

# Group claims BLM is breeding special mustangs in Oregon

By **JEFF BARNARD**  
*Associated Press*

GRANTS PASS — Wild-horse advocates are challenging U.S. Bureau of Land Management plans this summer to round up the famous Kiger and Riddle Mountain mustang herds in eastern Oregon, arguing the agency is developing a “master breed” of wild horses exhibiting characteristics of old Spanish bloodlines that are popular with the public, rather than maintaining wild horses in natural conditions, as the law requires.

The Colorado-based group Front Range Equine Rescue filed an appeal of the roundup plan Wednesday with the Interior Board of Land Appeals.

The appeal argues that the BLM returns to the range only horses exhibiting Kiger characteristics, effectively breeding for those characteristics and depleting the gene pool, endangering the ability of the herds to survive in the wild.

“We just believe the Wild Horse Act was intended to protect wild horses in their natural state, not to turn herd management areas into breeding facilities for specific types of horses,” said attorney Bruce Wagman, who represents the wild horse group.

The next roundup is expected in mid-August, with adoptions at the wild horse corrals in Hines in October, the BLM said. Plans call for keeping off the range up to 105 Kigers out of a herd of 141, and 48 Riddle Mountains out of a herd of 73, according to BLM documents.

BLM spokesman Jeff Campbell said bureau lawyers were still examining the appeal, but the bureau keeps close track of the herds’ genetic diversity, bringing in outside horses to the herd



Jamie Francis/The Oregonian via AP, file

**Kiger Mustangs from the Kiger Management Area near Diamond in southeast Oregon are shown in 2007. Wild horse advocates are challenging U.S. Bureau of Land Management plans to round up the famous Kiger and Riddle Mountain mustang herds in eastern Oregon, arguing that the roundup is designed to breed a master race of wild horses exhibiting old Spanish bloodlines, violating the intent of the law protecting wild horses.**



AP Photo/Don Ryan, file

**A wild weanling Kiger mustang horse reacts to a nip on the cheek from another horse at the Bureau of Land Management wild horse pen in Hines in 1999.**

when needed, and returns to the range horses less likely to be adopted.

Wagman said the appeal was the first challenge of

a BLM wild horse roundup based on genetic issues. Other challenges have been based on claims of cruelty and whether environmental laws



Anthony Dimaano/The Bulletin via AP, File

**A mustang and her calf run at the Forever Free Mustang refuge near Bend in 2006.**

have been followed. Some wild-horse advocates also object to the use of contraceptive to control herd numbers.

Wagman said the appeal was not seeking an order immediately stopping the gather, but they hoped the BLM would hold off until the appeal was settled.

The BLM has put on hold plans to round up 300 wild horses in Nevada after a federal judge temporarily blocked it earlier this year for fear of harm to the mustangs.

The BLM gathers the Kiger and Riddle Mountain herds every four years to control their effect on the range.

While other wild horse herds rounded up around the West often go begging, the BLM website says that nearly every one of the Kiger and Riddle Mountain horses brought in is adopted, some in competitive bidding. Meanwhile, nearly 50,000 wild horses are held by the BLM at a cost of \$43 million a year because no one wants them.

Located about 50 miles south of Burns, the Kigers are known for being strong compact horses that bond closely with people. They come with distinctive markings, such as a stripe down the back, zebra stripes on the lower legs, long contrasting manes and fine muzzles. The most common colors are dun, but a slate gray known as grulla, and a light buckskin known as claybank, are highly prized.

At one auction in 1999, a claybank filly sold for \$19,000. Another served as the model for a 2002 animated movie about wild horses called “Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron.”

“By capitalizing on the fame and desirability of the Kiger Mustang to the detriment of other horses presently found in the Kiger and Riddle Mountain (herds), BLM is participating in the unlawful commercial exploitation of wild horses that the Wild Horse Act sought to prohibit,” the appeal argues.

