



EDITORIAL | A Slick In The Night

by Valerie James-Patton

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A Slick In The Night

We keep hearing the upsetting stories from our wild horse advocates living in Nevada near the BLM wild horse holding facilities about wild horses being hauled in the middle of the night and disappearing. We hear it often.

We've been told by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), that's to prevent the horses from getting overheated during the high temperatures in the hot summer months, but that doesn't fly when we hear of it happening during the cold winter months.

When numbers from BLM reports don't add up, and large numbers of horses are missing from the charts, all those stories of night-time hauls come to mind.

So does the story from a BLM informant, who anonymously gave his testimony to a special agent from the Department of Justice back in 1994, and was exposed in the [1997 PEER Review Report: Horses to Slaughter - Anatomy of A Cover-Up](#).

Sure, it's an old document from the past, telling how BLM escaped a grand jury trial over BLM's decades long horse theft program, which was concluded to be so vast and wide spread throughout the BLM Wild Horse and Burro program that no one could be held accountable, but has anything changed? Or has BLM just gotten better at covering the trail of disappearing wild horses?

In a condensed version from 3 pages of testimony from the PEER report by a BLM informant in the horse theft program, he explains that, 50 head out of 65 horses would be reported at a location, the excess 15 horses would be transported to satellite ranches which are actually holding pens. The ranch receives money to hold the horses for a certain time until they're picked up again. They may be hot-branded with different brands, or transported as "slicks", meaning they have no brand at all. Most of them over a time period will go to the killers. Sometimes the horses are transported during working hours, but "most of the time it's been at night, after the count's been jimmied around. You strictly drive down to a certain location, open a gate and dump those horses in with a bunch of other horses. The BLM guy goes home around 4:30 and guys would load up the stolen horses, take them to satellite ranches and be back by the next morning for business as usual."

Double-booking or black-booking is when more than one horse is branded with the same brand, and one set of legitimate paperwork is filled out to go with one horse, and depending on how many horses are wearing that same brand, a fake set of paperwork is made for them. "They are sold as legitimate horses, and sold within a week to sale barns or... The odds of you ever being checked are 100 to 1, and I've never seen a title on a wild horse."

When asked if this was a pretty good organization, the informant replied that it's very well set up, and "nobody that participates in it isn't well known, and it can't be done without the BLM guy standing right there."

He further explained that "You can't enforce a common practice that's been going on for years and years. You can't stop everybody that's in it. You catch one guy, so there's 50 more out there doing the same thing."

The informant justified and summed up the operation by saying, "It's not actually stealing in our way of looking at it. It's just a way of life, you know. It's been a common practice for numbers and numbers of years. There's never been any paperwork ever required. If we wanted to trade horses, move horses, you know, it's just a way of life. You've got ranchers out there that are paying the permit fees on grazing, and then they have a bunch of wild horses move in, they're losing money because they're paying for that grass. These wild horses come in and are eating up the grass, so sure they're pissed off. It's our job to disburse those horses, you know, so we do our best to get rid of as many as we can. I don't really consider it stealing".

But we do. And we currently have a large number of horses missing.

Flash forward to June/July 2010:

As we explained in our [EWA press release](#), (7-27-2010), it appears we have at least 2,282 horses missing from the BLM wild horse holding facilities, and no rocket science is needed to add and subtract the numbers in the BLM population facility reports and compare those to horses removed from the range along with the reported deaths, adoptions and sales of the wild horses.

Even though there are questions on BLM's math skills, it's important to remember we're not just questioning calculations on paper, but we're questioning the lives of horses that have disappeared. There's a huge problem taking place in BLM's wild horse facilities and the horses removed from the range than just what paper work reveals, and much more than what BLM is willing to tell.

One can only wonder if they became "slicks" quietly hauled away in the night.

Even a rocket scientist adding the numbers up would not be able to give us an answer to that question.

Contact:

Valerie James-Patton

Vice President, Equine Welfare Alliance

EWA Research Subject Matter Expert (SME)

530.474.1128

valerie_jamespatton@yahoo.com

<http://www.equinewelfarealliance.org/>

Equine Welfare Alliance is an umbrella organization representing over 115 organizations and hundreds of individuals across the United States and several countries worldwide.