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Opportunities for Local Partnerships in Managing Free Roaming Equids (Abstract)

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ABSTRACT: In Modoc County, located in northeastern California, there is a high elevation sage-steppe rangeland ecosystem heavily populated by free roaming equids and managed primarily by the United States Forest Service (USFS) known as the Devil's Garden. Free roaming equid populations have significantly exceeded (roughly 2000 horses) appropriate management levels (206-402 horses) in the last decade and expanded their range outside of the designated territory (about 250,000 acres) and on to private and tribal lands (over 450,000 acres), degrading rangeland and threatening endangered species. Helicopter gathers in recent years have removed over 2000 equids from the Devil's Garden. Due to an extensive collaboration between the USFS-Modoc National Forest, and local partners, many of these equids have found new homes. An early collaborative group developed unique strategies for placement of old (over nine years of age and historically characterized as unadoptable) and young horses. Modoc County has utilized the government- to- government communication process to participate in management decisions and worked to change federal law to provide USFS equal opportunity to placement programs. A robust social media campaign ran by local volunteers has created a brand for the Devil's Garden equids and educated the public on the declining range condition and equid health. Volunteers also matched potential adopters and buyers with transportation options for cross country transportation and some funding for transportation of large groups of equids was provided. Finally, the Devil's Garden Colt Challenge has placed nearly 100 horses with California 4-H and FFA youth over the last three years and additional horses with friends and family members.

KEY WORDS: collaboration, equids, feral horses, management, partnership, public education, wild horses

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