

## CALICO REPORT: THE LOOK IN THEIR EYES



January 10, 2010 (modified Jan 11, 2009)

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Wild for Life Foundation (WFLF) is working hard behind the scenes and on the front lines for the protection of all equines from slaughter. We just returned from the Calico range where through our film and media programs we've documented the BLM round up and removal of wild horses from their rightful homes on the Calico range. We witnessed the separation of young foals from their mothers and documented the many wild horses now in holding at the new BLM facility in Fallon, NV.



The new Indian Lakes facility is barren at best. It is still under construction with welders and workers on site. What struck me the most was its remote location. Far off the beaten path, this new BLM short term holding facility sits on a 160 acre private flag lot property. We were told by the BLM that it will not be open to the public once they complete the current round up. The BLM states that all wild horses currently being rounded up from the Calico Complex will be transported to this facility. When asked how

long the horses would be held there, we were told that after a few months some maybe placed up for adoption and some would go to the Mustang Make Over program which they are apparently expanding. When asked what would happen to the rest of them, it was uncertain. The BLM representative on site that day was Lili Thomas and she said that the remaining horses would most likely be transported from there after a couple years. It was unclear as to where they would wind up after that.



We drove across hundreds of miles of unpaved back mountain roads in the general HMA areas of the Calico Range and despite the BLM claims that wild horses in the region are “over populating and excessive”, we only sited nine horses.

When inquiring about the purpose of the round up the BLM cites a variety of justifications. BLM Winnemucca District Manager Gene Seidlitz said “the Calico

Complex consists of five HMA's with a total of 550,000 acres, and that is not enough range area for 3,040 wild horses to thrive". Based on the same, Mr. Seidlitz explained that the BLM must therefore remove the so called "excess" horses for their own protection... *BLM*, says that placing these wild horses in pens of approximately 700 square feet per horse is supposed to be the best thing for them. These arguments do NOT make sense when you do the math; each wild horse living on the Calico Range prior to this round up had approximately 180 acres to roam freely (again, that's 180 acres per horse).

The BLM website states that these wild horses are starving, thin and under nourished, yet every wild horse that we observed roaming free, at the trap site and at the new holding facility was visibly well proportioned with no signs of malnourishment. When documenting the newly arrived Calico horses at the Indian Lakes holding facility, Lili Thomas said "the environment would show signs of destruction caused by these horses long before it would be apparent that the horses were starving". She further explained this concept by using the analogy that "people would still look the same for a while after their home refrigerator had been emptied". In a responsible management system it makes sense to relocate animals before evidence of poor body condition or plant- induced toxicoses. In my opinion, considering the natural migratory grazing patterns of equines, it makes more sense to allow the horses to migrate across the established HMA's on their own, and if the BLM has data showing that the equines are not migrating sufficiently; why hasn't the BLM provided that data to the public? Using AUM's (animal unit months) of forage from the BLM Grazing web page, in 1941, 22M AUM's were authorized to livestock. In 2008, 12.5M AUM's were authorized to livestock, but of that amount 8.6M AUM's were actually used. In 2008, only 397K AUM's were allocated to wild horses/burros, a mere 4.6% of the total forage used, concluding that cattle still far outnumber our wild herds.

What many researchers have found to be occurring is that the BLM removes the wild equines from the range lands rather than relocating them to HMA's where the BLM has zeroed them out. it seems to be a pattern that once the equines are gone, the BLM sells extended grazing permits to cattle ranchers for the same lands. Wildlife ecologist Craig Downer, states "the digestive system of this species compliments the environment and helps to replace the nutrients that are otherwise stripped by other grazing animals such as cattle and sheep". Based on the several



independent scientific studies that compare the grazing patterns of cattle to equines, it can be concluded that wild equines replenish the environment whereas cattle do the opposite. Based on these findings and other BLM activities, it's been concluded that the BLM is mismanaging the legally established wild horse and burro herd areas to the detriment of equines. Moreover, it seems that the BLM management practices are to the benefit of livestock owners rather than to the equines that have been given the rightful use of these lands by law.

