News

Horse dies on roadside

Groups seek solutions to the area's wild horse problem

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It was a scene that strikes fear into many an animal-lover's heart — an unidentified form wrapped in a blanket on the roadside.

This was the case on Monday when a sad incident unfolded on Highway 97, leading some groups to raise awareness to the issue of feral horses.

By 11:30 a.m. a foal was in a ditch on the side of the highway near Kaleden, just its nose, hooves and tail visible under a blanket. Breathing quickly it was displaying signs of distress and injury.

"I saw the horse at 9:30 in the morning," said an employee of a Petro Canada station across the highway from the scene, who asked to remain anonymous.

At the time, the young horse was caught underneath a deer fence on the side of a hill, obviously struggling.

The employee, who originally reported the horse to conservation officers, said she got the run-around while trying to get assistance for the troubled foal.

But the employee said calls to the RCMP, the Penticton Indian Band, the SPCA and Critteraid did not yield immediate help for the horse.

"I tried getting everyone out there," she explained, adding after some time good citizens worked together to get the horse out from under the fence and into a ditch on the side of the road.

"It was trying to get up from the ditch and then the SPCA showed up and I'm not really sure what happened," she said, noting she couldn't leave her post at the gas station.

Tracy Westmoreland, general manager of the South Okanagan Similkameen branch of the BCSPCA, said it didn't look good for the horse upon inspection of the scene.

"It looked like the little colt fell off the rocks at the top because there was a smear of blood in the snow and it looked like it fell all the way down and

Western News File Photo
AFTER THE ACCIDENTAL DEATH of a foal, groups are hoping to bring more attention to the issue of feral horses in the area.

got trapped in the deer fence," she explained, adding after a difficult search for a veterinarian, one arrived and assessed the horse. It was suffering internal bleeding and the most humane course of action would be to euthanize it.

About three hours after the horse was first reported to authorities, it was euthanized. While some consider it a tragic accident, others are taking the opportunity to bring attention to the issue of wild horses in the valley.

"We would like every horse to have proper ownership," said Theresa Nolet, a member of Critteraid, an animal welfare organization.

The West Bench resident said there are a number of citizens up and down the valley privately purchasing hay to help the horses get through the winter.

Nolet has noticed the wild horses in her area have grown in numbers — this winter she has observed a group of 15 with all the herd's mares currently pregnant.

It is reported that the horse that died Monday was not part of the wild horses that mainly roam the Penticton Indian Band area; but wild horses have been a problem in the past.

In October 2008, several

car accidents were caused by feral horses on the highway and it's a concern they will cause a fatality.

"I'm afraid that something's going to happen and we're going to have some major accident — they are starting to cross the highway," explained Nolet.

"If something were to happen where someone was critically injured there would be a knee-jerk response to round (the horses) up and send them to slaughter."

Nolet said Critteraid is hoping to work with the Penticton Indian Band to expediently repair the problem.

"Our long-term goal is to work co-operatively with the band," she said, adding she has already spoken with Chief Jonathon Kruger as well as some area politicians regarding the issue.

"When I went to speak with Chief Kruger they were welcoming, they want conversation, they want communication," she said. "It's almost like people have a preconceived judgment and are afraid to open that door."

A call to Penticton Indian Band chief Jonathon Kruger was not returned by press time.