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Associated Press

Mustang deaths up to 26 in Nev wild horse roundup

By MARTIN GRIFFITH, Associated Press Writer Friday, January 29, 2010

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(01-29) 16:17 PST Reno, Nev. (AP) --

Wild-horse advocates criticized federal land managers after the number of mustang deaths so far in a government roundup on the range north of Reno nearly tripled from a week ago, going from nine to 26.

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The U.S. Bureau of Land Management on Friday reported four more deaths stemming from its roundup in the Calico Mountain Complex.

Agency spokeswoman JoLynn Worley said three horses have died at the roundup site and 23 have died at a Fallon holding facility where the horses have been taken since the two-month roundup began Dec. 28.

Another 25 horses are recovering at the facility 60 miles east of Reno after being treated for various injuries and health issues, she said.

Activists said the BLM's roundup methods are "brutal" and violate the intent of a 1971 law Congress enacted to protect the horses.

"America's wild horses are protected by federal law as important parts of our national heritage, but they are being brutalized and destroyed by the BLM's policy of massive roundups," said William Spriggs, an attorney who represents California-based In Defense of Animals in a lawsuit against the Interior Department over the roundup.

Worley said the agency has 40 years of experience of conducting roundups and has learned the safest way to conduct them and minimize risk to horses.

"I don't think it (26 fatalities) is high given the number of animals gathered and given the condition of some of the animals coming in," she said.

"We're seeing quite a few mares in emaciated condition. We're either euthanizing them or they're showing up dead," she said.

According to a 2008 Government Accountability Office report, the BLM has not regularly reported to the public how many horses are killed in the course of roundups.

BLM officials have said 0.5 percent of horses die in roundups, but Worley on Friday said that figure only counts deaths at actual gather sites and not holding facilities.

Of the 1,447 horses gathered so far, about 0.2 percent have died at the roundup site and 1.8 percent have died in all.

Activists expressed concern over the nearly threefold increase in deaths over the last week and said they intend to continue monitoring the Fallon facility.

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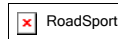
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"The numbers speak for themselves," said Eric Kleiman, research director for In Defense of Animals. "Time will tell, but it'll be very interesting to see what happens over the next week."

A contractor is using two helicopters under BLM supervision to drive horses in the Calico complex to corrals. Officials are then trucking them to Fallon before placing them for adoption or sending them to long-term holding corrals in the Midwest.

BLM officials said the removal of about 2,500 horses is necessary because an over-population of the animals is harming the range and native wildlife, and threatening the horses with starvation.

The government says the number of wild horses and burros on public lands in the West stands at nearly 37,000, about half of them in Nevada. It believes the number that can be supported on the range is about 26,600.



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