

# Many horses treated at W.S. gelding clinic

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Gelding is a practice long-entrenched in the world of tribal wild horse herd management. However, the practice of gelding—or castration—represents far more than simply a medical procedure, performed on stallions to prevent future breeding.

The entire equine castration activity is heavily steeped in tribal tradition.

Forty of 50 years ago Warm Springs family members practiced equine castration as a necessity for healthy herd management.

It was time of celebration for Warm Springs family members, as they worked together for the preservation of the herds that would also preserve the tribal traditions and lifestyle.

Both men and women rode together, gathering horses from the wilds, gathering them as selected for branding and the castration procedure.

All young men were expected to participate as well, learning how to work with the horses, and become productive members of the family.

The practice still exists, connecting families and upholding tradition.

I was privileged to witness a tribal castration activity. I did this in conjunction with Oregon State University.

I heard many stories of how the entire family's men, women and children would ride together on their saddle horses, gathering and bringing in wild horses from reservation lands.

Tribal member Tacu Lee Wich is proud of his heritage, ancestry and family. His eyes sparkled as he shared his own story with me, "Even my grandmother Annie was part of the day."

Mr. Wich expressed his pride in family stewardship, as he explained that the younger boys were not allowed to play until the day's chores were finished.

At the OSU horse clinic in October, Tacu Lee was a happy man today, watching all his family work together.

The Lincoln Jay Suppah family also rides together, gathering up wild horses for many weeks prior to the cas-



Vaccine injection at the Gelding Clinic.

Beth Matanane/WSHN

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tration clinic. Fay Hurtado is considered the matriarch of this family.

Her equine knowledge and organizational skills are one of the driving forces behind this family's successful place in the equine world.

Most importantly, Fay has always kept the traditional tribal ways at the center of what is being accomplished with the horses.

Fay strongly believes in the importance of keeping tribal horse herd numbers manageable and healthy, through good practices and gelding young stallions.

She said that in the early 2000s there were so many reservation horses that one stallion could claim up to 35 mares.

Fast forward to 2008—when in a moment of 'past meets the present'—Fay contacted the OSU Department of Animal Sciences and College of Veterinary Medicine. Together they orchestrated a well-planned castration clinic in Warm Springs.

Fay remembers how the restoration of 'the lost art

of family gatherings' was aided by the Oregon State program. It was a historical event that combined tribal members working on horseback and OSU staff and students, who took turns gelding.

Lunch was provided to all, as we formed positive partnerships.

In 2011 Fay provided participants with printed tee-shirts that read 'I Survived Dirt, Dust and Dragging.' That statement proudly represented that day's accomplishments.

The clinic in October was the thirteenth successful year for the event: Twenty-one horses were successfully gelded.

This fall's event team included Warm Springs Agriculture, Range and Ag and the Branch of Natural Resources, and the OSU Veterinary School.

Natural Resources organized and facilitated this exceptional day of learning, sharing and communication.

Among the participants were Dr. Jacob Mecham, Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, and assistant professor of Clinical Equine Science Faculty; and Dr. Jorge Vanegas, Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, associate professor of Clinical Science and Rural Veterinary Practice.

On hand was Dr. Vanessa De Souza, resident, graduate student in Theriogenology, specializing in reproductive medicine and provided guidance.

Dr. Mecham summed up the results of this par-

ticular clinic as a win-win for students and horses. "The Warm Springs gelding clinic is a large portion of the experience the students receive regarding gelding," the doctor said.

All participating gelding clinic students were women this year—A first in its history.

Undergraduate student Jaymie Belcher owns a mustang and she would always own a mustang. Jamie is now considering a Warm Springs tribal horse as her next horse.

At the clinic safety was of the utmost importance, and clear instruction was provided to all on the necessity of being alert, and having a conscious and constant awareness of their surroundings and activity.

A variety of techniques and procedures were taught and implemented by students, including the use of the 'Henderson tool'. This tool is a specialized, state-of-the-art castration clamp, aiding in minimizing blood loss for the animals.

In addition to gelding processes, some tribal members branded their horses. Vaccinations were administered by OSU students, including the West Nile virus vaccine.

Dr. Mecham's assistant and OSU Veterinary Technician Kim Veldman prepared and dispensed vaccines and sedation for administration.

Each horse was given appropriate sedation according to weight approximation, plus temperament assessment. Kim spent

many hours preparing for this event.

One tribal member asked to have his mare branded and vaccinated, and mentioned she might possibly be carrying a foal.

When palpated for pregnancy by Dr. Vanessa De Souza, the beautiful bay mare was confirmed to be at three months gestation. This discovery added to the excitement on Gelding Clinic day.

Another horse was found with an injury. While sedated the animal underwent a tooth extraction.

I liken the entire operation I witnessed to be 'a dance as old as time'—A precision dance that incorporated traditional methods, skilled hands and experienced riders on proven saddle horses.

It was obvious that the tribal members were entirely familiar with the operation unfolding before me. And they understood the necessity of carefully orchestrated teamwork.

It was a dance, a song of precision with all dancers proficient in the steps of accuracy and history's melody. The teamwork among tribal members, OSU and the other participants was astounding.

Each horse was initially guided into a hydraulic chute, front and rear gates were closed with the horse standing inside. OSU students then expertly administered sedation, medications, blood draws and vaccines.

I remember hearing the harsh, metal-on-metal sound of the release gate opening, seeing the horse's first preliminary reaction, indignant steps towards its perceived freedom.

A single, mounted tribal member would shadow the horse, watching carefully as the horse became woozy under the sedation, as its hoof placement became less accurate.

Once the horse accepted the sedative affects and laid down, its legs were secured with ropes, the steady tension skillfully managed by the mounted tribal members surrounding the sedated animal.

Steady pressure on the ropes was applied from their saddles, with each man

*... the cherished Pacific Northwest American Heritage horses from the Warm Springs Reservation...*

and his saddle horse literally locked onto the job they were performing.

Another tribal member would sit at the horse's head, holding it and covering its eyes.

Each person was affixed on the timing and the precision needed for the process to be successful and without incident—It was a true dance to behold!

The day's experienced tribal members, working alongside the skilled OSU veterinary team and students, made this clinic a well-planned and very successful event.

There were no injuries to either human or horse. The impact of stress to the horses was at a minimum; and all horses were up and walking within a short time.

Special recognition goes to Avon 'Von' Garcia, a young man 14 years of age.

Von made sure the leg ropes were secure on the horses as they lay down under sedation. He assisted in meeting any need his team requested.

Von has learned the tribal way, and observed the precision and compassion in which the OSU students applied their own skills to the work. Von has proven he is a valued team member for tomorrow's future.

He and his uncle Dustin Suppah were recently featured in an OPB news article. See it at:

[opb.org/news/article/wild-horses-warm-springs-oregon-chase/](http://opb.org/news/article/wild-horses-warm-springs-oregon-chase/).

The tribal members and their roles in the Gelding Clinic were many and varied:

Jay Suppah, Range Management ride boss for the Simnasho Grazing District, oversaw all the tribal men who participated. Terry Stradley, Maynard Jim and Terry Squiemphen operated the panels that guided the horses into the chute.

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The Warm Springs gelding clinic saw many participants, and more than 20 horses treated.

Beth Matanane/WSHN