

Horse policy: Tribes respond, detailing consequences

(Continued from page 1)

Smith is knowledgeable when it comes to horses: He has worked and been around them all his life, he owns several, and leads the top Wild Horse Race team in the nation. As president of the National Tribal Horse Coalition, Smith was prompted to write the Secretary of Agriculture due to the following situation:

Congress in 2007 effectively banned domestic equine slaughter by cutting funding for federal inspection of such operations.

Over the ensuing years, the number of unclaimed horses increased significantly across reservations and other rangeland areas. The ban also resulted in increased horse abuse and abandonment on tribal, state and federal lands.

The animals cause serious damage to streams, destroying fish habitat. They graze across rangeland, depleting the resource used by livestock and wildlife. Indian reservation land is especially affected, as people use these lands for horse abandonment.

The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs supported the Obama administration in 2011, when he signed legislation that would again allow USDA horse meat inspections.

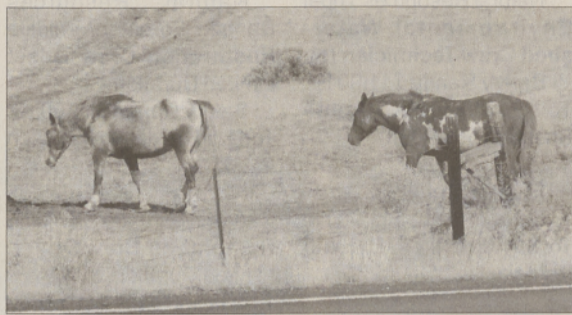
The legislation would allow sale of horse meat to countries in Europe and Asia where it is consumed the same as livestock meat. In France they raise horses as livestock for the purpose of human consumption.

Recent change

Earlier this year, following the 2011 legislation, the USDA was close to approving a horse meat processing facility in New Mexico.

Then, unexpectedly, word came that a Department of Agriculture spokesperson was urging Congress to continue the ban on horse-meat inspections.

This prompted Jason Smith to write to the Secretary of Agriculture. Other tribal leaders from the National Tribal Horse Coalition also wrote to the Secretary. Tribal Council Chairman Stanley Buck Smith addressed the topic in a letter to President Obama.



Yvonne Iverson/Spilyay

Horse can range at will across the reservation.

In his letter Tribal Council Chairman Smith writes:

"To reinstate the ban on USDA inspectors for horse meat for human consumption will not only continue a period of nearly seven years of unnecessary suffering and abuse of horses, but will also have severe economic and detrimental environmental effects on Tribal communities across this land."

Such an action warrants tribal consultation before implementation, Chairman Smith said.

Letter to USDA

Jason Smith's letter to Secretary Vilsack, providing the best summary of the issue, is worth reprinting here in its entirety:

Dear Mr. Secretary,

The National Tribal Horse Coalition (NTHC) is aware that a spokesman from your agency is now "urging Congress to reinstate the ban on production of horse meat for human consumption." The NTHC strongly opposes reinstatement of a policy that will have such severe detrimental consequences to our Tribal economies and fragile ecosystems. Tribes participating in our organization occupy trust lands of nearly 20 million acres.

Those who are advocating renewing the 2007 Appropriations Budget ban on horse meat inspections ignore the real world consequences of that ban. These are the findings of a Government Accountability Office (GAO) inquiry into Horse Welfare in relation to the termination of USDA horse meat inspectors, June 2011.

The GAO report concluded: Clearly the cessation of domestic slaughter has had unintended consequences, most importantly, perhaps, the decline in horse welfare in the United States. If that policy is reinstated,

Our reason for stepping into this rather unpopular fight is that the U.S. policy could be taking another wrong turn of historic significance...

the consequences are no longer "unintended." Proponents of an inspection ban do this knowing that it will inflict greater suffering to horses, and economic and environmental hardship to Tribal nations.

We in Indian Country know that our ability to affect Congressional action is often restricted when our voice is overridden in populist, popular and special interest forums of the majority culture. The emotional fervor of groups advocating for a ban on equine slaughter is a current case of this phenomena.

Our reason for stepping into this rather unpopular fight is that the U.S. policy could be taking another wrong turn of historic significance for the trust lands in much of Indian Country. Indian Country has long been subjected to the whims of the Congress of the United States. Federal lawmakers make policy in law that has far reaching impacts on the lands held in trust for the benefit of the Indian owners (Tribes and individuals): For example, the General Allotment Act (and related acts) had far reaching impacts for both the U.S. Treasury and to the Indian Country. Many of these Indian Country lands have recently seen the settlement of long-standing disputes of both policy and management issues with the United States (i.e. Cobell and Keepseagle) where federal

Executive Agencies have settled Tribal and individual Indian claims stemming from both bad policy made by Congress and poorly executed management and policy on the part of the departments and agencies of the United States.

