

# Legal distinction for Nevada's wild horses causes confusion

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CARSON CITY, Nev. — A state panel plans to allocate \$374,325 over several years to help the federal government find homes for wild horses that roam across Nevada.

But the state Commission on the Preservation of Wild Horses can't give funds to the state Agriculture Department, which is losing money on its separate wild horse adoption program.

**Catherine Barcomb**, executive director of the wild horse commission, said the funding is for wild horses — and under state law the Agriculture Department is dealing with "estrays."

Estrays are wild horses or offspring of horses that once had owners. Barcomb said that's different than the wild horses on Nevada's vast expanses of federal land that may never have been owned by anyone.

The estrays managed by the Agriculture Department are in the Virginia Range, a 316,000-acre area near Reno.

The agency rounds up the estrays and tries to get them adopted, but Agriculture Director Paul Iverson says the program loses money because there's little demand for the horses.

Iverson told the state Board of Examiners this week that there are about 1,000 estrays in the Virginia Range — and the area shouldn't have more than 600 animals.

He added his agency has spent about \$70,000 and will need to tap into the state's emergency fund for another \$70,000 to continue caring for the horses.

But Barcomb says she can't turn over funds to Iverson's horse program because of the animals' legal status as estrays.

The wild horse commission was created in 1985, financed by interest from a state fund created after a California man died in the 1970s and left about \$230,000 for "the wild horses of Nevada." The money from Leo Heil sat in a trust fund for years, growing to more than \$1 million.

At first, the fund couldn't be drawn down below \$900,000, except in emergencies. The 2001 Legislature changed that, permitting \$400,000 from the trust fund to be used to match a similar amount from the federal Bureau of Land Management.

**The money is for a nonprofit national foundation** whose goal is to get wild horses and burros on federal lands adopted. There are about 35,000 wild horses in Nevada — the largest population of any state.