**Teaching Notes**

**The Navajo Horse Policy Dilemma**

By

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**Learning Objectives**

1. Demonstrate the ability to explain the basic history and evolution of horses in North America.
2. Gain understanding of the potential and the limitations of federal policy under the Free Roaming Wild Horse and Burro Protection Act of 1971.
3. Demonstrate the ability to articulate the cultural role of horses in the Navajo Nation.
4. Demonstrate a familiarity with the relationships of Indian Tribes to state and federal organizations and nonprofits.
5. Demonstrate the ability to articulate major policy issues around various alternative actions and assess potential outcomes
6. Explore the value of partnerships and collaboration in solving difficult issues

and the associated challenges for tribal leadership.

1. Increase understanding of the roles of science and leadership in the policy making process.
2. Understand the relationships of tribal, federal and state legal processes as they relate to horses

**Audience:** Suitable for college students, undergraduate through graduate studies. This case is especially useful for study in Public Administration, American Indian Law and Federal Law, Wildlife Management, Range Management, Zoology, Sociology, Anthropology, Environmental Studies, Political Science, and Veterinary Science.

**Update and Additional Information (9-6-16):**

Wild horse management continues to be a significant issue for tribal and non-tribal land managers in the West. The BLM increased and deepened its partnerships with wild horse adoption programs and explored new options like sending burros to South America where they are still part of family-based agriculture. Still, funding and facts remain limited. Three new wild horse eco-sanctuaries were approved, including the Double D Ranch on the Wind River Indian Reservation. A new drug called anti-GrRH lasts longer than PZP and offers hope for better temporary birth control for wild horses.

Nonetheless, drought and increased competition with livestock only became more problematic on the Navajo Reservation. In 2016, it was reported that some horses were dying of thirst. Estimates for the number of wild horses on the Navajo Reservation vary wildly, possibly because of some confusion with free-ranging horses owned by individual Navajos. Theoretically, they should all be branded and identified, but that is not always the case.

Rick Abasta, Assistant to Navajo President Begaye, reminded people of the old saying “Our horses are sacred.” The Tribe is proceeding to try to improve the effectiveness of birth control management and identify the number of wild horses. The new administration is also seeking tribal input on wild and feral horse management and meeting with the New Mexico Wildlife Foundation established by former New Mexico Governor Richardson and Robert Redford. The Navajo-based nonprofit group, the Navajo Horse Healing Project raised funds on Indiegogo and continued national tours drawing hundreds to Navajo Horse Blessing Ceremonies.

This case study has found its way into the hands of BLM Land Managers in Washington DC who are using it to reformulate research questions on this topic. An interesting class approach after reading this case might be to assign tasks, either in written papers or assignments for class discussions, about what research questions should be studied and why they would be important. Are the research questions for the Navajo Nation different from those of the BLM? Should they be?

Resources:

<http://www.reuters/articlell-us-usa-horses-navajo-idUSKBN0ol02320150650>

[www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/whbprogram/history-and-facts/myths-and-facts.htm](http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/whbprogram/history-and-facts/myths-and-facts.htm)

www.horsesforlife.org/news--blog/category/tribal%20lands

**Implementation:** This case demonstrates tensions between highly debated positions, and it can evoke both strong feelings and engagement. To fully develop the opposing positions as a basis for understanding the need for collaboration, it is recommended that the case be taught in two or more sessions. For the first session, students are assigned to read the case as homework and come prepared to discuss the questions from a particular perspective. Small group work is most effective for building basic positions on the Navajo Nation horse population issue. The second session continues the discussion with an emphasis on developing a collaborative strategy to handle the different components of the problem. Unless it is an advanced class, it is best to start with Level 1 questions and progress through Level 3 questions. Encouraging students to do additional research is also recommended. Additional written assignments may be added on relevant topics like the federal natural resource and agricultural laws that directly or indirectly affect tribal lands, histories of the relationship between Tribes and various federal agencies, tribal-state relations with regard to wildlife and agricultural management, and traditional knowledge/tribal science as it applies to horses.

**Discussion Questions: (organized by level of complexity with level one questions emphasizing facts)**

**Part I Wild Horses and the Navajo Nation**

**Level I**

1. Describe the evolution of the horse in North America.
2. What are some of the major factors that produced the current situation of inadequate lands for wild horses?
3. Does choosing one name over another- wild horses versus feral horses, mustangs over livestock- change the nature of the discussion and recommended actions?
4. Describe three types of actions that were used to manage wild horse populations.
5. What actions did the Navajo Nation initially recommend to deal with the apparently runaway horse population, and what actions did they take?
6. Why did the Navajo Nation change its position on horse slaughter plants?
7. What reasons did cultural leaders like the Medicine Peoples’ organization give for opposing roundups and horse slaughter? Do you think that they categorically opposed the actions or did they just oppose the manner in which the actions were conducted?

