

that we wouldn't have been able to vaccinate the horses we'd spied even had we been able to get to them. They were on private property, and while it's possible for the volunteers to get permission from land owners, it's not as simple as just asking. It's a process that requires obtaining assessor's parcel numbers for properties and allowing the NDA to cross check these to ensure that permission was obtained from their rightful owners.

By the time we were ready to break for lunch, I was beginning to think I wouldn't get to see the AWHC volunteers administer any birth control vaccines that day. But Walker, Sullivan and Kilian had one more trick up their sleeves.

Before taking me to a piece of private property in Paradise Valley, the women explained two things. First, it's illegal to feed wild horses on BLM or private property for the most part—but that was what was happening here. And, second, it wasn't illegal in this case. It was an NDA-approved effort to use a large swath of private land as a place to feed the horses on the edge of Paradise Valley in an effort to keep them out of the neighborhoods closer to the highway. Its goal, they said, was to move the horses slowly over time back up into the foothills.

When we arrived, the property owner asked me to please not reveal the location of her land. It's hard enough, she explained, to keep people who want to see the horses at bay. And I could immediately see why. There

they were—hundreds of Virginia Range horses all in one place.

When Kilian and Sullivan donned bright green vests and walked right out among them, my pulse quickened at the sight of two small women in the midst of so many huge animals. But this feeling faded quickly as I watched the pair identify mares and stallions by name. Soon, they'd picked out half a dozen mares in need of vaccinations and boosters and were headed back to the Jeep to prepare their doses.

The process of preparing PZP for injection is fascinating. The vaccine itself is kept frozen in tiny vials. It's thawed quickly in warm hands and then mixed in a separate vial with an adjuvant—a substance that helps create a stronger immune response. When the vaccine is ready, it's contained inside a thick-needed dart and loaded into the CO<sub>2</sub>-powered rifles.

I watched as Kilian prepared to take her first shot at a mare eating hay with her band near the edge the property. With a range finder she determined the mare was 22 yards off. Using this information and a simple mathematical formula, she set the pressure on her rifle and then lined up her shot.

When she fired it, the sound wasn't much louder than that of an arrow shot from a compound bow.

The dart flew quickly and found its mark. I flinched as the mare whinnied and began to trot, causing her band to stir around her, but



Elena Sullivan (left) and Deborah Walker watch wild horses grazing in the distance.

was dumbfounded when almost immediately she'd turned back to eating—flicking her tail against the spot in her buttock where the dart had struck.

It was Kilian's 532nd successful vaccination since she began darting four years ago—and the first of several she did that day. For Sullivan, her first dart of the day delivered her 374th vaccination. Since forming it's agreement with the NDA in April, AWHC's volunteers have delivered more than 1,100

vaccines. They estimate that amounts to about 50 percent of the Virginia Range mares. Their goal is 65 percent for the year.

As I prepared to leave that day, the property owner stopped me and thanked me for covering the horses. "We love them," she said. □

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