

WILD WORD NEWSLETTER

Year of the Fire Horse Begins!

Wild Horse Education

FIRE HORSE RISING: LITIGATION, WELFARE RULES, EXPOSURE, AND A BIRTHDAY WISH

Wild Word Newsletter
February 2026

Graphic: LLeigh

As 2026 dawns—the Year of the Fire Horse and the 55th anniversary of the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act—Wild Horse Education stands at a turning point with our work where history, law, and active court battles converge. This is not just another year on the calendar; it is a year to confront decades of systemic failure and to forge a different future for wild horses and burros on their home ranges.

2026 is the Year of the Fire Horse, a rare, energetic, and transformative year in the Chinese zodiac that occurs once every 60 years.

The Fire Horse is associated with fierce resolve, independence, and uncompromising courage, traits that have defined every chapter of the fight to protect America's wild herds. In 1971, that same spirit helped win passage of the Act declaring wild horses and burros "living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West," meant to be protected from capture, harassment, or death on the lands where they roam.

Fifty-five years later, the promise of that law remains unfulfilled as agencies manage for convenience and industry, not for living, viable herds and healthy, shared public lands.



Our wild horses and burros deserve so much more

January–February: Work on the Ground and in the Courts

From the first days of January through the start of the lunar Year of the Fire Horse on February 17, our team has focused on making the law on paper match the reality on the ground.

In this newsletter:

- **A Roundup and taking action to stop abuse**
- **No Herd Left Behind**
- **Litigation Run Down**
- **SAFE Act Update**
- **A Birthday Wish**

In this new Year of the Fire Horse, our resolution is clear: turn legal precedent into lasting reform and undo patterns of mismanagement that have harmed wild horses and burros for generations. But this year we are making more than a resolution; we are making a promise to be resolute—to hold our ground, to refuse to be worn down by delay or denial, and to keep pushing until the intent of the law is honored on the range.



Roundup Coverage

The Snowstorm and Little Humbolt “emergency” roundup began January 26 in the Owyhee Complex, with BLM claiming that wild horses were in poor condition and out of forage after the 2025 Jakes Fire swept across the herd management areas. Using a Determination of NEPA Adequacy (DNA) instead of a current, site-specific gather plan, the Winnemucca District authorized the removal of 182 wild horses, despite the fact that the last full gather plan for this complex dates back to 2012. Horses captured in this operation are being shipped to the off-limits Winnemucca holding facility, with no plans for release back to their home range.

Over several days of helicopter drives in sub-freezing morning temperatures, at least 180 horses were captured, with BLM reporting 87 stallions, 93 mares and no foals, in part because the agency appears to classify any youngster over four months old as an “adult” at this roundup. At least seven horses have been killed, including a 6-year-old buckskin stallion and a black mare shot on the range, as well as a foal whose death is directly tied to being pushed long distances through rough country. Our observer documented trailer loading incidents, fighting among stressed stallions, and horses driven from Rock Creek—an area not clearly covered in the emergency paperwork—raising serious questions about where BLM’s legal authority begins and ends in this operation.

This roundup exemplifies the ongoing pattern of using fire and “emergency” labels to fast-track removals while sidestepping transparent, updated analysis of forage, grazing, and on-range management tools like fertility control that could keep these big-framed, intelligent Owyhee horses on their range. As BLM intensifies helicopter operations across Nevada, the lack of clear, consistent standards—whether in defining foals or justifying which herds are targeted—undermines public trust and the intent of the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act. Wild Horse Education will continue to keep cameras on the ground, challenge the misuse of “emergency” authorities, and fight for meaningful management planning that protects both the bodies and the freedom of these horses.



Screen shot of video. This horse has caught it's rear legs on the top rail and is struggling. You hold your breath watching events like this praying there is no broken bones.

He seems physically "ok" in the video that follows, but is in distress and has lost family and, it appears, has lost a way back home.

Wild Horse Education

One of the last captured at the roundup made a dangerous escape. Exclusive video went viral through our social media and helped raise awareness.

