

January 14, 2010



Friends of Nevada Wilderness (FNW) is a non-profit organization that was established in 1984 to protect Nevada's wildland heritage.

Maintaining wilderness values means helping to maintain a healthy ecosystem for all our native plants and animals. It means providing wilderness visitors with an opportunity to enjoy seeing a rich diversity of native plants and animals for generations to come.

We have many members who enjoy hiking, hunting, fishing, camping, horseback riding, wildlife and wild horse watching, star gazing, photography and exploring wonderful wilderness areas like the Calico Mountains, Black Rock Desert, High Rock Lake, North Black Rock Range and Pahute Peak.

Friends has been active in issues involving the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon region for over 20 years. We were instrumental 10 years ago in helping these areas earn long-term protection by Congress via the Black Rock Desert – High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area Act of 2000. Our volunteers are active helping to repair damage to our wildlands resulting from past actions or from on going activities. In 2009, FNW wilderness volunteers contributed nearly \$50,000 worth of in-kind labor in the Black Rock region—removing unnecessary barbwire fences in several locations, constructing a buck and rail fence and seeding native plants to protect the delicate Coyote Spring Dune system, and restoring damage from off highway vehicles.

Friends of Nevada Wilderness is very concerned about the current very large number of horses in the Calico Complex. When horse numbers increase above levels the land can support, wilderness values can suffer. When horse numbers reach unsustainable levels, the health of our sagebrush community suffers along with our native wildlife. But just as importantly, the horses themselves suffer. Because Nevada is such an arid state too often horses can die from lack of water and food to eat. Allowing horse numbers to expand far beyond the carrying capacity of the land is cruelty to these animals. Since wild horses in Nevada have no natural predators, gathers are necessary to maintain the herds at humanely sustainable levels without destroying the land that sustains them. It is our responsibility to see that they don't destroy the habitat they share with native wildlife and to ensure that neither they nor Nevada's wildlife are allowed to starve or die of thirst because of our failure to manage them.

Because of their size (a horse can be up to five times bigger than a pronghorn antelope or bighorn sheep), horses eat so much more than any of our wildlife. Horses can stand guard at limited water resources until other wildlife find the water source unusable. Horses can remove the riparian vegetation component to the extent that isolated populations of the native western jumping mouse, montane vole and Preble's shrew can become locally extinct. Healthy springs and riparian corridors are also an extremely important component of greater sage-grouse habitat during the brood-rearing season. Damage to these areas can cause sage-grouse numbers to decline even further. Native understory grasses and forbs can be depleted to the point that creatures like pygmy rabbit, pronghorn and sagebrush vole can no longer live in those areas. Removal and destruction of native upland shrubs, grasses and forbs can also destroy and/or degrade shrub nesting and ground nesting habitats for species such as the burrowing owl, vesper sparrow, sage sparrow, Brewer's sparrow, sage thrasher, loggerhead shrike and greater sage-grouse. If the land is too badly damaged it makes it more susceptible to invasion by weeds which can lead to total ecosystem collapse.

Wild horses have a place on the land just like Nevada's wildlife does. Together, we must find the right balance to protect the land and the animals that depend on it for the future.