

Roundups are the family business



Cattoor Livestock and Helicopter Roundup Service gathering feral horses for 40 years

By Jolyn Young
The Nevada Rancher

NEPHI, Utah – Dave Cattoor has been gathering wild horses since before the Wild Horse and Burro Act was passed. Sue, his wife of 50 years, took pictures and made a photo album of a gather they did in Wyoming in 1971 and titled it “The Last Wild Horse Roundup.”

Thirty-nine years later, the Cattoors have expanded their operation to include their son and daughter-in-law, three helicopter pilots, a full ground crew, semi trucks, single-deck trailers, a fuel truck, and more. Cattoor Livestock and Helicopter Roundup Service regularly performs jobs for the Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, Native American tribes, the Forest Service and various private ranchers.

BLM gathers typically start in July, after the peak of foaling season. Jobs vary from several days to several weeks, depending on the number of horses to be gathered and the size of the area. When gathering a new area, they talk to ranchers who run cattle on the allotment to learn the location of the horses and the lay of the land and water sources. After 39 years of gathering BLM lands, the Cattoors rarely gather an unfamiliar location.

Before the gather day, the roundup crew sets up



Submitted photos

Above, a single feral horse runs into the trap. The saddle horses are tied to the trap to help keep the gathered horses calm, plus they're readily available if the roundup crew needs to quickly ride out and help the helicopter pilot. At top, Feral horses, plus one burro, follow Shorty the Judas horse through the wings to the trap.

portable panels for the trap. They pound t-posts for the wings, then drape a woven material called jute between the posts. The natural brown color of the jute doesn't spook the feral horses, but it provides

boundaries to funnel them into the trap.

The panels that the horses initially see once in the trap are bare so as to look less solid and not deter the horses from entering the trap. ☞

Safety of the animals is a primary concern

Farther back, the panels are covered in green snow fence to look more solid and discourage the horses from trying to escape or running into them.

"It's for the animals' safety. That has to be our first priority," said Cattoor. The most common injury is from horses running against panels. The Cattoors have less than a 0.01% death loss in nearly four decades of operation.

Once the trap and wings are set up, the helicopter pilot sets out to find horses that are within a few miles of the trap. He starts them toward the trap, letting them travel at their own pace. The pilots notify the ground crew via radio when they are approaching the wings, where someone is holding a haltered Judas horse. As the feral horses approach, the Judas horse is turned loose at just the right time for the approaching horses to "hook on" and follow him into the trap.

"They don't come in behind them with saddle horses, ever. If you've got the helicopter and they're respecting that helicopter and responding, if you come in with horses, that'll confuse them and they'll just go everywhere," said Cattoor. The



Submitted photo

A helicopter pilot brings a small bunch of horses to the trap at the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge. All the horses are being removed to keep Sheldon true to its original intent of being a wildlife, not a feral horse, refuge.

Wild horse advocates watch many gathers, but don't always report accurately

Laura Leigh, founder of the wild horse activist group Wild Horse Education, was present nearly every day at the recent gather on the Sheldon Wildlife Refuge. A local news station was present the first day, and their reporter got an earful from Leigh. Unfortunately, no ranching advocates were present, so the local evening news viewers only heard the anti-gather side of the story.

Cattoor said ranchers and ranchers' wives have attended their gathers before in the observation area and told their side of the story. One strategy to counter one-sided news coverage is for local ranchers to take shifts volunteering one day of their time to sit in the observation area.

"It's very effective," said Cattoor. She said that news media is usually present the first day, but they don't stay for the entire gather.

To find out the gather schedule near you, check out the BLM's website at www.blm.gov and click on the tabs for "National Wild Horse and Burro Program" then "FY 2014 Removal Schedule" or email Sue Cattoor at clr@wildhorse-roundups.com.

See our related story on the death threats that horse advocates lobby against the Cattoors and other gather companies on Page Seven



Sue Cattoor visits with a local day-work cowboy while waiting for the helicopter to bring in a group of horses.

roundup crews' saddle horses stand tied to the outside of the trap during the gather, ready for a cowboy to jump and rope a horse that's spooking away from the trap or otherwise assist as needed.

