

Wild horses shot dead in Canada

RCMP investigates claim of killings

RCMP investigating reports that stallion, five mares killed recently

Nicholas Read
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Brittany Triangle - Chilcotin RCMP are investigating a claim that up to six of B.C.'s last remaining wild horses have been shot to death.

The horses, which live in the Brittany Triangle region of the Chilcotin, are thought by some biologists to be the province's only extant links with a time -- about 8,000 years ago -- when wild horses were part of North America's natural landscape.

David Williams of Friends of the Nemaiah Valley, a conservation group dedicated to preserving the horses, said Monday that he has received reports from locals in the area that a stallion and a herd of mares were shot to death last week.

Witnesses to the incident refused to speak to The Vancouver Sun, but they told Williams that one of the mares was discovered dead with her two-week-old colt standing over her starving.

"We have heard that wild horses are being shot in the Tatla area [west of Williams Lake in the west Chilcotin]," Williams said in a phone interview.

"At this point, nothing's been confirmed, but the RCMP are looking into it."

Alexis Creek RCMP confirmed they are investigating the incident, but nobody was available to comment.

Alexis Creek is about 100 kilometres from where the horses were said to have been killed.

The 155,000-hectare Brittany Triangle is at the centre of a court case involving the local Xení Gwet'in nation, which is claiming aboriginal title to the region, about 150 kilometres southwest of Williams Lake. About 700 horses are said to live in the region.

The province wants to issue logging rights to the Brittany so area companies can salvage stands of lodgepole pine, many of which have been infested by the pine mountain beetle.

But the Xení Gwet'in are suing Victoria for title to the triangle and the right to continue traditional activities such as hunting, trapping and the capture of wild horses.

Xení Gwet'in Chief Roger Williams says if his nation, in conjunction with five other Chilcotin bands, wins the case, the Brittany will be left untouched.

Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection officials in Williams Lake were looking into the incident Monday.

However, because the ministry doesn't regard the horses as wild, merely feral, it doesn't offer them any protection.

Williams says by taking that position the ministry is condoning the horses' shooting.

"This attitude seeps down to the locals and feeds this kind of activity. There is no protection for the horses. It's open season on them."

He added that while six dead horses is not a threat to their population, it is still serious "because if there's no protection for the horses, it's the kind of thing that can spread."

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