

Starved horses recovering

United Press International
TYLER — Bureau of Land Management officials are treating and identifying 148 wild horses so the starved animals — who are spending the week feasting on bermuda grass hay — can be re-adopted.

Late Wednesday, John Gilbert of the BLM said veterinarians were vaccinating and medicating the malnourished horses.

Their brands also are being cross-checked with records from last year, when they were bought for \$25 each under the BLM's adopt-a-horse program. The man who purchased the horses is facing charges of cruelty to animals for keeping them in a

barren pasture.

"Today (Wednesday) we did 44, and 43 of them are federal horses. One young colt was not marked. It apparently was born after December," said Gilbert. "We'll continue the process tomorrow."

Gilbert said three special law enforcement agents from the BLM who have been handling the investigation since the horses were found on rancher Joe Corbett's east Texas property met Thursday with the U.S. attorney in Tyler to discuss possible federal charges. He said he did not anticipate any federal charges being filed soon.

Corbett was charged Monday with one count of cruelty to

animals, but authorities said multiple state charges would be filed before his scheduled arraignment Dec. 10.

Last week, a deer hunter found the carcasses of two horses in Corbett's pasture. During the next few days, 38 dead horses and another 149 horses near death were found on the 380-acre pasture, which was described as a "mud patch."

The survivors were taken to the Fund for Animals' Black Beauty Ranch near Tyler, where they were being cared for by Jerry Owens, the organization's executive vice president, and his family.

"They are doing better," Owens said Wednesday, "but

they are all in very poor health. We lost one more yesterday and I'd say we have about five that are marginal, that could go either way."

"They have been eating continuously. We have coastal bermuda grass hay and they just stand there and eat it. We also have mineral blocks and protein blocks laid out and they are licking them."

"Oh, it's nice to see. Now they throw their ears back a little and once in a while one of them will take a kick. Their stomachs are filling out a bit."

Owens said the Fund for Animals has received "one telephone call after another" from people who want to adopt a

horse. He said east Texans also had been generous about donating hay.

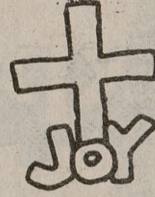
Gilbert said the BLM would allow adoption of the horses after they are fully recovered.

"The Tyler horses can be adopted as soon as the horses are in shape and the legal entanglements are solved," he said. "We're not going to improve or change our technique (of adoption) just because of this one incident."



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Social Security aid lifted

Senior citizen thought dead

United Press International
ROSENBERG — The Social Security Administration says Mattie Lee Zeller is dead. Zeller emphatically disagrees, but she has to prove she's still alive to keep her much-needed \$440.10 monthly Social Security check.

Zeller said a nurse reported her dead in July following a stay in a Richmond hospital for treatment of injuries she suffered in an accident.

"I was sick, and I was so sick I thought I had died. But I didn't. It takes you up to be told you're dead," she said Wednesday.

Because of that false report, the Social Security Administration removed the 75-year-old retired nurse from its rolls.

Zeller said a banker at the First City National Bank in Richmond called her last week because he received a "peculiar" letter telling him Zeller was dead. The letter instructed the

bank to refund about \$2,200, the total of five months of Social Security benefits deposited in Zeller's account following the accident, Mattie Lee Zeller said.

Security benefits deposited in Zeller's account following the

accident.

Zeller decided to confront Social Security bureaucrats face-to-face in their Houston office.

"I asked the woman at the Social Security office in Houston if I looked dead," she said. "That lady was pretty surprised by my question, but according to the Social Security office I had died in July."

Zeller is afraid the mixup may cost her the \$440.10 check for December. The check is due Friday.

"If the check doesn't come, it is going to be rough. Some bills won't be paid and others will have to wait. Something like this happened once before, and I borrowed money and had to pay interest on it. This time I'm not doing it that way. If I have to wait, then they have to wait, too," she said.

"I'm leaving it up to God. I've done all I can with Social Security," Zeller said.

Fred Wagner, assistant district director for the Social Security office, said the administration sends out 44 million checks a month, and the odds of someone being incorrectly categorized as dead are 1-100th of 1 percent.

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Trio caught in north Texas; charged in equipment theft

United Press International
CLEBURNE — Three central Texas residents were held in the Johnson County jail Thursday on \$150,000 bond each, charged in the theft of a tractor-trailer rig and \$140,000 worth of oil drilling pipe.

Johnson County District Attorney John MacLean said the arrests were the result of a long-term investigation of several oil drilling equipment thefts in west Texas. He said other arrests

were possible.

Texas Rangers and Department of Public Safety officers arrested the trio early Wednesday at a rest stop south of Burlington on Interstate 35 when they allegedly attempted to sell the 1980 rig and 6,000 feet of pipe valued at \$140,000 to an undercover DPS agent.

The truck and trailer were stolen late Tuesday from an Abilene truck stop, authorities said.

Held in Johnson County jail are James Everett Gribble, 35, of Purlmea; Coney Mac Clark, 38, of Temple; and Terrie Sue Cox, 21, of Temple.

MacLean said the charge — theft of over \$10,000 — is a second-degree felony with a maximum penalty upon conviction of two to 20 years in prison and a \$10,000 fine.

Sheriff's deputies from Bell and McClennan counties also participated in the arrests.

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