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## **I-Team: No Straight Answers From Nevada's Top Wild Horse Official**

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More than 30,000 wild horses are now being held in government pens. That is more horses than exist out on the open range.

Critics say the reason for the logjam is that the Bureau of Land Management, which is supposed to manage wild horses and burros, spends most of its budget on roundups but very little on adoptions.

Are the charges true? Put it this way -- suspicions confirmed.

No matter where you stand on wild horses, your tax dollars are being spent in this program. The *I-Team* filed an information request with the BLM back in February to find out what they spend on the wild horse program. It took until August to get the answer.

And then the spin campaign began courtesy of the BLM-Nevada's top wild horse official, whose statements to us were simply incredulous.

Susie Stokke, with the Nevada BLM, said, "These last three days, without question, has been the highlight of my career."

It seemed odd that BLM's Suzie Stokke would be so bubbly. Less than 24 hours earlier, 129 wild horses in the BLM's Palomino Valley facility had died horrible deaths. And days before that, more than 70 wild horses were found dead of nitrate poisoning on the Tonopah Test Range.

These horses were Stokke's responsibility. Yet she was giddy.

**BLM's Suzie Stokke:** "I'm still in the hot air balloon."

***I-Team's* George Knapp:** "That's what you want to say? It's the highlight of your career."

The reason Stokke was so stoked, despite the deaths of more than 200 horses, is the success of a horse adoption event. One hundred wild horses were adopted out during a gala show. And \$50,000 from the Nevada BLM budget sponsored the event, even though it was held in Fort Worth, Texas. As far as we know, it was the biggest one time adoption expenditure the Nevada BLM has ever made.

**Suzie Stokke:** "What's your question? Are you asking why it wasn't here in Nevada?"

**George Knapp:** "Yeah. I've asked that a couple of times. Why didn't you hold it in Nevada?"

**Suzie Stokke:** "I'll tell you why."

**George Knapp:** "Okay."

**Suzie Stokke:** "The will Rogers Equestrian Center in Texas is one of the premier horse facilities in the country. It was offered to BLM and the foundation at no charge."

This, it turns out, is simply not true, just like much of what we were told by Susie Stokke.

Wild horse advocates aren't surprised that Stokke would okay an adoption event somewhere other than Nevada, where most of the horses live. Her critics say Stokke has long opposed spending the Nevada budget on adoptions, even private efforts.

For example, Jerry Reynoldson worked out a deal with California BLM officials to bring Nevada wild horses back here for adoption events not controlled by the Nevada office. He hoped to sidestep Stokke. Her office stopped him in his tracks.

There are now more horses in government pens than there are on the open ranges, about half of them from Nevada. More than 9,000 a year are rounded up here, but fewer than 250 are adopted out. It's a formula for disaster, Reynoldson says. Just feeding them costs millions.

Jerry Reynoldson, wild horse advocate, said, "At some point, somebody will say, we've just got to put these horses down. It's the only answer."

Federal law requires the BLM to work on adopting out the horses. A \$500,000 BLM study recommends getting the private sector involved. But under Stokke, the Nevada BLM puts nearly all of its resources into roundups.

From 2003 through 2006, BLM Nevada spent around \$2 million a year on roundups, just under half of its entire budget. During the same time, it spent a mere \$122,000 a year on adoptions. Is it any wonder the pens are filled up?

Contrary to what Washington, D.C. BLM told us, Stokke says she spends \$200,000 a year on adoptions.

**George Knapp:** "Did you spend \$200,000 in any of those years on horses?"

**Suzie Stokke:** "I think what's important is the average."

**George Knapp:** "Did you spend \$200,000 on adoptions in any of those years since we filed the FOIA request?"

**Suzie Stokke:** "I believe so."

**George Knapp:** "Could we get those numbers?"

**Suzie Stokke:** "I believe so."

But the numbers didn't add up. During the *I-Team's* seven month wait for budget information, Stokke inflated the 2007 adoption spending to more than \$500,000 by adding in \$400,000 in grants that will be paid to two organizations over the next five years. She said a Las Vegas horse group was paid \$50,000, but it only received \$10,000.

Shari Warren, with the National Wild Horse Association, said, "It's not all at once and what we're planning on doing with the \$10,000 or so per year..."

And why does Nevada spend so little on adoptions? Because Susie Stokke sees things this way: "Our market is not Nevada. We're the supply. Our market is in states with larger populations."




The decision to let other states handle adoptions wasn't made nationally, but rather by the Nevada managers. It means there's a pittance for adoptions but plenty of money for roundups, and thus, the pens will always be full.

The *I-Team's* WEB EXTRA interview with Ms. Stokke speaks volumes about the attitudes of those who call the shots in the Nevada Wild Horse & Burro program.

[Read The I-Team's Part 2: How the range studies used to justify the roundups.](#)

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