

BOZEMAN DAILY CHRONICLE

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A TIME FOR FISH



Superb fish recipes for Lent (and the rest of the year)

HOMESTYLE | PAGE C3

Second opinion: Owner's veterinarian says horses are healthy

By **GAIL SCHONTZLER**
Chronicle Staff Writer

After a local veterinarian complained that two horses kept at Montana State University's research farm were in bad shape and suffering, a second veterinarian examined the horses Tuesday and concluded that they are in "overall good health."

Dr. Stacie Boswell, who works with the Hardaway Veterinary Hospital in Belgrade, examined the two gelding quarter horses, Smoky, 5, and Blue, 11, at the request of their owner, Tom Groneberg, MSU livestock op-

"The horses are completely normal and healthy. There's no neglect."

— **Dr. Stacie Boswell,**
Hardaway Veterinary Hospital

erations manager.

"The horses are completely normal and healthy," Boswell said. "There's no neglect."

MSU released a letter by Boswell, who refuted complaints made by veterinarian Dr. Sid Gustafson. He charged that the horses didn't have adequate food or water when he saw them Thursday and Friday, and

the fact they'd been eating bark off of trees showed they were "clearly underfed."

Boswell disagreed.

"Both are in good condition with both having a healthy body condition score of five out of nine," which is in the normal range, she wrote. "(T)heir energy requirements are being met, as evidenced by their normal body condition score and their overall health. ... In my opinion, the food, water and tree shelter that Blue and Smoky have access to is adequate medically."

Boswell wasn't critical that the issue had been raised.

"Last but not least, citizen re-

ports to assess horse care are necessary and well-intentioned," she wrote. "As I told Mr. Groneberg, I would much rather see horses that are cared for than miss horses that are in need of assistance."

Groneberg could not be reached for comment. MSU spokesman Michael Becker said Boswell isn't associated with the university in any way.

Boswell wrote that the horses had no visible wounds, injuries, lameness, parasites or other problems, that their hooves were in excellent condition, and they had normal hair coats to protect them from winter weather.

"They are in good body

condition, and are otherwise apparently healthy," she wrote.

Gustafson had submitted photos to the Chronicle showing a few inches of dirty water in the horses' trough, which he complained was too hot to drink because of the heater that keeps the water from freezing.

His other photos showed the horses' hay covered with a lot of manure, and trees where the horses had eaten off the bark. He argued that in severe cold weather, horses need a lot of forage to stay healthy and generate heat, and what they had was inadequate.

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Horses/*from C1*

Gustafson rated their overall body condition at four.

After Gustafson's visit, Groneberg put out a round bale of hay for the horses. Boswell wrote that in her medical opinion, horses don't need access to a round bale of hay at all times. It allows the horse to eat as much as it wants, ensuring enough calories, but can lead to obesity and related health problems, and owners may not check on their horses every day.

Gustafson said he had recommended not a round bale, but that the horses have 24-hour access to high-quality hay, spread out around the pasture so they could forage. He also recommended a three-sided shelter.

Boswell said her only suggestion was that perhaps a shelter should be available. The large tree in the horse pen provides shelter from snow and wind, and while it may not be ideal, it is adequate, she said, adding she has seen horses prefer a tree to a shelter.

If the horses were eat-

ing snow, that's normal behavior, she said. And the fact that the horses had eaten the bark off trees was also normal. They nibble on things all the time, Boswell said.

On the nine-point horse body condition scale, a one means emaciated, and seven, eight and nine are obese, she said. Four, five and six are the normal range.

Boswell said she earned her veterinary medicine doctorate at the Virginia-Maryland Regional College in 2009. After graduation she sought specialty training and board certification from the American College of Veterinary Surgeons. She has worked in equine medicine and surgery in North Carolina, New York, Tennessee and New Mexico.

Gustafson said he earned his veterinary medicine doctorate at Washington State University in 1979. He formerly served as equine studies coordinator at the University of Montana-Western, taught equine behavior at the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada, and has written a blog on racehorses for the New York Times and several novels.

