

# Rehabilitating Horses and Prisoners

AP

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The aim was rehabilitation, both for the horse and for the men, inmates at the Colorado state penitentiary who were taking part in a program, now one year old, aimed at speeding public adoption of wild horses.

Ranchers and the Federal Government have long debated whether too many wild horses and burros crowd the West's grazing lands.

To reduce the wild horse population, the Government has captured up to 10,000 of the animals and is offering them for adoption. Meanwhile, the cost of holding them in Government corrals is \$9.3 million annually.

Moratorium on Killing at Issue

Now the Bureau of Land Management has endorsed a proposal that would lift a 1982 moratorium on killing horses and burros not adopted after 90 days in a holding pen, a decision that has provoked thousands of protests.

While the proposal is under review, the inmates continue their work.

Walt Jakobowski, who runs the bureau's wild horse and burro program in Canon City, believes that if the horses are tamed by convicts, they become more desirable.

It took him more than a year to persuade his agency and the Colorado Department of Corrections to take the gamble.

The program started with 50 horses and eight inmates, only one of whom had experience working with horses.

"Our biggest problem was finding somebody to run the program who had experience with wild horses," Mr. Jakobowski said. Key Members of the Team

He found Ron Zaidlicz, a veterinarian active in the National Organization for Wild American Horses, with headquarters in nearby Bailey, Colo. Mr. Zaidlicz agreed to teach the inmates animal husbandry. Another member of the organization, Tony Bainbridge, a cowboy who has spent more than two decades working with wild horses, joined the experiment to show the prisoners how to halter-break horses.

"The deal was perfect," Mr. Jakobowski said. "The prison provides the facilities and the labor, the B.L.M. provides the horses and feed, and NOWAH provides the expertise."

The bureau pays the corrections department \$2.55 a day per horse, the standard fee for keeping wild horses at the holding pens in Nevada, Nebraska and Texas.

Benny Johnson, the prison superintendent, who was initially reluctant to take part in the program because of high risk and fear of injuries, said that the prison system is now making a slight profit on it.

"There's a light at the end of the tunnel for these horses," Mr. Jakobowski said. "Because of the care and inmate training they get here, we've been able to adopt out nearly every one that's come through." Horse-Taming Program

Besides teaching the horses to accept a halter, the prisoners treat illnesses and injuries, clean up coats, curry manes and tails, trim hooves and worm

and vaccinate the horses. Each horse averages 30 days of taming before being shipped to an adoption center for sale at \$125 a head.

Thirty-five inmates and 350 horses are involved in the program. Mr. Bainbridge talks of expanding the stable to 1,000 horses and as many men as necessary to train them.

"We've got a good thing going here," he said. "Everybody wins - the horses, the inmates and the taxpayers."

"This is the way to do time," said Carl, a 30-year-old Denver inmate who asked that his last name not be used. "You never know what's gonna happen, you're never bored, you're out in the sunlight and you're away from the prison atmosphere. This is the closest thing to freedom you're gonna get in the big house."

Carl is halfway through a two-year sentence for assault.

The superintendent's fears of inmate injuries were realized. The inmates have had several broken bones and a few concussions.

"But most prisoners went right back to the program after they healed up," Mr. Johnson said. The superintendent is now a wholehearted fan of the experiment. Superintendent Is Elated

"It gives them responsibility, and I've seen changes in attitude," he said. "We're trying to give them a positive experience, a work ethic, a feeling of being back in society. These men must all work together as two-man teams. They have to depend on each other for their own safety. The program teaches them how to get along with people as well as wild horses."

"Out here you're not just a number, you're a man," Mr. Bainbridge explains. "I forget they're inmates."

Robert Martinez finishes his three-year sentence for burglary in September. He is planning to supplement his income as a painter by breeding horses

and has already adopted two that he trained. His family is keeping them in Colorado Springs.

Carl is now considering giving up the limousine business in favor of ranching when he leaves prison.

"There are very few people who deal with wild horses on an eight-hour, five-day-a-week basis," Carl said. "When I take a wild maniac and turn it into a trusting friend, that's rewarding. That's an accomplishment."

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