

**Gus Warr, Utah Wild Horse and Burro Program Lead
Bureau Land Management**

Interviewer—John Howe

Just start out by just telling me what the process was today, why are these horses being taken off the ranch?

Gus Warr

We were doing this wild horse gather specifically today because we had these wild horses, or these mustangs that were on private or state property, and we had been approached by the land owners wanting to know; were we going to remove the animals and what was the process there. Because they were actually animals that some people would say were in trespass, but they didn't belong there.

Interviewer—John Howe

Tell me why wild horses have become controversial in the American West?

Gus Warr

You know the-the biggest controversy that I see with the wild horse issue is, there's a balancing act there, and some people want to see more, some people want to see less, but it's a right of passage of "Ok do they belong? Or they not belong"? And as an agency, we're here to manage them because the law says we're here to manage them. It's a two-sided issue with multiple complex issues involved.

Interviewer—John Howe

I'll ask you both of these, but rancher's position first. Tell me what their position is regarding wild horses.

Gus Warr

It depends on the area, but one of the things that the livestock operators I know, and the permittees that graze on public lands, they look at wild horses as actually a direct competition. They have animals that they're trying to make a living off of and the wild horses are foraging the same food source that their cattle or sheep would be utilizing. It's a direct conflict there in many cases.

Interviewer—John Howe

Now tell me the other side. Certainly from the protection standpoint, how do the wild horse protection advocates look at the issue?

Gus Warr

The wild horse advocates, I think they have a strong point as well as the other side. The wild horse advocates look at it as "Ok, we are to manage wild horses out there but how come there's more livestock versus not as many wild horses"? They see the free roaming wild horses and burrow Act, as we are to have as many wild horses as possible out there for the public to enjoy. So, they're seeing it from that side.

Interviewer—John Howe

Tell me how you can walk the line between the two.

Gus Warr

It's a challenge. As an agency we have to balance that protection versus “Ok we want to see less numbers of animals out there”. What we have to do is we have to look at the resources, we have to look at the vegetation, we have to look at the available water, and we have to look at the animals themselves. Because we are charged with managing healthy wild horse populations, and so it's a balancing act to make sure we don't have too many that it impacts the resources, or impacts other uses, as well as having enough genetically sound animals that they can populate and live their lives out.

Interviewer—John Howe

Talk about the issue of surplus animals, and why that's an issue.

Gus Warr

The issue of surplus animals is huge. In fact, probably the biggest dilemma as an agency that the BLM is in right now is because of these huge numbers that we have. Nobody really wants them as far as to adopt them. We have an adoption program, and only so many animals are being adopted and so that means we have leftover animals that weren't adopted so we have this huge surplus, and the law says one thing--common sense or your gut feeling says “I'm not going to go out, and we're not going to go out and euthanize unadoptable horses, which the law says we should do, but as an agency we have chosen politically not to do that. And so it's a big issue, and we literally have thousands of animals that we're holding.

Interviewer—John Howe

Tell me about the adoption process a little bit, and where these animals end up.

Gus Warr

As an agency BLM has adopted thousands of horses over the years, and the first avenue for placing excess animals is through this adoption program. And the reason it's an adoption is because the government still holds title to the animals for one year to make sure they're cared for. So, they come off the range, they're prepared with vaccinations, and then hopefully they're adopted into a good home or as many as possible.

Interviewer—John Howe

What do you see for the future of wild horses in the west?

Gus Warr

I'm a taxpayer like anybody else, even though I'm a government employee, I could almost tell anybody that I can guarantee that wild horses have a place on public lands, and they're going to be there. There are a lot of issues or controversies saying they're going to go extinct. I think that's the farthest thing from the truth. I see my grandkids and my great-grandkids enjoying wild horses just like I do. They're going to be there, it's just a management level of what numbers.