

Redford joins fight against horse slaughter - Valley Meat claims it is unfairly targeted

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SANTA FE — Former Gov. Bill Richardson and actor and director Robert Redford are teaming up to oppose a **horse** slaughterhouse in New Mexico, the first effort of their new animal-protection foundation.

The Foundation to Protect New Mexico Wildlife has joined a pending federal lawsuit by animal protection groups challenging the U.S. Department of Agriculture's permitting of a slaughterhouse in Roswell.

“ **Horse slaughter** has no place in our culture. It is cruel, inhumane, and perpetuates abuse and neglect of these beloved animals,” Redford, who lives in New Mexico part time, said in a statement issued Monday.

The proposal by Valley Meat Co. to begin slaughtering horses next month was dealt a setback by state regulators on Monday when the Environment Department said it wouldn't renew the company's wastewater discharge permit without a public hearing. The agency said it had received more than 450 comments in opposition to the slaughterhouse.

Valley Meat Co. attorney Blair Dunn said the plant can still open but would have to haul its waste. He said the state agency was unfairly targeting a small family-owned business.

Also on Monday, Attorney General Gary King said he has asked the U.S. District Court to allow the state to intervene in the same federal lawsuit. He argues that because there was no federal environmental review of the Roswell slaughterhouse, there is a risk to the state's environmental quality and public health.

The USDA issued a permit at the end of June to the Roswell company, which proposes to kill horses and process the meat for export. According to the lawsuit, at least five other permit applications have been submitted in other states. At least one other, for a slaughterhouse in Sigourney, Iowa, has been approved.

The proposed resumption of domestic **horse slaughter** — the first since 2007 — has sparked debate, with proponents saying it's preferable to shipping horses to Mexico or Canada for **slaughter** and opponents arguing there's no way to humanely kill the animals or ensure the safety of **horse** meat.

“Congress was right to ban the inhumane practice years ago, and it is unfathomable that the federal government is now poised to let it resume,” Richardson said in a statement.

Richardson, a Democrat who was governor from 2003 to 2010, rides horses and appeared on horseback — in a “new lawman in town” spoof — in a 2006 re-election TV ad. His animal advocacy includes signing a cockfighting ban and helping to persuade the National Institutes of Health to halt medical testing on chimpanzees, many of them housed in Alamogordo.

He has joined forces with Redford before. In 2009, they announced a collaboration between Redford and the state to expand training opportunities for Native American and Hispanic filmmakers.

Their new foundation also will focus on preservation and protection of New Mexico's wild mustang and burro population, the Mexican gray wolf and the bison; the reintroduction of native fish and mammal species; and the support of animal shelters and animal cruelty prevention.

The announcement from Richardson's office said it's "a natural extension" of decades of animal advocacy and conservation work by the two men.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

REDFORD: Says **horse slaughter** is inhumane KING: There is a risk to N.M. public health RICHARDSON: Congress ban was right