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Deleting the Fiction: False Claims of Abandoned Horses

February 2008

The Short Paper - condensed

Full report online at Kaufmanzoning Horsemeat Website*, Animals' Angels Website*, and Commonhorsesense.net*

In state after state a concerted effort has been orchestrated through the news media, designed to mislead the public into believing that the closure of U.S. horse slaughter facilities had resulted in a large number of horses being abandoned on public lands, the majority of articles simply repeating the claims made in other articles. In fact, allegations of tens of thousands of cases of abuse and abandonment are unfounded and false. Noteworthy as well is that in every state existing laws make abandoning a horse a criminal offense.

Members of the American Horse Council (AHC) have alleged that from 90,000 to 320,000 cases of abused or abandoned horse following the closure of U.S. horse slaughter plants in media outlets throughout the country. However, in a December 2007 telephone call to AHC Director of Communications, Sara Chase, stated: *"for the record... neither AHC nor their Unwanted Horse Coalition has ever put out a number, and that none of those quotes should have ever been made."*

While this paper focuses on allegedly abandoned horses, many news outlets have printed claims of rising abuse and neglect as well. Findings on Pet Abuse.com, for horse abuse and neglect cases in 2007 occurring in the months preceding the closure of the last horse slaughter plant, revealed an average of 12 cases involving 107.6 equines per month--while in the months following the closure, abuse and neglect cases **decreased** to an average of 7 cases involving 79.5 equines per month.

ARIZONA:

Articles in the *Tucson Citizen* and in *AZ CentralNews* alleged that abandoned horses are on the rise in Arizona. Both articles quoted Ed Hermes of the Arizona Ag. Dept. stating there had been a large number of horses seized in Arizona and that owners were simply turning horses loose. But in a February 5th, 2008 telephone conversation with Mr. Hermes, Information Officer of the Arizona Dept. of Agriculture Animal Services, he explained that the numbers used in the Arizona article were actually based on reports of estray or loose horses, and that in 80% of the cases owners are located without impounding the horses since these are horses that had only gotten loose from ranches. According to the statistics provided by Mr. Hermes for all of 2007 in the state of Arizona there were approximately 106 horses impounded for which owners could not be identified, which is 15 horses more than in 2006 and only 8 horses more than the three year average of 98 horses.

FLORIDA:

The Wall Street Journal reported that 5 horses were found abandoned in the everglades in Florida, however the South Florida SPCA explained, *"There were actually six horses that were abandoned. They were abandoned at a farm."* On the South Florida SPCA website, it was found that 22 animals altogether were abandoned in this case, and this included cattle, goats and pigs.

ILLINOIS:

An article from Illinois told of 2 horses abandoned in the Shawnee Forest (which local authorities eventually gave to the landowner who had found them).When contacted the reporter further claimed that he has ridden the trails in Shawnee Forest and seen the graves of abandoned horses, and that abandoned horses have been a problem in the Shawnee Forest for years. However, Shawnee National Forest Public Affairs Officer, Rebecca E. Banker, states: *"We have no knowledge of a problem with abandoned horses on the Shawnee. I have checked with our recreation staff and our law enforcement personnel, all of whom are in the field on a regular basis, and they have encountered neither live horses nor horse graves. I am unfamiliar with a publication entitled "The Daily Journal" and they have certainly not been in contact with any of us to verify whether or not we have a problem with abandoned horses."*

INDIANA:

When questioned about the published claims from Indiana stating horses were being abandoned in Indiana's forests, John Seifert-State Forester, Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry, replied, *"I can assure you that there are no abandoned horses, or to our knowledge have ever been abandoned horses on Indiana state forests."*

KENTUCKY:
A widely published article from Kentucky citing abandoned horses was based on horses seen free grazing at a reclaimed strip mine in Eastern Kentucky. After thorough investigation by the Kentucky State Police and animal control officials, it was found they were all privately owned and were not abandoned. Governor Ernie Fletcher responded with a letter saying the report was, *"filled with inaccurate statements and information."* Congressman Ed Whitfield (KY) also investigated the claim and stated, *"There is no crisis and there is no glut of 'unwanted horses' roaming the Bluegrass State or anywhere else."*

OHIO:
The Ohio Horse Council reported in an Ohio article, that horses were being abandoned in state parks. When contacted, Rick Patterson of the Ohio Horse Council, stated horses were being turned loose in Perry Forest. However, after investigation Land Management Administrator Chad Sanders of the Ohio Division of Forestry, stated *"there was no knowledge of any horses being turned loose in the state's forests."*

OREGON:
An article in the *Oregonian* stated that Undersheriff Brian Wolfe had investigated 9 abandoned horse cases, and although he tries to find homes for the abandoned horses, 90% of those horses are not branded. When questioned about his statement, Mr. Wolfe said it was true that 90% of the animals abandoned are not branded, but that included dogs and cats, and further, that he couldn't remember investigating <u>any</u> abandoned horse cases himself. The case cited in the *Oregonian* was ultimately marked ***"unfounded."***

SOUTH DAKOTA:
Sen. Frank Kloucek, D-Scotland, of South Dakota, stated in an Associated Press article *"many horses are being abandoned or being sent to ranches and animal shelters that already have too many of the animals."*
A reply from Larry Stearns of the South Dakota Livestock Brand Board, who is responsible for estray livestock in South Dakota gave this reply: *"It is difficult to determine if estray horses, recovered in the past, are abandoned, dumped off by someone wishing to dispose of the horse, or just an unbranded stray from the neighbors. Since horse slaughter plants were closed last year, we have not yet seen a big increase in the number of abandoned horses. In 2007, we had 5 strays sold at sales barns. One was sold at Gregory Livestock in Gregory SD, and the other 4 were sold at Philip Livestock in Philip. No owners could be found for these horses. Estrays are usually sold in the area where the animals are found. These applies to cattle as well as horses."* When questioned as to how many cattle were estrays in 2007, Mr. Stearns replied *"We had 14 head of cattle estrays."*

UTAH:
Harper's Magazine wrote, *"Patricia Evans, of Utah State University's Animal, Dairy, and Veterinary Sciences Department says that more horses are being abandoned now that domestic slaughterhouses have been closed."* But when contacted and asked for evidence, Ms. Evans replied, *"I have decided since speaking on the radio that due to the actions of some groups I am not going to give out the names of those contacted. We were able to find this information and I am sure you can as well as you search deeper. Good luck in your search."* A statement from Utah's Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Division avows, *"We do not have any reports of horses being abandoned on our Wildlife Management Areas."*

· 31 states contacted have responded with no reported cases of abandoned horses on state lands (current to 02-20-08): AL, AK, CT, DE, GA, IN, IL, KS, KY, LA, ME, MI, MN, MS, MO, NC, ND, NH, NJ, NM, OH, OK, OR, PA, SC, TN, UT, VT, BA, WV, WI,
· 3 States contacted have confirmed cases of abandoned horses: Arizona, South Dakota, and Florida
Remaining states have not yet replied.

<u>CONCLUSION:</u>
Claims of a national crisis of abandoned horses are unfounded, deceptive and dishonest. We do not have a wave of abandoned horses in the U.S. What we do have however, is an attempt to overwhelm the public with a wave of fictitious, articles about abandoned horses, designed to coerce lawmakers into making sham-based decisions.

*For fully detailed report 'Deleting the Fiction: Abandoned Horses' part 1 & 2, go to:
http://www.kaufmanzoning.net/horsemeat/
http://commonhorsesense.net/
http://www.animals-angels.com/index.php?pageID=start_us&sessionLang=us