



## NEWS RELEASE

Texas Animal Health Commission  
"Serving Texas Animal Agriculture Since 1893"  
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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# Smuggled Horses in West Texas Found to be Diseased

AUSTIN – U.S. Border Patrol agents recently seized 10 adult horses and four yearlings as they attempted to enter Texas illegally by walking across the Rio Grande River near Indian Hot Springs, in southern Hudspeth county, south of El Paso. The animals were turned over to the United States Department of Agriculture, Animal Plant Health Inspection Service, Veterinary Service (USDA/APHIS/VS) officials, who tested the horses in Presidio, Texas for a number of disease conditions that are considered foreign to the U.S. All 10 of the adult animals tested positive for Equine Piroplasmiasis (EP). EP is routinely found in Mexico and numerous other countries around the world, but is not considered to be endemic to the U.S. The blood borne protozoal disease can be fatal to horses and could create major constraints to interstate and international movements if left undetected. EP does not affect humans.

According to Dr. Grant Wease, field veterinarian for USDA/APHIS/VS in El Paso, the illegal movement of animals is an ongoing concern in the vast open spaces of West Texas. "In some places the Rio Grande poses no barrier at all to foot traffic for man or animal." According to the latest USDA information, Dr. Wease indicated that "In 2011, approximately 280 head of cattle and 160 head of equine (primarily horses) were intercepted by USDA officials along the Rio Grande." To further complicate the situation, many of the normal import process for livestock entering Texas have been impacted by border violence, making the attempt to smuggle animals into the state even more tempting.

The investigation by USDA and Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) is ongoing to determine not only the source of the horses, but the possible destination as well. The TAHC recently passed EP rules requiring testing of race horses prior to entry into a Texas track, and numerous other states have done the same because of recent cases found in that population of horses. "Racing Quarter horses with some connection to Mexico appear to be at highest risk of testing positive to the emerging disease," according to Dr. Dee Ellis, State Veterinarian and TAHC Executive Director. Although the interdicted horses were described as Thoroughbreds, they were considered to be more likely breeding type animals rather than race ready horses. Dr. Ellis went on to state, "This situation highlights the ongoing border security problems Texas is facing, which leads to an increased risk of disease introduction for the Texas livestock population when animals enter our state illegally. I encourage all citizens that witness unusual activity regarding livestock movement near the Mexican border to contact their local law enforcement or animal health officials as quickly as possible to report the situation."

The TAHC strives to provide quality customer service to the citizens of Texas and works with its USDA partners daily to protect Texas livestock and poultry from foreign animal diseases. With limited state and federal resources however, the two agencies must continually review ongoing surveillance efforts along the border to ensure their actions are as effective as possible.

For more information contact the TAHC at 1-800-550-8242 or online at <http://www.tahc.state.tx.us> .

Founded in 1893, the TAHC works to protect the health of all Texas livestock including cattle, swine, poultry, sheep, goats, equine animals and exotic livestock.

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