

EQUUS SURVIVAL TRUST - ACTION ALERT
ALBERTA WILD HORSES ADDED
To EQUINE CONSERVATION LIST
September 2, 2016



PHOTO by Duane Starr

A study is currently underway to determine the genetic heritage of the Alberta Wild Horses of Canada known as Alberta "Wildies". Central Registry Services Group (CRSG) in the USA partnered with advocate group Help Alberta Wildies (HAW) in Alberta, Canada and enlisted the expertise of world renowned equine geneticist Dr. Cothran of Texas A&M University to study the DNA of Wildies. Samples were taken from a range of horses that had been previously culled from the herds including Ghost River, Sundre, and Williams Creek over the last 10 years.

Preliminary individual analysis of the Alberta Wildie samples did not indicate any single closely related foundation breed or family group. Instead, markers indicated a variety of groups, supporting the theory that the foundation stock was multifaceted, however, the most frequent genetic markers were drafts. This is in keeping with the regional history of draft horses used in the area for logging throughout the 1800's and abandoned in the early 1900's. Absent were any Canadian Horse markers, indicating that native breed had no part in influencing the development of the Alberta Wildies.

Surprisingly common were markers for a Russian breed from Siberia - the Altai horse, a breed known for thriving in cold climates. The presence of the Altai markers suggests

some of the original bloodlines were Altai based stock, genetics reaching far back into the early development of the Wildies when explorers and settlers came to the Pacific Northwest or perhaps even to early Native cultures.

As a note of interest, markers for another Russian Siberian breed, the Yakut, was recently discovered to be common in the Brittany triangle horses of British Columbia, however, the BC Wild Horses do not share the same foundation stock as the Alberta Wildies, and as such the groups do not appear to be related.

The Wildie samples showed the overall genetic diversity to be of average variation, and the allelic diversity to be pleasantly high, indicating the Wildies currently enjoy a stable, healthy genetic diversity - a condition that could easily be damaged if culling and/or poorly managed contraception practices disturb the genetic base nature has shaped this past century and a half. These preliminary genetic findings suggest a strong link between today's Wildies and pre-mechanization gene material from endangered draft breeds in addition to a direct connection to the historic Altai-bred stock of Siberia.

These combined genetic findings, along with dozens of photographs from the wild provided by photographers Duane Starr and Diane Seaman of Alberta, and information collectively gathered and/or observed first hand by Victoria Tollman of CRSG and Darrell Glover of HAW, were presented to the Board of Trustees at the Equus Survival Trust, a rare breed conservation nonprofit.

After careful review, the EST Trustees believe the Wildies' conformation, uniformity in type, and ability to breed true qualifies them to be studied further as a possible landrace breed of historic significance, and as such have placed the Alberta Wildie on the 2016 Equus Survival Trust Equine Conservation Priority List under a "Study" category. Dr. Cothran's team will do further research and publish a full report of their findings in the future.

For more information on the conservation efforts for the Alberta Wildies contact:

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<https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=help%20alberta%20wildies>