**Level II**

1. Is the horse a North American native species or not?

2. What are the potential and limitations of the roundup system authorized?

by the federal Free Roaming Wild Horse and Burro Protection Act and the

Navajo Livestock Act when applied to Navajo Nation lands?

3. How would you describe the methods used by the BLM for establishing

wild horse population levels and predicting future growth? What is  
 needed to make them scientifically credible?

4. Should the Navajo Nation harmonize their policies with the BLM? Why or

why not?  
   
5. What could the Navajo Nation gain or lose by exercising their unique  
 sovereignty and opening up a horse slaughter plant on the reservation?

6. If the Navajo Nation pursues a path of creating partnerships, what are  
 some potential common goals? What are some barriers to   
 collaboration and how can they surmount them?

**Level III**

1. Major federal natural resources laws often fail to offer funding or support for tribes, and even fail to mention the federal trust responsibility. Does this reflect respect for tribal sovereignty or a failure to consider the trust responsibility?
2. Why does the cultural symbol of the horse play into Dine ideas about caring and managing horses? How does this compare with the horse as a cultural symbol of the American West? With the idea of horse as livestock?
3. What are some of the scientific parameters for assuring genetic diversity in wild horse herds?
4. Given the large numbers of horses on the Navajo Reservation, are the environmental organizations’ ideas for eco sanctuaries, tourism, prison and youth training programs a viable solution?

Questions for Level III can be used for discussion or be assigned for research papers. Question three could be expanded to a stronger science orientation on protocols for population studies, genetic diversity and projections of population based on herd makeup. This case could be used as an applied learning activity in classes on Wildlife Management, Zoology or Genetics.

**Part II: A Second Way to use the Case—The Scenario Method**

The Way Forward: Building a Collaborative Wild Horse Strategy

for the Navajo Nation

This scenario can be completed as a role-play or as a group exercise with the groups describing how they think their section would proceed. Since a large number of small groups is needed, this scenario is appropriate for a larger class. If the class is smaller (under 25), it can be worked with just two of the Partner Groups.

One class period should be devoted to a general discussion of the case before beginning the scenario. Next, the groups meet to develop strategies during a second class period. Finally, a third class period allows for presentations from the groups. If the class has large blocks of time, the class discussion and group meetings and presentations could be conducted in a 3-4 hour block of time. Like many multi-layered cases, this case could be enriched with speakers who are involved in the issues. If desired, a follow-up written assignment based on the presentations and research discussed in the class meetings can be assigned on a topic such as creating the best possible strategy for the Navajo Nation.

Background Scenario: The Navajo Nation plans to meet with environmentalists and horse protection groups, the BLM and other federal representatives, a scientific commission from the National Academy of Scientists and the Governor’s Office and politicians in New Mexico to develop a way forward. Each of the Partner Groups must plan an internal and external strategy as a foundation for collaboration. Partner Groups are composed of smaller groups with factional components.

**Partner Group I.** The Navajo Nation is working to create a strategy that includes the Hataali (Medicine people), the Navajo Agricultural Department, livestock owners, and participation of the people through Chapters that are the local political units of the Navajo Nation. All these smaller groups contribute to the discussion and should meet individually as small groups for the first half of the session before coming together. They discuss difficult issues like how to conduct culturally appropriate horse capture programs and what should be done with captured animals. In the second half of the class period, once they have established an internal strategy for the whole Partner Group, they can then discuss and external strategy for working with partners.

**Partner Group II**. The federal /state government group is composed of smaller groups, including BLM officials, BIA officials, USDA Forest Service officials, members of the presidential administration, the Governor’s Office and congressional representatives and senators from New Mexico. The smaller groups can meet separately, first to identify their goals. The BLM, as the lead agency, facilitates the larger discussion on how to create a unified strategy on wild horse management. Second, they need to develop a workable external strategy to improve coordination with the Navajo Nation that respects sovereignty, the trust responsibility, and Dine culture.

**Partner Group III**. This group includes wildlife biologists, veterinarians, geneticists, and science policy advisors from the National Academy of Scientists. Each smaller group meets to make recommendations on how to develop a shared, credible scientific approach to working with wild horse populations. After they develop a shared internal strategy, they will come together to discuss how to develop an external strategy for managing wild horses with the Navajo Nation, and the state and federal governments.

**Partner Group IV**. This group includes horse protection organizations like the Cloud Foundation and other animal protection nonprofit organizations led by Robert Redford. Other small groups include large landowners willing to explore sanctuaries and tourism options, environmental organizations, and prison and youth training officials. These interests meet in small groups to discuss how they could implement plans to incorporate wild horses from the Navajo Nation in significant numbers. After coming together to develop a unified internal strategy, they discuss ways to collaborate with the Navajo Nation.

**The Big Meeting.** The Navajo Nation facilitates the final meeting with all participants with the objective of finding common goals and strategies. The first step is to agree on a list of topics that will be discussed. Next, each major group states its internal strategy and works to implement an external strategy that respects the abilities and limitations of other collaborators.