

Chasing Horses Wild Horse Advocates

February 16, 2020 ·

An interesting blog written around the time of the 2013 round up at TRNP. Again, make sure you read through the comment section, there is a lot of interesting information shared there.

This shows that the issues being brought up are not new at all. In fact, the same rhetoric has been coming out of the park for over 40 years.

"The definition of stupidity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." — Albert Einstein

I'm not sure how anyone thinks that anything will change, if in fact, NOTHING changes.

NOKOTAHORSE.WORDPRESS.COM

Nokota vs ND Badlands Horse

What is the difference between the Nokota® Horse and the North Dakota Badlands Horse? There are two major differences; the horses themselves and the people behind the breed registries and what prin...

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The Nokota is a breed of horse, North Dakota Badlands Horse is a Facebook page.

Nokota vs ND Badlands Horse

September 22, 2013 by nokotahorse



What is the difference between the [Nokota® Horse](#) and the [North Dakota Badlands Horse](#)? There are two major differences; the horses themselves and the people behind the breed registries and what principles they represent. Since this turned out to be a deeper issue than the title reveals and hence important to get the full picture to understand the life-changing outcome of this text; I beg of your patience in this lengthy blog post.

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The Nokota® Horse Conservancy

In the late nineteen seventies the Nokota® horses caught the attention of two brothers, that need no presentation in this context, but in brief one might say; their knowledge about horses in general is legendary and especially about the horses from TRNP. It is not their horsemanship or riding skills, though they have been very successful in extreme endurance races in the past, it's not their skills as breeders, though them they selves and their ancestors have been breeding horses since dawn of time, it's how they connect to horses, how they understand horses as unique living beings and the unconditional self-sacrificing commitment they put into their care of these wild horses. In time a handful of people have joined in on their commitment and gathered around [The Nokota® Horse Conservancy](#) since 1999, a nonprofit organization that works on voluntary basis to preserve, promote and educate. Several prominent researchers has thoroughly studied the history and genealogy of the Nokota® Horse as well as recognized the national (and international) importance of preserving the Nokota® Horse breed for future generations. NHC are working to preserve an old breed not to create one. The NHC manage a preservation herd of Nokota® Horses on private leased land and they promote the Nokota® by spreading information about the breed and their relentless work to save an endangered breed. In addition to written information they educate by offering guided pasture tours and clinics where the attendants get a deep

insight in the life of the Nokota® during a five-day experience. They have managed to get the State of North Dakota to recognize the Nokota as the official state honorary equine. With strong political support they have managed to accomplish resolution 4011 to make the NPS work to preserve the Nokota® horse breed within the TRNP, which the NPS provocatively answers by removing 50% of the horses from the TRNP this September. They fight on a day-to-day basis against hay prizes and pasture leases to provide for the Nokota Horses, totally dependent on donations and a NHC membership fee from a much too small group of humans like me and hopefully you who read this.

[The North Dakota Badlands Horse Registry](#)

The North Dakota Badlands Horse Registry (NDBHR) is a four-year old congregation of basically two families, formed "back in 2009" as they say themselves. The NDBH is any horse of any breed or mix of breeds that comes out of the TRNP, well-defined and simple enough. NDBHR operate primarily thru Facebook groups and there is very little up to date information about them publicly available elsewhere. Parallel to their own registry they are very active in Nokota Horse groups and formerly also within the NHC promoting a wider acceptance of the Nokota® breed characteristics and that the, as they find, proposed colorful origin of the Nokota® horse is to dim and should not be told. They operate from Minnesota. By fair coincidence the same state a now closed shadow organization to NHC operated trying to run a parallel operation and steal the Nokota name. That is the reason the Nokota is a registered trademark today. The people behind the NDBHR work closely with National Park Service (NPS) which is the federal authority who runs TRNP and they agree with park policy that the park horses are all mixed feral horses of no special genetic background worth preserving. The NPS manages the horses within the national park according to their own rules and The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 does not apply in TRNP. Their job is to keep the horses within 70-100 animals to make sure that the parks head attractions the elk, the deer and the bison get a fair part of available grazing. The NDBHR founders are kindly helping the NPS by voluntarily monitoring the park horses and keep track of them. For a moderate fee the NDBH organization provides a registry for private owners of horses that has been rounded up and removed from TRNP, and their future offspring. They have no other costs than themselves and do not provide for wild horses, neither by work or financially. In cooperation with the NPS they promote frequent roundups of park horses and auctions as they believe it is a necessary evil they must accept to keep their good relations with NPS. Since it also provides a much welcomed business opportunity for the struggling livestock town of Wishek, as well as it gives everybody all over America the opportunity to come to a popular festivity event and for no other obligation than a wrinkled hundred dollar bill straight out of the pocket, buy and bring home a wild horse to be registered in their new and successful NDBH Registry, it is all for the best. This September 28th 50% of all horses in TRNP will be rounded up by helicopters, removed from the park by trucks on a 200 mile drive to Wishek Livestock auction. NDBHR is looking forward to a successful event, spreading advertising posters and keeping a list of prospects with photos and promoting descriptions, naively trivializing the well-founded doubts raised about the overall ability to provide appropriate safety for the wild horses.

