

Horse deaths explode into a conspiracy

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News flash: BP not satisfied with ruining Gulf Coast, now hell-bent on killing wild horses in Nevada.

That was the essence of a CNN report Wednesday titled “Horse roundup connected to gas pipeline?”

The global news network interviewed Las Vegas TV reporter George Knapp about a story he did for station KLAS titled “BP connected to wild horse roundups?”

Note the question mark in both titles.

The idea is that the Interior Department cares more about keeping cozy relationships with big business than it does about the animals on the land it is charged with managing. Thus, they orchestrated last winter’s Calico roundup in northwest Nevada and this summer’s Tuscarora roundup in Elko County.

An unacceptable number of horses died in the Calico gathering, and so far the percentage of deaths in the Tuscarora gathering is so high that the project has been suspended.

“Why is the U.S. government so hell-bent on getting these animals off the public lands?” questioned CNN anchor Jane Velez-Mitchell. Her panel was eager, of course, to raise the same complaints.

Knapp explained that BP will be one of the primary users of the pipeline El Paso Corp. is extending through Western states, implying that the horses were in the company’s way.

Could this be a plot between the evil Big Oil Company and the villainous Federal Government? Maybe that’s why BLM chief Bob Abbey was appointed over the offshore drilling program!

CNN slapped up a graphic for the dim-witted, with the title “CULTURE OF CORRUPTION? Department of the Interior” and two large arrows, one pointing to a picture of horses in a corral, the other to an offshore oil rig.

The silly report probably left millions of viewers believing a conspiracy was at work. Yet, even Knapp states toward the end of the piece, “I don’t think they did the roundups specifically to make way for that pipeline ...”

For CNN to run a report stating “Gigantic pipeline project is set to remove and destroy federally protected wild horses” is irresponsible. Just a week earlier, Velez-Mitchell was reporting the real motive behind the gathering was “to clear the land for cattle grazing.”

Had she done any research she would have known that the BLM is required by law to round up horses when populations exceed the land’s capacity to support them. And, instead of telling viewers the horses were being “removed from their natural lands,” she might have noticed that the Tuscarora herds originated from ranch releases and Cavalry remounts in the not-so-distant past.

Failing to remove excess horses from the range results in starvation, dehydration and death, according to the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971. If activists want to change the law, that's what they should be working on instead of concocting outlandish conspiracy theories.

Madeleine Pickens, who also appeared on the CNN panel, has been trying for two years to set up a sanctuary. One place she looked is in Elko County, although the proposal met stiff opposition last year. Last week she helped fund the purchase of 172 horses gathered from eastern Elko County.

The Obama administration wants to increase funding for the wild horse and burro program by 20 percent next year, to \$75 million. The plan calls for increasing the use of fertility control and establishing preserves in the Midwest and East. Another \$42 million has been set aside to acquire land for one preserve.

Nobody — including Bob Abbey and BP — wants to see horses die or spend the rest of their lives in a government holding pen. Maybe if a few billion in stimulus dollars were thrown onto the pile, along with T. Boone Pickens' billions, we could finally get something done.

Members of the Elko Daily Free Press editorial board are John Pfeifer, Jeffry Mullins and Marianne Kobak.