



Feral Horses vs Wild Antelope

Will Roger Peterson - President

Editors Note: The article below does not necessarily represent the position of the Friends of Black Rock. Our board is comprised of diverse individuals who have various opinions on land management.

In 1971 'wild' horses and burros were protected by an act of Congress. The Bureau of Land Management was put in charge of managing the feral horse herds in the wild. Since that time the horse population has increased dramatically. For these many years the only population control available to the BLM was rounding up the horses, in areas where they were over the appropriate management level (AML), and placing them in BLM managed holding areas. The BLM was then obligated to find citizens to adopt a wild horse or continue to hold, feed, and care for the animal until it died. This strategy worked for a short time but soon the horse population increased beyond the capacity to capture and care for them. Right now we have some management areas that exceed the AML by a power of ten, while the BLM cares for and feeds over 30,000 horses in their corrals. Additionally, domesticated horses are more frequently being turned out to the wild when they become too much of a burden on their owners. Currently the BLM is proposing to attempt to manage the horse population by using birth control drugs. I doubt that this will work very well

because of the difficulty in rounding up all the horses and the high cost that this will incur. Before the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act, the horse population was maintained at an acceptable level by private enterprise that gathered the horse as a usable resource while maintaining the correct levels in the wild, similar to today's range cattle industry.

Horses are not truly a native wild species in the Americas. They were imported to the Americas by the Spanish in the sixteenth century, and later by northern Europeans, and are therefore feral. Feral horses have no real population control in the wild as they have no prevalent predator other than the natural management that man should provide when allowed to use the horse as a resource. Controlled hunting provides some numbers management over large wild mammal populations in North America. Somehow, through biased, irrational and emotionally based legislation, we've allowed the feral horse to live outside of the historic management methods either by



Feral horse and native antelope. Horse courtesy of BLM. Antelope photo courtesy of Tamara Gooch Photography, tamaragoochphoto.com

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The Friends of Black Rock High Rock is a 501 (c)(3) organization which helps manage the resources of the Black Rock Desert region and educates the public to foster stewardship and preserve its unique character.

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Hams? In the Black Rock? Part Two - Repeaters

David Book
Board Member
KD7YIM

Several members have asked for additional information on amateur radio (Ham Radio) in the Black Rock and the status of the repeater station that Friends of the Black Rock is working on.

First of all, amateur radio is very different from the Citizen's Band radio that truckers use. CB radio is restricted by law to 5 watts and has a range of around 3 to five miles. If you've ever listened to CB radio, you've probably noticed that it's often unusable because of the rude behavior of many of the users. Amateur radio users have a reputation for being polite and helpful. Most car-mounted amateur radios are between 50 and 100 watts and have a car-to-car range of about 25 miles. Handheld radios are usually 5 watts and have about a 5 to 10 mile range.

Morse code used to be required for an amateur radio license and this was a major roadblock for a lot of people. Morse code is no longer required for any of the 3 grades of license. The first license requires a 35 question test with 26 (74%) answered correctly. People as young as 6 years old have passed the test. Many say it's an easier test than the test to get a driver's license. In most major metropolitan areas, tests are given weekly or bi-weekly.

A good website to visit for amateur radio information is

www.arrl.org There you can search by ZIP code or state for test dates and locations, and search for amateur radio clubs in your area. These clubs often have classes to help you prepare for the test. There are also several self-study programs available. One free study guide is available at www.hamclass.org, where you can print their 40-page "Tech Study Guide." There is also an excellent book by Gordon West, "Technician Class 2006 – 2010" for \$18.95 from www.w5yi.org. They ship fast! Many ham clubs give "Ham Cram" classes that are a one-day review of all the questions followed by immediate testing-- but they expect you to study on your own first! Testing is \$14 or \$15 and the license is good for 10 years.

Handheld, 5 watt radios are usually about half the size of a paperback book. Single band radios sell for about \$100 - \$150 but radios with additional bands and features can cost up to around \$400. Mobile radios for your car start at around \$150 plus another \$50 or so for the antenna. Installation can be tricky but can usually be done by a commercial radio shop.