Monitoring and keeping track of the horses in TRNP is an already tax funded task that NPS are responsible for so however admirable the voluntary work done by the NDBHR is, it is per definition without purpose. The NDBHR is also for another reason without purpose since it already is possible to register horses from TRNP in the Nokota® Breed Registry in the Nokota® park cross category. The very existence of the NDBHR is severely contra productive when it comes to preserve and save the TRNP wild horses from extinction, causing great confusion among wild horse enthusiasts and stealing attention and means from the real cause; preserving the Nokota Horse from the North Dakota Badlands.

[About the horses](#)

The Nokota® Horse is a horse that originates from the North Dakota Badlands. [The history of the Nokota® Horses](#) is easily available at the NHC web page and there is also a series of [blog posts](#) on the subject here on this website. In brief the first wild horses came to the area around 1730. The horses of Spanish Colonial type blended in with later ranch horses of the area, but also with 60 horses from Sitting Bull and his Lakota people that Marquis De Mores acquired at Sitting Bulls Surrender in Fort Buford 1881.

Other ranchers like A.C. Huidekoper also made contributions to the breed in the same era. The horses then lived isolated in the Little Missouri Badlands until around 1950 when the TRNP was formed and the horses happened to be caught inside the park unknowingly. The wild horses were considered trespassers not being part of the wild life, leading to a wild persecution of the horses, who then took refuge further and further up in the most remote parts of the park. In modern times TRNP was forced by public opinion to give up their goal to exterminate the horses and accept a so-called demonstration herd within the park, following regular roundups and auctions to keep the numbers appropriately low. Some park employees used proposed reports of seeing signs of inbreeding as an excuse to replace some wild stallions with other breeds like Shire, Arabians, Quarter Horses and BLM Mustangs. This went on as late as in the mid nineteen eighties and it changed the horse population. Some very shy old bloodline horses still remained in the remote parts and occasionally some of them appeared on the auctions.

The Kuntz discovered them as being outstanding horses, well-built and sure-footed, extremely versatile and with strong health, they began using them as endurance race horses, only later finding out about their history and their origin. But it was neither the history nor the horses physical appearance that caught their deepest interest, it was what you can't see on the outside, it was their personality, their incomparable social intelligence, their language and complicated herd structure that was so unique, shared only in part by other wild horse populations living isolated under similar conditions. They have been working for the survival of these horses ever since, sacrificing everything for the Nokota Horses.

The North Dakota Badlands Horse as newly defined is all and every horse coming out of the TRNP regardless of origin, though a few Nokota cross breeds still exists in the park and occasionally find their way to the auctions. The NDBH are as all horses equally entitled to a good life that fulfills their needs, no sane person denies that. However the difference between these horse breeds is that the Nokota® Horse is the horse from the North Dakota Badlands as it was before modern time crossbreeding with various domesticated breeds. The North Dakota Badlands Horse is a horse coming from the Theodore National Park regardless of breed.



Afterthought, or a lesson to learn

This is my most personal opinion and I am not sure this is the right forum, but I think I have noticed a change in recent years among some young people, as well as among some not as young, that they tend to always refer their opinions relative something or someone else. It can be a useful approach at times I agree, but it is not a very good rule to live your life by. Let me give you a random example in a current topic:

“The removal of the, 110 or so, TRNP horses for the Wishek Livestock Auction next week is a necessary evil, but if we work together to make this a “successful event” we are making the best of it and doing the right thing for our community.” For the individual socially intelligent horse the traumatic experience of being violently separated from home and family, forced into an overcrowded compartment by shouting and waving men, driven far, far away and then sold at an auction to the highest bidder whomever, is beyond bad. What if horses were humans; in what position would that put you?