[You can view the video HERE if you havre not seen it.](#)

A little colt in that operation was driven miles over rough terrain and multiple livestock fences from the Little Humboldt HMA into Rock Creek; his legs gave out and he became the first reported death. BLM's records labeled him an adult with "lax tendons," a description that erases his youth and the grueling chase that led to his collapse. All of the captured horses were shipped to the private BLM facility in Winnemucca, where half of the roundup was conducted as direct trap-to-facility shipments, minimizing the number of deaths reported at the trap itself.

BLM does not publish statistics on injuries or deaths in facilities, so information about what happens after capture can only be obtained through FOIA. Deaths during and immediately after capture average 12%.

[See more on this subject, click here.](#)

Tell Congress to Fund Real Welfare Rules

Congress can fix what BLM has refused to fix. Right now, as congressional offices begin crafting recommendations for the FY 2027 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, you can help demand a specific line item directing and funding BLM to complete, formalize, and implement enforceable CAWP welfare rules.

[You can send a letter directly to your representatives... just click here.](#)

No Herd Left Behind



"If left unmanaged, herds can double in size in just four to five years and quickly outgrow the ability of the land to support them," the BLM states on its Herd Management website.

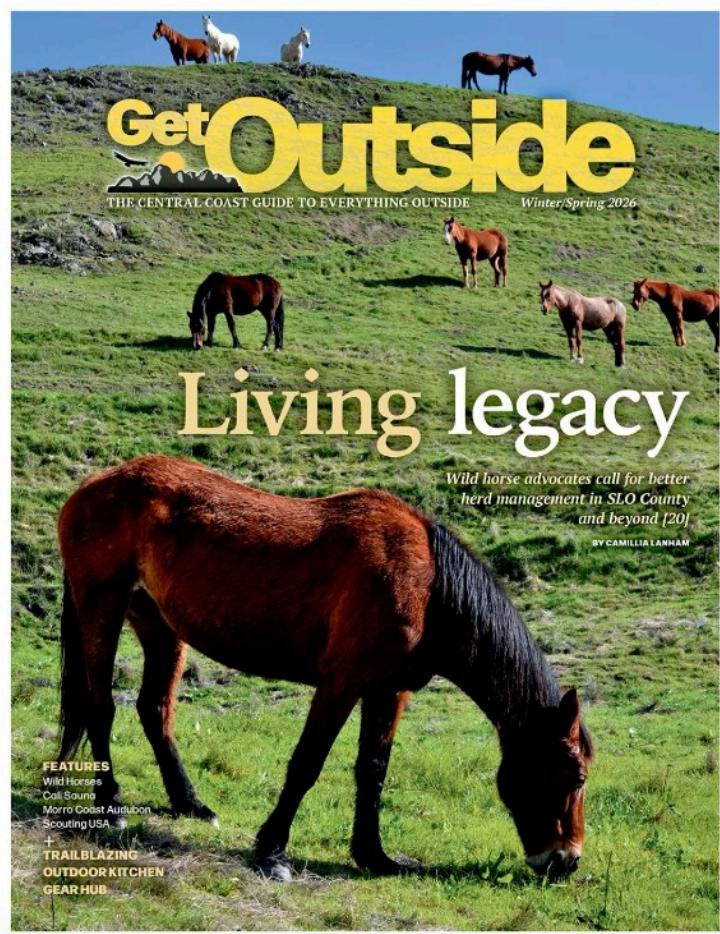
A wild horse herd in SLO County has a different issue. The Black Mountain Wild Horse Territory in Los Padres National Forest has a herd so small that it's in danger of becoming extinct, Kaluza said.

The herd management plan, which hasn't been updated since the 1980s, states that the herd's appropriate management level is 20 horses. As far as Kaluza can tell, there are only eight horses alive and well in the 13,000-acre territory.

Los Padres counts the number of horses at 10.