Repeaters

About 25 years ago, improvements in technology made low cost repeaters possible for amateur radio use. Repeaters are relay stations, usually on a high point such as a hilltop, mountain peak, or tall building, that receive and then retransmit a radio



Amateur Radio set up near Black Rock Point during the 2009 Field Day trip. Photo by Lee Kerlin.

signal at higher power for a much longer distance. For example, there's a repeater with a BIG antenna on a mountain top about 5 miles west of Nixon. It's about 25 miles from my house in Reno. I can reach that repeater with a handheld radio (I told you it had a BIG antenna!) and the repeater then re-transmits the signal all the way to Black Rock Hot Springs, about 100 miles from my house. That same repeater reaches east past Lovelock and south to about Yerington. There are about 2 dozen repeaters around Reno and northern Nevada that are free for public use. Average repeater coverage is about 50 miles.

These repeaters cover many parts of northern Nevada, but there's really no good coverage in the Gerlach/Black Rock area. The first amateur "technician class" license is limited to frequencies that are generally "line of sight" plus about 20 percent, so elevation is really the key. Line of sight to the horizon from an 8000-foot mountain is quite a distance. The worldwide frequencies start with the middle "general class" license, another 35 question test. However, with that license, I recently talked with a guy in Poland using only 100 watts! Reach out and touch someone!

The Friends of the Black Rock is working on a repeater on the ridge north of Gerlach along Highway 34. When it's completed, we expect coverage over most of the Black Rock NCA, north along the Jackson Mountains, and up toward Soldier Meadows and Summit Lake. The Granite Mountains will probably block coverage to the southwest, but coverage to the south will likely reach to about Nixon. We hope to provide some monitoring with a radio in the Friends office in Gerlach, and we will encourage ham licensing and use by Gerlach and Empire residents so they can also monitor the frequency.

We already have the right-of-way for the site, and a repeater expert to do the wiring, programming, and related work. One of the Friends Board Members lives in the Gerlach area and has

(Horses, continued from front page)

hunting or range management techniques similar to those used for cattle.

The damage that feral horses do to the springs and flowing wells in the wild is devastating. The horse's hooves and their behavior cause a compaction of the springhead, eventually causing the water to stop flowing. The result is the drying up of the natural habitat in much of the wild range in the Great Basin. In addition the horse also has an aggressive behavior around the other grazing wildlife such as bighorn sheep, elk, antelope, and deer, effectively driving them away from the water sources. If we don't do something soon to limit the feral horse numbers to the AML or below, then we will be forced to make a choice between feral horses in the wild or wild native animals like the antelope. Feral Horses vs. Wild Antelope— as managed today we can't have both.

I truly love seeing the horse in the wild. But I like seeing healthy

FM Radio Station Update

Along with our amateur radio plans, a full-power FM radio station is also in the works for Black Rock country. The Friends of Black Rock has allocated \$20,000.00 toward the project, but we will need to raise approximately \$80,000.00 more for start-up costs. Since the construction permit deadline is February, 2011, this will be an important focus of our fundraising efforts in 2010.

To donate to this specific project please go to blackrockdesert.org/friends/0910/fm-radio-project and click the FM Donate button. With a little help from you, we will provide a great service for the regional community.


packhorses to help get the gear up to the top of the ridge. We hope that somebody out there, probably another ham radio enthusiast, has a garage full of radio gear that would make everything work! Are you that person or do you know them? We can provide a tax deductible receipt and arrange for pick-up.


Here's what we need:

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- A repeater controller
- A 2 meter duplexer
- A second solar panel or small wind generator
- Deep cycle batteries
- A low voltage charge controller

We look forward to providing expanded services to all amateur radio enthusiasts, and hope that the result will be a safer and more enjoyable Black Rock experience for everyone.

blackrockdesert.org/friends/0910/hams-black-rock-part-two 

populations of all the other native wild animals, too. Would this be an issue if feral horses were managed like livestock or wildlife? Current legislation makes it illegal to slaughter horses for use in human consumption, be it for glue, hides or a food source. I think we need to return to managing the horse population by allowing private enterprise to humanely harvest the animals as a resource, thereby effectively managing their numbers. Critics claim the BLM isn't managing the program very well— I think that under the current laws they don't have a chance. It's my opinion that we should repeal the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act, or amend it in such a way as to make the management of feral horses humane and actually possible. This is a contentious issue, and the public needs to be aware of the facts on both sides of the argument. What do you think should be done? Be proactive and contact your elected officials and let them know what you think, or post comments on our web site at blackrockdesert.org/friends/0910/horse_vs_antelope 

Featured Partner: Friends of Nevada Wilderness

Friends of Nevada Wilderness Celebrating 25 years of Keeping Nevada Wild!

