

# WINECUP GAMBLE RANCH

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Elko County Commissioners  
and Concerned Citizens of Elko County

## **RE: Wild Horse Sanctuary**

Dear Members of the Commission and Concerned Citizens:

During the past few weeks, the Winecup Gamble Ranch has received a number of comments from Commissioner Dahl and member of the public concerning the wild horse sanctuary proposed for the Winecup Gamble Ranch. While I realize I am not going to convince everyone, I do hope to at least have answers to your questions. Some of the more common questions and comments, together with the Ranch's responses, are as follows:

### **1. Will this proposal jeopardize Elko County's horse-free status or lead to wild horses expanding into new areas?**

The answer is that Elko County doesn't have a "horse-free status." There are currently 10 wild horse herd management areas on public lands in Elko County. Those areas are the Little Humboldt, Little Owyhee, Owyhee, Rock Creek, Snowstorm Mountains, Maverick-Medicine, Goshute, Antelope, Diamond Hills North and Spruce-Pequop HMA's.

Moreover, this proposal will not lead to expanded herd management areas. In order to expand herd management areas, the BLM must go through a lengthy and difficult process, but that will not happen in connection with this sanctuary. A sanctuary is entirely different than a herd management area.

### **2. Does this proposal create a long-term solution to the wild horse problem?**

In the long-term, our plan goes a long way toward solving the problem, but the ranch does not control the wild horse herd management areas. If the BLM agrees with our recommendation to primarily remove females from the management areas and castrate the excess studs, there will be a reduction in wild horse populations through attrition. The plan also calls for no breeding of wild horses within the sanctuary, although mares in foal will be allowed to give birth, with the goal of gentling the foals for adoption purposes. Keep in mind that

euthanizing wild horses on a large scale, which has been tried in the past, is met with so much political resistance today that it is just not going to happen. That's just the political reality of the situation and if cattle growers are going to try to hold out for that type of long-term solution to the problem, they're going to have a long wait. The Ranch's proposal allows the horses to live without reproducing and the process of natural attrition will eventually reduce their numbers, during which time the Federal funds used to support the horses will stay in Nevada.

Something else to consider is that the horses living in holding facilities back East live much longer than horses living in a more natural environment on the open range. For that reason, horses living on the Ranch will have shorter lifespans, which also is a factor in reducing the cost to taxpayers.

**3. Will the conversion of the Ranch to a wild horse sanctuary degrade public or private resources?**

We have carefully conducted range studies and have determined the number of horses that the Ranch will support without degrading riparian areas, forage and other resources. We will continue to manage the horse herds in the same ecologically-sound and sustainable manner that we have historically managed our cattle operation. Also, there will be a full-time BLM employee onsite to work with the Ranch in monitoring range conditions.

The issue of resource management is discussed in our position paper. That paper contains the findings from the Ranch's satellite forage study, the agreement with the BLM and a description of the use of public lands during the dormant period. Copies are available for the public at the Convention Center.

**4. Does the Ranch have the expertise to hand large herds of wild horses?**

We believe that we do have the expertise to make this operation successful, or else we would not be making this proposal. Also, the BLM is planning to move onsite personnel to the Ranch and the Ranch fully intends to bring on new management personnel who have experience in dealing with large herds of horses. The Ranch is familiar with operations in Oklahoma and Kansas, and intends to utilize some of their practices to control the horses on the Ranch.

**5. The number of wild horses stated in the document seems high.**

The number of horses stated in our executive summary is based on our range study. We plan to start with 8,000 horses, which represents a substantial reduction in the Ranch's AUMs compared to the current cattle operation. This is also substantially less than the number of horses that the land can support based on the Ranch's range study and the BLM's key area sampling process. After that, the Ranch and the BLM will coordinate in deciding whether additional horses can be added based on the amount of forage that is available. The Ranch has a 5-year plan calling for additional horses if the Ranch and the BLM determine that the amount of forage is sufficient. That plan is addressed in the Ranch's position paper.

