

Monitor Wild Horse Territory

The Monitor Wild Horse Territory (WHT) is administered by the Austin/Tonopah Ranger District, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest.

Location/Habitat

The Monitor WHT is located in Nevada approximately 15 miles east of Tonopah. The territory consists of about 380,000 acres of Forest Service land in the southern half of the Monitor Mountain Range.

The topography of the area is mountains and valleys. Elevations range from 6000 ft to 11,000 ft. Climate is represented by hot, dry summers and cold winters. Temperatures range from below zero in the winter to 90° + F in the summer. Average annual precipitation is 5-12 inches.

The territory consists of 3 primary vegetation types: 1) low sage community, 2) desert shrub community, and 3) pinyon-juniper community.

Wildlife present within the territory include elk, deer, antelope, hawks, owls, and bats.

Livestock grazing occurs within the territory.

History

Although Spaniards brought horses with them to the Nevada area in the 16 th and 17 th centuries, it is believed that progeny from strays of early emigrants, as well as abandoned and stray animals from early mining booms and settlement of homesteads account for much of the current wild horse population in the Monitor Territory. Many of the abandoned animals were the result of economic slumps and periodic droughts which plagued the early settlers. Also many of the wild horses are descendants of the Dixon strain.

The Dixon strain, developed by Tom Dixon, a rancher who came from Ireland to California and then to Nevada in 1869, was a mixture of Shires, Percherons, Morgans, Hambletonians, and various Irish stock. Hambletonians were the foundation bloodline for the Standardbred breed. At one time Dixon's horses ran at large over much of Nevada (including Long Valley to Fish Creek, Spring, Diamond, and Monitor Valleys) and numbered over 10,000.

Also adding to the population are remnants and descendants of the Clifford "steeldusts." "Steeldust" was a common name referring to a preferred type of cow pony. These horses were descendants of Steel Dust, a Kentucky bred stud born in 1843. Steel Dust was of Thoroughbred lineage, but an excellent sprinter. He was a blood bay who stood 15 hands

high and weighed 1200 lbs. He was moved to Texas and became a popular sire for ranch stock. Many ranchers would breed captured wild mares of Spanish decent to Steel Dust, and the result was a much desired cow horse. Horses of Steel Dust lineage became commonly known as “steeldusts,” and these horses later became known as Quarter Horses.

Herd Description

Wild horses of the Monitor WHT come in a variety of colors. Grays are common in the territory, along with bays, blacks, sorrels, roans, and buckskins. The horses average 14-15 hands.

For More Information

Contact the Tonopah Ranger District at 775-482-6286.