



*Pryor Mountain*  
WILD MUSTANG CENTER

**FALL 2023  
NEWSLETTER**

P.O. Box 385 • 1106 Road 12 • Lovell, WY 82431

## THE MORE THINGS CHANGE - THE MORE THEY STAY THE SAME



*Wild Horses Running 2082*  
Photo by Rev. Floyd Schwieger

Every year, the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range experiences natural routines of enduring cycles. The seasons move with predictable patterns of weather that impact the life cycles of plants and animals. At times, change disrupts the normal routine of the system. This was seen in 1977-78, when a bitter winter reduced the population from 145 to 70. The year of 2004 holds a distinction as "the year of the mountain lions," as all but one of the foals and most of the yearlings died, mainly due to mountain lion predation. 2021 was the year of the drought.

Likewise, human management plays a predictable part in the lives of wild horses in the Pryor Mountains. The horse range is primarily managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Since the establishment of the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range in 1968, the big question has been how many wild horses can be supported on the land. And from the start, removals have been the primary way to control the population. The first recorded removal was in 1971, which was the year the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros

Act was passed. At that time, 45 horses were removed from the total population of 200. Since then, a general routine has persisted, with gather years interspersed periodically with non-gather years. In 2001, the BLM introduced the use of fertility control to help manage the wild horse population. This brought in a new routine of annually darting mares to reduce the foal crop and, subsequently, stabilize the total population. The overall goal was to utilize effective fertility control to reduce the need for horses to be removed from the range.

2023 has been another year with a shift in the patterns of the natural routines and human management of the horses. Extreme and unusual weather patterns caused equally extreme reactions in the horses, with some thriving and others succumbing to the harsh realities of a life lived in the wild. The land shared a similar experience, with a harsh winter and heavy spring rainfall bringing both flooding and an explosion of grasses and vegetation across the range.

On the human management side, the BLM released a major management plan in March of 2023. This complex plan brought about a number of proposals that would significantly change the management of the Pryor herd. The public comment period on this plan closed on April 30, 2023. The Mustang Center submitted a substantial set of comments in response to the proposals. Since then, there have been no updates from the BLM.

Though there have been many changes this year both in weather patterns and potential management styles, with some undoubtedly making a lasting impact on the horses and the land, the overall picture remains the same. Even in the face of incredible adversity, the Pryor Mountain wild horses and the range they inhabit continue to thrive.



*Long May They Run - 2023*  
Photo by Nancy Cerroni

**THE MUSTANG CENTER BOARD OF DIRECTORS THANKS YOU FOR YOUR DONATIONS AND ASKS FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT AS WE WORK TO PRESERVE THE FUTURE OF THE PRYOR MOUNTAIN WILD HORSES.**

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*Quannah's band in the lush grasses of the Skyline*

There is an area on East Pryor Mountain that people refer to as the Skyline. It is an escarpment that rises almost a mile above the plains below. From the Skyline, looking east, you can see the Black Hills in South Dakota more than 200 miles away. It is considered a more remote area of the wild horse range and until the last few years, not frequented by many horses. There is excellent forage and a water catchment system, a water guzzler, that collects melted snow and rain in tanks.

Every summer, I hike out to the area several times to check the water levels and to see if the horses have been in the area. I've always found a few horses, usually a single bachelor stallion or a small group of bachelor stallions. The bands/families tend to stay in the familiar territory of the main meadows. While there are distinct bands that keep

their distance from each other, there is safety in numbers. That is the reason the bands typically congregate in larger meadows. But in the last few years, I'm finding more and more horses in the Skyline meadows. Several family bands are now venturing to the area to graze on the abundant grasses and drink clean, clear water from the guzzler tanks.

Over the years, I've hiked to the far reaches of the Range and what I've learned is the horses traverse and utilize the entire area. They have adapted to the land that has been allotted to them. These incredible horses have developed their own system for using the Range without depleting it by dispersing and through natural rotational grazing.

Knowing the horses and the land where they live is the answer to understanding how they have survived for hundreds of years, but more importantly, how we can ensure their long-term survival.



*Chief Joseph and Nodin/Navigator's band at the Skyline Guzzler*

## 2023 - A LESSON IN NATURAL MANAGEMENT

A major topic of discussion in the wild horse world is population management. This is typically achieved through human interventions of gathers/removals and/or fertility control.

However, 2023 was a reminder that natural management is still a factor in controlling the wild horse population. As spring broke through winter's grip, wild horses began to emerge from their hidden places of refuge from the winter weather in search of spring grasses. It soon became apparent that many horses

had disappeared. In the last couple of years, the mortality rate of the Pryor horses was fairly low, especially among the young ones. This changed in 2023. Throughout the spring, summer, and into the fall, many horses had still not been accounted for and, in all likelihood, had not survived.

The chart below tracks the population of the horses from 2022–2023. It provides the total number of horses lost in 2023 and also lists those lost in the various age classes. Natural mortality in the Pryors occurs either through exposure to the weather, injury, or predation. There is no way of knowing what happened to any of these horses. The exception to this is Whisper. She was removed from the horse range as a three-month-old after the death of her mother, Cecelia, and is now thriving in her domestic home.