The March 21, 2013 article posted in "Foodsafety.com" reflect policy advocacy in a quote from you referring to a "third way" of "dealing with the nation's horse problem" other than "slaughtering the animals for human consumption."

Mr. Secretary, we want to emphasize that the arguments around horse slaughter are all about imposing cultural mores of special interest groups from majority American culture on others. We have experienced this often in the past. Though we have always highly valued the horse in our cultures, we also understand the lands we live on. We also are subject to the economics of the society we must participate in. We cannot afford to ignore the role of the horse as livestock that needs management. We own horses we value highly and honor but we know ultimately that nature will destroy our herds if we cannot manage them. Our children's children will be left with a greatly diminished future.

We in Indian Country do not relish the concept of slaughtering horses; however, the scope of the overgrazing impacts to our lands are degrees of magnitude greater than for the owners of private lands in the rest of the U.S.

Private landowners can simply chase dumped livestock out of the gates of their pastures, with little effort or consequence. We, on the other hand, control large stretches of (often arid) lands that we rely on for subsistence use, economic use, and cultural practices where illegally dumped horses are, in many cases already threatening watershed and ecosystem stability on our trust lands. Other than shipping horses to Canada or Mexico (which some are already forced to do at an economic loss) or trying to sell locally (on a market that is so depressed that roundup costs exceed sale proceeds and supply overwhelms demand). Some have

tried adoption, to little avail. Demand is always swamped by the reproductive capacity of the herds. We do not have funding available to sterilize large numbers of horses and if we did, they would still be overgrazing for another human generation until the sterilized horses died. We do not have the 25-plus years to wait around and see if a failed "third party" alternative will solve the nation's problem.

The trust responsibility of the whole United States government must be lived up to.

Badly informed policy (i.e. the 2007 inspections ban) has had "unintended consequences" and must not be repeated.

We look forward to dialoguing with you further on this issue. We are engaging our member tribal governments to request that they demand government-to-government consultation on this issue.

Sincerely, Jason Smith, President, National Tribal Horse Coalition.

Around the Region

Rancher slams wild horse impact study

Federal biologists have concluded that the management of wild horses in a portion of Oregon Malheur National Forest doesn't jeopardize threatened steelhead.

However, the rancher who sued the government to study the horses' environment impact said the study minimizes their detrimental effects on fish.

Rancher Loren Stout of Dayville believes the horses are causing damage to stream banks that is blamed on his cattle, preventing them from being turned out to graze.

The recent biological opinion downplays the harm that horses have had on steelhead habitat to justify the government's management plan, he said. "What they're saying is it's different if it's a horse. It's the work cover-up I've seen."

Wild horses may cause injury to individual fish, but this harm does not imperil their continued existence, according to a biological

opinion recently issued by the National Marine Fisheries Service.

To mitigate the impact on steelhead habitat, the U.S. Forest Service will be expected to remove horses from the Murderers Creek wild horse territory to maintain the population at 50-140 animals.

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management is in charge of delivering removed horses to its holding facilities as well as the adoption process.

The federal government estimates that horse populations have hovered between 90 and 460 animals in the past decade, with the current number standing at 57 after roughly 200 horses were removed in late 2012 and early 2013.

Stout said there's actually many more horses left in the territory, which will be verified by more recent aerial surveys of the area.

(Note: This article by Mateusz Perkowski is reprinted from the Capital Press.)

Guilty plea in federal domestic assault case

Casey Marcus Lillie, 26, of Warm Springs, pleaded guilty last week in federal court to one count of domestic assault by an habitual offender. The maximum sentence for domestic assault by an habitual offender is ten years in prison, a fine of \$250,000, and three years of supervised release.

Sentencing is scheduled for June 20. Lillie is currently in the custody of the United States Marshals Service.

According to the prosecutor's statements in court, on December 12, 2012, Lillie assaulted a woman with whom he had been cohabitating as an intimate partner.

Lillie struck the victim with his hands and kicked her in the face with his feet. The assault caused extensive

bruising to the victim's face. The defendant battered the victim so severely that one of her eyes was temporarily swollen shut. The victim's injuries required her to be transported to St. Charles Hospital Madras for medical attention.

On two separate prior occasions, in November 2011 and March 2012, the defendant was previously convicted in the Warm Springs Tribal Court for assault and battery, as well as abduction, against the same victim.

Both of those prior assaults also resulted in the victim being transported to St. Charles Madras for treatment of her injuries.

The case was investigated by the Warm Springs Police Department and the FBI's Bend office.

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