

In Truth of Wild Horses on Native Land and Tongue

First in a series of insights based on excerpts from the documentary film

SAVING AMERICA'S HORSES: A NATION BETRAYED

By Katia Louise, of Sioux descent

Presented by the Wild for Life Foundation

What's all this about wild horses destroying America's rangelands? Why are there some Native Americans, but by far not all, lobbying for horse slaughter?



The American public would be surprised, if not outraged to learn that government agencies, including the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forestry and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) have in fact been encouraging the eradication of America's wild horses from public lands. Within days of the preliminary injunction that stopped a New Mexico slaughter house from killing horses on U.S. soil for the first time in 7 years, surges of tribal forces have begun to shun their own four legged brothers and sisters, known as the horse – while parroting pro-slaughter lines.

The Desert Independent¹, Aug 12, 2013, reported the Ft. McDermitt Paiute Shoshone Tribe in Nevada intends to push wild horses from public lands onto reservation lands for the purpose of capture and sale to a slaughter. Aug 19, 2013, AP/Daily Journal² reported Navajo Rangers rounded up over 250 horses from their rangelands citing them as “feral” or otherwise in violation of grazing rights. The seized and unclaimed Navajo horses are reported to be sold, many for transport to slaughter. As reported in the Navajo Times³, “While Navajo President Ben Shelly has publicly supported the idea of a horse slaughtering operation in Roswell, N.M...” It is obvious that his view point is not shared by other tribal people like Diné Leland Grass⁴, or other tribal leaders and spiritual leaders like Chief Arvol Looking Horse [who] publicly oppose the slaughter of equines.



“When I heard about the slaughter of America's horses it reminded me of the genocide on Indian tribes,” says Paul Rainbird, Former Lt Governor San Idelfonso Pueblo New Mexico. “For us to turn around and slaughter horses is like cutting out our own heart.” Chief Arvol Looking Horse, Lakota Nation, S Dakota

¹ <http://www.thedesertinde.com/Articles-2013/Obama-Administration-Forest-Service-Permits-Federally-Protected-Wild-Horses-to-be-sent-to-Slaughter--0812.html>

² http://www.dailyjournal.net/view/story/edafa3b3a20b4b4ea9e272ff95077738/NM--Navajos-Horse-Roundup/#.UhdW1H_he7L

³ <http://navajotimes.com/news/2013/0813/080813hor.php#sthash.LaWfRf1M.dpuf>

⁴ <http://bsnorrell.blogspot.com/2013/08/dine-leland-grass-wild-horse-slaughter.html>

speaks out, “My great grandfather was Chief Big Foot. He was massacred at Wounded Knee, 1890. I speak out today because my heart is heavy and hurting; that we still have to face the ongoing genocide, that what we hold so deeply in our heart.”

As news spreads about what’s happening, people are asking why tribes would go against their indigenous cultural beliefs and values to label the horse, a species many tribes consider sacred and as family; to instead label them as “feral” and sell them for their meat. For one thing as revealed in the documentary film, “SAVING AMERICA’S HORSES: A NATION BETRAYED”, **Agriculture and Forestry have threatened tribes with a loss of livestock grazing permits if they fail to implement management policies.** In a statement made for the Confederated Umatilla Journal⁵, a newspaper of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation; Range, Agriculture and Forestry Program Manager Gordy Schumacher warns Tribes that grazing permits are at stake. “Without implementation of a management policy by the end of 2011, livestock grazing permits may have to be canceled,” says Schumacher.

Formidable power is held by those with grazing rights, and when you consider the political power and influence of the western livestock industry it may come as no surprise to find government issued data revealing persuasive agency tactics, such as threats, or creative forms of bribery or misrepresentation. Tribes that are involved in livestock grazing stand much to lose if they don’t go along with the BLM rangeland policies.

A 1990 GAO study⁶ determined that the primary cause of degradation in range land areas is poorly managed domestic livestock grazing, which has gone on for well over four and a half centuries. Yet wild horses are blamed fervently by the ranchers/ BLM for the rangeland destruction. The BLM was created by Congress to bring in revenue and heal the degradation caused by livestock grazing, but ironically, it’s the livestock ranchers that govern the BLM and they continue to authorize livestock grazing on the vast majority of the BLM's 177 million acres in the lower forty-eight states.