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CALLING WORKS

A person who got a new iPhone called 911 while figuring out how to call 911 to see if it would actually go through. It did. **POLICE REPORTS | PAGE A7**



Vet charges horses kept at MSU were starving

By **GAIL SCHONTZLER**
Chronicle Staff Writer

A local veterinarian charges that two horses kept at Montana State University's research farm weren't adequately fed or watered during last week's sub-zero temperatures, which left the animals starving, suffering and at risk of dying.

Dr. Sid Gustafson, 63, a veterinarian for nearly 40 years, said Monday that he noticed the horses when he drove past last Thursday. The horses had stripped the bark off of trees trying to get enough to eat, and they "had a posture of resigned helplessness."

MSU responded Monday that the horses don't belong to the

university but are the personal property of the MSU livestock manager, who is allowed to board them at the Bozeman Agriculture Research and Teaching farm.

"We believe these animals are in excellent condition and health and are being properly cared for," said Michael Becker, university spokesman. "MSU people see them all the time. They're fed high-quality feed supplements, they have unlimited access to clean water."

Gustafson called that a "misrepresentation" of what he had seen and photographed.

"They had no potable water for two days and were clearly underfed," he said. "Those trees don't lie."

Tom Groneberg, MSU live-

"We believe these animals are in excellent condition and health and are being properly cared for."

stock manager, could not be reached for comment.

Gustafson said he stopped Thursday and found the horses didn't have enough hay to eat, stay healthy or generate heat in severe cold. The hay they did have was inadequate and filled with their feces.

Gustafson charged their water trough held filthy, undrinkable water. The water level was so low, the heater inserted to keep trough water from freezing had made it too hot to drink. The horses resorted to eating snow, he said, which made it even harder for them to stay warm.

— Michael Becker, MSU spokesman

"We could count all their ribs, which means they had no fat under their skin," he said. "They were dehydrated. Their eyes were sunken."

The veterinarian said he tried to find someone at the equine center, off Stucky Road near South 19th Avenue, to feed and water the horses, but had no luck.

"Without water, that's one of the worst deaths for horses," he said.

Friday morning at daylight Gustafson stopped by again and the horses still hadn't been fed and watered. There was a blue bucket put out with some

supplemental feed, he said, but it was inadequate because in cold weather horses need forage 16 to 20 hours a day.

Gustafson said he tried in vain to find someone in charge of the horses. He finally called the Bozeman Police Department, which referred him to MSU Police. Officer Thomas Bonnell came out, saw the conditions and took his report. Groneberg then showed up.

"Within an hour they were fed properly and the water was restored," Gustafson said. "Tom pretty much got the message — the water had to be filled two times a day and they can never be without high quality forage. Better late than never."

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Horses/*from A3*

A copy of the MSU police officer's report was requested by the Chronicle, but hasn't yet been released.

Gustafson said he's concerned to see the person in charge of taking care of MSU livestock doing such a "horrible" job, at a farm that's supposed to be a showcase, where students are learning the ethical treatment of animals.

He said this is part of a history of animal insensitivity at MSU. He recalled an incident in 2002, when nine MSU horses died of dehydration because a creek dried up at the Fort Ellis Research Farm. He cited a 2016 report that infections had killed two monkeys used in brain research at MSU.

MSU needs better protocols, better supervision

of the people who oversee animals, and should hire an animal ethicist, Gustafson said.

"MSU takes animal safety very seriously," Becker said. "In past situations where problems have come up, MSU has taken steps to correct those problems promptly, and we work with the appropriate agencies to ensure" proper care.

Becker said MSU staff who work with horses say that giving horses feed at all times is not a uniform practice. If they're not being heavily worked, horses need to eat only 2 to 3 percent of body weight for maintenance, he said, and overfed horses can become overweight or develop diseases.

"It bordered on cruelty," Gustafson said. "They're fed now. That's all I'm really concerned about."