

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, in 1984 the BLM declared the Virginia Range "wild horse free."

As a result of this declaration, the Virginia Range horses are legally considered 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 under jurisdiction of the Nevada Department of Agriculture (NDA).

What are stray/feral livestock?

Per NRS Chapter 569.008, "feral" is defined as any formerly domesticated livestock, which are running at large upon public or private lands with no physical signs of domestication. Per NRS Chapter 569.0075, "stray" is defined as any domesticated livestock showing signs of domestication, running at large upon public or private land, whose owner is unknown.

Why does the NDA gather and remove Virginia Range stray horses?

The NDA gathers and removes or relocates horses when they are a public safety concern. Public safety concerns include livestock that are in close proximity to unfenced roadways and residential areas.

Why are the horses sometimes considered public safety hazards?

Four major highways border the Virginia Range, as well as a number of residential areas. From late summer into winter, as forage and water sources diminish, stray horses move from the range and into urban areas searching for feed and water. Horses crossing roadways and entering residential areas may be involved in vehicle collisions and human interactions. The NDA has documented incidences where horses have kicked and seriously injured children, numerous incidences of horses dying from vehicle collisions, and three separate incidences with human fatalities as a result of horse/vehicle collisions.

What happens to horses that are hit in accidents?

The NDA, or other authorized law enforcement agencies, humanely euthanize injured horses. Deceased animals are removed from areas affecting public safety by cooperating agencies depending on location and availability of resources and equipment.

What happens to the Virginia Range stray horses collected by NDA?

Per NRS 569.075 the NDA may sell all feral livestock if the Department determines that the sale is necessary to facilitate the placement of livestock.

I've heard that Virginia Range stray horses go to slaughter, is that true?

No Virginia Range horses have been sold at public auction since 2013. Any horses removed since then have been adopted by individuals or horse advocacy groups. In the rare occurrence they are not adopted, it is possible that horses could be sold at public auction – at which the NDA has no authority to determine buying outcomes.

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

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



The aftermath of a horse-vehicle collision.

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Why are there so many Virginia Range estray/feral horses?

Unmanaged feral horse populations grow quickly, doubling in size every few years. Based on the last official census (January 2018), there are at least 2,951 estray/feral horses in the Virginia Range area. In 2001, a range inventory report conducted by the NDA, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Virginia Range Wildlife Protection Association, determined the range can only support a population of 300 to 600 horses.

Is there a management program for the horses?

The NDA partners with advocacy groups for fertility control and management of the Virginia Range feral/estray horses. The NDA's efforts are focused on protecting public safety, such as removing horses in areas where public safety is at risk.

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

Yes, although there are several different birth control measures available, only one is currently being used in the Virginia Range. Under a non-exclusive cooperative agreement with the NDA, an advocacy group is administering fertility control for the Virginia Range feral/estray horse population. The program aims to reduce population growth rates.

Is it illegal to feed the horses?

It is a violation of NRS 569.040 to feed estray/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 feral 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 one warning citation has been issued.

Can I supply them water?

Watering horses is not illegal under NRS; however, the NDA recommends NOT watering horses in or near urban areas or major roads out of concern for public safety. Please be aware that some local jurisdictions have additional restrictions on watering estray horses.

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 can I do?

▶ Report illegal feeding.

Call the Animal Industry division at **775-353-3608** 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, a legal fence, per NRS 569, around such areas can help keep horses out of urban and suburban areas.

▶ Keep a safe distance from horses.


Even though they show signs of domestication, horses can be unpredictable and cause serious bodily injuries.

▶ Drive with extra caution.

Stay alert, and always drive with caution in areas where horses or other wildlife may be located. Notify law enforcement to report feral/estray horses on roadways or highway.

Contact Us

▶ Animal Industry Division

 775-353-3608

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