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Alberta Wild Horse Population “Skyrocketing?”

**ALBERTA WILD HORSE WATCHDOG GROUP
SAYS RECENT GOVERNMENT FIGURES ARE
INACCURATE AND PURPOSEFULLY MISLEADING**

Olds, AB — Statistics released last week by the Alberta Ministry of Forestry, Parks, and Tourism in conjunction with its new “framework” to manage the wild horse population that resides in six “Equine Management Zones (EMZs) of the province misleads the public and needlessly puts the lives of the wild horses in jeopardy, says Darrell R. Glover, President of the Help Alberta Wildies Society (HAWS), an Alberta Wild Horse advocacy and watchdog organization.

“Government officials would like you to believe the wild horse population in Alberta is skyrocketing and that’s just not so.” says Glover. Natural predators like Grizzlies, black bears and wolves have kept the population in check. From 2018 to the present, the number of wild horses in the province has been static and actually is in decline.”

According to the provincial government’s 2023 census, the wild horse population in the Sundre EMZ which is the province’s largest, increased 51% from 642 to 969 over last year’s totals. “What they don’t tell you is the fact they flew 500 more kilometers in that zone in 2023 than they have in the past. Of course the numbers would go up if you surveyed more territory. The question you need to ask yourself, is why?”

To estimate the number of wild horses residing in each zone, Alberta ‘s Ministry of Forestry, Parks, and Tourism (FPT) conducts an aerial count once a year. To keep government officials honest, HAWS also conducts its own independent parallel aerial count using the same flight pattern as the government then publicly publishes its comparative results.

“This year without warning, FPT flew an additional 500 kms and expanded their survey area, then included the number of additional horses spotted in the official 2023 count for the zone, artificially inflating the wild horse population numbers by more than 50%. Our 2023 count that followed the same flight path used in 2022 by the government came up with 684, an increase of only 25 horses (4%) over the year before,” Glover explains.

(more)

Government Admits Wild Horse Population Figures Inaccurate and Misleading/2

Under the government's new wild horse management framework, that 51% increase puts the Sundre zone in particular, perilously close to the 1,000 maximum number of horses allowed in that zone before they will be culled and/or subject to a medical contraception program to prevent further growth.

HAWS representatives met with government officials last week to challenge the FPT's 2023 census figures and question the methodology used.

"We're not disputing the fact that the larger the area surveyed the more likely more wild horses will be found, however, in order for such important research to be valid and statistically sound, there needs to be an "apples to apples" comparison, says Glover.

"That means, you have to be consistent year-to-year in terms of what geographical areas are being measured. You can't change the parameters mid-stream, then suddenly claim there has been massive growth, and base critical decisions on that," he states.

Glover notes his group did make some headway last week in their meeting with FPT's Rangeland Director. "They did acknowledge to us they flew more miles in the Sundre zone in 2023 and also agreed they will share their intended flight paths with HAWS in advance starting in 2024 so that HAWS can conduct a parallel count," Glover explains.

"However, they refuse to amend their 2023 population count report that makes it appear there has been a massive increase in the wild horse population in the Sundre EMZ," Glover says. "Not only are they misleading the public but by arbitrarily expanding their survey area to inflate the numbers, they're purposefully setting themselves up to justify a future cull or contraception program to bring those numbers down. That's just not right nor ethical, and the public needs to know."

HAWS was founded in 2014, in response to the government's plan to eradicate all wild horses in the foothills of the Eastern Slopes of the Rocky Mountains in Alberta. Since that time, the non-profit group, comprised of a team of dedicated volunteers and subject-matter experts, monitors and conducts research including via an extensive trail cam network in the Sundre Equine Zone and advocates for the well-being of the Wildies province-wide.

More information about HAWS can be found on its website: www.helpalbertawildie society.com. and also on its Facebook page (Help Alberta Wildies Society) where the group shares much of its research with close to a half-million group followers world-wide.