

By Jesse R. Bussard

## Too good to be true?

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), the largest and richest animal rights organization in the world, recently released a report to the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Wild Horse and Burro Program calling for a revision of its standard operating procedures to make mustang gathers more humane and provide more transparent coverage of roundups.

Though most times proposals like this sound all well and good to the general bystander, more times than not animal rights groups have an ulterior motive. What does HSUS have hiding up its sleeve with this one?

Currently the BLM manages an approximate 38,500 wild horses and burros on federal rangelands covering 10 Western states. BLM is responsible for not only management of the range where the mustang herds reside but also maintaining a sustainable population of wild horses and burros. Currently these populations of wild horses and burros are at unsustainable levels on many ranges and therefore require some form of population control. If not controlled, populations could reach levels that would not be able to be maintained on the current amounts of rangeland available, leading to starvation, disease, and increased environmental degradation from overgrazing of rangelands.

In the report, HSUS calls for installation of real-time cameras on helicopters, traps, corrals, and holding facilities to allow BLM officials and others to be able to better directly observe gatherings and also act as an evaluation tool to improve existing operating procedures. These video cameras would also increase transparency to the public by providing remote live-streaming video available online. In addition to improved transparency, HSUS would also like to see the BLM establish basic minimum standards for conducting gather operations.

I can agree with HSUS on its first two requests of BLM. Both are reasonable suggestions and issues that BLM cur-

rently does need to address. Where I become skeptical is on the third recommendation. HSUS strongly recommends that BLM work in partnership with them to conduct their Capture, Treat, and Release programs to inoculate the appropriate ratios of mares in wild horse and burro herds at the most effective time of the year, thereby optimizing to the greatest extent possible the benefits of using the contraceptive vaccine Porcine Zona Pellucida (PZP) as a method of population control.

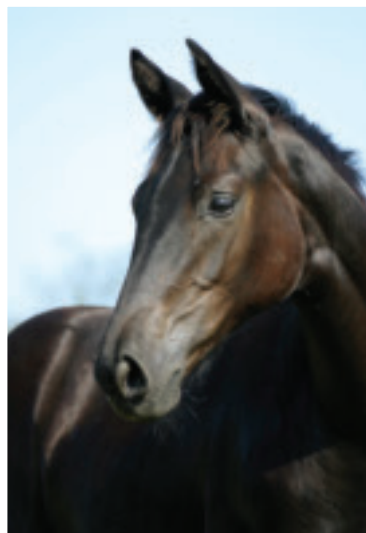
Here's where things get real interesting (wait for it)...the patent holder of the PZP vaccine is none other than HSUS.

This all leads me to wonder if the true motive and intent behind HSUS's report to BLM is none other than that of profit. One dose of PZP can run as high as \$500. To vaccinate just 20,000 horses would require a whopping \$10 million of taxpayer dollars. Is this really a wise use of our money? Surely there are other alternatives for population control that the BLM might consider such as alternative contraceptives, predator management, spaying, and/or gelding.

The last thing our government needs to be doing is funding the lobbying efforts of an animal rights group.

Currently, the BLM is also reviewing another report of the agency's wild horse and burro program conducted by the National Academy of Sciences/National Research Council (NAS/NRC). NAS/NRC is a non-profit group that advises government agencies on scientific issues. I would hope that BLM will take all commentary and options into consideration and not jump on the HSUS bandwagon just yet.

Sometime the offer really can be too good to be true.



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*Jesse R. Bussard is a Pennsylvania cowgirl with a degree from Pennsylvania State University in animal science. Currently she is pursuing graduate studies in plant and soil science at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, Ky. She is an active advocate for agriculture through social media and her personal blog, Pearl Snaps' Ponderings (<http://pearl-snapsponderings.wordpress.com/>).*