“By reducing the genetic diversity in the (herds) to only those horses with Kiger Mustang characteristics, and then conducting gathers every four years to round up these valuable Kiger horses to sell them for adoption, BLM effectively creates a breeding facility that injures the wild horses’ survival possibilities and benefits only BLM and private actors desirous of purchasing this ‘breed,’” the appeal said.

# Guided hikes on Mount St. Helens offer up-close views

By **ERIC FLORIP**  
*The Columbian*

WINDY RIDGE, Wash. (AP) — Looking into the crater of Mount St. Helens, it can be difficult to grasp the scale of the massive geologic amphitheater.

That’s true even from the closest vantage points. Peter Frenzen, the Mount St. Helens monument scientist, helps put things in perspective.

Frenzen points out that the older lava dome inside the crater dwarfs Seattle’s Space needle. The volcano’s newer lava dome, formed between 2004 and 2008, reaches higher than the Empire State Building. And the entire mile-wide crater is large enough to encircle all of downtown Portland.

There’s another feature inside the crater that’s often overlooked in this active volcano. It’s also a relative rarity: a glacier that’s growing in size, not shrinking. The Crater Glacier, which forms a ring around both lava domes, continues to slowly lurch northward toward the crater’s mouth.

The young ice formation underscores the ever-changing nature of Mount St. Helens and its surrounding landscape.

“The world is not stable. It’s a temporary thing,” Frenzen said. “This is a place where it’s really kind of in your face.”

Later this summer, the Mount St. Helens Institute will offer guided hikes featuring up-close views of the glacier and the inside of the crater. The Crater Glacier View Climb takes participants close to the crater rim on the mountain’s north side, a destination no public trail reaches.

The institute has offered the guided hike as part of an overnight trip in 2013 and 2014. But this is the first time participants can see the Crater Glacier up close on a single-day hike.

The cost of the daylong trip — \$195 per person — isn’t cheap. But paid excursions such as the Crater Glacier View Climb help pay for other programs and activities the Mount St. Helens Institute offers, said Ray Yurkewycz, the nonprofit’s director of operations.

Thirty-five years after its catastrophic 1980 eruption, Mount St. Helens remains a strong hook for people, Yurkewycz said. Providing access to new areas helps generate new interest, he said. It helps teach participants about



Natalie Behring/The Columbian via AP

**A stream along the way during an uphill hike on Mount St. Helens in Washington June 25. A group of local media were invited to take part in a new hike that later in the summer the Mount St. Helens Institute will offer, guided hikes featuring up-close views of the glacier and the inside of the crater.**

the volcano and the science behind it.

“There’s so many things to talk about and think about while you’re walking,” Yurkewycz said.

The Mount St. Helens Institute and U.S. Forest Service recently offered a preview of the Crater Glacier View Climb before this year’s first trip goes out on July 26.

## The hike

The glacier view hike starts and ends at Windy Ridge Viewpoint, northeast of the mountain. The 9-mile round-trip follows sections of the Truman Trail, Windy Trail and Loowit Trail before venturing off trail up to the crater rim.

At times, it’s not a gentle stroll.

The hike climbs about 1,800 feet to a peak elevation of 5,300 feet. The final ascent requires navigating a loose mixture of ash, pumice and other volcanic rock on a steep incline. The moon-like terrain sinks and shifts underfoot. Each step feels like two or three.

Much of the hike is unsheltered across a mostly treeless landscape. But the trek includes stellar views — including Mount Adams, Mount Rainier and Mount Hood in the distance — from start to finish.

As the Truman Trail descends from Windy Ridge, the trail follows an old forest road that was used for logging operations and public access before 1980.

By the time the hike reaches the Windy Trail, the earthy smell of prairie lupine faintly hangs in the air. The small wildflower has



Natalie Behring/The Columbian via AP

**A field of Lupin grows along the way on Mount St. Helens in Washington.**

taken hold here, particularly on the Pumice Plain directly north of the volcano — the area completely scrubbed clean and buried by the lateral blast of May 18, 1980.