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To me a bad thing cannot be done in a good way. A bad thing is not relative at all, it is just absolutely bad. Embracing the lesser of two evils will keep you awake every night for the rest of your life.

If we instead consider doing what’s good, consider this; If no one buys a single horse at the Wishek Livestock auction the NPS will be forced to take the horses back to TRNP and start doing their job the good way.

I promise you; anyone competent enough can write a book of instructions on how to manage wild horses in a national park in a good sustainable way, maybe not easy, but not impossible. To do the same thing in a sustainable bad way, only requires three words; "remove the horses". NPS is responsible for managing wild horses in TRNP and they are not putting enough brains into it. They have the opportunity and the funds to do something life changing, to be recognized globally, but they are sitting paralyzed in the dark.

In addition to this the NDBHR is confusing the concepts for a less informed public and distracting the well needed help from the individual wild horses that need our help to survive, not because they can't survive anywhere, but because humanity won't let them.

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/Mikael Werner

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[October 3, 2013 at 19:50](#)

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/Mikael Werner

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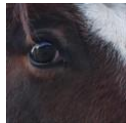


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• •

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• [Editor](#) says:

[October 3, 2013 at 20:02](#)

Reblogged this on [Rancho Comancho](#) and commented:

This is a great story that, we apologize, didn't know anything about. Thanks for sharing. We are asking our friends to read and act as they can. We will soon translate it in Italian to share with more people. Questa è una cosa grandiosa, giunta pari pari dalla Svezia. Chiediamo scusa a chi non parla inglese tra noi se non la traduciamo subito, ma lo faremo presto. Il succo, in ogni caso, è questo. Ci sono un mucchio di cose che fanno riferimento ai cavalli delle Badlands, al Theodore Roosevelt National Park e allo spostamento forzato del 50 per cento dei cavalli presenti nel parco, finiti, pare, a un'asta che dovrebbe poi condurli, presumibilmente, al macello. Pare ci siano parecchie cose da capire, visto l'accumularsi di sigle e di, sembra, polemiche. Il dato di fatto è che ci hanno linkato, sperando di far crescere il rumore intorno a quest'asta e alla probabile fine di cavalli che sono, fuori da ogni schema commerciale, parte della storia d'America. Legga chi può adesso (gli altri appena traduciamo) e se si può fare qualcosa, facciamo.

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- [Marylu Weber](#) says:

[January 6, 2014 at 18:41](#)

I started North Dakota Badlands Horse and would like to visit with you about my views on the horses from TRNP. I wish you would have contacted me before you wrote this, as I could have helped you understand my point of view. Much of what you have shared in this article is not true, but I do not wish to start trouble between groups of horse lovers, but promote understanding and cooperation. Thank you, Marylu

[Like](#)
[Reply](#)



- [nokotahorse](#) says:

[January 8, 2014 at 13:30](#)

Thank you for reading and welcome. I am so glad you now want to promote understanding and cooperation, since that is exactly what this blog post was all about. I presume neither of us wants to start any trouble, but if you think much of what I wrote was untrue I must ask you to please be more specific or else your statement is of no value.

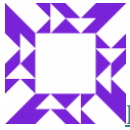
I read your blog at <http://wildhorsesoftrnp.blogspot.se/2011/03/north-dakota-badlands-horse.html?m=1> some time ago and posted a question but received no answer or approval, maybe there was some problem? So I try again, if I may quote you: "The Nokota Horse came from the same stock as the North Dakota Badlands Horse, but have evolved into a slightly different type because that smaller gene pool." As you know the Nokota represents the wild horse of the northern plains as it was before later deliberate introductions of other breeds or mix of breeds into the park. The North Dakota Badlands Horse is the same horse but after other breeds was added. So which horse has then "evolved" into a slightly different type?

Among other things you also wrote on your blog that many Nokota Horse owners claim that ND Badlands Horses are of less value. It is of course a very intimidating assertion. These are just two examples of how you and your colleagues do not promote understanding and cooperation between groups of horse lovers, but rather speak with a forked tongue.