Since our organization was founded we have always tried to bring attention to herds often overlooked in the news cycle. This month an [OpEd written by WHE volunteer Colette Kaluza](#) spurred a longer article on the tiny Black Mountain herd in California. The story even made the cover.

Special Issues & Guides



[You can read the article by clicking HERE.](#)



January-February on the Litigation Front

Litigation is an intensive process of review, research of facts and law, writing and filing multiple documents. “A lawsuit” is not simply asking a court to do something. We must present numerous motions, briefs, arguments, all laid out with supporting information and file answers to refute what the opposition presents.

Lawsuits must be brought on a site and decision specific basis and programmatic challenges are not allowed. However, winning on an issue creates “precedent” that can then be used to stand for another herd to address systemic wrongs.

We are also dealing with changes in current legally defined processes in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Center For Environmental Quality (CEQ), impacts to the Administrative Procedures Act (APA) and more. This changing landscape (primarily created to fast-track reviews of big resource exploitation) is requiring us to do additional research and look for challenges.

Much of this process does not make good simple social media content. Watching someone read and write is not a “viral video.” Our team is working hard.

In the Stone Cabin/Saulsbury case (in district court succeeded on demonstrating an illegal delay in creating the Herd Management Area Plan for Saulsbury) we are continuing Mediation (after filing in the Ninth Circuit Court to gain accountability to approved plan at Stone Cabin). We are operating in good faith after our initial overtures were not rejected and there is continued discussion underway to find a reasonable avenue to gain accountability and some sanity for one of the most historic herds in our country.

Devil's Garden has just entered what is called the “Administrative Review” phase of the case. This is where the government must present all of the documents cited in their decision and any information used to create their decision. We have received a litany of documents we must review and then, if the record is not complete, argue to obtain “what is missing.” Final arguments would be crafted after this phase.

Pancake, phase two, is the follow-up after the landmark ruling that clearly proved BLM has illegally withheld critical management planning (Herd Management Area Plan, HMAP) as they skip directly to roundup plans for decades. Instead of creating a management plan BLM created a roundup plan and simply changed the name. Work on this critical case is now moving again after the government shutdown.

Carter/Buckhorn/Coppersmith is an important lawsuit to protect three relatively small herds that have been shortchanged drastically for decades. BLM wants to take the isolated Carter HMA down to only 25 wild horses after gutting 270,000 acres of territory that was designated for wild horse use and simply deciding it was going to be for livestock with zero data-based analysis. BLM has refused to create an HMAP that includes current data, science and applies to current procedures. BLM filed a Motion to Dismiss and, this week, we answered with an Amended Complaint to expand the arguments.

Juniper Project is a case where the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA) denied us the right to Appeal a decision for a mine that will impact more than 30% of the Triple B HMA and create impacts in surrounding HMAs. So we are mitigating the IBLA in Federal District Court. The court has allowed the mine to join the case and they have filed another brief last week we are reviewing and preparing to answer.

We have additional cases in various stages in the legal process. Those mentioned on the previous page highlight the ones our team has spent the most time on so far in 2026.

The landscape of public lands processes and subtleties in law have been changing over the last year and our team is working to translate these changes as we engage to protect and preserve our wild horses and burros.



The Save America's Forgotten Equines (SAFE) Act (H.R. 1661/S. 775) is back on the table in Congress this session, with a simple, overdue goal: finally shut down the horse slaughter pipeline. SAFE would ban the slaughter of horses for human consumption on U.S. soil and make it illegal to ship American horses—including titled BLM mustangs and burros—over the border to Canada or Mexico to be killed for meat. That matters because once BLM transfers “title,” formerly wild horses are treated as domestic under law, and too many end up in kill pens after passing through auctions and sham “sales.”

Right now, SAFE is sitting in the House and Senate agriculture committees with strong bipartisan support in the House but far fewer Senate cosponsors, which is why many advocates are pushing to tie it directly to the 2025 Farm Bill.

The Farm Bill is one of the few “must-pass” packages this Congress, and attaching SAFE to it is the most realistic path to getting a vote and final passage instead of letting the bill die quietly in committee again.

