

## **Wild Horses of Alberta Society - 2005/2006 Newsletter**

**2005 in review:**

**Members of the board met with Government officials and other interested parties in April of 2005, in Rocky Mountain House, Alberta. The purpose of the meeting was to allegedly resolve some of the concerns that WHOAS and other individuals had in the wild horses. Despite our best efforts we accomplished little in this meeting. The government is still listening to a very small number of other individuals who have other interests in mind for the horses, preservation not being a part of it. Members of Sustainable Resource Development attempted to more or less intimidate the members of WHOAS by having a large number of their different agencies there, lumber company representatives who definitely are opposed to the wild horses and ranch operators who lease grazing rights where the horses roam but who also have staff who capture some of these beautiful wild horses. So, instead of procuring a stop for one year on the issuing of capture permits, SRD decided, listening to only one person, to have a separate month when the roping and running down of the horses was allowed. Then two more months that run in conjunction with the trapping season. This, despite our objections, was extended from February 1 to March 1 in a capture season. Now instead of just three months of being chased, harassed and captured, the horses are subjected to 4 months. This last month is of grievous concern because many wild mares are nearing the end of their pregnancies. The stress of being run down and captured jeopardizes the mares' lives along with that of the unborn foals. The one thing we did agree to was that we would not immediately notify the media whenever an atrocity occurred to any of the wild horses (being shot, etc.) This would allegedly allow SRD officers to hopefully conduct a proper and thorough investigation. Needless to say we walked away a little upset but vowed to carry on.**

**Despite the capture of over 18 head of horses, that were reported, we did hear that the number was larger, the spring looked promising for the wild horses. April and May of 2005 was fairly warm and dry and a large foal crop was observed. Many herds had two to four foals with them early in the year. In previous years it was only common to see one or maybe two with a herd. In June the heavy rains came wreaking havoc on the environment. Many streams ran over their banks washing out roads, bridges and a lot of the trails. However this in turn caused a very lush and heavy green growth of grass, even on the high hill sides. It also limited the insects that cause a lot of stress on the wild animals. The horses did well with this thick luxurious supply of grass. By mid summer most of the herds were looking very good and the foals were looking rather plump and growing fast. The rains continued throughout the summer and fall thus assuring a very good winter range for the horses. Although wolves**

continued to take the odd animal, the numbers seemed to be down over other years and by fall most foals were still with their herds.

Then came October. Sometime around the middle of the month some ruthless individuals shot and killed an entire herd of seven horses, leaving them to rot and be scavenged on. Keeping our promise and despite our absolute horror and anger over this, we kept silent and did not bring this forward to the news media. This was to allow the officials of SRD to do their job and investigate the offence. Only later to learn that they did go out to the scene and look around, and when nothing was obvious to them, they just left it at that. Again we have been let down by SRD. I can assure anyone that if this had been cattle and or other wildlife it would have been front page news and they would have conducted an extensive and thorough investigation, and charges laid in no time at all.

The capture season then started on December 1 and again despite their promises to the contrary, a large number of permits were issued for a very small area, not spread over the whole horse range. As this writing takes place it is believed that over thirty horses have been captured and only destined for the slaughter plants. The season is coming to a close. In the government's latest aerial survey as to the number of horses, they only counted 225 head. When you take at least 37 head so far, out of that population and the gene pool is being rapidly diminished.

We believe that total eradication of the wild horses may be the hidden agenda of SRD and its staff, despite their claims to the contrary. Letters and e-mails have been sent to officials in charge of the SRD and the minister David Coutts, asking that the season be immediately closed, to little avail. Is this because the largest horse slaughtering plant in North America is in the ministers constituency at Ft. McLeod? Then to some of the so called legitimate trappers have also tried to use intimidation against us to dissuade us from our objectives. The biggest problem even with those wild horse trappers that obtain permits is that there is no control on the number of horses that one individual can take. The regulations allow for three studs to one mare, but an individual can take as many as he wants if this quota is followed. One individual we know of has taken at least a dozen horses so far and had no intention of stopping until season ends. How ludicrous!

WHOAS is now in the process of going out to different interested groups and giving a power point presentation on the wild free roaming horses to help educate animal lovers everywhere of the plight of our wild horses in Alberta. We are informing the public of the regulations as they now stand and our recommendations for changes. We hope to change our tactics to one of education rather than outright lobbying, in hopes that we can persuade the public to speak up directly to the government and thereby

effect change that way. We would still like to see the wild free roaming horses awarded their own protective legislation, with strict guidelines for management and severe punishment for those that commit illegal acts against the horses. In Calgary, for example, if a dog is running free the owner gets fined several hundred dollars. However, if you shoot a wild horse or illegally trap one, nothing is done.

WHOAS most current project is raising funds to allow us to take our own aerial census of the number of wild free roaming horses remaining in the foothills of Alberta. We have sold the Wild Horses of Alberta 2006 Calendars, displaying pictures in all seasons of wild horses and continue to receive donations and new membership monies to help in this. It is in the works for a preliminary flight to take place in early March 2006. A more in-depth survey to take place by the end of the month, using several small aircraft . This census will allow us to be more accurate in our arguments for the welfare of the horses and their future in Alberta. Next year we hope to have the calendars out much earlier and publicized more. We are also updating our website, so that we can regularly put forward new information on the situations as they exist concerning the wild free roaming horses. All these projects take time and money. There are no paid staff or board members of WHOAS, we all donate our time and efforts, all for this love we have for the horses. However we only have a very few members able to help us in our current projects of creating a new website, in preparing more professional power point educational presentations, in letter writing projects to the government and general administration.

The board of WHOAS is still, despite all the negative, optimistic that we can and will have an impact in protecting and saving these beautiful wild and free horses, a living link to our western heritage. So we go forth with this continued passion and zeal in this effort. We thank all of our members for their continued support for the fight to save our wild horses. The wild free roaming horses are a proud resilient animal that if given a fair chance can and will survive in a more than hostile environment and despite those that want to eradicate them from our public lands.

We ask for your ongoing assistance and appreciate hearing from you more than you know. Our Power Point Presentation is available to any interested groups free of charge. We also apologize for the lateness of this annual newsletter it has been a year of personal tragedies and difficulties as well. Happy trails and hope to see you at the Annual General Meeting held on Wednesday March 29, 2006 at 8:00 pm at the Olds Municipal Library. Phone 403-556-6167 for details or email [bob1603@telusplanet.net](mailto:bob1603@telusplanet.net)