

# Virginia Range Feral Horses

## Frequently Asked Questions



### Are the Virginia Range horses wild mustangs?

Most wild horses in Nevada fall under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM). However, the BLM Nevada declared the Virginia Range a “wild horse free area” through a land planning process in 1986.

As a result of this declaration, the Virginia Range horses have been designated as stray/feral livestock because they are not within a BLM herd management area. Horses that have migrated over time or have been “turned out” onto the Virginia range fall under Nevada Revised Statute (NRS) Chapter 569, pertaining to stray/feral livestock.

### What is stray/feral livestock?

“Feral” refers to any formerly domesticated livestock, which are running at large upon public or private lands with no physical signs of domestication. “Stray” refers to any domesticated livestock showing signs of domestication, running at large upon public or private land, whose owner is unknown.

### Why are there so many Virginia Range stray horses?

Horse populations in the wild can quickly grow, doubling in size every few years. Based on the last official census (June 2014), there are more than 1,950 stray/feral horses on and around the Virginia Range. The range was determined by a range inventory report by the Nevada Department of Agriculture (NDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Virginia Range Wildlife Protection Association in 2001 to support a population of 300-600 horses.

### Why are the horses sometimes considered public safety hazards?

Four major highways border the range as well as a number of residential areas. In autumn and winter, as the forage and water diminish, stray horses come down off the range and move into urban areas searching for food and water. Horses near roadways and residential areas can cause car and pedestrian accidents. In recent years, the NDA has documented incidences where horses have kicked and seriously injured children, horses have died from vehicle collisions, and three separate incidences with human fatalities as a result of horse/vehicle collisions.

### Is there a management program for the horses?

The Virginia Range feral/stray horse population can benefit from a proactive management program. Currently, the NDA is managing feral livestock to the best of its ability within existing legal and fiscal authorities, and within the cooperative agreement with the American Wild Horse Preservation Campaign (AWHPC). The NDA’s efforts are focused on protecting public safety, such as removing horses in areas where public safety is of concern.

### What can I do?

#### ▶ Report illegal feeding.

Call the Animal Industry division at **775-353-3709** with specific details – date, time, address or location, license plate numbers and any other identifying information.

#### ▶ Fence out private property.

Because horses are attracted to green landscapes, sturdy fencing around such areas can help keep horses away from urban and suburban areas.

#### ▶ Keep a safe distance from horses.

Horses can be unpredictable and can cause serious bodily injuries.

#### ▶ Drive with extra caution.

Please be especially careful in areas where horses or other wildlife may be located.



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### Are there viable birth control methods that can be used to control expanding horse populations?

Research continues for a cost-efficient method of birth control for free-roaming horses. Currently, under the cooperative agreement with the NDA, AWHPC is administering an immunocontraceptive vaccine called porcine zona pellucida (PZP), as a research trial to determine if it is a viable method of management in the Virginia Range.

### What does "fence out" mean in Nevada?

"Fence out" means if landowners do not want livestock on their property, they must construct a legal fence in accordance with NRS 569.431.

### What happens to horses that are hit in accidents?

The NDA humanely euthanizes injured horses. Carcasses are removed from areas of concern for public safety reasons, with cooperating agencies depending on location, and when resources and equipment are available.

### Is it legal to feed the horses?

Feeding horses is a violation of NRS 569.040 to feed stray/feral horses. Despite the public's best intentions, feeding horses only draws them out of the range and brings them into urban areas. This poses a direct threat to public safety on roads and in neighborhoods. Additionally, like any other non-domesticated animal living in the wild, if there is not sufficient forage, feral livestock is expected to migrate to survive.

The NDA investigates feeding complaints, enforces the no-feeding statute with warning citations, and issues fines of up to \$2,000 and charges of a gross misdemeanor if feeding continues after warning citations have been issued.

### Can I supply them water?

Watering horses is legal under NRS; however, the NDA recommends NOT watering horses in or near urban areas or major roads out of concern for public safety.

### Why does the NDA trap and remove Virginia Range estray horses?

The NDA only traps and removes or relocates horses when they are a public safety concern. Public safety concerns include livestock that are in residential areas and horses in close proximity to roadways. Since 2011, the only horses that have been trapped and transferred to the NDA's facility at the Northern Nevada Correctional Center are those considered threats to both public safety and to the horses themselves.

### What happens to the Virginia Range estray horses collected by NDA?

Currently, under the cooperative agreement with the NDA, AWHPC has the option to adopt the horses. If AWHPC cannot place the horses, the horses may be sold per NRS 569.080 at a public livestock auction where any member of the public may purchase the livestock.

### Are citizen tax dollars used to collect and remove Virginia Range estray horses?

No general fund money currently is allocated for the management of feral or stray livestock. Fees paid by Nevada livestock producers support the NDA's agriculture enforcement officers, which include activities associated with the Virginia Range horses.

### I've heard that Virginia Range estray horses go to slaughter?

Since March of 2013 NDA has had an agreement with the AWHPC, a non-profit horse advocacy group, to adopt out the horses. If they do not get adopted, it is possible that the horses could end up for sale at public auction – at which the NDA has no authority to determine buying outcomes.

#### Contact

##### ► Animal Industry division

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