At the same time, we still have to fight through the annual budget process to block BLM from expanding “sale” programs, weaken the 4-horse limit in practice, or move more wild horses into disposal pipelines that SAFE alone will not fix.

For wild horses, SAFE is one critical piece of a bigger reform puzzle: it can close the foreign slaughter door for titled mustangs, but it does not control how many are removed, where they go after roundups, or whether BLM respects the intent of the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act on the range.

That is why we are pressing Congress on three fronts at once: pass SAFE via the Farm Bill, keep anti-slaughter and anti-sale-without-limits language in annual appropriations, and demand real on-the-range reforms like enforceable welfare standards and honest, science-based management plans.

[You can send a letter urging your representatives in Congress to support both the SAFE Act and inclusion in the Farm Bill HERE.](#)



Happy Birthday and the Fire Horse New Year

Happy Birthday to Laura Leigh, whose life's work has been spent creating a lifeline for America's wild horses and burros. On this day, we celebrate not only another year of her courage, grit, and relentless truth-telling, but the countless lives on the range and in holding pens that have been touched by her refusal to look away. Her advocacy has turned heartbreak into action, and action into real change as she pushes for real reforms.

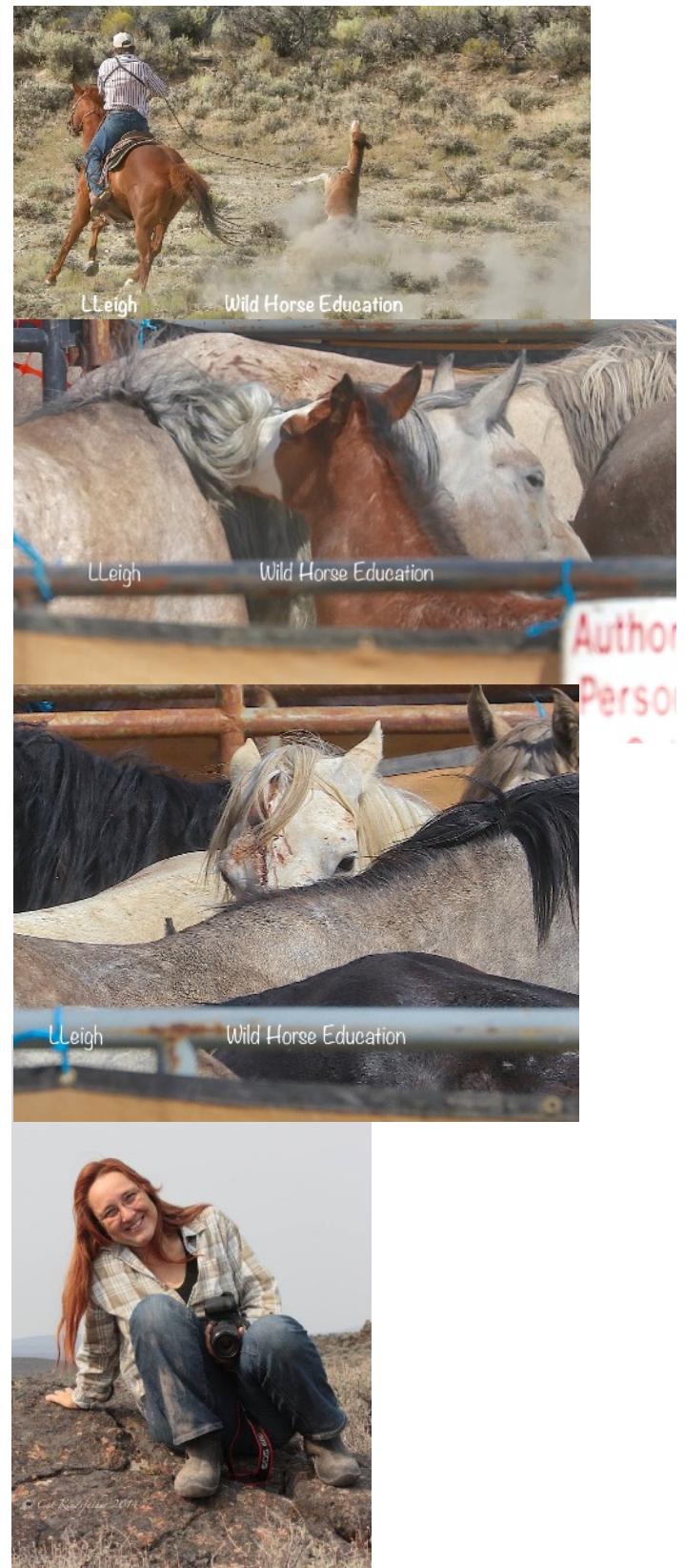
As we step into the Year of the Fire Horse, it feels fitting that Laura's birthday stands right at this threshold.

