



October 7, 2010

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Maureen VanDerStad

860-598-0095

Contact: Info@grassroothorse.com

Legal documents were filed in Reno, NV on October 4, 2010 adding to the Temporary Restraining Order Motion that was filed earlier by Laura Leigh against Ken Salazar, Dept. of Interior, Robert Abbey, Bureau of Land Management and Ron Wenker, NV State Director of BLM.

The legal action asks for full accountability and transparency from the Bureau of Land Management as they capture wild horses from the Silver King herd in Nevada. Plaintiff Laura Leigh is a photojournalist and videographer whose work documenting wild horses is gaining international attention. The lawsuit addresses the BLM's violation of the First Amendment right for the public to witness and report on the government in action, specifically the capture of wild horses and the denial to allow access to enable meaningful reporting.

This right was previously upheld in court decision made by the Honorable Larry Hicks in the July 2010 case on the Owyhee, Rock Creek, Little Humboldt wild horse roundups which closed public lands.

As evidence mounts pointing to retaliatory measures by the BLM against Leigh by allowing her and another member of the public even less access to document the roundup operations, (which the BLM euphemistically refers to as "gathers"), it becomes increasingly clear that public and press observations are critical.

"I left in disgust over the constant battle over meaningful access. I left three trap sites as my access to witness the activities of the contractor during the moment of capture was non-existent," said Laura Leigh.

When the boundaries to access were pushed on Wednesday, October 6, 2010, the one moment the public and press were able to witness was the death of a Silver King stallion that apparently broke his neck on one of the fencing panels and went down hard.

The Silver King lawsuit is all about "access" to witness and document the activities during and after the round ups. "Support for this legal action is critical and it is about accountability for the wild horses --horses that were deemed so important by Congress that they warranted protection," said the plaintiff Leigh. "We are failing these horses from the range all the way through. We don't really even know where 'all the way through' is since we have no verification of where they are taken or where they ultimately end up," she continued.

With severely limited access, Laura Leigh could see and pointed out areas that could create a potentially deadly safety issue, specifically a big gap from a loading ramp onto a trailer where foals had been kept separated from their mothers for five hours. Nothing was done to remedy the unsafe condition and a foal did fall through.

Filmmaker Elizabeth Slagsvol flew in from the East Coast and then drove twelve hours to attend one day out of the only two scheduled public observation days for the Silver King roundup which is set to last about three weeks. "I left," said Beth on Tuesday, October 5, 2010 after she had traveled on good faith that she would be able to witness and document the roundups at the public observation day. "You couldn't see anything at all. I told Chris (referring to Chris Hannefield, BLM public relations contact) this wasn't the deal and he replied, without facing her, 'there is no deal,' " said Slagsvol. The idea of scheduling a public observation day is for the public to observe. Initially the BLM intended to close public lands for this roundup, but when the Silver King lawsuit was filed, the BLM reversed itself within twenty four hours of filing, keeping public lands open and scheduling two observation days.

The numbers posted by the BLM on their daily gather reports, which do not appear daily, show the numbers of wild horses captured and shipped, and do not match records of horses arriving at their intended destinations. “What is really going on out there?” asks Maureen VanDerStad of Grass Roots Horse, the equine welfare and mustang advocacy group that is supporting the legal actions. “We have a right to know and the public wants to know what is happening to these animals and where are they going. The BLM has lost any trust and confidence the public may have had in the program and the courts are our only option for remedy as well as our only hope of saving these horses that are our national treasure.”

The legal filings, including photographs, are available on the legal page of www.grassrootshorse.com

Grass Roots Horse is a non-profit equine welfare and mustang advocacy group that is supporting the legal actions. To support this critical endeavor, please visit www.grassrootshorse.com