Nevada has been much maligned as desolate and unattractive. But some of us know better: Nevada is majestic and beautiful. Most of Nevada's 70 million acres is undeveloped, and most of that belongs to all of us—an under-appreciated national treasure, where you can have an entire mountain range to yourself if you plan well; where looking up at the stars can take your breath away; where discovery, adventure and solitude still live and breathe.

In the 1980s, as Congress was busy designating wilderness on Forest Service lands across the country, local Nevadans founded Friends of Nevada Wilderness to give Nevada's spectacular National Forest landscapes a local voice. In 1989, thanks partly to Friends' efforts, Congress gave places like Mount Rose, Mount Charleston, Arc Dome and the Ruby Mountains the highest protection public land can receive: the gift of wilderness.

Since that time, Friends of Nevada Wilderness (a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization), has worked with fellow citizens and elected officials across Nevada to conserve a total of 68 wilderness areas and three National Conservation Areas in the Silver State. In 2000, Friends members worked hard to see the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area established.

Boots on the Ground

Although Congressional wilderness designation can do a lot to keep watersheds intact, protect habitat and migration routes for wildlife, and provide unparalleled recreational opportunities for all citizens, lines on maps aren't enough to protect Nevada's wild landscapes from population growth, invasive nonnative plants, irresponsible off-road vehicle use, fire, development and other threats.

To add to the challenge, the federal land-management agencies—the Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, Fish & Wildlife Service and National Park Service—will never have the budget or personnel they need to give Nevada's public wildlands the attention they deserve. So it's time for We the People to step up and help; they are our lands, after all.

To make sure Nevada's wild places remain wild in fact, not just in name, Friends of Nevada Wilderness works with the BLM and other land management agencies to manage wilderness appropriately and fairly, helping the agencies when we can, and challenging them when we must. Perhaps more important,

we encourage people to get out on the ground, pick up a shovel, camera, rake or GPS unit, and do part of the work that's necessary if we want our shared natural treasures to remain so for the future.



Volunteers removing obsolete barbed-wire fence that threatens wildlife and people in the North Black Rock Range in August. Photo by Brian Beffort.

Since 2002, Friends has developed enthusiastic Wilderness Stewardship program that gets people like you out into the wild for restoration and monitoring trips across the state. In 2009 alone, Friends has accomplished 43 restoration and monitoring trips, involving 396 volunteers, who donated 6,500 hours of their time, which generated \$123,000 of in-kind labor to help wilderness in Nevada. Several of those trips have taken in the Black Rock Desert in conjunction with the Friends of Black Rock—in Fly Canyon and Soldier Meadows, at Coyote Dunes and the North Black Rock.

In celebrating Friends of Nevada Wilderness' Silver Anniversary in 2009, we're proud of the work we do. Many of Nevada's wild jewels have a strong chance of being just as wild and beautiful when your grandkids take their kids out to explore. And thanks to our volunteers, many of Nevada's wilderness areas are wilder and more beautiful today than they were when Congress designated them. But Friends is just a catalyst; we encourage people to stand up, speak out and break a sweat for their public lands, but it's the people, our members and volunteers, are the ones who do the heavy lifting. Thank you everyone for taking active care of Nevada's wild beauty. *For more information, check out: www.nevadawilderness.org*

Brian Beffort, Associate Director
Friends of Nevada Wilderness

National Public Lands Day 2009 - Success in the Black Rock

Matthew Ebert, Executive Director

Every year, volunteers across the nation participate in National Public Lands Day right around the autumnal equinox. In the Black Rock Desert we somehow seem to have it a week earlier than the rest of the country, and so it was again this year. We held our event on September 19 & 20, while elsewhere it was held the next weekend. We camped just a short way from the twelve-mile playa entrance off Rte. 34, in an area with gumdrop-shaped dunes that are spaced wide enough apart for vehicles to intersperse themselves among them without driving over vegetated areas. Spots like this are ideal for camping and can be found along the edges of the playa, and by employing proper leave no trace principles like using firepans, staying on durable surfaces, and packing out all trash, campers and their vehicles leave minimal impacts.

