

# Horse roundup is taking the heat for deaths, injuries

Deseret News (Salt Lake City), Oct 30, 2006 by Nancy Perkins Deseret Morning News

CEDAR CITY -- Outlaw, Naylene Nield's pride and joy, is a real stud.

"He's the ultimate boss," she says, rubbing the horse's broad forehead as he eyes a cluster of mares nearby. "He's the first wild stallion I ever adopted."

Outlaw was born into Utah's wild horse Sulphur Herd that roams the Needle Mountain Range, about 45 miles west of Milford along the Nevada/Utah state line. Outlaw was rounded up, or gathered, during a Bureau of Land Management wild horse roundup several years ago and

eventually found a home with Nield, who purchased the horse during a BLM adoptathon.

The herd's distinctive markings make the Sulphur horse a national favorite. Its tiger-striped legs, dorsal stripes, bi-colored manes and tails, and ears that curve in like a bird's beak, are proof that its bloodlines date back to the original Colonial Spanish horses, first brought to America by Spanish explorers in the late 1500s.

"There is an amazing difference between domestic and wild horses," says Nield, who owns and breeds about 26 wild horses on her 40-acre ranch outside of Cedar City, most of them from the Sulphur Herd. Nield adopted the horses from the BLM, which is mandated by law to manage the wild horse herds and the rangelands they live on.

Roundups, or gathers, are conducted several times a year, and excess horses are taken from the open range. After the horses are given a clean bill of health, they are offered to the public through a BLM-sponsored adoption program.

"These horses are beautiful, mellow and gentle," says Nield, who has bred the horses and sold their offspring for a decade. "Their temperament is amazing. "

Through the years, Nield has spent time out on the wild horse management range, watching the BLM and its contractors conduct the roundups and photographing the animals. She's become friends with the local and state BLM employees that work in Utah's Wild Horse and Burro Program and supported their efforts.

During a roundup of the Sulphur Herd this year, however, Nield said she witnessed a callous disregard for the horses during a roundup conducted by a BLM national contractor.

"It was the first time I've seen a bad gather," she said. "The whole way the contractor did things bothered me."

Nield said two mares and a foal were killed during the roundup, which was conducted in July. One mare suffered neck injuries after being roped and later died, while another mare died after running into a horse panel, breaking its neck. Another horse kicked the foal after it was rounded up with the adult horses, killing it.

Gus Warr, who heads up Utah's Wild Horse and Burro Program for the BLM, said several "unavoidable

accidents" occurred during the July roundup.

"There definitely were some instances I was concerned about," said Warr, who has been involved in BLM wild horse gathers for 16 years and conducted an investigation into Nield's complaints. "I want to make sure the horses are protected and handled properly."

After reviewing the July gather and talking with the contractor, Warr said he is satisfied that the contractor followed standard operating procedures in gathering horses from the herd.

"Anytime we do a gather there's a chance of something happening," he added. "We do a lot of gathers ourselves, and we've gone through many with no scratches on a horse. Another time, a horse may be hurt. I don't care how many times you go out, every time we go out it seems like we learn something."

Warr said he was contacted by dozens of people after Nield sent an e-mail about her concerns to the American Wild Horse Preservation Campaign, which posted a synopsis of her experience on its Web site, [wildhorsepreservation.org](http://wildhorsepreservation.org).

"The gather contractor has decades of experience in gathering wild horses and he has an excellent track record," Warr wrote in a letter he sent to those expressing concern about the July Sulphur Herd roundup. "Wild horse gathers are inherently complex operations, and at times accidents occur, even after great care is taken."

Warr said proper procedures were followed during the gather and that BLM personnel on site did their jobs well.

"Regrettably, this gather was one in which several unavoidable accidents did occur," he said. "My hope is that we can learn from this and improve on any future gathers that take place. The BLM is ultimately responsible and this is one of the few times people have raised questions about a gather to me."

Nield said she still couldn't shake the memories of what she saw and felt during the July gather of her beloved Sulphur Herd.

"It is hard for me to put into words my feelings for what I saw," she said, standing inside one of the corrals that encircle several of the mares she adopted over the years. "I love these horses. I get so tired of what's going on. People need to care enough to do what's needed."

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