

Ep #58: A Journey for Wild Horses and a Reprieve



Freedom for Wild Horses

WITH CAROL J WALKER

Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Carol J. Walker

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Have you wondered where advocacy for wild horses is going? If so, this episode is for you. I'm your host, Carol Walker, and let's get started.

Welcome to the *Freedom For Wild Horses* podcast, the place to find out about wild horses in the American West and what you can do to help them stay wild and free. If you love wildlife, wild horses, and the freedom that they stand for, this show is for you. I'm your host, Carol Walker. Let's get started.

I began a journey with wild horses 21 years ago. At the time, I had just found out that the Bureau of Land Management was rounding up and removing most of the wild horses in Adobe Town, a herd I had grown to love. I wasn't sure what I could do other than witness and document the roundup, then later publish my first book, *Wild Hoofbeats: America's Vanishing Wild Horses*, to show that these horses were not starving and that they were uniquely suited to this wild land they called home.

Since then, I have spent the years exploring and returning again and again to wild horse herds in Wyoming, Montana, Colorado, Utah, and Oregon. I have been to all 16 herds in Wyoming and spent most of my time returning again and again to 8 of them. I have attended 22 roundups, documenting, observing, photographing, and spreading the word about what is happening. And none of it is good.

In 2009, at the Pryor Mountain roundup, the very first wild horse blog was started by the Cloud Foundation, and my own Wild Hoofbeats blog followed quickly afterward. Social media became a way to educate people about wild horse issues, and thousands upon thousands of people started caring and becoming involved with the movement to save our wild horses on our public lands.

There are many wild horse advocacy groups now, and two I have worked closely with over the years are the Cloud Foundation and American Wild Horse Conservation, both of whom have been fighting and will continue to fight to save our wild horses. I have participated as a plaintiff in seven lawsuits to help protect our wild horses because frequently the only way to

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stop the actions of the BLM sterilizing or wiping out herds is to use the courts.

In 2005, when I began working as an advocate, I really thought that in a few years, we would have saved the wild horses, and they would be protected, and there would be no more roundups.

Now it's 2025, and the sound of those blades spinning overhead is very fresh in my mind because of the most recent Adobe Town roundup last month. The fight is far from over. With more wild horses in holding facilities today than there are in the wild, over 64,000, and the president's Project 2025 threatening to kill all the wild horses in holding, the picture seems very bleak right now.

But there are signs of hope. Our case to save the Wyoming herds, Salt Wells Creek, Great Divide Basin, and one-third of Adobe Town from being zeroed out had the judges of the 10th Circuit Court calling out the BLM and saying their plan to zero out the herds was illegal. The case has been sent back to the Wyoming District Court. We are waiting for the District Court's decision, and in the meantime, the BLM announced that they plan to go ahead and zero out Salt Wells Creek and one-third of Adobe Town, starting October 13th. This is clearly going against what the 10th Circuit ruled, and the BLM is recklessly plowing ahead forward.

Shortly after our group, American Wild Horse Conservation, Animal Welfare Institute, Chad Hansen, Kimberly Curl, and I had our attorney file suit against the BLM on Wednesday to prevent them from moving forward with its roundup and zeroing out of Salt Wells Creek, Great Divide Basin, and one-third of Adobe Town, which was scheduled to begin October 13th, we heard from our attorney. He had reached out to the BLM's attorney on Monday to find out the status of the roundup. Today, he told us that the roundup was canceled, and BLM would not move forward until summer of 2026 at the earliest.

There is no doubt in my mind that pressure from our group strongly contributed to this decision. It's such incredibly welcome news, sparing

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almost 3,000 wild horses from a horrific roundup and captivity. And, very important, it gives time to the District Court to review our case and the findings of the 10th Circuit Court and make a decision about the fate of these three herds.

Where do we need to go now? Of course, I have a list. The BLM may say, "We don't know what to do," but I do. Stop the helicopter roundups immediately. There are already too many wild horses in holding facilities. Helicopter roundups are dangerous and inhumane, and so many horses die, not just during the roundup, but afterward. Helicopter roundups should never be conducted in July or August. There are way too many young foals being born, and a young foal should never be run 10 miles in the heat in a roundup.

Next, we need to find a way to release wild horses that are in the holding facilities back into the 22 million acres that have been turned from herd management areas into herd areas that have been designated not for wild horse use to live out their lives. The stallions have already been gelded, so it will not be an increasing population. It will just be a place where the horses can live wild and free until they pass.

Do not kill the wild horses currently in holding facilities. Do a reassessment of appropriate management levels for all herds given current conditions on the range, and with a mixed-use approach, using herd management area plans. The minimum herd size should be 255 to maintain genetic viability. This should be the case in all the herds.

Rescind all grazing leases from the public lands where wild horses roam. If you need to pay off the ranchers to do so, then do so. Do forced, if necessary, land swaps in all the checkerboard areas where wild horses roam, especially in Wyoming, and consolidate the parcels of public lands. Use fencing to keep the horses on public lands if necessary.

If the numbers of wild horses need to be limited, use humane, reversible birth control like PZP only. No GonaCon, no sterilization. Use volunteers to aid in documenting and studying the wild horses and for giving birth control.

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Listen to advocates who've been documenting and spending time with the herds before any decisions are made on a particular herd management area.

The best possible solution is to have an agency independent of the Bureau of Land Management who has the best interests of the horses as their goal managing the horses, not the BLM, the rancher's mouthpiece. My goal has always been to keep sustainable herds of wild horses on our public lands where they have been found at the time the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act was passed.

Rounding up and removing wild horses from their families and homes is cruel, inhumane, costly, and completely unsustainable. There is a better way. Treat wild horses as part of our ecosystem, part of our heritage, and manage them for long-term survival, not as if they are livestock.

Thank you for listening for this episode of Freedom for Wild Horses.

Thank you for listening to this episode of *Freedom for Wild Horses*. If you want to learn more, follow me at www.wildhoofbeats.com for more information and for ways to help America's wild horses. See you next time.