**THE FOALS OF 2023:** Each new foal is a celebration of life. From their first few days, they are exuberant and learn quickly to keep up with their mothers. Unfortunately, the young foals are vulnerable to exposure to the weather and predation. In 2023, thirteen known foals were born. Of these, four did not live long.

2022 Age Range	Fall 2022 Numbers			Fall 2023 Numbers			Loss in 2023
	Female	Male	2022 Total	Female	Male	2022 Total	
Total Horses	120	89	209	113	83	196	13
21 and older	19	0	19	17	0	17	2
11-20	35	26	61	33	22	55	6
2-10	57	53	110	57	52	109	1
2022 Foals	9	10	19	6	9	15	4

### 2023 BIRTHS - NAMES START WITH X

Xander (D)	Ximena (F)	Xtreme (M)
Xhilarate (M)	Xema (M)	Xacara (F)
Xyla (D)	Xota (D)	eXalt (M)
Xavier (M)	Xara (F)	
Xyris Montana (F)	Xanthos (D)	

*F - Female M - Male D - Deceased*

The loss of each horse is poignant. Even though changes make a noticeable and sometimes lasting impact, the herd overall continues on, as they must. The mother who watches her foal die, and the band members who endure the change of a band stallion or the loss of beloved members, are undoubtedly affected by the loss. But they have the strength, skills, and grit to carry on, thus preserving the long-term survival of the herd.





*Before the Repair*



*After the Repair*

On the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range, there are several man-made water guzzlers due to the lack of water resources for the wildlife and Spanish Conquistador wild horse descendants on the range. The goal of the guzzlers was to better distribute the horses across the range. These guzzlers were originally built in 2010 by the Bureau of Land Management who were assisted by Pryor Mountain Wild Mustang Center volunteers. The guzzlers funnel rainwater and snow into 1,800-gallon tanks, with an opening for horses and other wildlife to access water at any time.

Several years ago, it was reported to the Pryor Mountain Wild Mustang Center by Jack Sterling and Phyllis Wray that the Skyline Guzzler buck and rail fence was down, meaning that the horses and other wildlife could walk on and damage the water collection membrane.

So, when the Bonham family took a trip to the Pryors in the summer of 2023, they met with Nancy Cerroni, Jack, and Phyllis and discussed the problem of the downed fencing. As wild horse activity has increased in the area, it was time to repair the fencing. On June 18th, the Bonham Family and Jack Sterling fixed the fence. After an hour and a half hike up to the remote Skyline Guzzler and being surrounded by wild horses and wildflowers on the cold, cloudy, and extremely windy day, the four of them working well as a team completed

the entire fence in an hour and half. Beth and David Bonham fixed the gate and set up the buck parts of the fence for Forellen Bonham and Jack to attach all the horizontal railing logs.



*The Team: Jack Sterling, Forellen Bonham, David Bonham, Beth Bonham*

## JUNE FLOODS



*June 6, 2023: A mountain rain sends Shoshone's band into the shelter of the trees.*

It is not unusual to get June rains, but in 2023 there were BIG rains. Even the Lovell, WY area received close to 4 inches of rain, which is one of the wettest Junes in the last fourteen years. Logically, the higher elevations of the mountain would get considerably more. In 2021, the Pryors were sieged with dry conditions that ranged from severe to extreme drought. This made the precipitation of 2023 very welcome, despite two flooding episodes in June.

The first flooding occurred in early June. This hampered travel to the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range as places on all mountain roads were washed out and made impassable. However, the BLM crews got right to work and opened up the roads to the top.

The next round of flooding happened on June 26. The words of a childhood song, "the rains came down and the floods came up," best describe the situation in and around the lower areas of the horse range. A river of flood waters from Crooked Creek cascaded over Highway 37 as it headed into Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area. An example of "living erosion" was seen as new landscapes were carved, leaving the area near Horseshoe Bend almost

unrecognizable. The same was true with Big Coulee. The normally dry creek bottom surged with flood waters that devastated the Cottonwood Creek area. This has been a historical oasis in the desert land of Lower Sykes providing water and shade for bands such as Jesse James' and Sentinel's throughout the year. The area has been radically transformed, but the all-important spring remains functional.

The precipitation and the floods impacted the PMWHR in both negative and positive ways. The negative came with the damage to the wild horse boundary fences in the low areas. Most notable was the damage to the fencing right along Crooked Creek Bay near the entrance to the horse range. This is a popular horse-watching spot where Hickok's and Quasar's bands are frequently seen by visitors. Throughout the fall, both bands were seen both inside and outside the range. It wasn't unusual to see Hickok's band grazing in the Horseshoe Bend area. The fence will be rebuilt soon to return the horses to the safety of their home.

The positive impact of the year's precipitation was that it brought growth to the drought-depleted landscape. From the bottom to top of the horse range, new growth has turned the land green. The horses' body conditions were able to shift quickly to their healthy summertime look after a long and grueling winter. It was exciting to see the grasses in the mid-elevations establish themselves even to the point of re-seeding. These grasses await the horses as they make their annual trek off the alpine meadows for the long winter ahead.



