

## Cattoor Livestock and Wild Horse Gathers



Wranglers at a recent gather



Dave and Sue Cattoor

The Cattoor Livestock Co. has gathered about 150,000 wild horses, burros and even wild cattle since 1975. Dave and Sue Cattoor's company is one of two companies with BLM contracts to gather wild horses and burros. I recently spoke with Sue and their son Troy as they passed through Elko on their way home to Nephi, Utah after the Augusta Mountains gather.

It was fitting to meet them in Elko, since Dave has a long history here. He began catching wild horses at the age of 14. After the 1971 Wild Horse and Burro Act, Elko County ranchers hired Dave to pick up private stock running with bands of wild horses, which he did on horseback. In 1977, a rule change allowed aircraft so Dave rented a helicopter from Elko's El Aero and pioneered the techniques involved in gathering wild horses by helicopter.

Today's wild horse gather is a large undertaking. During last summer's Owyhee gather, they worked in this area for over 30 days. The company typically arrives with two pilots and helicopters, 8-10 wranglers, portable corrals and chutes, four stock trucks, four pickups with horse trailers, water trailer, loads of hay, and helicopter fuel. They bring along living quarters for at least an onsite security person, if not the entire crew.

The company is responsible for catching wild horses, sorting them and transporting them to holding pens. They water and feed the horses as USDA APHIS vets check the horses and remain on site 24 hours a day. Horses to be released are trucked back out near the trap site and horses to be removed are trucked to the nearest short term holding facility. They also truck horses between short term and long term holding facilities.

The Cattoors are proud of their work and especially the minimal horse deaths caused by the gather process. Since January 2010, they have gathered almost 10,000 horses for the BLM and lost far fewer than one percent of these horses due to the gather, (0.158%). Non-gather related deaths, usually due to pre-existing physical problems, starvation, or thirst have amounted to one-half of one percent of

gathered horses. Using two helicopters is not part of the BLM contract, but the Cattoors find the extra helicopter to be more efficient and humane.

After gathering wild horses for 35 years, conditions have recently worsened. It started with the September 2009 gather in Montana's Pryor Mountains and escalating during last year's Calico Mountains gather. Horse advocates have attacked the Cattoors in print, the Internet and in person, claiming the gathers have killed large numbers of horses by running them for miles, calling them helicopter stampedes. Anti-gather groups have accused the Cattoors of gathering horses when it is too hot, too cold and worst of all, cruelty toward the horses.

The Cattoors have received threatening telephone calls and e-mail messages. Their personal telephone numbers and addresses have been posted on Face Book. People have tampered with equipment, released horses from holding pens and tried to interfere with helicopters bringing in horses.

These attacks have not changed how the Cattoors do business but it has forced them to distance themselves from gather visitors. BLM personnel now keep visitors farther from the capture site and holding pens and away from contractor personnel. Sue says it is sad because they have always enjoyed visiting with people. She is not concerned with horse advocates visiting the gathers and knows most of them. She worries about other people influenced by blogs and Internet articles who have never been close to a wild horse or a gather.

The Cattoors fight these allegations through their web site, [wildhorseroundups.com](http://wildhorseroundups.com). Troy assured me the company will carry on despite these recent attacks.

It seems to be a case of blaming the messenger. People who disagree with BLM policy take it out on the more visible contractors who do their best to humanely conduct the BLM's wild horse gathers.

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