

Wild Horses of Alberta Society



Annual News Letter 2004

"...he was wild, wild as the wild deer, and untaught, with spur and bridle, undefiled..."

Lord Byron, Mazeppa's Ride, 1819

Here it is a new year with another eventful year having gone by for WHOAS. The accomplishments achieved has been largely due to caring members like yourselves who took the time to write to the government regarding the plight of the wild horses. We would like to thank all new and long term members for your continued support. We are growing in numbers and in power, The last membership card printed out was number 193.

It has been an busy year. In January 2004, we were asked to submit a proposal to the Alberta Government regarding our recommendations for changes in the legislation governing the horses and the perceived problems surrounding them. We responded with a ten page report stating our viewpoints and recommendations. As a result of this report we were requested to attend a meeting to further discuss our viewpoints. This monumental meeting was held on June 9, 2004, between WHOAS, government officials from the Department of Sustainable Resources, Fish and Wildlife, Livestock Inspection Services and Rangeland Management. The recommendations of the January report were discussed and the parties agreed to work together regarding improving current laws and reporting crimes against Alberta's wild free roaming horses. Notwithstanding, there remains a significant disagreement between government and WHOAS, this difference is the terminology of the horses in question. The government still refers to the horses as feral and WHOAS would like to see the horses have their own protective legislation and be termed as free roaming horses rather than feral, WHOAS believes that as long as the horses are legislated under "The Stray Animals Act" they will continue to be slaughtered and unscrupulously captured at will. Under their own legislation, these horses could enjoy the same protection as given to other wildlife, without being defined or referred to as wildlife. This seems to be a contentious point for the government, Furthermore, the government maintains

that these horses have only been around since the early 1900's when the horses escaped or were set loose from logging camps and therefore becoming long term strays. However, we have found documentation of the first European settlers/missionaries such as John A McDougall and David Thompson who documented observing wild horses in their travels in the same areas where they may be found roaming free today. This being the area between the Clearwater and Red Deer Rivers. Clearly, there has been human interference of breeding domestic stock with wild horses which was done to improve the hardiness of the ranch horses and rodeo stock. There were also escapee's that did break free and join the wild herds. However, this human interference that took place over the past century or longer is now used to justify the horses annihilation, This eradication has been slowly carried out over the past 50 years.. In 1980's there were 1100 free roaming horses, 2004 government count is 190. We have requested a moratorium on capture licenses for the designated area for the 2004/2005 season, citing poor foal/yearling counts. The decline in numbers may be due to increased number of predators and other factors. This request was denied. Another recommendation included banning the running down and roping of a horse, due to the danger both to the wild horse being chased and the horse being used to run them down. The ground is often very icy and obstacles hidden by snow which could easily break a leg on a running animal. There were two roping permits given out this year. Another cruelty issue is the practise of using a bait mare to lure wild horses into capture corrals we recommended that this be discontinued. The reason we gave for this is due to the fact there has been a drastic increase in the number of cougar attacks on domestic stock in corrals, in the area.. We believe that these bait horses would be more vulnerable and stand no chance at all to flee if attacked. Time will tell if they discontinue permitting bait horses. Thus far however, none of our recommendations appear to have been implemented.

September 12, 2004 was a black day for the Henderson's as they found the remains of four horses that had been shot and left to rot. There is no explanation for such cruelty other than someone doing it for the thrill of just killing one of these magnificent animals. This only strengthened WHOAS resolve to fight harder for the helpless horses. It proves that that the current legislation is no deterrent. Unfortunately, as with an incident in February 2004, where three horses were illegally leg snared and removed from the wild, only negative events are considered newsworthy. However, even these reports do draw attention to the plight of the horses and our attempts to preserve and save them. With each report, even the negative ones, we gain more members and support for the cause of the wild horse.