*Hickok's band at Horseshoe Bend  
Photo by Diane Granger*

## 2023 AT THE MUSTANG CENTER

BY KATIE RUNDELL

What a year we had at the Pryor Mountain Wild Mustang Center in 2023! From solo travelers all the way from Europe to local tour buses filled with more than 50 people, we had over 2,700 visitors from 48 states and 15 countries walk through the doors of the Mustang Center this summer.



*Katie Rundell holds Whisper for visitors.*

Guests were able to learn about the long and storied history of this unique herd of wild horses, the range they call home, and the Mustang Center itself. They were also given tips on the best places to look for the wild horses. Thanks to Diane Granger's commitment to go to the range nearly every day, visitors had the absolute best chance possible to see horses.

Once again, PryorWild Tours began and ended at the Mustang Center. Each summer, Steve & Nancy Cerroni provide people with a remarkable experience with Pryor Horses in their rugged land.

Education is such an integral part of the mission of the Pryor Mountain Wild Mustang Center. As said so eloquently by forestry engineer and scientist Baba Dioum, "...we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will only understand what we are taught." Our job, then, if we hope for a future for these beautiful animals, is to share as much about them as we can with the people who walk through our doors. So many individuals who came in not even knowing wild horses still exist in the West left the Mustang Center with priceless knowledge and a newfound passion for the horses that they could then share with the people in their own lives. Many of those visitors came back to Mustang Center after their visit to the range unable to contain their excitement about having seen wild horses in real life! Because of the generous support we receive as a non-profit organization, we can not only teach visitors about the horses, but also help instill a true love for them that will last a lifetime.

## A MORNING WITH MUSTANGS

BY JOANN ALMLOF

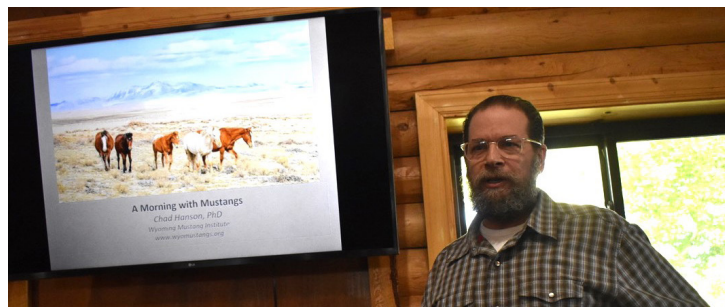


*Nancy tells Whisper's story.*

On September 9, 2023 we held A Morning with Mustangs at the Center and had two very special guests. The first was Whisper, the feisty year-old filly that was rescued off the mountain last year and now lives happily on a beautiful ranch here in Lovell.

Whisper was a hard act to follow, but the author Chad Hansen took on the challenge. Chad, a social scientist and poet, spoke to us about his experiences discovering wild horses which led him to write the book, "In a Land of Awe: Finding Reverence in the Search for Wild Horses." While Chad discusses the perils wild horses today face, he also captures the wild beauty nature provides us in this tumultuous world we live in. He captures it perfectly in this excerpt: *Standing on the prairie with the last remaining wild horses on the continent is riveting. The animals capture your attention. It takes all your senses to absorb the setting: splendor, peace and motion. You strain your eyes. Your heart beats, notably, in your chest. You have to remind yourself to exhale.*

The day was made even more special as it was the 55th Anniversary of the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range. In addition, along with our two special guests, we had many others attend the celebration. We had local, national and even a few international folks stop by to join us on the special day.



*Chad Hansen shares his passion and knowledge of wild horses.*

**Photos of A Morning with Mustangs by the Lovell Chronicle.**

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## NOTHING COMES CLOSE TO BEING ON THIS LAND WITH WILD HORSES

BY BOARD PRESIDENT JOANN ALMLOF

I have always been a horse person. I'm the one that still will say, "Look, a horse" every time I drive by one. Coming out west and seeing my first large ranch cavy was amazing, but to then see a herd of wild horses took my breath away and forever changed me. For those that have had this experience you understand. It's an incredible feeling, one hard to describe and once lived is never forgotten. It becomes part of your soul, and you can't wait for the next time.

I want to thank all of you for supporting the work we do to preserve this herd. Your donations, visits to the mountain, visit to the Mustang Center, and the sharing of your experiences are so appreciated and valued. Our goal is for future generations to be as blessed as we are to find the reverence and awe in wild mustangs.

## FOLLOW THE PRYOR MOUNTAIN WILD HORSES THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

Website: [www.pryormustangs.org](http://www.pryormustangs.org)

PryorWild Tours: [www.pryorwild.com](http://www.pryorwild.com)

YouTube: PryorWild

FaceBook: Pryor Mountain Wild Mustang Center

Online Store: [mustang-center-gift-shop.com](http://mustang-center-gift-shop.com)

*Unless otherwise stated, all articles and photos are by Nancy Cerroni, Mustang Center Director.*