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Rare Choctaw and Hidalgo Horses Threatened

Wild horses galloping across the Western plains is an image that has long been associated with the spirit and freedom of America, and in 2004 Americans fell in love with a legendary mustang, thanks to the Disney film Hidalgo.

The film featured the story of Frank Hopkins, a man who devoted his life to protecting wild horses, and his famous mustang Hidalgo. Descendants of Hidalgo still range free in Blackjack Mountain near Finley, OK, along side original strains of the Choctaw Indian Horse. Owned and overseen by Bryant Rickman, the horses have been able to range in hundreds of thousands of acres, until now. Having endured centuries of change, the survival of this herd is now threatened. They are facing their last stand.

The Oklahoma Land and Timber Company has, with very little warning, terminated the grazing leases on Blackjack Mountain. **They have just sent a final notice demanding that the mustangs be removed by March 31st 2008 and then it will be handed over to the local Sheriff's department who will take the horses to auction.**

Prior to the company canceling the grazing lease, they, along with other timber companies, had already begun spraying some 200,000 acres the horses shared with cattle and other wildlife. The chemicals are being sprayed to eradicate the vegetation used by grazing animals and wildlife, thereby eliminating the need for these animals for fire control.

"The endangered horses on Blackjack Mountain are a part of our American history. The Choctaw Indian Horses survived the horrific Trail of Tears in the 1830's, only to face Government slaughter campaigns right up through the 1950's when a cleansing policy under the euphemistic name of a Tick Eradication Program nearly wiped out the remaining horses," says John Fusco, Spanish Mustang preservationist and writer of the movies, Spirit, Stallion of the Cimarron, Hidalgo and the upcoming Forbidden Kingdom. "Today, the Choctaw Horses are a nearly-extinct strain, so the news of this heartless assault on their last stronghold is shocking."

In an effort to preserve this historical herd, John Fusco, Bryant Rickman, Dr. Phillip Sponenberg (geneticist), Return to Freedom Founder Neda DeMayo, and other conservation groups have joined forces to launch an urgent rescue operation.

The IMMEDIATE and URGENT need is to safely relocate the horses to a 300 acre tract of land owned by the Rickman family, and to provide feed and veterinary care for the herd. We need your help to do this. To make a donation to this historical effort, visit www.returntofreedom.org where you can donate online via paypal, or call (805) 737-9246 to make a donation over the phone.

Please note: Blackjack Mountain on all donations.

On behalf of the horses, thank you!
Return to Freedom