

Nevada Department of Agriculture News Release

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**For Immediate Release
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The Nevada Department of Agriculture (NDA) is planning an estray horse collection near Alternate Highway 95 and Highway 50 over the next 30 days. The Department has been receiving numerous phone calls and other communications regarding estray horses near these highways and is striving to prevent the inevitable. In the last seven days, seven estray horses have been hit by vehicles.

In 1971 Congress passed the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act which provided federal protection and management for free-roaming horses and burros on public land.

Most of the land on the Virginia Range is privately owned and in 1983 and 1984 the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) determined that there was no basis to designate this area as a herd area. BLM ran a capture program for two years in Stockton Flat/Horse Springs and Jumbo. When completed, the BLM declared the Virginia Range horse-free through public decision documents.

Management of the remaining horses on the Virginia Range rests under the jurisdiction of the NDA by the estray livestock provisions of NRS 569 and Assembly Bill 619 which was enacted during the 1997 Nevada Legislative session.

In 1997, NDA started the Virginia Range Estray Horse Management Program (VREHMP). The mission of the program focuses on three major areas of concern in this order: (1) public safety and animal welfare; (2) maintenance of a healthy and sustainable estray horse population on the Virginia Range; and (3) establishment of cooperative agreements with non-profit groups to facilitate the adoption and proper care of the estray horses removed from the Virginia Range.

Fourteen years after the VREHMP was initiated, the program has evolved into a problem horse management issue. There's no funding for gathers, contraception, or effective management of these estray horses. According to studies done by BLM and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) the Virginia Range can support 500 to 600 head of estray horses. That low number has never been achieved to establish if environmental conditions could even support that many horses. It is estimated that there are close to 2,000 head currently living on the range and problems are starting to surface.

The Virginia Range herd area consists of an area approximately 283,769 acres bounded on the west by Hwy. 395; on the east by Alternate Highway 95; on the north by the Truckee River and Highway 80 and on the south by the Carson River and Highway 50.

During spring and summer, the estray horses generally have enough water and forage on the range to stay at higher elevations. In autumn and winter, as the forage and water diminish, these estray horses are coming down off the range and moving in search of food and water. "With four major highways as basically borders of the range, and with as many horses as there are on the range, conditions point to a potential public safety crisis" said Ed Foster NDA spokesperson. "We're not willing to just wait and see what happens" he added.

Autumn is upon us and the Virginia Range is drying out fast. Over the last two weeks surveillance has concluded that even though it's still early, there are a couple hundred horses within one mile of one of the four highways surrounding the range.

In an effort to reduce the chance of vehicular interaction with drivers and horses on the four highways that border the Virginia Range, NDA will be conducting an ongoing collection of estray horse over the next month. Horses collected will be processed according to NRS 569 (Attorney General Opinion # 82-9).

At this point public safety is the biggest concern NDA has with the Virginia Range estray horses, we would ask that citizens be alert to this danger especially at night.