The BLM reports that by the end of the day on January 8th, 2010 another 70 horses have been "gathered" from the Calico Complex. Though we are getting mixed reports from various BLM sources, in sum there now appears to be approximately 660 wild horses held at the new Fallon facility and another 105 wild horses held in pens on site where trapped. The wild horses once chased down by helicopters into the traps are maneuvered onto trailers and transported to sorting pens at the round up site. From there they are unloaded, marked by with paint on their back, by color to designate which HMA they came from and then they separated.

When asked specifically where these horses are coming from, we were told by the BLM that they are currently "gathering from two herd areas within the Calico Complex"... Black Rock Range East and Black Rock Range West. BLM representatives say that the horses cross back and forth between herd areas on their own so it's hard for them to know where the horses are actually coming from. The BLM also admits that they "push the wild horses across HMA borders" in order to meet their round up quotas. It seems that the reason for the paint markings placed on the wild horses which are supposed to define the true and correct HMA they came from are probably meeting some unknown BLM agenda. BLM authorities were not willing to say just how far these horses were run before lead into the onsite traps by their "Judas" horse.



During the briefing on site, we were told that they were being rounded up from the mountain tops where they cross back and forth between the HMA's. BLM staff also said they would be taking horses from the Paiute Summit Lakes reservation. Concerns were raised by horse advocates about the removal of wild horses from *the non* public lands of the Summit Lake Paiutes. In defense of their removal of 250 wild horses from the Summit Lake area, BLM representatives stated that "the Summit Lake Paiutes requested the BLM to remove the horses because they were

destroying their resources". It's important to note that the Summit Lake reservation is adjacent to the Black Rock Range West. During a recent interview WFLF conducted with a Paiute elder from another tribe; we were told that the Summit Lake reservation is completely uninhabited. It's significant to also note that when looking at the regional map of the HMA's, that the horses rounded up from these areas would have been forced to transverse miles and miles of various terrain, including vast plains of lava beds, and elevations of over 2,000 feet higher than the trap site.

Neither media nor the public were given access to observe the entire round up areas while we were there. The limited viewing area where we were told to remain made it impossible to observe the horses as they were driven by helicopter down from the range and across the terrain to the trap site. We were not allowed to get close enough to the trap site to observe the condition of the horses upon their arrival without binoculars or a special telephoto lens. By 2pm, the Lisa Ross of the BLM told us the round up was over and that we had to leave the area, but before we



left, we noticed that another group of wild horses had been driven into the trap site by helicopter. We have since learned that the helicopters will continue to roundup the horses and bring them in as long as they can see, which on this particular day, under fair weather conditions, there would have been enough time that we could have observed the round up for another three hours of day light.



With further regard to the separation process at the roundup site, shortly after being driven into the traps, the mares are placed into one pen, the foals in another pen and the stallions into another. The BLM states that foals age 6 months and up are ready to wean and it's easier for them to deal with that way. These foals are being weaned under extremely stressful circumstances; a winter roundup by helicopter and long distance travel, etc. It was obvious to all *non* BLM observers in

attendance that both the mares and the foals were experiencing extreme anxiety.

Knowing that these are sentient beings, I couldn't help but notice the look in their eyes as we left the last group of mares and foals who had just been trapped. Their eyes said it all... *"Why are we here? What just happened to us?..."* They had no idea that they had just spent the last free roaming moments of their lives and that they were about to forever lose their family bonds.

As a side note, when asked about burros living in the area, Winnemucca District Manager Gene Seidlitz said that there was "a viable herd living just north of Winnemucca", but he was unable to tell us any more than that.

As a result of documenting and observing these conditions we at WFLF believe that the roundup activities that took place during the set observation were most likely staged by the BLM in order to portray conditions that they would like the public to believe exist on any given day. We find it curious as to why the roundup is being conducted on private land where additional BLM staff and armed marshals are employed as escorts to and from the roundup, especially when there are hundreds of miles of public land available adjacent to the area and which could have easily provided a working trap site for the so called "excess" wild horses. Placing the trap site on public land would have likely enabled observers to fully view the roundup without obstruction.

WFLF fully supports the calling of a [Moratorium](#) on all BLM roundups and further encourages a full judicial/ congressional investigation into the BLM management practices as related to wild horses and burros. We further believe that an independent entity be assigned to document and record each and every equine that is rounded up by the BLM and or is currently under their jurisdiction through holding, in transport or otherwise.