

2003 Lawsuit Article

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## **Nevada might sue over lack of wild horse roundups**

ASSOCIATED PRESS

CARSON CITY, Nev. (AP) - The state might sue unless the federal government removes thousands of more wild horses from public lands in Nevada, a state legislator warned.

State Sen. Dean Rhoads, chairman of the Legislative Committee on Public Lands, said a lack of federal funding is threatening planned roundups of the animals.

"There's far too many horses on the range," said Rhoads, R-Tuscarora, a rancher. "With damage from fires and the continuing drought, there isn't enough forage. Wildlife and livestock are being negatively impacted."

The Bureau of Land Management wants to reduce the number of wild horses in Nevada from the current level of about 18,000 to 14,500 over the next two years.

But BLM officials said the plans are in doubt because they haven't received their federal budget appropriation for the current fiscal year.

Rhoads said the committee would send a letter to Interior Secretary Gale Norton to request her support in securing the funds.

"If this doesn't work, we might be forced to take legal action," he told the Reno Gazette-Journal.

Last month, the Nevada Wildlife Commission expressed similar concerns to Gov. Kenny Guinn, who has appealed to Norton for help and called for a re-evaluation of the agency's wild horse budget.

State Wildlife Department spokeswoman Kelly Clark said her agency is considering a number of options to protect wildlife threatened by too many wild horses.

Clark said bighorn sheep in southern Nevada are among a number of animals facing problems, and a lawsuit is one possible option.

In 2000, the BLM established a five-year plan to trim the number of wild horses in Nevada. There were an estimated 25,000 wild horses then.

BLM spokeswoman JoLynn Worley said the removal of 1,200 wild horses from the Nellis Range northwest of Las Vegas is under way.

But other scheduled roundups this winter and next summer are on hold because of the budget situation.

Some BLM funds were diverted to round up horses in Wyoming after that state sued the federal government, Worley said.

Wild horses, viewed by advocates as a symbol of the Old West, are protected under federal law.

Information from: Reno Gazette-Journal