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Organization:

Title:

Comments: I came to the Black Canyon Ranch when I married Richard Gibson in 1955. The Gibson family was in the ranching business. I witnessed running cattle on the forest service permit on the mountain and then in the fall taking all of the cattle off of the forest in the winter. I have seen many changes on the forest including a huge increase in horses following the Rodeo Chediski Fire in 2002. It burned the boundary fence between the National Forest and the Apache Indian Reservation. From Forest Lakes and the 300 road all the way to the outskirts of Show Low.

At first in the 70's we had a small herd of 7 head of horses and they were the horses that the Heber Wild Horse Territory was established for. Bruce Mortensen with the Forest Service Range Management designated the area in Westfork from Forest Lakes parallel to highway 260 from the Forest Road 86, almost to Heber. This area was never intended for 100's or 1000's of horses.

The original horse herd died in approximately 1974, the stallion was sterile following several severe winters and no more colts were produced. The black stallion had a club foot on the left back side. I witnessed the horses when they were in the territory and I witnessed when they were no longer there.

There were a few horses to the East side of the grazing permit. In those early days the ranchers were told by the Forest Service to control the feral horse population or they would get their permitted amount of cattle reduced.

Following the fire in 2002 when the boundary fences were destroyed many horses came onto the forest in search of food from the reservation. When the Forest Service attempted to handle this problem by proposing a gather that is when the litigation began. The Forest Service did not manage the horses any longer. The Apache Tribe did not want the horses back as they already had thousands of horses damaging and destroying their land.

There is legal precedent for managing these horses. Our family knew Dolph Slosser who was a Forest Ranger that was involved in previous efforts to gather and manage horses on this forest. The legal battle is well documented and prior to horse and animal rights activists getting involved these trespass animals were removed following the Forest Service regulations and Arizona State Trespass animal laws.

The activists and their supporters constant stream of propaganda has caused a great deal of division within our community. It has also caused members of my family to receive numerous threats. This is completely out of control. Where is the Forest Service when it comes to educating the general public on ranchers rights and their legal use of the forest?

The Forest Service used to have numerous people employed who interacted with members of our community. They understood our desire to work in the agriculture industry in harmony with the regulations and the people within the Forest Service. The employees are much more distant and removed from interactions within the people of the community. With this disconnect they seem out of touch with the harm being done to the ranching community as well as the hunting community. After all this problem has gone on for over 15 years, only becoming worse with each Spring when the herds grow.

The Ranchers pay to have their cattle on the forest. The horses and the activists who want them on the forest do not pay one dime.

I support common sense horse management. It is imperative for the health of our forest and our community.