**Situation:**

The horse industry has gone through a significant economic downturn in recent years, which has lead to a significant devaluation of horses. Concurrently, there has been a significant economic downturn in the coal mining industry which has resulted in less expendable income for people in the Eastern Kentucky region to spend on their horses. These two issues, coupled together, have led to a growing problem of unmanaged and unwanted horses on reclaimed coal mine sites in eastern Kentucky.

A white paper, authored by Debby Spencer of Bowling Green, Kentucky, has been recently written describing the situation, problems, issues and proposed solutions. The title is “Increasing Number of Unwanted Horse Herds in East Kentucky.” Please refer to this publication to gain background and insight into this situation. *(I would put some information here as to a website or web-address where they can go to review her paper).Ask Debby Spencer for this information.*

**Goal:**

To identify and explore the steps involved to provide veterinary health care to this specific horse population. Services would be provided or overseen by Drs. Duane Chappell and Phil Prater, Morehead State University.

**Topics:**

The topics are to identify standards necessary to initiate and provide on-going veterinary health care.

1. Horse friendly handling facilities

* To provide necessary safety features, to limit injury to the horses and people involved
* A centrally located site that can be used for health care processing and providing loading/unloading facilities.
* A permanent centrally located processing facility may be the most economical and efficient way to provide necessary care. This may be a simple pole barn structure that will provide shelter from weather conditions and house handling structures to limit weather deterioration.
* Additionally, outside pens and alley ways should be available around this pole building for ease of handling.
* A portable corral system may be necessary to gather horse herds throughout Eastern Kentucky reclaimed coal mine sites.
* The recently abandoned or unwanted horses may still be easily handled with a halter and lead rope, but the next generation of horses will not have been trained for routine handling.

1. Costs of health care
   * The following basic fee schedule is proposed to cover costs of services and products. (Reviewable on annual basis)
   * Veterinary services provided by Morehead State University veterinarians and representatives from local veterinary clinics.
   * Some projected costs may be offset by programs that offer donated products for the unwanted horse population.
     + Physical examination $
     + “Core” vaccinations- $
       - (Tetanus, Eastern Equine Encephalomyelitis, Western Equine Encephalomyelitis, West Nile Virus Encephalomyelitis, Rabies)
     + Coggins test for Equine Infectious Anemia $
     + Microchip placement and chip $
     + Deworming product $
     + Reproductive examination $
     + Sedation agents $
     + Castration includes anesthetic agents $
     + Basic dental care $
     + Hoof care referred to participating farrier organization
2. Permanent individual horse identification
   * A microchip would be placed in each horse to establish long term means of permanent identification.
   * Initial efforts would be made to distinguish privately owned horses turned out to free-range graze vs. abandoned or unwanted horses that have no apparent owner.
   * Freeze branding may be considered to denote previously captured and processed horses.
   * Digital photographs may be collected to connect external markings with microchip.
3. Physical examination
   * Physical examination including dental examination will be recorded on each horse to establish health baseline status.
   * Body condition scoring will be performed to establish initial baseline status. (Henke scale of 1-9 will be used)
   * Physical condition assessments will review the horse’s ability to ambulate, prehend, and maintain normal body function without medical assistance or intervention sustained by a forage diet.
4. Alternatives for disposition
   * Primary goal would be to connect privately owned horses to owner OR to identify new sources of ownership through adoption and foster agencies.
   * Identify short-term and long-term care facilities, groups or organizations.
   * Criteria for humane euthanasia
     + This alternative may result for horses identified during physical examination to have untreatable conditions causing insufferable pain, or hamper ability for normal locomotion, ambulation or prehension.
     + This decision will be made by examining veterinarian. Alternative thoughts or concerns will be taken under consideration.
     + Examples of conditions resulting in humane euthanasia (but not limited to these examples): fractures, laminitis, colic, aged animals lacking adequate dentition, to name a few.
     + If humane euthanasia is chosen based upon examination findings, a plan must be in place to care for carcass. This may be burial pending state and local statues and laws and at land owner’s permission.
5. Reservoir of disease
   * Coggins testing of all horses captured be performed on annual basis utilizing microchip as preferred form of identification.
   * This would provide a minimum level of disease surveillance.
   * This would be necessary for horses to be adopted or change of ownership.
6. Vaccinations
   * Based upon vaccination guidelines by American Association of Equine Practitioners, “core” vaccinations will be performed on all captured horses identified to be healthy.
   * The vaccinations would include Tetanus, Eastern Equine Encephalomyelitis, Western Equine Encephalomyelitis, West Nile Virus Encephalomyelitis, Rabies.
   * If the initial vaccination is the primary vaccination, booster vaccination should be performed based upon vaccination and manufacturer guidelines.
   * Other vaccinations referred to as “non-core” vaccinations may be necessary based upon disease surveillance and control methodology.
7. Reproductive status
   * Goal is population control.
   * Stallions:
     + All captured stallions based upon physical examination findings shall be castrated.
     + Stallions with 2 descended testicles will be castrated on site.
     + Stallions with 1 or 0 descended testicles may be referred to surgical facility, if financial provisions are available.
   * Mares:
     + Based upon rectal/Ultrasound examination at least 15 days after stallions are removed to determine pregnant or open status.
     + This examination requires proper restraint in horse stocks with front and back doors and sedation as necessary.
     + If mare is pronounced open- re-examination is recommended in 4 weeks.
     + If mare is pronounced pregnant, a policy needs to be in place to either terminate pregnancy by inducing medical abortion OR allowing mare to deliver foal due to latter stage of pregnancy present, opportunity to adopt or foster exists or privately owned horse is claimed.
8. Liability
   * The faculty, staff and students of Morehead State University will not assume any liability for actions, decisions or consequences that occur during the interaction with this program or project.
9. Safety
   * The faculty, staff and students of Morehead State University will consider safety first before performing any services or care.
   * Morehead State University asks to be included in any facility design and construction planning.
   * This will allow constructed facilities to meet the level of safety desired for the concerns of the horse, Morehead State University faculty, staff and students and volunteers.

**Future thoughts and concerns:**

* What can be done to limit the continued growth and perpetuation of this present problem?
* What can be done to keep this project from becoming a long-term entitlement program?
* Fees for products and services need to be annually reviewed. Modifications may be necessary to cover ongoing costs of care.
* Development of long-term funding sources

Author Reviewed by

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