



Vin Suprynowicz

A pony for Christmas ... all skinned and quartered

It's still an item of faith in America that if we want to "save" natural resources from the evils of capitalist "exploitation," the only solution is to allow wise, "scientific" government officials to seize them and hold them off the market at gunpoint.

The faith in this premise is so nearly religious that no amount of evidence to the contrary seems able to shake it. The late governor of Washington state, Dixie Lee Ray, wrote two excellent books, *Trashing the Planet* and *Environmental Overkill*, demonstrating that private owners do the best job of preserving forests, caves, lakes — any asset they're allowed to bequeath to their children — while bureaucrats who profit by the subsidized destruction of the very resources they're appointed to "protect" represent the reliable pattern of government "stewardship" all round the globe.

Even when it comes to wildlife, scholars like Ike Sugg have documented again and again that when capitalists are allowed to own elephant herds in Tanzania — or green sea turtle farms in the Caymans — the animals multiply and prosper. But when wildlife is "protected" by banning private ownership, the critters inevitably fall prey to the "tragedy of the commons" — grab what you can now, because the next "communal owner" will only sweep clean what you leave behind.

Now — as if it's needed — surfaces another example of a "well-meaning" government "environmental protection" with unintended consequences.

In a story on the front page of the Jan. 6 *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, Associated Press writer Martha Mendoza reports how things have worked out in the 25 years since the federal government decided to "protect" the wild horses and burros of the Great Basin, declaring them "living symbols of the American West."

Since the horses tend to breed until the desert range can't support their numbers — and since of course neither natural die-offs nor the private harvesting of this introduced species can now be tolerated — the Bureau of Land Management has no choice but to engage in expensive annual roundups of the surplus wild horses.

Then, to make everyone feel better, many horses are saved from the slaughterhouse by being offered for "adoption" to private parties. Horses that cost the government about \$1,100 each to round up, vaccinate, brand and transport, can be acquired for \$125 or less by anyone who promises to care for them for one year.

Sounds great. But — by tracking those brands — Miss Mendoza now determines that about 90 percent of the 165,000 horses rounded up through this \$16 million-a-year program have ended up being slaughtered and exported to European dinner tables, anyway ... while still in the prime of equine life.

Even allowing for feed costs, "adopters" can make a handsome profit selling the "rescued" ponies to slaughterhouses at \$700 apiece after grazing them for a year as required. And Miss Mendoza discovered some of those "adopting" the most horses, and making the biggest profits, are BLM employees — more than 200 BLM employees.

In Rock Springs, Wyo., the manager of the local BLM corrals, it turns out, has "adopted" 16 horses under his own name. Add in the fellow's children, girlfriend, ex-wife and co-workers, and this good-hearted little group turns out to have "adopted" at least 90 captured horses. Needless to say, the BLM employee told the AP he could not account for the current whereabouts of all that horseflesh.

That these non-native herds should be thinned, and some use made of animals which the range will not support, is not the tragedy

here. The absurdity is the tax money spent — and the cynical corruption encouraged — because Congress chose to meddle from far away, adopting laws designed to enable legions of weekend bunny-huggers to go to bed harboring the warm, cuddly illusion that all the little ponies have been safely "adopted."

Caught in the act, will the federals now withdraw from this scene of their latest failure and chicanery?

Please. We already hear talk out of Washington about "reform." At an additional expenditure of millions more tax dollars, will some way be found to allow superannuated wild horses to live out their natural days frolicking on bluegrass ... and breeding ... behind white picket fences?

Will America's "sacred horse farms" someday rival the profligacy of the Hague warehouses in which are now stored all the worthless paintings bought up by the socialist government of Holland to subsidize the lifestyle choices of their myriad "starving Dutch artists?"

When tax revenues are seen as inexhaustible, and the Constitution no longer viewed as placing any limitation on the things government can try to "fix" ... why not?