Three main groups were involved in the projects this year. The Tahoe Montesorri School brought 25 kids and their parents, and they participated in several educational activities. While some of the smaller kids did arts and crafts, making “playa creatures” out of pipe cleaners, older kids built and launched gunpowder rockets. All the kids attended a lesson about solar energy, including a demonstration with thin mylar bags that float when they soak up energy from sunlight, and learned about desert ecology on an exploratory hike through the sage along the edges of the playa.

It was too windy for another planned activity-- planting of greasewood seed on the dunes along the Nobles Route of the Emigrant Trail. Those dunes, commonly called the Coyote Dunes, were again the site for continued protection and restoration work, mostly conducted by the Friends of Nevada Wilderness. The Friends of Nevada Wilderness can always be counted on for hardy workers, and they brought a sizeable crew of about 40 people.

We built a buck and pole fence around these spring-fed dunes in previous projects to prohibit vehicle traffic and attempt to allow vegetation and habitat to re-establish itself there. Originally, fence was put up in sections and did not completely encircle the most sensitive of these dunes. Despite warning signs, vehicles continued to trespass, causing erosion and destruction of habitat. The volunteers completed the fence around this dune, and larger signs explaining the reason for the fence were placed on the fence around this and another dune. Workers also used rakes to naturalize and erase vehicle tracks on the dunes. Although having a fence at this site is an imposition on the original pristine condition, it was deemed necessary since the tracks are so destructive. We hope that the fence and signs will serve to educate people about prohibitions on vehicle traffic, and that eventually the fence can be removed when habitat is restored and responsible behavior is adopted by respectful visitors.



Teaching our kids the value of stewardship. Andrew and Logan learn that it takes work to keep our public lands wild and beautiful. *Photo by Brian Beffort.*

There was also a good-sized group of about 40 Burning Man crew members involved in the public lands projects this year. The DPW Playa Restoration Crew is usually working at the site of the Burning Man event around this time, picking up any leftover litter and naturalizing burn marks from art and so forth. This proved to be valuable experience for our clean up projects at Frog Pond and the microplayas above Black Rock. Although Frog Pond is on private land, it is adjacent to the Black Rock NCA and draws much traffic because of the hot springs there. The crew started the day cleaning up trash here, and then caravanned past the Black Rock to the “mini hi-dry” playas. There we found a considerable amount of campsite detritus such as burnt plastic buckets, campfires dug into the playa, broken glass, clay pigeons, and shell casings. About 6 bags of garbage in total were removed, and we also took notice of an illegal trespass road that has been created off the northern edge of the top playa. A future project will have to be undertaken to erase this road and to put in more signs explaining that such behavior is destructive and therefore prohibited. The proliferation of such roads could turn the wild Black Rock into an eyesore criss-crossed with truck tracks and trash.

All in all, the event was a success, projects were completed as we hoped, and a good time was had by all. Saturday night we had our potluck with Dutch oven cook-off, with many different dishes available for everyone, and various personal favorite beverages augmented the keg of beer. Kids ran around with sparklers and guitar music played into the night by firelight.

Around 100 people contributed altogether, and the Friends of Black Rock High Rock would like to thank them all for their contributions to public lands and the Black Rock Desert. We trust that the experience was rewarding for everyone involved, and hope you will join us for more projects in the future. blackrockdesert.org/friends/0910/npld2009.





Main Street, Gerlach. Photo by Bob Wick.

