

October 16, 2010

During normal operations of the wild horse gather in the Mare Canyon gather area on October 11, 2010, a black mare with a chestnut stud colt were captured. The mare and colt did not enter the trap and were roped. During the gather I observed that the mare was at least grade 3 to 4 of 5 on her right front leg. I saw very little flexion in the carpal joint while she was moving from the helicopter. After she was roped while she was being herded to the trap she stepped into a rut and fell down. The gather contractor's men kept her down and tied her up and requested the trailer in order to limit further stress on her bad leg. I observed the mare prior to and during loading onto the trailer. She appeared depressed, was less responsive than I would expect from a normal horse and she had a severely deformed carpus on her right fore limb. The carpal joint was enlarged to the size of a cantaloupe (approx. 20 cm in diameter) and appeared calcified. I also observed abnormal wear on her right front hoof, enlargement of her right fetlock and of her left carpus and fetlock. I did not place my hands on the mare, not wanting to add any additional stress. She did not stand immediately upon being untied in the trailer so I recommended we leave her in the trailer and keep all personnel and visitors away from the trailer to allow her to recover as quietly and calmly as possible. She stood on her own in the trailer within approximately 1 hour. We unloaded her into the pen where we had placed her colt and I observed that she was grade 4 of 5 lame on her right fore leg. The lameness grading system that I am using is a 1 – 5 system with 1 being barely discernible while horse is moving at a trot or greater and 5 being non-weight bearing on that limb. She was also thinner than the other horses that had been gathered in the area (including other mares with foals). I graded her a 4 on a scale of 1 – 9 with the other mares grading 5 – 7 on the same scale.

I continued to observe the mare in the holding corral with her foal. I determined that the foal is at least 5 months old and eating hay and drinking water independently of the mare. The mare's lameness did not improve, she still appeared depressed and less responsive to external stimuli than the other mares in the same corral and she did not move around the corral nearly as much as the rest did. She had obvious atrophy over her right shoulder, indicative of the chronicity of the injury.

During my routine morning observation of the horses in the holding facility on Oct. 14, 2010, at 8:00 am, I saw this same black mare standing next to the water tank pointing her right front leg forward to limit the amount of weight she was bearing on that limb and leaning on the corral fence. Her head was down and she looked depressed and was less responsive to normal stimuli than the other mares in the pen. I was called back to the holding facility at 12:00 pm with a report that this black mare was down in the corral in lateral recumbency and would only rise with extreme stimulation (people on the outside of the corral talking and banging on the rails). There was also a report of blood on her rump. When I arrived at the holding facility she had gone back down and was in lateral recumbency. She only lifted her head and did not rise even with similar stimulation. She had blood on both thighs and I could see blood coming from either her anus or vulva (could not differentiate which from a distance). I recommended that this mare be humanely euthanized at that time. I felt that she had a severe, chronic lameness that would not allow her to live pain free and that her condition had deteriorated to the point where she showed an extremely poor prognosis even with aggressive medical treatment. She was humanely euthanized by gunshot by the contractor.

Upon external examination of the mare post euthanization, I found the following: no external wounds to explain the hemorrhage seen on her thighs, the severe calcification of the right carpus with less than 10 degrees of flexion, calcification of the left carpus, edema of the left fetlock, and pale mucous membranes. I aged her using her lower incisors and found her to be approximately 20 years old.

The forelimb lameness that was seen in this mare was not recent and was not caused by gather activity. I feel that the only humane option for handling this mare was euthanasia due to the chronic, incurable nature of the limb deformities and the progressive depression with the hemorrhaging.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Richanne E. Lomkin".

Richanne E. Lomkin, DVM  
Field Veterinary Medical Officer,  
USDA, APHIS, Veterinary Services