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WILD HORSES FIND RESOLVE-PRISONERS FIND REHABILITATION

BY MARK ASHLEY HATFIELD

As a kid, I grew up trailing the Appalachian Mountains. My family's roots, as many others do, run deep in the eastern Kentucky town of Phelps. But today, the mountains of Phelps are being trotted by a different set of... hooves. Dozens of wild horses now roam the mountains I once walked and sometimes these horses even find their way into residential neighborhoods.^[i]

(file:///C:/Users/Evan/Documents/KJournal/Online%20Editor%20Stuff/Blog%20Posts/Hatfield%20Blog%20Post%20Edited.docx#_edn1) Little has been done to tame the horses or to guide them away from residential areas. Although majestic creatures, wild horses present some significant risks when they go completely unchecked and begin roaming the yards where children play, or sprinting across the highway traveled by those on their work commute. Perhaps examining another town in America, with a different, yet similar, situation, may give some ideas to policymakers, and comfort to my friends and family back home.

Far and away from the Appalachian Mountains is a town sixty miles southeast of Phoenix, Arizona called Florence. Florence is home to a population of wild horses. Unlike the wild horses in Phelps, which have seemingly come out of nowhere, Florence maintains its wild horses to protect the wild horse habitat. This activity began in 1971 with the passage of the Wild Free-Roaming Horses Act.^[ii]

(file:///C:/Users/Evan/Documents/KJournal/Online%20Editor%20Stuff/Blog%20Posts/Hatfield%20Blog%20Post%20Edited.docx#_edn2) With the passage of this act, the Bureau of Land Management became the agency responsible for managing the wild horse population at specialized locations.^[iii]

(file:///C:/Users/Evan/Documents/KJournal/Online%20Editor%20Stuff/Blog%20Posts/Hatfield%20Blog%20Post%20Edited.docx#_edn3) To maintain a sustainable population of wild horses, some of the horses must be tamed and offered to the public. This is where Florence has recently cracked the WHIP (excuse the pun, but it was too tempting.)

The Wild Horse Inmate Program (WHIP) is a program by which inmates at an Arizona state Prison in Florence work with wild horses to "gentle" them before offering them to the public via the Bureau's Adopt-a-Horse program.^[iv]

(file:///C:/Users/Evan/Documents/KJournal/Online%20Editor%20Stuff/Blog%20Posts/Hatfield%20Blog%20Post%20Edited.docx#_edn4) As anyone familiar with horses knows, attempting to saddle, or do anything with a wild horse, can be quite difficult. One must first tame the horse and give it a sense of comfort in controlled spaces. The inmates in Florence are doing just that. Not only are these inmates helping maintain the wild horse population and training horses for domesticated use, but they are experiencing serious personal benefits as well. Roughly fifty inmates have been released from WHIP since 2012 and the recidivism rate among those fifty is

zero percent.[v]

(file:///C:/Users/Evan/Documents/KJournal/Online%20Editor%20Stuff/Blog%20Posts/Hatfield%20Blog%20Post%20Edited.docx#_edn5) To put that small sample size into perspective, the national recidivism rate shows “two-thirds of released prisoners arrested and behind bars again within three years, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics.”[vi]

(file:///C:/Users/Evan/Documents/KJournal/Online%20Editor%20Stuff/Blog%20Posts/Hatfield%20Blog%20Post%20Edited.docx#_edn6) Some may say that these inmates are just part of the one-third who would not become repeat offenders anyway, but I would respectfully disagree. Not only are these inmates staying out of prison but they are using the skills they learned from WHIP to obtain jobs in the equine field.[vii]

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Those inmates involved in the program have been quoted saying they have learned, “patience, love and caring, and trust”[viii]

(file:///C:/Users/Evan/Documents/KJournal/Online%20Editor%20Stuff/Blog%20Posts/Hatfield%20Blog%20Post%20Edited.docx#_edn8) from these horses; the same things they had trouble recognizing before their imprisonment. Others near the program like Randy Helm, the operator of the program, has stated that this program is a process, “and you can’t take short cuts.”[ix]

(file:///C:/Users/Evan/Documents/KJournal/Online%20Editor%20Stuff/Blog%20Posts/Hatfield%20Blog%20Post%20Edited.docx#_edn9) Helm goes on to state that a lot of the inmates he has worked with have admitted to being in prison for that very reason: taking short cuts and trying to “circumvent the process.”[x]

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WHIP began as nothing more than another work program for the local prison; much like the lawn maintenance and trash-removal programs I see county jail inmates completing when I travel home. WHIP has brought undeniable benefits to Florence and its incarcerated citizens, and I believe officials in my hometown could learn from its example. I truly believe that, in a state that embodies all things equine, one could find some experienced volunteers to help train our inmates on taming wild horses. In doing so, the residents of Phelps would regain the comfort they had before wild horses trotted through their back yard, and perhaps even more significant, it could help to cut down on our own recidivism rates as well.

[i]

(file:///C:/Users/Evan/Documents/KJournal/Online%20Editor%20Stuff/Blog%20Posts/Hatfield%20Blog%20Post%20Edited.docx#_ednref1) *Kentucky Community Says Wild Horses Are Causing Damage*, WYMT (Jan. 6, 2016), <http://www.local8now.com/home/headlines/Kentucky-community-says-wild-horses-are-causing-damage-364457501.html?platform=hootsuite>.

[ii]

(file:///C:/Users/Evan/Documents/KJournal/Online%20Editor%20Stuff/Blog%20Posts/Hatfield%20Blog%20Post%20Edited.docx#_ednref2) *Wild Horse Program*, Arizona Correctional Industries, <https://www.aci.az.gov/wild-horse-program/> (last visited Aug. 3, 2016).

[iii]

(file:///C:/Users/Evan/Documents/KJournal/Online%20Editor%20Stuff/Blog%20Posts/Hatfield%20Blog%20Post%20Edited.docx#_ednref3) *Id.*

[iv]

(file:///C:/Users/Evan/Documents/KJournal/Online%20Editor%20Stuff/Blog%20Posts/Hatfield%20Blog%20Post%20Edited.docx#_ednref4) See *Id.*

[v]

(file:///C:/Users/Evan/Documents/KJournal/Online%20Editor%20Stuff/Blog%20Posts/Hatfield%20Blog%20Post%20Edited.docx#_ednref5) Associated Press, *Arizona prison horse program helps inmates get on track*, StarTribune (July 4, 2016), <http://www.startribune.com/prison-horse-program-helps-also-helps-inmates-get-on-track/385483361/>.

[vi]

(file:///C:/Users/Evan/Documents/KJournal/Online%20Editor%20Stuff/Blog%20Posts/Hatfield%20Blog%20Post%20Edited.docx#_ednref6) *Id.*

[vii]

(file:///C:/Users/Evan/Documents/KJournal/Online%20Editor%20Stuff/Blog%20Posts/Hatfield%20Blog%20Post%20Edited.docx#_ednref7) *Id.*

[viii]

(file:///C:/Users/Evan/Documents/KJournal/Online%20Editor%20Stuff/Blog%20Posts/Hatfield%20Blog%20Post%20Edited.docx#_ednref8) *Id.*

[ix]

(file:///C:/Users/Evan/Documents/KJournal/Online%20Editor%20Stuff/Blog%20Posts/Hatfield%20Blog%20Post%20Edited.docx#_ednref9) *Id.*

[x]

(file:///C:/Users/Evan/Documents/KJournal/Online%20Editor%20Stuff/Blog%20Posts/Hatfield%20Blog%20Post%20Edited.docx#_ednref10) *Id.*

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