

Horse Corral

Wild and Free?

Addressing the Wild Horse & Burro Crisis

By Alex Valverde, Equine Advocates Communications Manager

Wild horses and burros are facing a crisis right now at the hands of the Bureau of Land Management, or BLM. In January, the BLM announced plans to gather at least 22,000 wild horses and burros through the end of September 2022. The plan is to remove at least 19,000 "excess animals," and treat at least 2,300 animals with various forms of fertility control and release those equines back onto public lands.

The BLM's press release on this announcement states that "if achieved, this would be the largest number of animals ever treated with fertility control in one year - nearly double the previous record of 1,160 treatments set in 2021 - as well as the largest number of animals ever gathered and removed in one year." So far this year, hundreds of wild horses have been taken from their homes. The governmental policy The Path Forward, which we are opposed to, has permitted and promoted these roundups in the name of "population control" since it was implemented in 2019. This horrific policy is destroying the viability of the herds and the process used for removal is cruel, inhumane, and unnecessary.

Workers use helicopters to chase herds



into holding pens. These tactics scare the horses and they can be injured or even killed during the roundups. The captured horses who aren't treated and released back into the wild end up being adopted through the BLM or sold privately at BLM auctions where their fate is uncertain and often bleak as they have no protection at all from ending up in Mexican or Canadian slaughterhouses. As an equine rescue and sanctuary, we've seen what can happen to Wild Mustangs that end up in captivity.

"The bottom line is that many people who adopt or end up with a wild horse or burro are not always equipped to care for them properly and often become frustrated when they realize these animals do not behave like domestic equines," said Equine Advocates Presidents and Founder Susan Wagner. "For many of these animals, it is just a matter of time before they end up at auction and sold for slaughter."

One of Equine Advocates' newest rescues is Onaqui, a Wild Mustang mare from Utah, who was rounded up by the BLM last summer. During that brutal 5-day roundup, more than 300 wild horses lost their freedom and their families. She was named in honor of the area she lived in for all of her life until her capture - the Onaqui Mountain Herd Management Area (HMA) located 60 miles southwest of Salt Lake City. The BLM estimated Onaqui's age to be around 16.

After the roundup, Onaqui was sold at a BLM online auction to someone in New York who was not able to work with her and consequently no longer wanted her. This comes as no surprise as wild horses and burros do not belong in captivity, especially a mare of Onaqui's age at her time of capture. She should have been released back with the remaining members of her herd, but that did not happen. Luckily, we heard about her and took her into the sanctuary, where our staff has the knowledge and training to work with her. We've also brought in a horse trainer to help us with the process of helping her adjust to living at the sanctuary. We know we can never replicate the environment of her former home of the public rangelands, but we feel that she'll get the proper care and a comfortable life despite her situation.

We know it will be a long process, but we're committed to helping her transition to her new life and hope she can soon thrive at the sanctuary, like our other rescued equines, including three other Wild Mustangs. However, our true wish is that she, and all other Wild Mustangs, could live out their lives as nature intended - wild and free.



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Equine Advocates-2022 Open Day Schedule 11:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

August 21st, September 24th, October 9th, November 5th

518-245-1599 • www.equineadvocates.org

The sanctuary is located at 3212 State Route 66, Chatham, NY.

All visitors will need to sign a release form upon arrival.

Masks will be required while inside the Welcome Center.

As much as we love animals, no pets are permitted to protect our residents. Admission is free, but please consider making a tax-deductible donation. We hope to see you here!

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