

BLM: Vets say horses are OK

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LARAMIE -- The "vast majority" of the wild horses on the Sheep Mountain Ranch west of Laramie "are in very good condition, considering the weather conditions and the age of the horses," a Bureau of Land Management official reported Tuesday following a Monday inspection.

BLM wild horse program manager Alan Shepherd said Wyoming State Veterinarian Duane Oldham and veterinarian Al Kane of the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Fort Collins, Colo., on Monday saw well over 200 of the estimated 350 former wild horses on the ranch. The two veterinarians will release a report in a couple of days, Shepherd said.

The veterinarians made their inspection following citizen complaints in recent weeks that some of the horses looked to be in poor shape.

The officials who toured the ranch Monday disagreed.

"Everybody who went on the tour Monday is comfortable with what they saw," Shepherd said. "The horses are being fed hay in two or three locations, and they have open ridges where they can graze. They seem to be moving around well and feeding good. They're not lethargic like a starving horse would be."

The inspectors did see the remains of one dead horse that appeared to have died several weeks ago, Shepherd said.

The BLM will continue to monitor the horses and see that the supplemental feeding is maintained, Shepherd said, because continued adverse weather conditions into the spring would take a toll on the horses.

"All animals on open country who go through a bad winter are going to lose some weight," he said.

In 2005, the BLM entered a long-term agreement with an organization called Wild Horses Wyoming to move 100 wild geldings from Nevada and California to the ranch about 10 miles east of Centennial. The organization was paid \$180,000 -- \$1,800 for each horse -- to keep the horses for the rest of their lives on the 23,000-acre ranch, with the BLM retaining ownership of the animals.

Later, Wild Horses Wyoming paid \$50 each to "adopt" more than 200 wild horses -- most of them older mares -- and brought the animals to the ranch. Wild Horses Wyoming owns those animals, but part of the sales deal was an agreement not to send them to slaughter.

Wild horse advocate Pat Fazio of Cody said she would have liked an independent inspection of the horses.

"If the vets say they're in good condition, I guess I have to believe them," Fazio said. "But I keep getting reports from people who've seen the horses who say they're in poor condition."

She said she still believes the idea of the wild horse sanctuary is unsound, along with the BLM's wild horse policies.

"It seems like these horses should be better managed," she said. "That's not just true of this sanctuary, but of other herd management areas in Wyoming and all over the West."

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