The distribution of misinformation provided to tribes by USDA APHIS began several years ago and has made an indelible mark on some tribal leaders’ viewpoints. As noted by documents⁷ from the United States Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA APHIS), its grass



roots meetings are held in part for the purpose of getting tribes to distribute information about horse slaughter in the U.S. to their congressional delegations. But the information about horse slaughter provided by USDA APHIS has been grossly misrepresented to American tribes and the falsifications are stacked one on top of the other. For example USDA APHIS denies wild horses of their indigenous roots to North America and says that they are purportedly “feral”; and, that the so called “feral” horse population has supposedly escalated out of control; and the alleged overpopulation is due to U.S. horse slaughter plants shutting down in 2007, therefore purportedly causing the slaughter of America’s horses to end. And, that if someone wanted to sell their horse for slaughter they would

⁵ <http://www.umatilla.nsn.us/CUJ2011February.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.gao.gov/assets/150/149472.pdf>

⁷ http://www.aphis.usda.gov/about_aphis/programs_offices/anawg/downloads/ANAWG_newsletter_March_2010.pdf

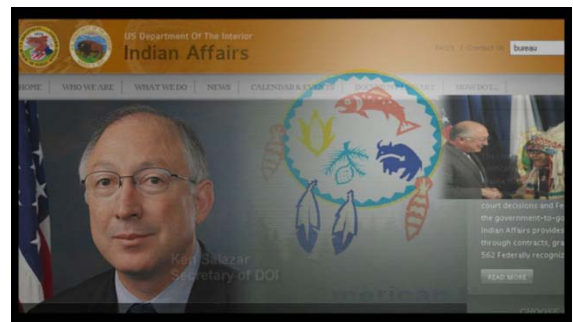
supposedly have to ship their own horse all the way to Canada or Mexico, and foot the bill for transport themselves.

As indicated per USDA APHIS, at least 50 tribal and tribal-organization representatives have been targeted through the help of USDA’s Senior Advisor to the Secretary for Tribal Relations, Janie Hipp. And, to insure that invited tribal leaders can attend the USDA APHIS meetings, APHIS’ Veterinary Services (VS) provides the funding for them to take part.

USDA APHIS has also been encouraging tribal leaders to support appropriations for horse meat inspections. “The key to profitability is a change in Federal law to once again, fund USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service inspection of horsemeat destined for human consumption” – The USDA APHIS.



Federal agencies like the USDA are said to be neutral on legislative initiatives and their employees are explicitly forbidden to lobby Congress, but in this case the USDA is using America’s tribal leaders to put pressure on Congress in their stead. In a USDA APHIS document dated April 2009, Beatrice Herbert from the USDA FSIS encouraged tribes to exercise their sovereignty and challenge federal laws that prevent federal agencies from inspecting horse meat that could be sold for human consumption. USDA’s Herbert actually suggests ways for Tribal operations to circumvent existing laws... Herbert says, “Tribal operations, especially if tribes could do their own certified inspections, may be a way around federal law.” The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), which has the overall Federal trust responsibility for managing reservation rangelands, had been working with one of the five Northwest Tribal Horse Coalition (NTHC) tribes to fund a feasibility study and business plan for a slaughterhouse in Oregon, but it reportedly did not pencil out.



In addition to benefits for grazing livestock, other government incentives offered to tribes include funding for the management of habitats. As illustrated by the USDA APHIS materials, tribes are told that wild horses can “be considered an invasive species”. Tribes can then declare that wild horses are destructive to their lands and simply repeat agency propaganda sent to them such as, “Feral horses are eating all the vegetation on rolling hillsides, depriving livestock of forage and endangering plants,” – USDA APHIS.

Statistics show that vast numbers of wild equines are disappearing from the American West. In the 19th century, more than 2 million wild horses roamed the West, but independent analysis of the Bureau of Land Management’s own data indicates there may now be less than 15,000 wild horses roaming freely on public lands.

When the Wild Free Roaming Horses and Burros Act⁸ was passed in 1971, it was passed unanimously by both houses of Congress, and Congress declared that wild free-roaming horses and burros are living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West; that they contribute to the diversity of life forms within the Nation and enrich the lives of the American people; and that these horses and burros are fast disappearing from the American scene. It is the policy of Congress that wild free-roaming horses and burros shall be protected from capture, branding, harassment, or death; and to accomplish this they are to be considered an integral part of the natural system of the public lands.

The 1971 act, in fact, directs the BLM to change their mindset from treating wild horses as feral and instead to protect them. The term “feral,” as used by the USDA, Forestry, the BLM and other proponents of slaughter, infers that horses and burros are not native to North America. As such, they are labeled and treated as destructive exotics, in denial of their great environmental contributions.



A congressionally mandated study by the National Academy of Sciences found that in one year, livestock consumed seventy percent of grazing resources on public lands, while wild horses and burros consumed less than five percent. “Livestock grazing has been the most widespread cause of ecological degradation of riparian/stream ecosystems,” states J. Boone Kauffman, Ph.D. Professor of Ecosystem Sciences in the Department of

Fisheries and Wildlife, Oregon State University, Corvallis.

