

Security at the Wild Horse Gather



Observers watching captured horses at the holding pens

The Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Wild Horse and Burro Program feels attacked from all sides. This was easily seen during last Friday's public observation day of the gathering of wild horses from the Little Humboldt Horse Management Area near Midas.

Last winter, the BLM took a lot of heat during the Calico Mountains Complex gather north of Gerlach, Nevada. Horse advocates were upset over a number of horse deaths and their perception of the BLM's horse treatment. The BLM then assumed Elko County's Tuscarora Gather would also draw protestors and they prepared for this assumption.

Several horses died during the Owyhee part of the Tuscarora Gather and activists obtained a short injunction before the gather resumed. Activists also complained about no public observers being allowed to visit the site during that gather. They contend capture sites and holding corrals were purposefully placed on private land to stop people from visiting these sites.

All of this set up conditions for the first public observation day last Friday. Of the ten visitors, three could be called horse advocates. The other seven visitors were local people, mostly from Elko.

We were greeted in Midas by Wild Horse and Burro Program personnel and people from the state and Elko offices, including four armed Law Enforcement officers. We caravanned to the capture site between Law Enforcement vehicles with flashing lights, although the road held no other traffic.

At the capture site, we were placed on a ridge away from the trap corrals and not allowed to approach the corrals or talk to anyone other than the BLM employees accompanying us. The local wild horse specialist came over to answer questions but soon had to leave as the helicopters brought in a group of wild horses.

After 60 wild horses were corralled and shipped to the holding pens, we caravanned back to the pens, again with flashing lights. At the pens, caution tape and Law Enforcement personnel ensured we stayed 100 feet away from the horses. The corrals were covered with mesh to help calm the horses, leaving a very limited view. We were not allowed to approach or talk to members of the Cattoor's Livestock Company crew, who were 50 yards away.

The BLM personnel were very friendly and we all visited amongst ourselves throughout the morning. I later spoke to people who went on the Saturday public access day who said the restrictions eased somewhat. But during that first day, I felt the Wild Horse and Burro Program treated all observers as potential protestors and disrupters of the gather and it was not a pleasant experience.

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