“It is a place where nothing survived,” Frenzen said. “It is truly primary succession — ground zero for a new ecosystem.”

That’s why scientists have taken such a keen interest in the area, Frenzen said. The eruption created a unique opportunity to see life start over from the beginning, he said. A 30,000-acre area mostly north of the mountain is considered the most valuable for research, and public access there is restricted to designated trails.

Thriving lupine has already changed the landscape. In full bloom, the flowers cover the

plain like streaks of purple paint across an empty canvas. The plants add nutrients to the soil that will pave the way for new life to follow, Yurkewycz said. Eventually, he added, a forest will return.

Some trees have already returned to the area. A grove of willow trees follows the slope of a creek down the north side of the mountain. The creek is fed by a natural spring near Loowit Trail, creating a welcome oasis of shade and cold, drinkable water along the hike.

From the Loowit Trail, the trek ventures off trail toward the crater. The final stretch gains 1,000 feet of elevation in just half a mile. It ends at the crater’s mouth, next to the Sugar Bowl rock formation.

## IF YOU GO

- What: Crater Glacier View Climb.
- When: Select dates between July 26 and Sept. 12.
- Where: The hike begins and ends at Windy Ridge Viewpoint, traveling to and from the Mount St. Helens crater rim.
- How much: \$195 per person.
- More info: Spots can be reserved through the Mount St. Helens Institute online at [www.mshinstitute.org](http://www.mshinstitute.org)

## The crater

While the Crater Glacier View Climb ventures right up to the crater’s edge, people aren’t allowed into the caldera itself. And for good reason, Frenzen said.

“The crater is an incredibly dangerous place,” Frenzen said.

From the outside looking in, the area appears rugged but relatively peaceful. The steady sound of Loowit Creek flowing through the crater’s mouth stands out.

Inside the crater, it’s a different story.

Paul Pepper of Yacolt-based North Country EMS is among the agency’s Volcano Rescue Team members who have hiked and even camped inside the crater. Pepper described hearing water rushing under the glacier as he stood on it. Steam vents release pressure. Rocks occasionally fall nearby.

“It is live in there,” Pepper said. “Everything moves.”

The terrain presents a lot of challenges for even the most experienced outdoor enthusiast, which is why it would be incredibly difficult to rescue someone who became injured or stuck, Pepper said.

That’s largely why the Crater Glacier View Climb exists only as a guided trip, Frenzen said.

The Mount St. Helens Institute is allowed to offer the hike under a permit from the U.S.

Forest Service, which manages the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument. And North Country EMS will likely accompany many of this year’s trips, Yurkewycz said.

## Lawetlat’la

Mount St. Helens rests in a state of relative slumber for now. But it remains an active volcano less than a decade removed from its last eruptive phase that ended in 2008.

For many, the mountain is still defined by the May 1980 blast that flattened miles of forest, darkened skies and killed 57 people. Mount St. Helens is now among the most closely monitored volcanoes in the world, Frenzen said. And scientists know it will erupt again, he added.

The volcano’s explosive history started long before 1980. Native people have long recognized that history as part of the mountain’s identity, said Nathan Reynolds, an ecologist with the Cowlitz Indian Tribe. The Cowlitz name for Mount St. Helens, Lawetlat’la (“The Smoker”), evokes its fiery past, Reynolds said.

Mount St. Helens’ cultural significance to the Cowlitz Tribe and the Yakama Nation helped it earn special recognition in 2013. The mountain was designated a Traditional Cultural Property and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It’s one of just 23 Traditional Cultural Properties in the country, and one of two in Washington.

“As you climb the mountain, you enter a place that’s of stronger spiritual power for the indigenous people,” Reynolds said.

The same can be true for any visitor, Frenzen said.

“There’s a whole world out here that people can connect with and spend time with and form their own relationships with,” he said.

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