Any horse of any breed is of course of equal value for themselves and their human friends, that is why we have both Clydesdales and Shetlands in this world. The North Dakota Badlands Horses, as you have named them, from the TRNP are wonderful horses, of that I am certain, but the only difference between a ND Badlands Horse and any other horse is its Nokota origin. What we do need to understand is that if we want a specific breed of horse to be preserved for the future it is that specific breed of horse we must cooperate to save. Since the Nokota Horse Conservancy desperately needs all possible support to preserve

the 118 or so remaining Nokota Horses of the most rare and unique bloodlines which your friends at the NPS refuse to recognize, it is of vital importance that you do help to promote understanding and cooperation in order to save the Nokota Horse we both love. Thank You. – Mikael Werner.

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• [Marylu Weber](#) says:

[January 10, 2014 at 06:32](#)

Thank you, Mikael, for allowing my post on your blog. I am sorry if some of what I have stated on my blog was offensive to you or other Nokota horse lovers. I would never want to put down the Nokota horse as I think they are wonderful horses. I do think the horses living in TRNP are wonderful horses also and are also deserving of life.

To correct one of your statements, I lived in ND for over 50 years before moving to SD in 2012. I started the NDBHR in 2009 as a result of the NHC stating that they would not register horses coming out of TRNP. NHC board members were quoted in 2009 in news articles saying that there were NO Nokotas in the park. In my request to register a filly I had gotten from the park in 2008, I was told my records would have to be confirmed with the park, but no one ever contacted the park to do so. Because I wanted a way to follow horses once they were sold and develop a network for buyers, it seemed necessary to create another organization for the horses. NDBH is more of a description of the horses of that area, not a breed. Friends and I agreed that a small percentage of blood of the few horses introduced in the 80s did not make a horse any less deserving of help than those whose bloodlines were from a mixture of horses who had been introduced over the past 100+ years.

You stated that the horses were “isolated until 1950,” but horses were being bred in and near the area of the park for decades before the park was established in 1947. People like Badlands Bill McCarty drove thousands of horses to that area when horses were no longer needed for transportation and farm work. Since open range practices were prevalent in those years, horses from local farms and ranches mingled and interbred with one another and with wild horses of unknown origin to create the horses that were inadvertently fenced into the park in the late 50s. This is well documented. Castle McLaughlin’s paper of 1989 supports this.

You claim that my and Tom Tescher’s work documenting the horses over the past 50 years is “without purpose.” Except for the past 3 years, TRNP has never had staff documenting the horses; it has always been done by volunteers. It was only because of the Colorado State University contraceptive study that the park was able to dedicate one person on a part time basis. If it wasn’t for Tom’s and my work for those 50 years, no one would know anything about the origins and genealogy of the horses.

I do cooperate with the park staff because I feel that getting to know people and lending a helping hand is a good way to promote cooperation and understanding. I do not agree with everything they do, but I have no power to control a federal agency. They do their jobs the way they see fit in balancing all the species of animals and plants in their care. At the roundup and sale the park staff and Wishek Livestock’s handling of the horses was caring, respectful, and professional. I know because I was there.

Your statements that our hard work to find homes for all the 103 sale horses was “contra-productive,” “stealing attention and means,” from more deserving horses, and “causing confusion” are very hurtful to me, however I forgive you for your misunderstanding. We did not set out to steal anyone’s thunder or work against any other organization, but to see that NOT ONE of the TRNP wild horses was lost to slaughter. You speak about doing what is right and yet you say, “If no one buys a single horse” that everything would work out right. I strongly disagree with you and other NHC people who tried to discourage people from buying the TRNP horses. If good hearted individuals and rescue people had not bought the horses, they would have ALL gone to slaughter, but because these caring, generous people did buy, the kill buyers did not get them. That was our goal and TEAM NDBH accomplished it!

Thank you again for allowing me to express my views on your blog. I will welcome additional discussion about the horses of TRNP and our organization. I also sleep very well, thank you.