Trip To Gerlach

Will Roger Peterson, President

In 1994 I was invited to an art festival held in the Black Rock Desert called Burning Man. Reluctantly I went along with my partner but I had many questions about the Great Basin Desert. I also knew that my extensive camping experience would probably get me through most challenges. The ride there was pretty normal until we got past Nixon, a small town on the Pyramid Lake Paiute Indian Reservation. Pyramid Lake was particularly beautiful, pristine and desolate. As we drove on, the land appeared more and more sparse. No settlements and seemingly few signs of animal life for miles and miles. After an hour or so we zoomed past the solitary store in Empire (a company town) with our sights set on the town of Gerlach five miles ahead.

Gerlach was really more of an outpost; a place where several brave families huddled together to ward off the lonely truth of the vacant, harsh, extreme high desert. There was a mile-long main street with trees, an historic Steam Engine Water Tower with park, a gas station, a motel, three restaurants, five bars, (no churches), several historic railroad buildings and about 350 full-time citizens. Most of the homes were older manufactured housing (mobile homes) and dotted through town were century old buildings made of stacked railroad ties. It reminded me of a movie set. In fact 'Far From Home', with a young Drew Barrymore, was shot on Main Street there, in 1989.

Much has and hasn't changed since then. The buildings are basically the same. Bruno's motel, gas station, restaurant and bar continue to be the main enterprise. Jalisco's Bar and Restaurant are now closed and vacant. The Black Rock Saloon

and Restaurant is now the private social club for Burning Man's seasonal employees. Joe's Gerlach Club and Bev's Miners Club continue on in the old tradition. The Friends of the Black Rock/ High Rock have their office in one of the old historic railroad buildings. Many people have since left town as jobs are scarce. The year-round population has dwindled to 210. The high school graduating class is usually less than 10. In 2000 Congress passed the legislation that created the nearby and largest National Conservation Area in the country. More recently a Reno reporter stated that Gerlach is a good place to drop off your old couch.

Yet this dying town that has such unique character and history, in my opinion, remains full of potential. When the Burning Man employees are around there is a noticeable buzz. Other times of the year the nearby Black Rock Desert- High Rock Canyon- Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area attracts large numbers of visitors.

Surprisingly, Gerlach can be pleasantly full of new faces. Many visitors come to experience the nearby historic Emigrant Trails. The hunting on the public lands around the town are legendary, attracting hundreds, perhaps thousands of hunters in the fall and winter. Other groups of recreators are the rocketeers, land-sailors, 4th of July revelers, hot spring soakers and a variety of other outdoor enthusiasts. Many of these visitors don't stop in Gerlach long because, other than a meal at Bruno's or perhaps a stop for a drink or fuel, the town just doesn't have enough to offer. There's not much support for the outdoorsman or casual visitor who just drove many miles to be seemingly ignored by the local habitat.

Gerlach is approaching a tipping point. I predict it will slowly die like many other rural Nevada towns or it will embrace its potential to reinvent itself as a tourist destination. It's easy to envision this transformation. Gerlach, the gateway to the National Conservation Area, home of the Burning Man Event, former western railroad town, hub for outdoor recreation is where the pavement ends and the adventure begins! Think of a western town like Virginia City, only with the facade of turn of the century western railroad, mixed with the creative self expression and public interactive art promoted by Burning Man, with the emphasis on outdoor recreation. All the pieces are there, we just need to develop a plan.

There are several important ventures in the works right now. The Bureau of Land Management is planning to build an administration center very near Gerlach, further underscoring



The Friends of Black Rock office, prior to its 2008 remodel. Photo by Bob Wick.

the town as the official Gateway to the Black Rock/High Rock-Emigrant Trails NCA. Recently the Gerlach Empire Citizens Advisory Board made modifications to the local development plan that will allow for more flexible use of the properties on Main Street. A large privately owned parcel adjacent to town was designated for possible expansion. This parcel borders the Black Rock Desert and could connect the town directly to the great flat expanse. Friends of the Black Rock/High Rock holds a construction permit for a FM Radio Station that could provide the area with a needed public service and unique radio programming. The Burning Man Company (Black Rock City LLC) has begun the process to develop a Master Plan for its operations in the area. Several proposals to open the nearby Fly Geysers to the public are being entertained by the owner. Friends of the Black Rock/High Rock are negotiating with the owners of the nearby Frog Farm Hot Springs to provide management and stewardship to a proposed primitive campground there. The BLM Winnemucca District Office is

in the final stages of preparing the Resource Management Plan for all the public lands in the area, which should include large tracks of land designated for Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) use and other designated recreation opportunities.

