

18 RIDE FOR THE SALT RIVER WILD HORSES AZ Rider

Did You Know...?

There were once more than 500,000 wild horses in Arizona.

There are now fewer than 500 wild horses on public land in Arizona.

Salt River Wild Horse Management Group has been documenting the Salt River wild horses in the Tonto National Forest for almost 20 years.



The Ride for the Salt River Wild Horses took place on Saturday January 30. Riders signed in at American Legion Post 58 in Fountain Hills [16837 E Parkview Ave]. There was no fee to participate.

The route took riders where the wild horses live ~ through the Lower Salt River on Bush Highway in the Tonto National Forest. Stops along the way included Butcher Jones Beach and Coon Bluff. SRWHMG volunteers were available to answer questions. The horses were out this day, and we heard numerous comments from people who enjoyed getting to see them.

The last stop was at Superstition H-D in Apache Junction. Activities, held from noon-4pm, included educational booths, classic rock music by 'Sidewayz', vendors, & more.

The Salt River Wild Horses are part of Arizona history, having roamed the area for hundreds of years. Their story is quite interesting. They are believed to be descended from horses brought to Arizona in the 1600s by the Spanish.

Although many locals are familiar their existence, they really caught the public's attention on a broader scale this past July. That's when the Forest Service announced that they were going to be rounded up, impounded, and 'removed'; aka *exterminated*. THAT caught a LOT of people's attention. Continuous public pressure, lobbying, negotiations, and petitions resulted in the Forest Service putting a hold

on their plans for the roundup and then a complete withdrawal of the impound notice. The horses were safe.

Now, efforts are underway to gain permanent protected status for these magnificent animals.

This cause may seem a bit unusual to some; but its goal is a noble one ... to protect not only the horses but the history that they represent.

The wild horses of America have been likened to the lions of Africa Synonymous symbols of these countries and their wild heritage. These beautiful horses are living icons of what has historically been the wild, free spirit of Arizona and of the American West.

We learned from event organizer Skeeter that 350 bikes and over 500 people took part in this inaugural event. \$3,770.00 was raised toward the cause.

The Salt River Wild Horse Management Group [SRWHMG] is a completely volunteer organization. The monies raised by their events go toward legal fees for lobbying and court costs, tools and supplies to maintain fences [an ongoing project], road signs, education campaigns, birth control, and more. 'Watch for Horses' signs are already in place. They are working on reducing the speed limit and installing flashing lights in the areas where the horses traditionally cross the roads. A similar 'Elk Crossing' system is used in the high country to alert drivers about large animals on / near the road.

A bill is currently making its way through Arizona's Legislature on behalf of the Salt River Wild Horses. HB2340 [wild horses; management; prohibition] just PASSED the House. It will now go to the Senate. We cannot say where the bill will be in the Senate side of the process by the time you are reading this. SRWHMG is urging the public to contact their State representatives to vote on behalf of the Salt River Wild Horses! This is the number to the AZ State Capitol switchboard. All you have to do is ask to be connected to your State representatives: (602)926 5999. You can also stay apprised of the latest updates by following the SRWHMG on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/saltriverwildhorsemanagementgroup/>

Anyone who wants to help is also invited to Like the SRWHMG Facebook page [URL above]. At their website <http://saltriverwildhorsemanagementgroup.org/> you'll find a 'What You Can Do' tab, with links to petitions to sign, donation & volunteering opportunities, and more.

The organizers thank Superstition Harley-Davidson and the Law Tigers for their support of this event. They also send out a big thank you to all those who came out to support and raise awareness for the Salt River Wild Horses.

Betsy & Bruce

Add'l photos from Skeeter Peak

