

Wild Horses Threatened By U.S. Government Bias



HSUS's Frantz Dantzler (right) talks with George Turcott, assistant director of the Bureau of Land Management, before the bureau began a roundup of wild horses in Nevada last July.

"The U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has become a slave to cattle raisers' vested interests," declared HSUS West Coast Regional Director Frantz L. Dantzler. Dantzler made the charge after making an aerial inspection of Stone Cabin Valley, Nev., before the BLM began a roundup of 400 wild horses on the rangeland last July. He called the government's claim of an overpopulation of horses in the valley "totally inaccurate."

"I flew over the entire area and counted far fewer horses than the government estimated. If there is an overpopulation of animals on the range, it is cattle, not horses," Dantzler said. "It looks as though the government has proclaimed an instant overpopulation of horses in order to make room for more cattle in the valley. Naturally, this will increase profits for the rancher." Dantzler said it was evident from the plentiful nature of the forage in the valley that BLM's claim that deteriorating vegetation on the range was insufficient to feed an estimated 2,000 horses grazing there was also invalid.

The roundup, which began on July 24, was underway barely 2 weeks when Nevada state officials ordered BLM to stop the operation. The officials claimed the horses were the property of the state, citing a New Mexico state court decision that penned animals were rightfully the property of the states. Seventy-two horses that had been captured in the first stages of the roundup were impounded by state officials and later released.

The feud between state and federal officials concerning ownership of wild horses began with the enactment of the Wild and Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act in 1971. The law requires that wild horses be "managed and protected" by the federal government and further requires that they be rounded up to thin out herds, with attempts being made to find suitable homes for them. A three-judge federal panel in New Mexico recently ruled the act invalid, but the ruling has been stayed pending an appeal that will be heard by the U. S. Supreme Court next year. New Mexico and Nevada state officials argue that the federal government has no jurisdiction and want title to the state's horses. Before 1971 ranchers had the right to round up the horses and frequently sold



them for pet food. Since then, they have urged removal because the horses compete with their cattle for forage.

HSUS interceded in the roundup to determine if it was justified, as well as to assure that horses captured by BLM would be adopted by responsible people. After reviewing BLM's adoption screening process, Dantzler said that almost anyone who wanted a horse could have gotten one, regardless of their competence or fitness as horse handlers. "I was afraid someone from New Jersey was going to back up to a corral and load an animal on a U-Haul trailer," he said.

Dantzler charged that BLM had incorrectly led him to believe the horses were endangered because of overpopulation

and needed to be thinned out in order to survive. He said the horses he observed were in excellent condition with good flesh and sleek coats.

Dantzler's observations were confirmed by Dr. David W. Kitchen, professor of wildlife management of California's Humboldt State University. Dr. Kitchen, who recently conducted a population survey in the area, determined that the horse population, rather than increasing rapidly as the government contends, has stabilized and that the range is in fairly good condition. "Even if the removal is appropriate, it isn't urgent," he said. "The government's own studies aren't adequate to merit the extreme policy at this point."

The American Horse Protection Assn.

called the roundup a needless harassment of the horse, a waste of government money, and totally unnecessary. HSUS agrees. HSUS believes the historical record reveals a distinct BLM bias toward cattlemen. It is BLM's duty to protect and preserve the nation's wild horses in the best interest of the animals' welfare, not cattle raisers' vested interests. HSUS has urged BLM to change its policies to reflect that concern. HSUS has also asked BLM to improve its adoption procedures to assure that surplus wild horses are given to the most competent people available. Make your views known. Write: Director Curt Berklund, U. S. Bureau of Land Management, U. S. Dept. of the Interior, Washington, D. C. 20240. □

Dantzler Appointed HSUS Chief Investigator

HSUS President John A. Hoyt has announced the appointment of Frantz L. Dantzler as director of field service and investigations for HSUS.

Dantzler, who is presently West Coast regional director for HSUS, assumes the new post on Nov. 1. He will be responsible for the operations and management of the HSUS regional office program and will lead HSUS's investigative staff.

Dantzler was the shelter manager for the Boulder County (Colo.) Humane So-

ciety before he joined the HSUS staff in 1964. He served as executive director of the HSUS Utah Branch until 1972, when he became director of the HSUS Rocky Mountain Regional Office. He was appointed West Coast regional director a year ago.

Dantzler has focused national attention on the plight of America's wild horses on several national television newscasts. He is also HSUS's leading authority on predator control. A prize winning photographer and dedicated

humanitarian, he has distinguished himself on many occasions while on the HSUS staff.

Dantzler said he is eagerly awaiting an active role in investigating cruelty and neglect of animals on a national basis. "Traditionally HSUS has served as the conscience of the American people with respect to animal cruelty," Dantzler said. "I foresee a continuation of that philosophy regarding the discovery and elimination of cruelty throughout the country in the future."