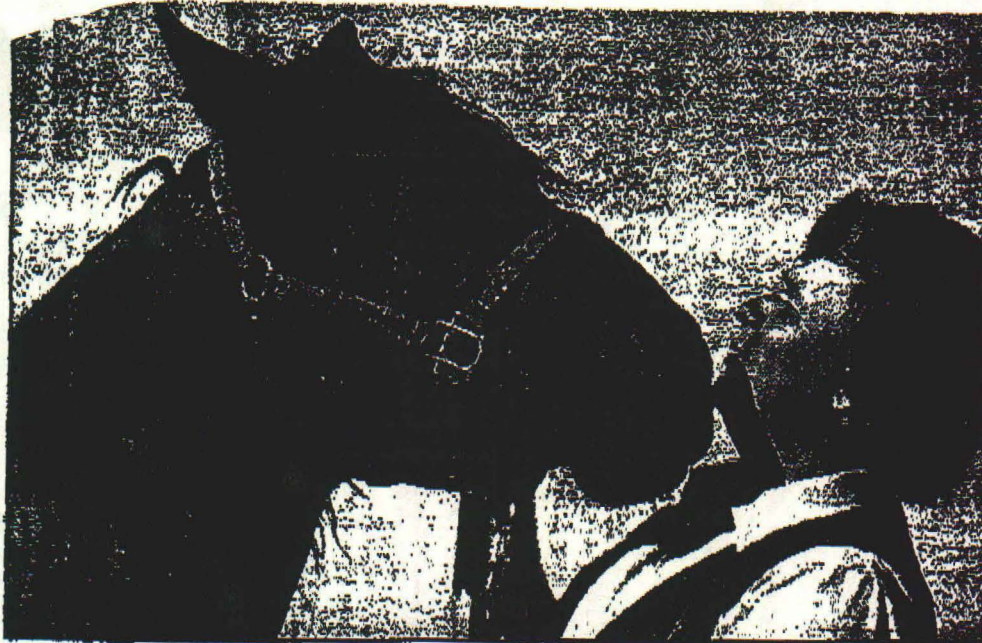
WILD HORSE HERDS IN THE WEST

Thousands of wild horses are rounded up by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management from these states each year, from an estimated 30,000 to 50,000 wild horses remaining in the West.



WILD HORSE AREAS

Source: U.S. Bureau of Land Management



The Denver Post / Karl Gahfog

FRIENDS: Alan Kania of Parker soothes 'Schwartzleder,' a sleek 7-year-old he adopted when it was 1½. At right, two tough mustangs show the effects of living in Wyoming's wild near Rock Springs. They're both up for adoption.

peared. Only a few true mustangs — with one fewer vertebrae — still roam the United States.

Most herds are a "duke's mixture of typical domestic breeds," including quarter horses and draft horses, said Frederick Wagner, director of the ecology center at Utah State University.

Horses mixed, smaller

The horses tend to be small — 14 hands — lean and durable. Their colors range the spectrum of horsehide, but many consider the typical wild horse a light brown with black mane. They can be broken to ride while young and have even been trained for show.

"My horse has gentled down to the disposition of a golden retriever," said Alan Kania of Parker, a carriage driver on Denver's 16th Street Mall. "Four years ago, he pulled my wedding carriage. He's used for riding lessons for kids."

The joy of owning a wild horse is reflected in the photographs and Christmas cards that Paula Carr receives from some of the 25,000 adopters she has processed over the past 12 years in Tennessee and Ohio. "My office walls are full of success stories," said the BLM contractor. "At Christmas, I get 50 to 60 cards of their horse dressed up like Santa Claus."

The BLM's Adopt-a-Horse program charges \$125 for a horse that costs more than \$500 to process. While successful from an individual standpoint, it has been unable to keep up with horse population increases. Director Jamison promises stepped-up adoptions, but he has put little new money into promoting the program or solving the horse problem.

The real argument is over the balance between horses, wildlife and livestock, and the quality of rangeland to feed them. And

Nevada is the cauldron for the debate.

The first federal wild horse range was created in 1961 within Nellis, the Stealth bomber hideaway that sprawls from Las Vegas northwest to Tonopah. At the time, the horses shared ground with cattle and took a back seat to their needs.

A General Accounting Office report to Congress last year supported the contention by horse advocates that rancher demands drove BLM horse removals, and that those decisions were not based on honest biologic range data.

A team from the National Academy of Sciences asked BLM range managers to cite examples of horse-abused land. None was found. The GAO also reported that when horses were removed, ranges did not improve. Often, cattle were increased instead.

The Nellis range was badly abused by 1979, when cattle were removed. The horse population then was estimated at 4,000.

Several small roundups were made on Nellis, but an attempt to gather 7,000 horses on Nellis and 17 other areas in 1988 was stopped by an appeal from the Animal Protection Institute of California, which has won 28 of 30 appeals since 1988. The Interior Board of Land Appeals ruled that BLM had not provided the proper range data to justify removal.

But on Nellis, the biological time bomb was ticking. Last year, the fourth year of drought, Air Force security guards found the bodies of several dozen horses at a dried spring.

As it turned out, hundreds were dying, trying to travel 15 miles between water and grass. Mares abandoned foals to save themselves. An entire generation of foals was wiped out; no yearlings are seen in the

herd. Fewer than one-third of the mares are seen with foals this year.

BLM admits miscalculations

BLM officials and Air Force ecology consultant Michael Pontrelli made regular visits to the range over the past 10 years but said they were fooled by occasional rain.

Pontrelli blames the catastrophe on "benign neglect." But when the BLM's census showed 2,000 horses missing last year, Pontrelli, a scientist, concluded that the horses had moved onto a secret part of the base. WHOA's Lappin says horses wouldn't go there because there was no water.

This summer, with the drought continuing, Air Force trucks have carried water to the horses.

Still, horses have dropped dead in front of roundup cowboys. Some 1,400 adoptable adult horses have been trapped, along with 300 weak foals. Another 600 horses will be trapped before money runs out.

BLM officials blame drought and the horse groups for delaying the gathering for 18 months.

"The mystique of the horse has done detriment to that herd," said Jamison. "Emotion got in the way of facts."

BLM's new Nevada director, Billy Templeton, admits that the agency didn't adequately monitor the range and still doesn't know how many horses Nellis can support. He agreed that the die-off showed the BLM's failure to manage the horses.

"We are going to have a positive program on horses in this state now."

"We don't want to see wall-to-wall horses," said Lappin. "We want equity."

Meantime, federally protected horses keep dying. Says Lappin: "No animal should have to suffer from our messing around."