In other parts of the world, such as the United Kingdom (U.K.), governments, scientists, environmental agencies and groups including the Wildwood Trust, are successfully rejuvenating rangelands through conservation grazing⁹ by restoring wild horse herds to the woodlands and pastures. “Wild horses and burros when allowed to roam as nature intended, act as gardeners to the rangelands,” states wildlife



ecologist and former BLM range specialist, Craig Downer. “Their droppings help to replenish the soils, their digestive system produces a perfect fertilizer and they pass along seeds that build up plant life. They compliment the rangelands and wildlife in many ways.”

Paleontological evidence shows that wild horses and burros are not “feral”, and that they evolved on the North American continent over 50,000,000 years ago. Their evolution in North America is documented by the American Museum of Natural History¹⁰. “This is their cradle, and they evolved into a virtual identical horse that was returned with the Spanish in the 1500s,” states Ginger Kathrens, Executive Director The Cloud

⁸ <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/16/1338>

⁹ <http://www.wildwoodtrust.org/files/conservation-grazing.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://www.amnh.org/explore/science-bulletins/bio/documentaries/the-last-wild-horse-the-return-of-takhi-to-mongolia/the-wild-horse-yesterday-and-today>

Foundation. “Nowhere else on the entire planet have we found fossil remains that tell the entire story of Equidi,” adds Neda DeMayo, President Return to Freedom, “...from the beginning all the way up to the Equus caballus; the current Genus Equis.

When the dots are connected – the horses, the ranchers, the BLM, the USDA, FWS, Forestry, the BIA and the tribes, it’s clear that the central force driving the round ups is the BLM, a government agency under the Department of Interior. And with a look into how the BLM was set up and how they are governed... the records reflect that the BLM’s administrators are primarily ranchers governing from separate offices in each state which enables



them to control the policies in which they are regulated. In his classic work LAND HELD HOSTAGE¹¹, Thomas L. Fleischner, Ph.D. chronicles the history of livestock and politics in America and notes problems with federal grazing policy. Ranchers among the first settlers were granted homesteads where tribes had been zeroed out by the U.S. government. As brought to light by Fleischner, the early federal homestead policies required ranchers to put large numbers of cattle on their lands... the more cattle they had; the more land they were given, and the more control, money and political power they were awarded.

The circle of life is eternal and in realizing how we came to be where we are, we must also look ahead at where we are going. Ranchers and farmers are at the heart of food production and we depend on them as much as we depend on agencies like the USDA for safe, abundant food, yet foreign market favors are said to be turning the tide. Independent farmers and ranchers are finding themselves beneath the shadows of giant seed companies, giant meatpackers and giant exporters. Clearly foreign interests are driving many markets, including the market for horse meat. And we can see that the USDA has moved into the business of delivering free trade deals – market favors, and fat farm bills in order to compete globally.

It’s a modern day “Trail of Tears” for America’s horses and burros which are being zeroed out from their native lands whether for the sale of their meat, or to make room for foreign lands sales and leasing or for livestock grazing. But we as native people honor this relative and the American public, without a doubt is adamantly opposed to slaughtering them. Horses are as much a part of the land as we are; their future is our future.

The governmental genocide that nearly wiped out America’s indigenous people now seems to have come full circle. The U.S. government is now wreaking havoc on one of man’s most treasured species, the horse, and victimizing Native Americans by attempting to coerce tribal people to do their dirty work and even take the fall.

Learn more: www.SavingAmericasHorses.org

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¹¹ http://www.publiclandsranching.org/htmlres/wr_history_politics.htm

Katia Louise is the founder and president of Wild for Life Foundation. Katia is an expert on issues involving wild and domestic equine welfare, preservation and horse slaughter. She is also a broadcast journalist and the international award winning filmmaker of SAVING AMERICA'S HORSES: A NATION BETRAYED. Ms. Louise, of Sioux descent began her research and investigation into the domestic and international slaughter of America's wild and domestic equines in early 2001. Her findings and presentations about the imminent and urgent health risks to humans, the unspeakable animal cruelties and the environmental impact caused by the capture, removal, transport and stockpiling of both wild and domestic horses to be slaughtered for their meat, have raised the bar for animal welfare in the U.S., elevated the sense of urgency for these issues, and have united equine advocates globally. Ms Louise's work is featured and referenced in international news publications, syndicated news and documented in the award winning film, SAVING AMERICA'S HORSES: A NATION BETRAYED, the transcripts of which have been invited to be part of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Research Library collection.

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