



25th Navajo Nation Council

# 25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Feral horse problem discussed in report to the Resources and Development Committee**



**Presenters from the Navajo Nation Department of Agriculture Horse Management Program presented a report before the Resources and Development Committee.**

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – The topic of feral horses overgrazing lands that Navajo ranchers use to support their livestock was discussed during a recent report from the Navajo Nation Department of Agriculture (DOA) to the Resources and Development Committee.

“The issue of feral horses encroaching and overgrazing on Navajo pasture land has been a long-standing problem,” said RDC Chair Brenda Jesus. “Feral horses are impeding on the livelihood of our Navajo ranchers.”

According to NNDOA Acting Department Manager III Jesse Jim, in 2018, the feral horse population on the Navajo Nation was approximately 38,000 with an 11-percent growth rate. In 2024, the NNDOA estimates there are approximately 100,000 feral horses on the Nation.

NNDOA Horse Management Program Senior Extension Agent Olin Begay said the program employs two methods of capture: entrapment and traditional round up. Horses that are rounded up are then tagged.

The Horse Management Program holds non-branded livestock for five to ten days and branded

livestock for 10 to 14 days. From 2019 to 2024, the program rounded up over 10,000 head.

Not all chapters want the program to intervene in capturing feral horses. Red Mesa Chapter passed a resolution opposing feral horse round ups. "Because of their resolution, we can't intervene," Jim said.

Delegate Danny Simpson recently attended a round up in Nageezi and provided food for the workers. Simpson said last year's round up captured 76 horses.

"They work 16-hour days in hot weather. It takes a lot of energy," Simpson said. "It makes a big difference in managing the rangeland. In many places the horses have destroyed the land."

Council Delegate Shawna Ann Claw had questions about chapter officials using chapter equipment for the round ups and if usage fees paid to officials were deposited back into chapter accounts.

Delegate Claw also asked about reimbursements made to livestock owners from sales of seized livestock.

"As we all know to have livestock you need a grazing permit. If you don't have a permit for grazing, the livestock will be sold. If you can prove ownership, you will get the money. If not, the money goes to probate. Until ownership is provided, they cannot be paid," Jim said.

Both Jim and Begay said they would look into the chapter equipment issue.

RDC Vice Chair Casey Allen Johnson said fence reconstruction is needed to secure boundaries from outsiders who abandon their livestock on the Nation.

"In Grey Mountain, there are people who bring their horses out and release them onto the Navajo Nation. They need to be arrested for trespassing. We need increased enforcement," Vice Chair Johnson said.

Delegate Simpson and Vice Chair Johnson called for increased support for staffing and proper equipment for the Horse Management Program. Delegate Simpson asked if Agriculture Infrastructure Funds could be used to support the program.

"I know you need more crew, equipment, and resources," Vice Chair Johnson said. "Thank you for your work. It goes a long way."

The Resources and Development Committee voted five in favor and zero opposed to accept the report.

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