

Protocol for Retirement of Horses
MSU College of Agriculture (COA), Montana Agricultural Experiment Station
(MAES), and Department of Animal and Range Sciences (A&RS)
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Background: Pleasure and work horses have a rich heritage in Montana. The MSU Equine Science Program is dedicated to advancing practical and research-based knowledge to students and the community. Horses are housed at the MSU Equine Unit (Towne Farm), Red Bluff Research Ranch near Norris, MT, MAES Northern Agricultural Research Center near Havre, MT and Fort Keogh Range and Livestock Laboratory near Miles City, MT. At the MSU Equine Unit, the horses include a university-owned string for Equitation and Equine Science classes, student horses that are boarded, private horses brought in on a daily basis for the MSU Horseshoeing School, and rodeo horses. Horses at the research stations are strictly used for handling livestock. All horses boarded or brought onto MSU Farm Units are managed under two A&RS policies that provide for humane and ethical management of horses. First, all MSU employees handling or feeding livestock and horses must be certified in the “*Agricultural Animal Care Training Program*” (approved by MSU’s Agricultural Animal Care and Use Committee in May 2003). Second, “*Protocols for Animals Brought to MSU Farm Units*” (March 2003) describes the health inspection documents and vaccinations required for all horses. In addition to these policies, liability waivers and information agreements are signed between MSU and Equitation students, boarders, owners of horses in the Horseshoeing School and horse donors.

Purpose: The purpose of this protocol is to define the retirement or “end-of-use” practices to be followed for horses owned by MSU (COA, MAES). The active lifespan of all horses is dictated by their use. Specifically, constant and strenuous work is required by all horses used for equitation classes, and horse temperament is closely monitored for novice and intermediate students. *From a practical standpoint, all MSU horses should be retired before their age, injury, illness or behavioral problems preclude their MSU uses in equitation classes, Equine Science instruction or ranch work.* This protocol will be the standard for dispersing horses owned by MSU; it is designed to be consistent with State of Montana property regulations and the humane treatment of horses.

Protocol: All horses are monitored daily for health and well-being. Whether a horse should be dispersed will be decided jointly among the Equitation Manager (or ranch manager), the Department Head, and the consulting veterinarian to MSU. With unusual events, the Department Head will notify the COA Dean who will notify appropriate individuals. MSU does not intend to generate excess revenue from the results of this policy; any monies collected will be deposited in the equine program designated account. The following stepwise protocol will be followed:

1. *Sale: “Sound” horses that are still able to be ridden, but are not suitable for equitation classes or ranch uses are to be sold.* The horse(s) will be ridden through a sale arena at a nearby auction for riding horses. If no timely auctions are available, then sale notices including descriptions and photographs will be

advertised on the websites of the MSU Extension Equine Program (<http://animalrangeextension.montana.edu/equine/>), MSU Surplus (<http://www.montana.edu/surplus/>), and other cost-effective advertisements. All sales will be on a “restricted-bid” basis, with the minimum bid set at \$200 above current average “loose horse” prices.

2. *Adoption: All horses deemed to be unsuitable for sale as a riding horse or not sold (in #1 above) will be considered for adoption.* Accurate descriptions of these horses will be posted to the websites (above) and in print format for Montana horse adoption agencies. Individual adoptions will occur on a “first-come-first-served” basis in cooperation with the adoptive agency and MSU. A \$200 adoption fee is required, and recipients of adoptive horses will sign appropriate waiver of liability forms. All transportation, veterinarian and feed costs subsequent to the adoption are the responsibility of the recipient.
3. *Euthanasia: Horses severely injured, untreatably ill, or unsuitable for sale or adoption will be euthanized following the Euthanasia Guidelines from the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP, 1995).* The AAEP criteria are: a) is the condition chronic and incurable?, b) is the immediate condition a hopeless prognosis for life?, c) is the horse a hazard to itself, other animals or its handlers?, and d) will the horse require continuous medication for the relief of pain for the remainder of its life? Immediately upon diagnosing a horse in one or more of these conditions, the Equine Manager (or ranch manager), Department Head and consulting veterinarian will decide the most appropriate action based on medical grounds. Horses will be euthanized by a third-party veterinarian using approved and ethical methods as described by the American Veterinary Medical Association (as cited in 2002 *NIH Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee Guidebook*, <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/olaw/GuideBook.pdf>). Carcasses will be disposed of promptly and properly by transport to a local landfill.