The Fire Horse is a symbol of fierce resolve, unbreakable spirit, and a willingness to charge straight into the storms others avoid—qualities that define Laura's journey and the mission of WildHorseEducation.org.

This is a year to carry that fire into courtrooms, onto the range, and into every conversation about justice for wild horses and burros.

So raise your glass with us: Here's to Laura, and here's to the Year of the Fire Horse—may this be a time when hard-won truths spark real reform, when the flame of compassion burns brighter than bureaucracy, and when the promise of "wild and free" moves from paper into practice.

Happy Birthday, Laura, and Happy Year of the Fire Horse to everyone who rides beside you in this fight.

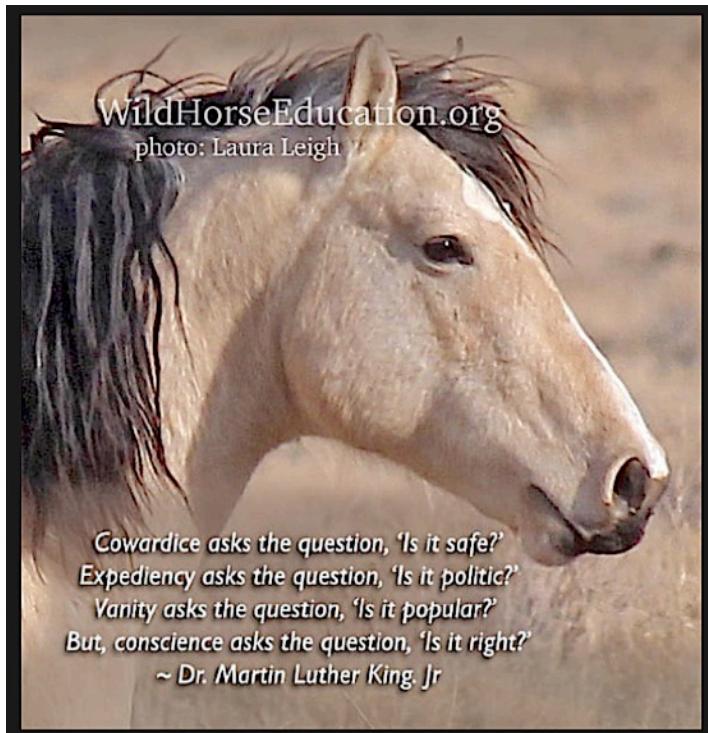


Through February 21st a generous donor has offered to match all contributions up to \$5,000. In honor of our founders birthday and the year of the Fire Horse.

If you can help support our teams you can make a donation (that will be doubled) by clicking this text.



You can also support our work through the purchase of "Year of the Fire Horse" merchandise. Shirts are still available on [Bonfire \(with the option of adding an additional donation\)](#) or on multiple products like mugs, notebooks and clothing at our [WHE Storefront on Zazzle](#).



Every mile we travel to cover roundups or assess a herd, every court case we bring, every win, every action we take is only possible because of your support.

Thank you for standing with us as we strive for justice, mercy and freedom. We cannot do this without you.