In October our spirits were bolstered when WHOAS heard from Wild Horse Association based in Lloydminster, Alberta. This group, is also trying to save wild horses in their area and would like to amalgamate with ours, thus becoming a stronger political voice. WHOAS board plans on meeting with them early in the new year to find out more about their struggles and for consideration of joining forces with them.

WHOAS is becoming known nationally by being featured in magazines such as *Horse Canada* twice, *Western Producer*, and *Horses All*, along with these magazines and newspapers WHOAS will be included in a few books. One such book is entitled "Wild Life in the Kitchen" by Roxanne Williams Snopek., Sharon Siamon, author of the Mustang Mountain series of children's books is acknowledging WHOAS in her upcoming book and giving a portion of the royalties to our society. We thank these caring authors and reporters for their interest and help in our cause.

December 19, 2004 Bob Henderson took a drive in the designated area and found two illegal capture pens and one shot horse. The horse died during the hunting season approximately two weeks before. The wooden capture pen, is a large wooden corral nine feet high with trip gates and a loading chute at one end. This makes for easy loading as each horse is individually driven through the narrow channel into a trailer and off on a death ride to the meat packers. The corral was baited with fresh green hay and a salt block. The height of the corral would keep in an elk. Essentially, there is no hope for the horses to ever escape. The steel panelled corral was much smaller and had a trip wire (binder twine) that once walked through by a horse would also trip the gate. Both corrals had recently held horses. Truck and trailer tire tracks were seen around the pens and leading out onto the road.

December 25, 2004 Bob and Doreen Henderson checked on these corrals after reporting them to the appropriate authorities. They found a sign on the wooden corral that read "Alberta Sustainable Resource Development Vidio Servalance. (misspelled) and listed a phone number and land location. Bob was not able to confirm the legitimacy of this as the Forestry Department was closed for the duration of the holidays. It seemed odd that the trap remained open with fresh bait as well. It is not common practice of the police to warn criminals engaging in illegal activities that they are under video surveillance. It was also questionable as to who would check on trapped horses during the holidays, if their department was closed. The sign may well have been posted by the poachers to throw off anyone following their vehicle tracks to the location. Photographs were taken of the dead horse and the two illegal corrals.

January 4, 2005 Bob took Rick Smee with the Department of Lands and Forests out to the locations of the corrals and they found a third one being built. No explanation was given for the sign itself other than the Department of Lands and Forests did not write it. It appears unclear as to how far the government is willing to go to stop the inhumane treatment of Alberta's free roaming horses. All of our requests have been denied and/or appear to have fallen on deaf ears. It is also uncertain as to whether or not corral permits were issued for the designated area for this season.

We truly do need your voice to help change government policy. Please write to the Honourable David Coumts #420 Legislature Bldg, 10800 - 97 Ave. Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6. Or Fax (780)415-4818, email livingstone.macleod@assembly.ab.ca

Another avenue being considered is a court injunction to stop horse capture next season, as it is obviously too late this year. However, this would take a considerable amount of money to retain the services of a lawyer. WHOAS will be searching for ways to make this possible. Watch for media coverage in the next few weeks. Consideration is also being given to enlisting the aid of World Wild Life Fund. In spite of everything, WHOAS has come a long way in two years. No other individual or group has been able to get the attention of the government. Again, we believe that it is due to the power of numbers of those writing the government echoing your support for WHOAS and the wild horses. Indeed the pen is truly mightier than the sword. Thanks once again to our membership for giving WHOAS and the wild horses such a powerful voice. We are making progress and we will succeed.

Our Annual General Meeting will be held on February 1, 2005 instead of December with hopes of a better turn out than December and January could offer. It is held at the Olds Public Library 5217 - 52nd St. at 8:00 pm, call (403) 556-6167 for more info or e-mail bob1603@telusplanet.net We will be showing a power point presentation which will be used in schools and for other interested organizations. We hope to see you there. To find out more about WHOAS you can also visit our website.

www.northernhorse.com/wildhorses

Happy trails. WHOAS Executive.