

WYWHIP

Wyoming Wild Horse Improvement Partnership



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www.wywhip.org

WHY WYWHIP?

BALANCED ECOSYSTEMS- THRIVING MUSTANGS

Wyoming Wild Horse Improvement Partnership began out of a realization of the complexities regarding the wild horses of Wyoming and the identified need of support rather than opposition to the BLM in the management of wild horse populations. The Wild Horse and Burro Act of 1971 provided these icons of the west with protection from indiscriminate practices that were threatening their continued existence on public lands. Years later, this topic still creates a divide between the agency tasked with managing public lands and the public who passionately either love or hate the horses. WYWHIP seeks to become part of the solution, by partnering with other agencies and the

BLM to create options that keep the rangelands at the forefront of the situation, above all else, because without balanced ecosystems, nothing will thrive.

THE PROBLEM

The current situation of wild horses in Wyoming is not a simple one. Wyoming has thousands of acres of public lands, many of which have been home to wild horses for decades. Generations of horses have created a living legacy of the history of our great state from pre-Eurocentric settlement through modern civilization. They are part of what makes Wyoming special.

Wild horses stir passion. Broach this topic with anyone, and there will be an opinion, and it is likely to be very strong either for or against. Animal lovers and specifically wild horse “advocates” often have a stance that is emotionally fueled by stories and legends of the human connection to the horse, and their loyal service that helped forge our country. Artists of all mediums find inspiration in the allure of a wild horse. Tourists coming through our state ask about wild horse herds as much as they ask about the other exciting animals not found in many other states.

Wild horses share the landscape with wildlife, birds, and native flora that are critical to our specific ecosystems as well as livestock that is critical to Wyoming’s economy. Many argue they belong here over others, but some argue they are an invasive species. They have purpose on the range, and properly managed, they can be beneficial. Management is the key.

Wyoming has a unique pattern of lands, the checkerboard, where alternating sections of land are private and federally owned by the BLM. Several Herd Management Areas (HMAs) fall within those checkerboard patterns in Sweetwater County and Carbon Counties. Many of the private sections within the checkerboard are owned by livestock producers, who also lease BLM lands for grazing. Wyoming

also has a large holding of tribal lands, the Wind River Indian Reservation in central Wyoming, and a portion of this borders HMAs in Fremont County.

Conflict exists. BLM managed wild horses can and do stray onto privately held and tribal lands. In a few cases privately owned herds have not been managed well, and have intermingled with wild herds or become feral, and strayed beyond their boundaries, and become labeled “wild” because they are not branded, and ownership is unable to be proven. Without management, herd size can grow quickly, even doubling within 4 years. With limited water, forage, and space this creates a drastic situation of competition for resources, repeated in a loop, every 10 to 15 years horses are rounded up and removed only to repopulate to unsustainable levels. The BLM is sued from all sides seeking to either remove or retain the horses, often delaying the removal of the horses. This causes the horses to spread further and further seeking resources to live, spreading beyond the confines of the HMAs and onto private holdings.

How to slow herd growth and what to do with the excess horses? Therein lies the problem. Ranges can’t support that kind of growth, especially in drought seasons, and especially when they compete with one of Wyoming’s largest industries, agriculture. Slaughter is very distasteful to many Americans who have more of an emotional connection to the horse but seems like a very practical solution from a producer’s view. However, slaughter requires shipment to another country, either Canada or Mexico. Adoptions are not keeping up with the influx of new horses into the program because thousands are removed from federal lands across the nation, including WY. Dozens, if not hundreds are removed from private and Tribal land each year. Those numbers are unknown because there isn’t an official tracking of the situation.