The ideal Judas horse is very herd-bound, and his desire to return to his buddies causes him to run toward the trap when turned loose.

"It doesn't always work to use a palomino horse or a paint, or a gray horse. Most herds are more respectful of a plain-colored horse," said Cattoor. Their current Judas horse is a saddle-broke sorrel

named Shorty. He was purchased for the Cattoors' grandchildren to team rope on, but his herdbound tendencies made him an ideal candidate for a Judas horse. When turned loose in the wings, Shorty lays his ears back and races for the trap like Secretariat in the home stretch of the Kentucky Derby. The grandchildren have never ridden Shorty.

A couple wranglers hide behind the jute at end of wings, then jump up and shut the gates behind the horses. The studs and mares are immediately separated to prevent fighting, and any pairs, weak, or injured horses are sorted off as well. Horses are loaded into stock trailers while waiting for the helicopters to bring in the next bunch. Once the trailers are full, they are taken to the agency's holding facility or transfer location and the Cattoors' job is done.

Under their BLM contract, the Cattoors are responsible and liable for everyone's safety on their gathers. "We've had to make sure that we don't have observers where the helicopter's going to fly over them. The helicopter has to fly fairly low," said Cattoor. "In some cases, that means that the observers have to be quite a ways away. They object to that because they want to be closer. At the same time, anyone who's taking a picture with a camera these days can zoom in." Observers can also bring binoculars to watch the gather activities.

Many of the observers are members of wild horse activist groups who are trying to shut down the roundups via public objection and court orders. Even so, the Cattoors try to accommodate their viewing needs.

"They're nice people. They believe in their cause. I've always tried to work with them," said Cattoor.

Activists often take pictures and videos out of context, giving the public an unfair view of the gathers.

"There's always been people who have a different opinion and don't think the horses should be gathered. That's been going on since they passed the law," said Cattoor.

Despite the lawsuits, false accusations and negative pushback, the Cattoors enjoy their unusual job.

"We enjoy what we do as far as working with the horses, being outside every day and the different places we get to go," said Cattoor. "One of the other things that we've really enjoyed is we've met ranchers all over the West. Now it's even more fun because you get to go back and get reacquainted with families that you maybe haven't seen in two or three years."

Some advocacy groups promote a conspiracy theory that there are far fewer horses on the range than the BLM reports. Cattoor said obtaining accurate counts of horses out on the range can be difficult, but under-counting is not a concern.

"You have to consider each and every HMA (Herd Management Area) and group of horses, because they are all so different," she said. Horses that are gathered and released onto same range will move away from the roundup helicopter, then reappear after the gather, skewing the numbers.

"I would say that there's as many or more than the BLM says there are," said Cattoor. "The specialists in the field that we work with, they want to do a good job. They want to have the numbers correct and get the numbers down to where they need to be, work with the ranchers and work with us when we gather. We've worked with some awesome specialists."

As the pioneers of the modern helicopter gather industry, the BLM wrote many of its regulations based on the Cattoors' methods.

"We're proud of what we do, we feel that horses have to be managed to have healthy horses out on the range," said Sue Cattoor.

For more information on their business and history, visit www.wild-horseroundups.com. ♦

Feral horse advocates get nasty on social media

Groups regularly post misleading photos, misinformation in quest to protect animals

Editor's Note: The Nevada Rancher holds to high standards for coarse language — but the incendiary comments posted on Facebook by the wild horse advocates must be read in their original context to truly capture the level of hatred and violence. Reader discretion is advised. — CK

By Jolyn Young

The Nevada Rancher

NEPHI, Utah – Cattoor Livestock and Helicopter Roundup Service is accustomed to getting flak from wild horse activist groups. The online controversy stirred up by their gather at the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge last month soared to new levels of misinformation and threats, however.

Two feral horse advocacy groups sent representatives to the gather. Laura Leigh of Wild Horse Education (WHE), a wild horse activist group headquartered in Reno, posted pictures almost daily to WHE's Facebook page. Steve Paige of Return to Freedom (RTF), a feral horse sanctuary in central California, also attended and posted pictures.

