

## Elko's Unwanted Horses

By Larry Hyslop



A neglected horse rescued in Pahrump

The national problem of unwanted horses is too often seen in Elko County. Connie Manley is the Elko County Animal Control Officer and gets called in when things get bad. She becomes heated talking about finding a horse off Bullion Road, in bad shape, shot and left. She gets weekly calls concerning horses in poor shape, occasionally mere skin and bones. Connie says it is usually not willful neglect but someone who cannot afford to buy, or even find, the necessary hay. Sometimes, a sick horse's owner cannot afford the veterinary bill or does not know how to care for the sick horse. "Some people have nowhere to go with a horse" she told me.

Her worst experience was finding a dead horse tied to a tree on public land, apparently abandoned to die. She feels the problem is worse now than in the past and sees the same problem with dogs.

Joanne Mothershead is the Administrator of the Animal Identification Program with the Nevada Department of Agriculture. In 2010, the BLM gathered estray horses from the Pilot Valley, which were then turned over to the Nevada Department of Agriculture. These horses were not wild but either strays, abandoned or even descendants of abandoned horses. They were offered for auction in Fallon and purchased by horse advocate groups.

Bruce Thompson is the Wild Horse Specialist with the BLM. During this summer's Maverick-Medicine gather, 20 domestic horses were picked up along with the wild horses. Most were escapees from area ranches and their owners were happy to get them back. The rest were turned over to the state to be returned to their reluctant owners or sold. One was an adopted wild horse, identified by its freeze brand, which was traced back to an Elko address. Its owner had moved away.

Blair Lybbert is the equine veterinarian at Elko Veterinarian Clinic. He sees numerous cases where people get into trouble because they cannot feed or care for their horse properly. Sometimes, they do not know, or even notice, that their horse is going downhill. Some wait too long, perhaps hoping something will change, and the horse becomes gravely sick or dies.

One service he can provide is euthanization. The process costs \$62 and if he drives to the horse, travel may add \$50. The owner must have a hole prepared for burial since the drugs used in euthanization are poisonous. He can also meet the owner and horse at the county landfill where the owner pays for disposal of the carcass.

Blair does not enjoy euthanizing horses, but it is necessary at times. He feels the problem of unwanted horses comes from a combination of today's economy, indiscriminate breeding and the depressed horse market. "We have done a disservice to horses by shutting down slaughterhouses."

Brent Glaser is an equine veterinarian who told me the horse market is glutted with animals of poor value. While quality horses are still worth money, "the lower half of the horses are worth \$.10 a pound at best."

Horse rescues exist but are also seeing hard times. Stephanie Pierce of the Miracle Horse Rescue in Pahrump told me they cannot accept any horses at this time, due to the economy and high cost of hay. "It is a sad state of affairs, but the harsh reality of the times".

Ole Olson is a local horse buyer. He was hard to pin down, but he might pay \$.08 to \$.12/pound, perhaps more. A 1,000 pound horse might be worth as little as \$80, but he will buy any horse. Ole may fatten or train it to increase resale value, but he ships some to Mexico.

These people brought out some common truths about Elko's unwanted horses. The closure of horse processing plants has destroyed the domestic horse market. The poor economy has added to unwanted horse numbers. The problem is not as bad here as other places in Nevada, but some Elko County residents get into situations where they cannot afford to keep a horse. Responsible owners find responsible ways to get rid of it. Irresponsible owners take the easy way out, neglecting or shooting their horse. The most contempt was reserved for owners who abandon their unwanted horse on public land in the belief the horse will return to the wild. Instead, it faces a slow, lonely death by starvation or thirst.

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