

An Update on the Mustang Monument

By Larry Hyslop



Madeline Pickens and Clay Nannini at the Warm Creek Ranch

We sat at a dining table, discussing wild horses and eco-sanctuaries. Outside the window, a dozen horses wandered past with Spruce Mountain in the background. Madeline Pickens used broad strokes to describe her vision for the Mustang Monument. Clay Nannini is a Wells native and her local spokesman. He tried to explain the eco-sanctuary's future plans, but said it is difficult since nothing like this has ever been done. Clay said "Although, I can't give a specific time line, I can tell you that we are moving forward". He believes in the Mustang Monument, saying "I keep waiting for someone to give me one good reason why this won't work."

Ms. Pickens' two properties may have different futures. The Warm Creek Ranch currently contains 500 recently purchased horses, affectionately referred to as the "Paiutes". Clay said they are doing well, gaining weight as they graze across over 4,000 acres of private ground and will soon be receiving hay. Since the horses arrived in June he has had very little problem with them escaping the BLM regulation fencing. "To date, we have had only two escapees and getting them back in was as easy as opening a gate and pointing them towards it".

Since the Warm Creek Ranch and its grazing allotments do not contain a Herd Management Area, it may not fit the criteria of an eco-sanctuary. If so, then the "Paiutes" will simply stay put. With its three new pivots and other substantial improvements, they feel that the ranch will adequately handle these horses.

The Spruce Ranch is owned by the Saving America's Mustangs Foundation, which has submitted a proposal to the BLM for an eco-sanctuary. Horses supplied by the BLM would graze both the ranch's public grazing allotment and private ground.

This proposal is under review. When the BLM review team recently visited the ranch, Clay described talk centered around making this plan work and defining the most sensible way to manage the horses and the resources. Both Clay and Ms. Pickens said the details are up to the BLM. All they can do is wait to see if the results are something the Saving America's Mustangs Foundation can live with. It is a juggling match between what they want for the horses, adhering to BLM rules and appeasing horse advocate groups.

This eco-sanctuary would be stocked with wild horses gathered off the range and currently held in short-term holding facilities. A big question is the ownership of these horses. When asked about

ownership, both Clay and Ms. Pickens shrugged but did give me some idea of what they would expect. If the BLM keeps ownership, then the Foundation would expect to be paid the same rate that Midwest ranchers receive for keeping captive horses in their long term holding facilities. If the Foundation owns the horses, it would expect to some sort of one time transportation and/or management fee. "These horses had better come with a dowry" Ms. Pickens said. She feels tourism is the future of the Mustang Monument but says it would need some sort of payment to allow the Monument to get started, but any money made by the Foundation would go back into the Monument.

Ms. Pickens holds strong opinions regarding wild horses and about the land that supports wild horses. "This is God's country, not ours, not the BLM's, but God's." She envisions an eco-tourism hot spot centered on the Warm Creek Ranch where people could not only see what she calls mustangs, but where an education center could allow school children and Boy Scouts to learn about wild horses and Nevada's range lands. She sees a village where visitors could watch craftsmen work with iron, leather, and pottery. She and Clay continue to plan for the future and will continue improvements to the ranches and allotments. She feels frustrated that things take so long but understands that this is a "Monumental" endeavor.

The nation is finding out about Nevada's wild horses and Ms. Pickens feels Nevada is missing the boat in not offering an opportunity for visitors to see them. She sees the Mustang Monument as a world-renowned eco-tourism center that will leave a legacy for Elko County residents.

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