

Citing starvation and neglect, officials seize 87 horses from ranch in Sweet

Owner says action motivated by state plans to build highway

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BOISE – Authorities seized 87 horses from a ranch in Sweet this week, claiming the animals were underfed and neglected.

Idaho Humane Society spokeswoman Dee Fugit said the horses, owned by Paul and Karen Shay, had no access to vegetation and were standing in mud up to their knees, eating their own feces to survive.

"They had nothing," Fugit said. "Nothing."

But the Shays claim that the animals were well fed and that the seizure is a political scheme to force the couple off their 76 acres.

"When you've got 90 head of horses you're going to have a few thin horses," Paul Shay said.

Shay said he thinks the horses were taken to pressure the couple into selling their property along Butte Road so it can be used for Gov. Dirk Kempthorne's proposal to extend Idaho 16 through Gem County to Valley County.

"The truth is they're putting a four-lane highway through Sweet," Shay said. "The highway is going to go right through my place."

Gem County Sheriff Clint Short said his office was alerted to the horses' condition on Monday when someone called to complain the animals were not being fed. A deputy and the state veterinarian both went to the property to examine the animals, he said.

Shay said he plans to hire an attorney and will fight to get the horses back.

"There's no reason to take all those animals," Shay said. "They came and wiped us out. More than 14 years work and they took it all."

In the meantime, Fugit said, the horses that require medical treatment will stay at the Idaho Humane Society Rescue Ranch in Boise and the rest will stay at a ranch in Gem County, where they will begin a monitored feeding regimen to regain their health.

Many of the animals allegedly suffered from eye problems, were covered with burrs and had severely overgrown hooves, she said.

The Shays are expected to be formally charged next week, Short said.