

Wild horses and the Pickens Proposal

Why it is that so many people believe that government is capable of managing things is difficult to understand. Take the passage of the Wild Horse and Burro Act as an example. Instead of protecting horses found upon the public lands, the passage of the act has caused the opposite to occur. Ranges have been grubbed off - springs and streams have been beaten out, and thousands of horses have starved or have choked for lack of water.

Without question, the very best system for taking care of wild horses was that which was in place before the Wild Horse and Burro Act was passed in 1971. Excess horses were removed from the range automatically, with no fan-fair. Millions and millions of dollars were not spent in management of the animals. The horses were treated as a commodity rather than a liability. Everyone benefitted. Even the wild horses benefitted. Mountain lions were held in check. There was always plenty of feed for the horses to eat. Springs and water holes were maintained and kept open. Everything was better. But did that last. No, of course not. We had to get the government involved, and now look at the mess we're in.

I can remember in the 1950's and 60's, my Uncle Raymond Gardner had a small allotment on the north end of the Maverick Range - a somewhat rough country, with a lot of pinion and juniper growth over a lot of it. Raymond had tried a lot of different things, trying to keep the excess horses down. He'd run them horseback. He had tried using fingers at water holes. He built traps and corrals at different locations. Once in a while they would rope one or two. But the thing that worked the best was a water trap he built at Maverick Spring.

Most of the springs on the Mavericks would dry up along in late summer or fall. And by placing an old coat or some other object the horses didn't like at the remaining springs that were running a little water, Raymond was able to force most of the horses to Maverick Spring for water.

After a few days, he would send someone out to Maverick. Just up the hill, not far from the spring and trap, was a small dugout or blind where a person could roll out their bedroll on a moonlit night and wait for the horses to come in - and when they did, a long cord was pulled and a tarp would drop from a pole above the gateway, and the horses were frightened into a second corral. The gate was then shut behind them. The tarp was rolled up and pinned to the overhead pole once more, and the trap was ready for the next bunch.

The next morning Raymond would show up with a bobtail truck to haul away the horses that were caught the night before - no fan-fair - no bother - no government involvement - no injuries - no abuse - just keeping the horses down to a manageable number.

It hasn't been easy for ranchers - all the horses that are being run in the state now. Studies show, when animals such as horses and elk are left to run on the range year long, they don't impact an area and use it uniformly as sheep and cattle do. Elk and horses go over the same ground over and over again, all year long - taking the best feed first - then feeding on the same

plants again and again - which is not only hard on the plants they prefer - but it also makes it hard on those who run livestock within the area - for when they turn their cattle or sheep upon these areas, the most nutritious feed is already taken - which causes a person's livestock to not do as well as they should while on a winter range or a summer range.

Consequently, a lot of ranges are now being abandoned. That's what happened on the north end of the Mavericks. There hasn't been any cattle run there to speak of for twenty years now. And what has it done to the country? The brush is all grown up - decadent and hard to get through. No sage grouse or chukars are to be found there. Deer are rarely seen. Rodents and small animals are nearly non-existent. Sure, you might see a few elk or horses once in a while. But if you compare what is there now to what was there fifty years ago, in terms of a rich and healthy environment - it's not good.

Think about the Pickens proposal. Here, the Sorensen family has been feeding somewhere between 600 to 800 head of horses for the people of the United States for nothing all these years - and having trouble getting their cattle to do well in winter - and having to cut their numbers of cattle down to accommodate elk and horses. And then, along comes Madeleine Pickens, with all of her husband's money, and is able to get the government to pay her \$500 per head per year for the same horses the Sorensen family had been feeding at their own expense.

Where is the justice? Why doesn't the government pay all the ranching families in Nevada \$500 for every horse that they are running within their allotments? Why should they not get back pay for all the horses they have been running for the last twenty years or more? Why - if we were all paid the way those who have pull in Washington are paid - we would all be millionaires or billionaires - like Madeleine and Boone Pickens maybe.