

## The Little-Known Plight of Wild Horses in America

Last year, 20,193 horses and burros were removed from the wild, and today, 62,398 wild horses are stuck in holding pens - aka 'horse jail' where many end up dying. Our newest Game Changer, Erin Anna Phillips, is working to change the plight of these intelligent, emotionally sensitive creatures.

**Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker**

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### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Erin Anna Phillips started Mustang Mission to rescue wild horses and burros in danger of being sent to slaughter or stuck in neglectful situations
- She was nominated for a Game Changer Award by Anne P.
- Though her rescue started just a year ago, she's already rescued three mustangs and is raising awareness about the plight of wild horses in the U.S.
- The Bureau of Land Management funds the rounding up of wild horses — intelligent, emotionally sensitive creatures — which are then transported and put in holding areas, where many end up dying
- Right now, 62,398 wild horses are stuck in holding pens; Mustang Mission is helping with their rescue and serves as an educational platform for change and protection of wild horses that are still free

Erin Anna Phillips started Mustang Mission to rescue wild horses and burros in danger of being sent to slaughter or stuck in neglectful situations. Though her rescue started just a year ago, she's already rescued three mustangs and is raising awareness about the plight of wild horses in the U.S. She was nominated for a Game Changer Award by Anne P.

*"There were 20,193 wild horses and burros removed from the wild last year, and it's mainly due to livestock ranching on public lands," she says. "There is plenty of public land for the wild horses, but due to livestock ranching, the ranchers kill a lot of the natural predators that would help the wild horse population stay in check."*

As a result, the Bureau of Land Management funds the rounding up of wild horses — intelligent, emotionally sensitive creatures — which are then transported and put in holding areas, where many end up dying. Erin is trying to make a difference not only for mustangs that have been removed from the wild but also for those that are still there — helping them stay wild and free.

### More Than 60,000 Wild Horses Are Sitting in 'Horse Jail'

Mustangs are being rounded up and taken from the wild because they're encroaching on ranchers' land. "I know a lot of people would think that livestock ranching would be really important, that we should take the wild horses out because it's feeding people, but only 2% of our meat comes off of public lands," Erin says, "and that could easily be made up in all of these off-range pastures that the wild horses are placed in when they're removed."

Right now, 62,398 wild horses are stuck in holding pens. "Our tax dollars pay to remove the horses, take care of them," Erin says. "So it's a really messed up situation." While some of the horses get adopted, many end up going to slaughterhouses. Erin explains:

*"The Bureau of Land Management often tries to come up with programs that help the horses get adopted. One of their most recent ones was called the Adoption Incentive Program, and that is where they offered \$1,000 to each person who adopted a wild horse.*

*And what ended up happening is people would adopt the wild horse, keep them for the amount of time the Bureau of Land Management required, which was one year, and then sell them to slaughter. So they'd end up making about \$1,500 off of each horse ... there is one family who I believe got around 20 horses ... and just was making money. And, unfortunately, that's happening a lot."*

## **Raising Awareness for Horses in Need**

Erin has loved horses since she was young, but her passion to save mustangs was ignited by Cloud: The Wild Stallion of the Rockies documentaries:

*"The documentary series followed the life of one horse named Cloud, which is the same horse I ended up naming my mini [horse] after. Every so often, the government will round up horses in the different herd areas ... and I remember just being really sad seeing the horses taken out of their homes.*

*Being really young, I couldn't really process all the reasons why it happened, so when I got older, I really started researching and just learning all the facts of why it happens, why it shouldn't happen, and what really goes on with that ... everything has gotten worse since that time, basically that more wild horses have been taken out."*

For six years, Erin has volunteered for The Cloud Foundation, which helps protect wild horses and burros. And now she's using her horse rescue, **Mustang Mission**, as an educational platform, as well as a place to rescue, rehabilitate and adopt out mustangs into forever homes.

If you'd like to get involved, you can follow The Cloud Foundation, the American Wild Horse Campaign or Mustang Mission, which is **fundraising for continued improvements and expansion**. Erin says:

*"Even though there's so much bad with the situation going on, there is still a lot of good ... the horses are honestly what keeps a lot of us within the advocacy field going, just to protect them and keep them safe. I'm really grateful for my horses, my mustangs outside because they really are a bright light in those difficult situations ...*

*Even though they were removed, they went through a lot of trauma, which they never should have, they ended up in a good situation. That is really my goal for a lot of the mustangs that come out of holding and the reason why I started this rescue."*

Erin believes that every animal is worth saving, and she's doing her part, following her passion and prompting meaningful change for horses in need. "There are so many people that just think mustangs are basically trash and they're not worth anything," she says, "but there are so many mustangs that have really gone to high levels that are incredible companions ... it is our duty to protect and preserve and save these animals."

If you'd like to learn more about Mustang Mission, you can visit its website, [mustangmission.blogspot.com](http://mustangmission.blogspot.com), and sign up for the newsletter list to get updates and alerts.

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