Living with Wild Horses
Steve Lewis, Extension Educator

Wild horses are a valued resource that live on public lands close to many residential communities in Nevada. They can become a problem when they wander outside of their herd management area. Residents of such areas can help wild horses exist in their natural environment by understanding 1) why herds must be managed and 2) how to keep wild horses off private property.

Problems Caused by Wild Horses

Wild horses roaming outside of their herd management areas have caused vehicle accidents, personal injury, and property damage. Additionally, wild horses can spread disease to domestic horses. In the three-year period from 1997 to 2000, 93 vehicular accidents were horse related and resulted in 25 personal injuries in six western Nevada counties.

Damages to landscape, fencing, irrigation equipment and other property, has resulted from wild horses wandering into residential neighborhoods.

Population Growth Potential

Problems caused by wild horses can obviously increase when herd populations are allowed to multiply. Herds can double in number every 4-5 years. Population levels for year 2000 were 24,300 head in Nevada and 48,000 head in the western U.S.

Why Are Herds Managed

Since populations increase quickly the health of the environment and the horses themselves may be adversely impacted when not managed. Wild horses share forage and water on the public rangelands with wildlife and domestic livestock. Animal populations must be matched to forage (food) available. Without management, wild horse populations will dramatically increase, overgrazing will occur, and result in death of horses due to starvation and damage to rangelands. When wild horse populations exceed forage resources horses must be captured.
THE LAW In 1971 The U.S. Congress passed the Wild Horse and Burro Act. This created laws which call for; wild horses to be managed so ecosystems can thrive herd management areas to be created penalties for harassment, which includes annoyance or disturbance of any kind the well being and humane treatment of wild horses and burros.

Don’t Feed The Wildhorses!

In addition to federal law, Nevada law states it is illegal to feed or provide water to wild horses. This practice lures them away from their herd management area and onto private property. It desensitizes horses to people and the urban landscape. Horses found outside their management area are subject to capture by the land management agency. Feeding is not only illegal it can cause serious health problems. Diet change can cause stomach disorders and possibly death in any horse, wild or domestic. Moldy, weedy hay and even good hay can cause serious health problems.

Keep Them Off Private Property!

Neighborhood residents can use some of the following ideas to help keep wild horses off private property. In areas designated “Open Range”, private property owners are required by law to fence out livestock and wild horses. String a clothesline about 4.5 to 5.0 feet above ground and tie contrasting color flagging on the line. Paint a cattle guard on the road. If horses have become more accustomed to the urban environment, an electric fence may be needed. One electrified strand at 36” to 48” above the ground with flagging should do the trick. Form a posse. In some instances the land management agency may be willing to work with a volunteer group of committed citizens. This group of horsemen would be responsible for moving wild horses back into their management area. Members of the posse would be trained by agency experts to insure they worked within the law. Post signs in the neighborhood of who to call when wild horses have ventured onto private property.

For More Information
The Bureau of Land Management (775) 861-6400, and the Nevada Department of Agriculture (775) 684-5333, are two agencies that manage wild horse/estray horse herds in Nevada. They are interested in working with citizens to insure that these animals and the environment are properly maintained. Please call if you have a problem in your neighborhood or are interested in helping to keep the wild in the wild horses.

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