Paige posted a picture of an injured horse being gathered by a helicopter to RTF's Facebook page on August 13 with the caption "This wild horse was put down at the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge on Aug 11 2014 after being rounded up from beyond the distant horizon. It was then pushed for miles by a team of helicopters on an injured leg."

This post drew over 500 comments and nearly 1,000 shares. Most of the comments were expressions of hatred and death threats directed at the helicopter pilot. The BLM also received a hefty dose of bashing, even though this gather was not on BLM land. Readers' emotionally charged

Steve Paige reporting in from Sheldon FWS Refuge:

"This wild horse was put down at the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge on Aug 11 2014 after being rounded from beyond the distant horizon. It was then pushed for miles by a team of helicopters on a injured leg."

Join us.

<http://www.returntofreedom.org/>



Like · Comment · Share

975 Shares



Veronica Bunch someone needs to have a grande launcher and every time they see this waste of human beings on a chopper they need to blow them up to hell where they belong

Like · Reply · 1 · August 13 at 12:49pm



Mitch Thompson Fuck them!!!!!! Stupid iam gonna hunt those pepole down break there leg and make them keep going then kill em

Like · Reply · August 13 at 3:54pm



Mary Jane Riggs These assholes need to be blown out of the air.

Like · Reply · August 13 at 3:23pm



Suzi Smith How can they do that! If it was my job I would tell them to go f... themselves!

Like · Reply · August 13 at 3:20pm · Edited



Wolfgang J Kovac Terrible

Like · Reply · August 13 at 3:15pm



Susan Gallegos bastards!

Like · Reply · August 13 at 3:15pm



Terri Brownfield Cowards.

Like · Reply · August 13 at 3:14pm



Anne Ross somebody shoot the copters out of the air.....

Like · Reply · August 13 at 3:14pm



Lena Simonson Horrible!

Like · Reply · August 13 at 3:14pm



Janelle Ghiorso Who is ready to get physically active and put an end to this bullshit?

Like · Reply · August 13 at 7:39pm

Misleading pictures like this incited hundreds of death threats, expressions of hatred and calls for physical violence on multiple feral horse advocacy Facebook pages

Hate speech welcome on 'horse freedom' Facebook pages

comments urged each other to get guns, bullets and grenades to shoot down the pilot at the next roundup.

When asked in a phone interview about the post, RTF President Neda DeMayo said she was unaware of all the hateful comments.

"People do what they're going to do," she said. "I did not create Facebook."

DeMayo said she felt no responsibility for the violent comments that picture incited. She said the picture was "a factual statement from an on-site observer. The fact that an injured horse had to endure being rounded up and pushed by a helicopter is inhumane and a legitimate subject for public discussion and understandably causes a reaction."

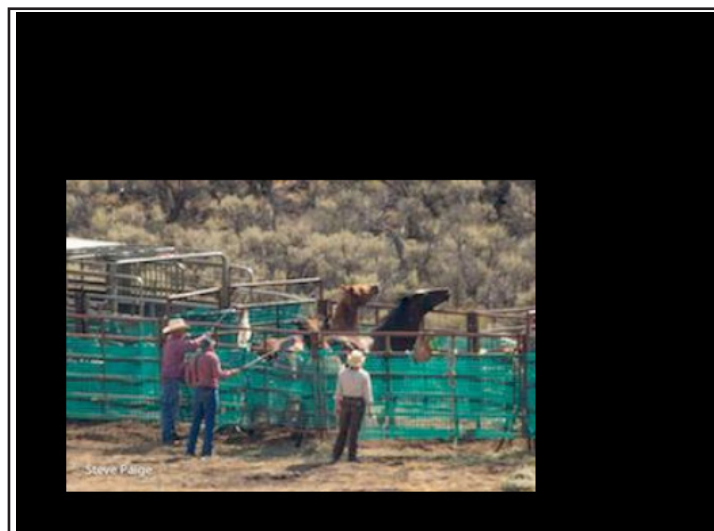
DeMayo said no effort was made by anyone at RTF to find out if the horse was injured prior to the gather or how far it traveled during the gather. She said she took Paige's word for what happened on the range.

