

Details on the Wild Horse Eco-Sanctuary



Logo for Madeline Pickens' non-profit group

Madeline Pickens is creating the Wild Horse Eco-Sanctuary through her non-profit group Saving America's Mustangs. She recently purchased a ranch southeast of Wells as the site for this sanctuary.

It is an idea that raises many questions concerning just how it would all work. I contacted Clay Nannini, a real estate broker in Nevada and Idaho who helped the group with the land purchase. He believes in Madeline Pickens' work and believes this horse sanctuary is good for America's wild horses and America's tax payers. He says the horses kept at the sanctuary will cost tax payers less money than those held at Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) short and long term holding facilities.

My main question for Clay concerns the ranch's public land grazing allotment. This allotment includes pieces of three wild horse Herd Management Areas (HMA), and roughly 1,000 wild horses. The sanctuary plan, which is just a plan at this point and is being worked through by both the non-profit group and the BLM, would capture all wild horses off the allotment. The mares and colts would be removed while the stallions would be gelded and returned to the allotment. These geldings would provide continuity through their knowledge of the land and water sources. Additional horses from BLM holding facilities would round out the group of sanctuary horses. If this plan does not work out, then Plan B would be to strategically divide up the allotment with fencing so wild horses remain separate from sanctuary horses.

The sanctuary wants to start out with close to 1,000 horses. The grazing allotment's permit was for 900 cattle and Clay feels the land could accommodate the same number of horses year around. Substantial range improvements and careful management would allow these horses to live on the allotment without the need for supplemental feed. The sanctuary would simply change the type of animals eating the available forage, not increase the density of grazers. But the number of horses allowed on the sanctuary will be set by the BLM and could be less than the hoped for 1,000.

Cattle were moved off the public land allotment last June and the land will be rested to ensure the best grazing conditions when the sanctuary opens. The grazing allotment will require about 50 miles of new fence, along with repairs to existing fence to completely enclose it and separate sanctuary horses from wild horses. Sanctuary horses will be marked to ensure that any escapees are easily identified and returned.

Another question regards public access to the allotment. The sanctuary will guide groups of visitors around the allotment with the goal of keeping this ecotourism as non-intrusive as possible. All money

generated by these tours will go back into the sanctuary. The sanctuary will not reduce public access and the land will remain open to public hunting.

The horse sanctuary plan will certainly change and evolve over time, but Clay provided answers to my questions for the time being.

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