

Alliance of Wild Horse Advocates
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EDITORIAL OPINION

The Elko County Commission and Welfare Ranching Mentality

Issue: The Elko County Commission's arguments in opposition to the Winecup Gamble Ranch's proposed wild horse sanctuary project.

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Many ranchers in Nevada are honest, hard working and responsible producers. They care about their ranges. When they avail themselves of grazing privileges on public lands, they work with the Bureau of Land Management and other public lands interests to resolve problems. This system is far from perfect, but it works.

There is also a small but very vocal contingent of public lands ranchers who only care about themselves. They are often the first to complain when tax dollars are being spent on anyone else while they stand at the head of the line to get their tax supported public lands grazing privileges. They complain about inner city welfare families who spawn future generations of welfare recipients while they themselves spawn generations of "welfare ranchers."

The welfare rancher mentality is often based on the convoluted logic that because some ancestor once grazed the land, they should enjoy some entitlement by birthright. They believe that public property should simply be given over to them. This logic is just about as rational as my wandering into the Quick Stop at will and helping myself to whatever I wanted because at one time my Great Grandfather owned the general store where the mini mart now stands. I'd be arrested and hauled off for the thief that I was.

The welfare ranchers preach law and order, so long as it benefits them, yet they assign some glamour to those among them who break the rules and break the laws that govern their relationship with the "evil" BLM.

The response by the Elko County Commission to the Winecup Gamble sanctuary proposal is illustrative of this welfare rancher mentality. These people don't want to solve problems unless the solution involves more taxpayer funded improvements going to them. They play themselves off as the poor and downtrodden while they live off a system that the rest of us taxpayers fund every April 15th. These ranchers do work for a living, but this 2% of our beef cattle producers get grazing rights at a fraction of the costs that the other 98% of beef producers have to pay in order to operate in the real market. This 2%, nicknamed "The Selfish Two" by some rangeland advocates, causes about 98% of the problems associated with public lands grazing.

One problem associated with this vocal self-absorbed minority is that these people constantly generate distractions that impede development of pragmatic solutions to long term problems. Unless a solution directly benefits them, they are opposed to it. In their minds their personal interests should receive greater status than public interests.

A greater problem involves the public and Congress finally having its fill of obstructionists that cost tax dollars and contribute an insignificant portion of the nation's food supply. People are starting to question whether welfare ranching has finally outlived its usefulness, including a few private lands ranchers who complain that they pay taxes that are used to subsidize their competitors.

Perhaps if the Federally subsidized public lands ranching industry doesn't appreciate what it has, then it is time to turn those public lands over to some more contemporary uses.