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- [nokotahorse](#) says:

[January 14, 2014 at 14:31](#)

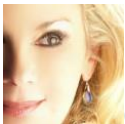
Thanks for your reply, to reconnect to my question I assume it is settled that it is the NDBH that has evolved into a different type, not the Nokota. Just to clarify; My opinions shared here are my own and I do not speak for anyone else, me and my family are not involved in NHC other than being Nokota Horse owners and generally affectionate about the horses from TRNP. About your first correction; I just wanted to mention the uneasy coincidence between the Minnesota based Nokota Horse Association which was basically closed down by the US District Court due to suspicion of violation of the Nokota trademark, following the immediate start of the NDBHR. The problem with NDBHR is that you deliberately confuse the meaning of equal properties and equal value, thereby misleading a less informed public that the Nokota does not exist as a breed. To keep a registry of horses removed from the TRNP and their future offspring is a great idea and I encourage you to do so, but you should also recognize the historic and unique Nokota Horse breed and the NHC for preserving them. I definitely agree with you that the intentional crossbreeding of TRNP horses with horses introduced in the mid-80s does not make the horses less deserving of help. However the whole idea with a breed is that it represents a certain breed of horses with identifiable traits important to preserve, not because the individual horses are more or less deserving of help, but because they represent a unique historical breed of horses. As you very well know the Nokota horses were carefully selected out of a larger population of horses NPS removed from TRNP, beginning in 1981 until October 2003, when e.g. Lucky Dust was removed (who is the dame of our Wild Prairie Rose). Dr Sponenberg, Robert M Utley and Dr McLaughlin have all verified the distinction in historic background, conformation and other characteristic traits that make up the Nokota Horse. Over and over again NDBH people claim that since there were unknown horses occasionally drifting into parts of the area during one or two decades until the TRNP was fenced; all and every horse intermixed like water in a pond. It does not take an expert to realize this is an absurd argument for many reasons. The horses selected from the early TRNP auctions had indeed been isolated during a long timeframe and they are called Nokota Horses. Even almost five hundred

years after the first Spanish horses set foot on the American continent, Dr Spoenberg still found 20 horses well defined as of Spanish Colonial type among the Kunz Nokota horses, but none in TRNP. The Nokota Horse is, as every other breed, a mix of many different horses during a very long, but historic timeframe. What makes the Nokota Horses a unique historic breed is, among other things, the many generations they endured and thrived in the Little Missouri Badlands; the conformation, language and other traits they developed is unique. The intentional introduction of external horses in the mid-80s changed more and more bands to a point where there were no more Nokota Horses believed to exist in TRNP. It did not change their value but their properties as a unique breed.

About the great Tom Tescher's early work I am very humble. My note was relating to the purpose of NDBHR doing the work that is NPS responsibility. I understand that observing and recording the horses inside TRNP must be a wonderful voluntary work to be engaged in, but it is a job NPS are legally responsible for and therefore they should take the full consequences for neglecting it to a point where the imagined only solution was to cut down the population in half and send the horses away without care for their future life. To cooperate means that you must share the same goals, values and principles. I believe negotiation is a better way to relate to NPS concerning the horses of TRNP. There is an important distinction between cooperation and negotiation. If you do not agree with NPS on everything speak up and tell the public about it, maybe NPS depend on you more than you think. By cooperating and promoting big-time helicopter roundups and removals of horses from their natural habitat NDBHR do not help preserving wild horses from the North Dakota Badlands, you merely legitimate the mismanagement that lead to the present situation where there are no longer any true Nokota Horses in the North Dakota Badlands. With good help from the NHC who put attention to the safety issues, you were able to save the lives of all the 103 removed horses; by the circumstances a job well done for everyone involved, anything else would have been a total disaster. But again you miss the point. By supporting and promoting the roundup and sale of one full half of the existing horse population, not without your organizations own good interest, you put yourself in a situation where your credibility was depending on a successful wild horse sale. To split up the horses from their natural habitat and then claim you saved them leaves you nowhere. The big time roundups will continue unless the contraceptive experiments make the population sterile. To me the picture is clear; the nonprofit NHC work relentlessly to preserve the horses from TRNP with a vision to reintroduce them into the wild, while NDBH saves horses by promoting wild horse auctions.

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- [Christine Hendler](#) says:

[September 24, 2015 at 18:26](#)

Thank you, thank you, thank you for this informative, clear, beautifully written post! I learned so much. I so agree with your point of view regarding "the lesser of two evils" when it applies to these glorious, intelligent, soulful beings whose lives are decimated by the "lesser evil". Thank you for your work. I'm on board!

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OUR NOKOTA HORSES



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