

Park plans auction of feral horses

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Courtesy Photo Theodore Roosevelt National Park is auctioning off 10 feral horses, including two foals Stockman's Livestock Exchange in Dickinson at 11 a.m. today.

Individuals interested in owning a piece of Theodore Roosevelt National Park can't necessarily buy land in the park, but today you can buy a horse from the park.

Today at Stockmen's Livestock Exchange in Dickinson, 10 horses, including two foals from TRNP, are scheduled to be auctioned off at 11 a.m.

"The horses we are selling Tuesday are tamer than the park's typical horses," TRNP superintendent Valerie Naylor said. "They should be the easiest to handle and most trainable of the park's feral horses."

The reason the park chose these horses was because they had been inhabiting the area in and in the immediate vicinity of Cottonwood Campground in the South Unit of the park.

Due to the safety and infrastructure risk associated with the horses being near the campground, the park made the decision to remove them from the area and auction them off.

“This band of horses has been staying close to Cottonwood Campground for the last few years,” said Naylor. “They are accustomed to people, and often come to close to visitors who may not realize that they are not tame. For that reason, they may be good horses for someone who is willing to take the time to train them.”

Typically the park only sells horses following a horse roundup, which is held when the park feral horse population exceeds 80 head. The park’s management goal stands at 50-80 horses in the park.

The park tries to manage the herd so those horse which have the traditional painted look of wild horses stay with the herd for visitors to see.

This year, instead of using a group of horses or helicopter to round up this small band of horses, the park utilized a new technique.

“We are experimenting with new, specialized techniques,” Naylor said. “Most of the staff now have been introduced to the low stress livestock handling method. Although we don’t expect to eliminate the need to use a helicopter for horse roundups, this method worked well for this group of horses due to their habituation to humans.”

The low stress method depends on one person on a horse and he or she directs the group in where to go.

Naylor hopes the auction at Stockmen’s sees a good turnout and feels the horses could be put to good use if someone took the time to train them.

“If someone takes the time to train them they’ll make good horses for someone, plus there are two foals,” Naylor said. “...Because these horses aren’t as skittish I think people would have pretty good luck with them if they are willing to give them a try.”