If we support the potential possibilities, dream and plan together, we could ensure the future of Gerlach. I dream of a town with a general store and specialty shops, several restaurants, museums (Emigrant Trails, the Railroad- Western History, Burning Man, Black Rock Desert), an art gallery and sculpture park, a commercial campground that is adjacent to the Black Rock Desert, a BLM Interpretive Center, a public hot springs and spa, a Main Street loop with a board walk and an overall face lift that emphasizes the Railroad/Western character of this very special place. If we work together to envision the possibilities we could establish the framework for a revival of Gerlach as the Gateway to the Black Rock Desert Area! This is my dream, my trip to Gerlach. 🏔️

Gerlach & Regional News

Matthew Ebert, Executive Director

Fly Geyser Property on Radar. Burning Man, the largest user group in the NCA, is looking to develop the Fly Geyser property into a year-round retreat and artists' "think tank". blackrockdesert.org/area_information/fly_geyser.php

Proposed Dump Site near Sulphur. A proposed dump near Jungo Flat, near the East Arm of the playa, not far from Sulphur, could receive 20,000 tons per week by rail from San Francisco, including toxic materials. Some see the area as an empty wasteland ideal for such use, others consider it home and habitat-- a pristine desert near protected areas, with severe weather conditions, a high water table, and a rich history. There are potential economic benefits-- \$1 million a year and about 30 jobs and also risks of environmental degradation. blackrockdesert.org/friends/proposed-dump-site-near-sulphur

Ruby Pipeline Project. The Ruby Pipeline Project proposes to build a 680 mile natural gas pipeline from Wyoming to Oregon, threading the gap between the Black Rock NCA and Summit Lake Paiute Reservation to the south and the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge to the north. Communities in Oregon and Wyoming rely on natural gas for fuel and their economy, and many temporary construction jobs will be created. Some would prefer that alternate, previously-disturbed routes be explored, and believe the project will have little economic benefit for Nevadans. Is this project an economic boon in a time of limited opportunities? Or, is it unreasonable to put irreplaceable resources at risk to serve short term energy demands and economic gain? blackrockdesert.org/friends/ruby-pipeline-project

Why Join Friends of Black Rock?

Friends is comprised of people who love Black Rock / High Rock country. We represent and belong to many user groups, with differing opinions, but we share a common respect.

- We help preserve the unique Black Rock experience by educating visitors about sensitive habitats.
- We work with the BLM to achieve many of their goals, therefore fending off the need for user fees or land closures.
- We host tours and events in the NCA with knowledgeable desert veterans.
- We perform volunteer service projects including dune and spring restoration.
- We provide the most up-to-date source for Black Rock country news and information on the web.


Please, join us today and make a tax deductible donation that will make a difference for generations to come. *Thank you!*

Moving On...

The Black Rock Desert enters a new era without the presence of three NCA contributors. Dave Lefevre, BLM Recreation Planner and Justin Robbins, BLM Ranger, have both left the Winnemucca office for new posts in California. Dave's wife Stephanie has taken a position with Humboldt State University. Stephanie and the Nevada Outdoor School were an instrumental factor in the emergence and growth of the Friends of Black Rock / High Rock. 

Thanks to This Season's Volunteers!

Michael Black, *Volunteer Coordinator*

As the 2009 season comes to a close, we would like to thank the many volunteers who have made this year a success –to those who worked on projects throughout Northern Nevada and in the Black Rock Desert. Your dedication is the only difference between success and failure of our volunteer projects; between Friends making a difference, or not. More than 160 volunteers put in 1,979 hours of work, driving over 24,000 miles in to make it happen. We've really been blessed by those who care and who are not afraid to make sacrifices or to act on their beliefs. 

Thank you to all of our new members and supporters

David Aiazzi
Kathryn Ataman
Russell Atkinson
Clarence Barger
Steve & Diane Berry
Spencer & Kathe Bitz
David Bixler
Curtis Booher
Elizabeth Carmel
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