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U.S. Department of the
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Cape Lookout National Seashore News Release

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2003 Findings Report on the Shackleford Banks Horses

Federal legislation passed in 1998 protects the horses within Cape Lookout National Seashore and requires an annual report on the status of the herd. The horses are cooperatively managed by the National Park Service and the Foundation for Shackleford Horses, Inc., pursuant to this legislation and a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 1999.

In January 2003, there were 140 horses on the island. These horses arranged themselves into approximately 24 harems and 5 bachelor bands; the number of harems has increased slightly since 2000 relative to the population.

The partial roundup in January 2003 gathered 131 horses; 20 were removed. Five removals were adult females; they joined their six herd members (removed during earlier roundups) in the nearby wild herd near Cedar Island. The others are in the process of being adopted to the public by the Foundation.

Height data collected at the roundup showed that adults averaged 48 inches (12 hands) at the withers (between neck and back). Foals of 2002 averaged 41 inches (10.1 hands).

Twenty-one foals were born on Shackleford Banks in 2002. Eleven of these were born to mares who had received birth control during pregnancy. Gestation in horses is 11 months. The birth control is giving these 11 mothers a break from gestation this year while they nurse their foals. Research has shown that mares who receive birth control-induced rest periods live longer than those who produce foals at every opportunity.

The summer of 2002 was the second year of Porcine Zonae Pellucidae (PZP) immunocontraceptive effect. None of the 19 mares contracepted in the field during the spring of 2001 tested pregnant or foaled in 2002.

PZP had also been administered in the spring of 2002 to 40 mares. These mares were chosen, as before, with their contribution to the herd in mind and with the help of genetics and horse behavior scientists. None of these mares tested pregnant. Twenty-one mares were not contracepted; approximately 10 foals are expected from these mares in 2003.

Mortality was 1% in 2002 with one death. Two horses have died in 2003. A 7-year-old stallion died of a twisted intestine and a 22-year-old mare died of old age.

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A roundtable meeting in October 2002 included scientist-advisors and Congressman Walter B. Jones' staff along with the park and Foundation. The resulting management strategy will keep the herd ranging between 110 and 130 horses. The next roundup is scheduled for the winter of 2004-2005.

For further information, contact Dr. Sue Stuska, Wildlife Biologist – Horses, at Cape Lookout National Seashore, (252) 728-2250, ext. 3017, or Carolyn S. Mason, Chairman and President, Foundation for Shackleford Horses, Inc., (252) 728-6437 / 6308.

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