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Organization:

Title:

Comments: I would like to bring a few points to consider regarding the Heber herd: the National Forest is classified as protected and managed federal land in the US; owned collectively by the American people through the federal government and managed by the US Forest Service...that includes taxpayers like myself. The ranchers opposed to these protected herds (as well as opposition to the wolf introduction) have been the most vocal, claiming the horses are not mustang or belonging to the land originally...which is correct. They were first introduced by Spanish explorers, long before said ranchers' families were settled here with cattle. Please inquire of the Native Americans which species is original. Some horses in these herds have been dumped by irresponsible owners and others have appeared due to downed fence lines, neither of which situations were caused by the horses themselves.

I have no objection to cattle grazing rights, but I do have an issue with entitlement, privilege and negativity about other species being culled that ranchers feel compete with their cattle. Cattle that they are allowed to graze on public land for a mere \$2.37/head which is a privately owned business. The situation with the shootings of protected horses within the NFS has escalated to the point of threats to horse advocates, taunting them with horse meat recipes and public spitting on certain individuals. Comments by certain ranchers show their obvious disdain and disregard such as "the horse advocate's love affair with the Heber herd".

Add to the above chaos is the eerie silence surrounding the investigation except for the standard statement being released for the past 18 months: horses appeared to have died from gunshot and the investigation is ongoing. The most recent slaying of an entire herd family leads to new suspicion that this is no longer the work of one individual, but an organized annihilation by several shooters. Horses do not typically stand around while being shot at. As a trail rider myself, I no longer feel safe or comfortable riding my horse in the NFS, and other riders have expressed the same concerns.

In closing I would like to add that the White Mts. relies heavily on tourism on its public lands: camping, hiking, fishing, hunting, boating, etc. bring thousands to the NFS to enjoy the beauty we take for granted every day, which supports our whole community economically, not just a few ranchers. It's a common sight to see cars pulled off the road, taking pictures of deer, elk, and yes, even the horses. I've never seen a herd of cattle being photographed!

I implore you to please consider these points and the impact of the negative publicity that removing the horses will bring. Nobody is fooled by the suggested plan of culling; the numbers projected will not genetically sustain a viable herd and will be a death sentence. Other herds have been managed successfully. I would encourage more research on the subject; perhaps Dr. Ole Alumbrac (Lakeside, AZ) who is a wildlife/exotic vet and Dr. Gail Leith (AZ Equine in Gilbert, AZ) who is a reproductive specialist could be of help.

Respectfully,
Scarlett Coyle