

Wyoming Horse Council News

Unwanted Horses

Written by Barb Daniels, Secretary

Nobody likes to think about it. We're always shocked and disheartened when we hear about it. But it's become a fact of life whether you agree with the slaughter ban or not.

The "unwanted horse" is a term used to describe horses that are considered no longer useful or needed, or whose owners are either uninterested or not capable of providing care for them, physically or financially. There is no typical description of an unwanted horse. It may be a perfectly normal, young, healthy horse, purebred with breed registry papers, or it may be a horse that is unsound due to an injury. It may be a horse that has been abused and mistreated, and has behavioral problems as a result. Sometimes horses fall into the unwanted horse category when their owners become ill, lose their jobs, or have some other major life crisis.

There is a lot of controversy over what to do with unwanted horses. There is currently a bill in the legislature that will make it a felony to transport horses for the purpose of taking them to a slaughter plant. There is a better bill that will do away with double decker trucks hauling horses. While this is

being sorted out by politicians, there are some things we can do to deal with unwanted horses.

The Unwanted Horse Coalition is a part of the American Horse Council and is financially supported by 21 member organizations as well as donations. It's mission is to reduce the number of unwanted horses and to improve their welfare through education and the efforts of organizations committed to the health, safety and responsible care and disposition of these horses. By educating existing and potential owners, breeders, sellers and horse organizations about the long-term responsibilities of owning and caring for horses, and focusing on opportunities available for these horses, the coalition hopes to help horses before they become unwanted. The Unwanted Horse Coalition lists rescue organizations on their site by state. Although there are currently no listings for Wyoming, there are some for our neighboring states of Colorado, Montana, Nebraska, and South Dakota. Check them out at www.unwantedhorsecoalition.org.

The American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA) is initiating a program called "Greener Pastures". Owners and/or breeders have the opportunity to provide for the long-term care of horses they breed or own. Enrolled horses are identified on their registration certificate. This program provides options to current owners if that horse ever becomes unwanted or at its retirement. You can find more information at www.aqha.com/greenerpastures or call 806-376-4811.

There are a few other options in Wyoming. Wyoming Horse Rescue at Jay Em provides care, rehabilitation & relocation of unwanted, neglected, abandoned or abused horses. They have been in operation since 1999 and only accept horses from law enforcement. Those that are adoptable are given away with a lifetime lease with stipulations on available feed, water, shelter and vet care. They have no horses that are ready to adopt at this time. They can be reached at 800-720-1615 or see their website at www.wyominghorsescue.com.

Reaching Hands Ranch in Powell has been using rescue horses to mentor at-risk-youth since 2006. They will take horses from individuals and also work with state livestock investigators. They have an adoption program and also have developed a program called Partner Adoption for people who can pay for the care of their horses, but for some reason cannot care for them anymore. Their website is www.reachinghandsranch.org for more information and to see the horses ready for adoption. They can also be contacted at 307-272-9437 or info@reachinghandsranch.org.

For those that have internet access, there are several sites that will list horses at no cost. www.equine.com offers free text only ads for 30 days. www.horseworldwide.com also provides free horse classifieds. Another website, www.equinenow.com, offers free basic photo ads as well as free text only ads.

But there is a major problem with all this - Wyoming law. If your neighbor gives you a horse because he can't feed that horse anymore, you have to get a brand inspection to prove change of ownership. Hopefully, he can prove ownership. According to Wyoming law, the brand inspection -not a bill of sale or registration papers - is the proof of ownership, whether it's a rescue organization, a gift, or a sale. Strays, by law, have to be taken to a market - there's no option to give them to a rescue. There is an estray account that is state managed, but it is greatly overused because of all the horses turned over to the Wyoming Livestock Board. Maybe it's time to take a long look at these laws.