



35 More Wild Horses Killed in the West

April 25, 2005

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c The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) - Thirty-five more wild horses rounded up in the West were slaughtered Monday, but the Interior Department acted quickly to save the lives of 52 other mustangs by enlisting last-minute financial help from Mustang sports car maker Ford Motor Co.

The horses killed came from a broker who obtained them from the Rosebud Sioux Tribe of South Dakota. The tribe traded 87 of the 105 aging horses it bought from the government for younger ones. Interior officials said they would review the arrangement to see if it violated a federal contract with the agency. Tribal officials were unavailable for comment.

"It's incredibly disappointing," Kathleen Clarke, director of Interior's Bureau of Land Management, told The Associated Press. "It is not our intent to have these animals killed. That's why we acted very aggressively."

The latest killings bring to 41 the number of wild horses slaughtered since Congress removed protections for mustangs in December. Just last week, six were slaughtered that had been sold to a private owner. Both incidents occurred at the Cavel International Inc. commercial packing plant in DeKalb, Ill.

BLM officials, tipped off by Agriculture Department inspectors, persuaded the plant managers to stop. That saved the lives of 16 mustangs about to be killed.

The plant agreed to give the horses food and water until BLM officials can pick them up. BLM officials also intervened to save 36 mustangs in Nebraska that were on their way to the Cavel plant. Those horses are to be picked up separately Tuesday and kept in the Midwest.

BLM, which captures the animals during government roundups aimed at reducing the wild population, has sold and delivered nearly 1,000 horses since the new law passed. BLM says 37,000 wild horses and burros forage its lands, 9,000 more than Western ranges can sustain.

Clarke said Monday she ordered an immediate halt to the delivery of some 950 more that have been sold. "We will not be making any more deliveries until we can check on the situation," she said.

``We just want to reassess our program."

Clarke said she'd already been talking with Ford about such a partnership even before she called the company for help Monday. ``We do not have any clear authority to buy private animals," Clarke said. So she got Ford to pledge \$19,000 to ship and care for the mustangs.

The Sioux tribe had to sign an agreement with BLM that it would ``provide humane care" to each of the animals, documents show. Clarke said Interior's top lawyer was investigating that arrangement and an earlier sale of six wild horses to an Oklahoma man.

On the Net:

BLM: <http://www.blm.gov>

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