SOLUTIONS

Wyoming Wild Horse Improvement Partnership (WYWHIP) seeks to join forces with the agriculture industry, Tribal Governments, other conservation minded groups, and private citizens to create viable solutions to help solve this crisis, for both the BLM managed horses and those found on private lands as estray. To date, the accomplishments of WYWHIP include the following:

- *Volunteers with WYWHIP are certified in the remote delivery of PZP Fertility Control Vaccines and assist in programs with private groups, NPS, and BLM.*
- *Attended the Fertility Control Conference at the Science and Conservation Center in MT in 2019, to collaborate with other groups and learn about fertility control methods and programs in multiple species worldwide.*
- *WYWHIP co-founders continue to attend virtual learning (COVID delayed in person conferences) opportunities by the Botsteiber Institute on fertility control methods, and research alternative methods through discussions with equine experts at CSU regarding surgical procedures and other vaccine methods, and biologists who specialize in feral and wild equid behavior.*
- *WYWHIP is currently in discussion with the Bureau of Land Management, Rawlins Field Office to offer support in the management of the Stewart Creek HMA, north of Rawlins, specifically a fertility control darting program to slow the growth of that herd.*
- *Established partnerships with Equine Rescue organizations nationally to intercept titled and un-titled BLM horses prior to sale barn auctions, allowing these horses to enter reliable training programs to become more adoptable for inexperienced horse owners.*
- *Provided training support to new horse owners, on the best proven methods of gentling and training wild and feral equines to help them stay in adoptive homes.*

- *Attended multiple rounds ups of horses from public lands.*
- *Obtained a Dan-inject Darting Rifle and other equipment to participate in darting projects.*
- *Created a website for education purposes on range health and management of feral and wild herds, viewing opportunities of horses in WY, news relating to wild horses in WY, and to apprise the public of opportunities to adopt horses.*
- *Obtained acreage in Carbon County, just south of the Stewart Creek HMA that is bisected by Highway 287, with the intention of an educational center for tourists and other possibilities.*

Solutions are best obtained when invested parties work together, with respect and open minds. The co-founders of WYWHIP have vast experience and history in peripheral aspects of this situation. We seek further education and collaboration to find viable solutions.

Christi Chapman, a Wyoming native, was raised in a ranching lifestyle, received a formal education in soils and livestock production and has worked in the agriculture industry in several western states for over 20 years. She is intimate with the fragile landscape of the Red Desert and the importance of keeping the land healthy for the benefit of our entire state. She has a training background, professionally specializing in feral animals. She has over 15 years of experience in animal welfare, with many connections to western rescues and sanctuaries for equines.

Mary is from the east coast and works for the Department of Ag in an animal control unit for the state of Connecticut. She has successfully run a rescue, All the King's Horses Equine Rescue, specializing in equines that are higher needs for over 10 years, finding adoptable homes and running educational programs to the benefit of the horses and humans. She partnered with the NYC Riding Academy, providing trained mustangs to teach riding and life skills to underprivileged youth in NYC. She currently works with corrections with the State of Connecticut, using offenders to care for animals seized in neglect and

abuse cases. Her rescue has successfully assisted the Forest Service in California with adoptive placements of several of the Devil's Garden, CA mustangs, establishing a great working relationship between the east coast and the west coast! She has placed five mustangs from Wyoming in adoptive homes in eastern states and Wyoming in the past two years and several more mustangs from other states have found homes through her rescue. In 2020 her rescue partnered with the Ethan Miller Song Foundation to open the Song Strong Sanctuary, utilizing rescued horses, including mustangs to begin an equine psychotherapy program for their community.



Frozen pig ovaries used to make PZP vaccine for fertility control in mammals. The training involves learning how the vaccine is made, and observing the process.



Mary practicing darting at the training for remote delivery of PZP.



Stella Trueblood, team leader for Sand Wash Basin Darting Team, with Christi and Mary at the 2018 Fertility Control Conference in MT.



Christi and Mary doing field work in Stewart Creek HMA.



Observing the 2020 Red Desert Complex roundup.



Titled Salt Wells HMA mustang rescued from a feedlot in CO prior to shipment to Mexico. "Renegade" came to Christi for training and was shipped to CT after he was gentled enough for basic handling. He is pictured here with his adopter from Long Island, NY who has finished his training and is now riding him. He is her first horse and they are very well matched!

Second picture is of Renegade and Sandman, also rescued from same feedlot. Sandman, a Divide Basin mustang, was adopted by a couple in VT and is being used on their farm as a draft and riding animal.