Sheldon's public affairs representative reported that the horse had been injured prior to the gather.

"It was his hind leg, it had swelled bigger than a softball," confirmed roundup crew member Zach Rhodes. "You could tell it was infected due to his mangy appearance and lack of weight. His rib and hip bones were showing. As you know a horse in this condition could not have been ran for 'miles and miles.' Wildlife officials and the crew believed it was best to put him down due to the severity of the injury and the fact that he was clearly suffering."

After the violent comments were brought to her attention, none were removed from the thread. Nevertheless, DeMayo said "We do not condone violence on any level towards a human being, a government official, or an animal."

Hundreds of comments stating



Photos like this, posted with no explanation, led most viewers to believe the roundup was using electric cattle prods on the feral horses. Many called for jail time for the "animal abusers."



desires to blow the helicopters out of the air with various weapons, hoping the pilots burn in hell, and many one-word expletives remain on RTF's Facebook page. The comment threads on this and another feral horse advocacy group's page are full of misinformation regarding ranchers' taking kickbacks from the BLM, the cattlemen suing for the removal of the horses, young foals being permanently separated from their dams, the roundup crew supposedly violating federal law, American history, how each species utilizes the land and resources, and horse handling methods.

On August 15, RTF posted a picture of the roundup crew using flag sticks to sort mares from studs in the holding pens at the trap. No explanation was offered, and most followers incorrectly assumed the crew was using electric cattle prods. The picture drew dozens of comments accusing the crew of animal abuse and expressing desires to use hot shots on the crew members. RTF did not censor or in any way correct the misunderstanding.

Leigh posted similarly misleading photos and captions on WHE's Facebook page during the gather as well. She posted pictures of foals being roped with no explanation; a foal being loaded into a stock trailer and not showing its dam already in the trailer; sweaty horses with no

explanation of the day's high temperature; and horses trying to jump the panels of the trap. These images incited many violent comments and attracted the attention of several ranching advocates, who began replying to the misinformed comments. Many offered factual explanations for the events in the pictures and beyond, as the discussions delved into whether the horses were native or reintroduced, the anatomy of horses' and cows' mouths and stomachs, Cliven Bundy, and the Pioneer Woman's Fourth of July fireworks display.

After dozens of defensive replies from the pro-rancher crowd and a public post about this article, Leigh deleted the most violent comments. In addition, she deleted most of the pro-ranching comments and blocked some of the commenters.

She did not remove comments calling the ranchers "maggots" or telling pro-ranching commenters to "piss off." She left all the comments commending her for doing a great job and offering to donate money.

Leigh widely promoted on her Facebook page that WHE was taking the mares and foals from the Sheldon gather. Many followers expressed a desire to donate money to this project. A Sheldon Wildlife official said she did not have permission to do this. Leigh did not respond when asked repeatedly for

written proof, and she later deleted all public requests for proof.

Pressure from commenters supporting the Sheldon gather successfully affected change on Leigh's website as well.

On August 13, she blogged "At present once again Sheldon is caught in the dust of the cloud of confusion. Multiple social media and public statements are perpetuating inaccuracies and fueling arguments.

"The Sheldon mustangs are not being removed because they are starving on the range. They are not being removed because of emergency due to drought. They are not being removed because of over population. They are not being removed because of domestic livestock (Sheldon has no livestock permits in almost two decades). Sheldon mustangs and burros are being removed because the 'mission' of Sheldon is to manage an antelope sanctuary."

It's tempting to dismiss these incidents as inconsequential Facebook rants, but behind these comments are real people. In 2010, a Cattoor helicopter pilot was harassed in the air by a small aircraft while on a gather. He landed for safety and the gather was called off for the remainder of the day. The Cattoors have received numerous threatening phone calls and emails, and are currently working with their lawyer to take action against the feral horse advocacy groups. ♦