New methods aid in EIA round-up

by Marsha Shewczyk

Wild horses are not easily captured. Ordinary methods are of no use when a horse takes an energetic stance to remain free and wild. But with Equine Infectious Anemia spreading among reservation horses, all domestic as well as wild stock must be tested.

The uncontrollable horses which are difficult to overcome are the only horses which have not received their first Coggins test. The Coggins test is the blood sample used to determine whether a horse has EIA or not. "This is a mop up job," rider Jacob Frank commented. These horses are "what we couldn't catch before."

Rounding up the first 2600 horses was easy compared to rounding up the uncontrollables running rampant throughout the reservation. Many dedicated men, much time, proper equipment, money and an effective method is necessary to test every single horse.

Testing for EIA began in March of 1981 when it was discovered that several horses on the reservation had the disease. Since that time range riders, ride bosses and volunteers have been involved in the testing program. Money is coming from both tribal and federal sources.

Rounding up uncontrollable horses on horseback was discovered to be unfeasible. Riders had to find a much more efficient method of locating and capturing the wild stock. They began with the use of a helicopter for spotting and have now expanded their method to include a tranquilzer gun.

The three-seat helicopter, piloted by Frank Knokee of Corvallis Aero-Service aids in locating the horses from the air. The helicopter swoops down close enough to enable a passenger to shoot a dart at the horse. The darts contain a tranquilizing drug which downs the horse. The horse will fall within five minutes depending upon where the dart strikes.

Within three minutes or less the helicopter must land, passengers in the helicopter must jump out and hobble the horse. Riders are then be able to pursue the animal which travels at a slower pace due to the hobbles. The horse can then be rounded up and tested.

The horse must be observed closely after it falls as the tranquilizer can cause heart arrest. With the aid of a pump, the horse can be revived if resucitation takes place immediately.

Using a helicopter has a definite advantage when it comes to spotting horses. However, if the horses are running in timber it is too often difficult to get close enough to shoot a dart accurately. It may be even more difficult to land the helicopter fast enough to get to the horse before the tranquilizing drug wears off, mentioned pilot Knokee.

Helicopter service appears to be the only sensible way of rounding up these uncontrollable horses—but it is not cheap. The federal government, through the Bureau of Indian Affairs, has spent $52,000 on helicopter contracts. The tribes have paid out $39,530, totalling $91,530 spent on helicopter service from March 1 to June 10, 1981. The total expenditure for the EIA program since its inception in March is $171,949.97. This does not include salaries of range riders working with the ride bosses.

EIA percentage figures for the entire reservation run around 20 percent. Statistics for various range units on the reservation vary, however. It has been found that 30 percent of the horses in the Log Springs and Mutton Mountains units have EIA. Boulder Creek, Miller Flat and the Dry Creek area have a 10-15 percent rate along with the Tenino range unit. Metolius and Sidwalter have a 1 percent rate. According to acting land operations officer Dean Elliot, "Virtually all of the horses with EIA in the south end came out of the north end originally" accounting for the low percentage rate on the southend.

Most of the horses in the south end are branded, says Elliot. Because of this it is difficult to get help to round the stock up. Money for the sale of these horses goes to the owners, whereas money for the sale of unbranded horses goes to the ride boss who distrubutes it among the volunteers working with him. A hard day's work in the north end is more worthwhile financially than at the south end of the reservation.

The round-up and sale of uncontrollable horses has its advantages on the reservation range land, according to Range Conservationist Brian Spears. Spears says, "Ideally perennial grass would cover the range. It is more palatable and nutriative to the stock." But because the range has been overgrazed "it will be a long time before annual grass is replaced by perennials. This may never happen," he says.

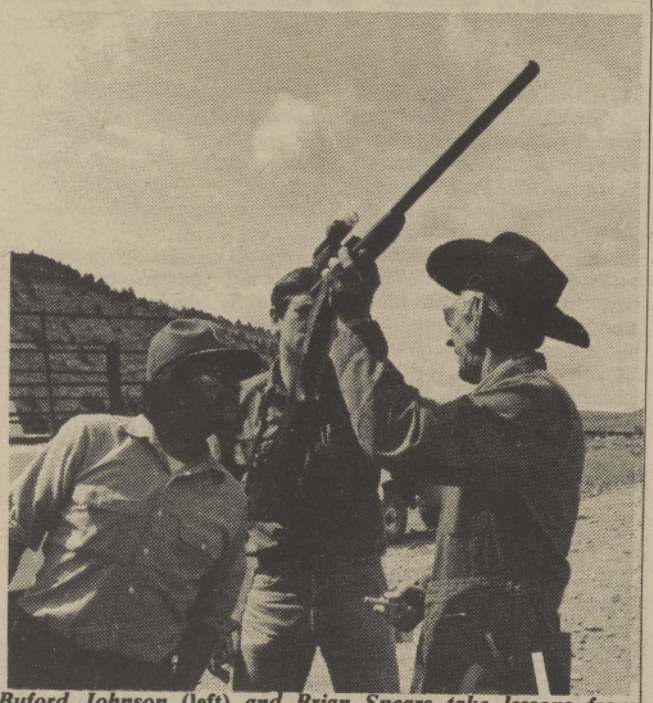
EIA testing also provides the opportunity to get rid of small inbred stock on the range. "There is a lot of culling," says Spears. The advantage to this Spears pointed out is in increasing the quality of stock on the range. With these added advantages to testing during the EIA operation, both manpower and money utilization are being put to the most efficient use.

The most difficult part of the entire project, rounding up the uncontrollable horses, has yet to be accomplished. Much more time and effort will go into this round-up before it is over. The scheduled completion date for the first testing is in the fall of this year when the second testing on reservation horses will begin.

Riders are all too aware of the necessity to get EIA infected horses off the reservation. The heat will increase the possibility of vectors contaminating more horses. With the utilization of helicopter, tranquilizer gun and dedicated workers, the infected horses as well as the uncontrollable stock on the range will be eliminated and eventually in as short a time as possible, the disease will be eradicated.

Spotting and pursuing horses from a helicopter provides an expedient means of rounding up uncontrollable horses.

Spilyay Tymoo photos by Shewczyk



Buford Johnson (left) *and Brian Spears take lessons from veterinarian Harry Vaughn of the University of Idaho in loading and shooting a 32 guage rifle loaded with dart and tranquilizing drug.*

Resucitation of a horse downed by tranquilizing drugs might be necessary during round-up of uncontrollables. Dr. Vaughn instructs Guy Wallulatum and other riders on the proper CPR method for use in the field.