**6. There should be a bond in order to protect neighbors against damage and expense resulting from stray horses.**

The Ranch hasn't considered that option, since we believe we have the resources to contain the horses and collect any strays. The Ranch is fenced and the horses will be trained to respect the fences and to come to feed, which has been used successfully as a method of gathering wild horses in facilities elsewhere. However, we will take the suggestion under advisement.

**7. The money for the sanctuary will come from the Federal government.**

That is true. The money that makes this project economically feasible for the Ranch will come from the Federal government, although the Ranch will have other revenue streams. However, the majority of the horses that would be going to the sanctuary come from Nevada. Normally, the horses are shipped out of state – along with the Federal money that goes to support them. This way, the money would stay in Nevada. It's also worth noting that there's a lot of Federal money that goes to Elko County, including money for highways and the California Trail Center. I haven't heard anyone saying that we should give that money back. It should also be noted that the amount of money the Ranch would receive from a horse would be approximately the same as the amount of money it would receive from a calf.

The bottom line is that the Federal money for the wild horses is going to be spent anyway. Stopping this proposal will not stop the need for a sanctuary, it will just take the money away from Nevada and give it to people in other states.

**8. There's no justification for having a wild horse sanctuary on the Ranch because people can see wild horses in other parts of the state.**

It's true that there are wild horses elsewhere in the state, but the Ranch and Elko County aren't deriving any economic benefit from those horses. In addition to the money from the BLM, the Ranch is proposing to profit from tourism through organized tour groups and a lodging facility. Tourists who just go look at wild horses on public lands, assuming they actually are able to find them, aren't paying anything for the experience. On the Ranch, they would, and the Ranch, Elko County and the State would benefit from the additional tourism.

**9. Who will own the horses?**

The Ranch takes no position on the issue of whether ownership of the horses should remain with the BLM or be transferred to a non-profit foundation.

**10. Will there be substantial savings to the taxpayers?**

The taxpayers will benefit in many ways, to include a reduced cost of transportation; reduced time and expenses in transition areas for training, as opposed to the short-term holding facilities currently in use; reduced veterinary expenses associated with the long-

term holding facilities currently in use; reduced life spans due to the open range environment as compared to increased life spans in the holding facilities currently in use; and greater control of breeding herds in management areas. Also, the taxpayers in Elko County will benefit, not only because the Federal money is staying here, but also because the Ranch is planning to make substantial fixed improvements to accommodate additional horses and the recreational aspects of the sanctuary.

**11. What would the impact of pending legislation?**

An amendment to the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act may be needed if the BLM retains ownership of the horses. However, passage of that legislation, which has passed the House and is currently before the Senate, would not result in new herd management areas outside of their present locations.

**12. What will be the effect on native wildlife?**

The requirements of wildlife have already been taken into account by the BLM's in determining the number of AUMs that are given to the Ranch. However, as discussed in the Ranch's position paper, the Ranch has gone beyond the BLM's minimum requirements by not only protecting existing habitat, but also by creating additional habitat for wildlife.

The wild horse sanctuary is something that the Ranch wants to pursue and did not come about because the Federal government suggested it. We are intent on making the sanctuary work so that everyone benefits in one way or another, whether it's through reducing costs to taxpayers, eliminating of overpopulation of wild horses elsewhere in the state, or developing the sanctuary into a tourist destination. This project will allow careful management of Nevada's wild horses while keeping Federal dollars in Nevada, which is not the case now. If we leave the status quo, the problem won't go away. One viewpoint advocates euthanizing the wild horses to make way for cows, while the other advocates moving all the cows off the range to make room for horses and wildlife. Many of the ranchers I have spoken with, including Commissioner Dahl, have expressed concerns about their pastures being overrun with wild horses without coming up with a solution that is politically feasible. What we are proposing to do here is the best solution we are aware of.

Sincerely,



**GARY WEISBART**  
Ranch Manager  
Winecup Gamble Ranch

Cc. Jeffrey Mullins, Elko Daily Free Press