

**TRANSCRIPT****INTERVIEWEE:** Dave Philipps**INTERVIEWER:** David Todd**DATE:** January 26, 2022**LOCATION:** Colorado Springs, Colorado, remotely recorded**TRANSCRIBER:** Trint, David Todd**SOURCE MEDIA:** MP3 audio file**REEL:** 4088**FILE:**

Mustang\_Philipps\_Dave\_ColoradoSpringsCO\_26January2022\_Reel4088\_NoiseFiltered.mp3

**David Todd** [00:00:01] Well, good morning. My name is David Todd, and I'm with Dave Philipps, and with his permission, my plan is to record our interview today for research and educational work on behalf of a nonprofit group called the Conservation History Association of Texas, and for a book and a website for Texas A&M University Press, and finally for preservation and access at an archive at the Briscoe Center for American History, which is hosted at the University of Texas at Austin. And Mr. Philipps would have all equal rights to use the recording as well. And so that's our intention and I just wanted to make sure that, you know, agreeable to him. What do you think?

**Dave Philipps** [00:00:52] That sounds good to me. Thanks.

**David Todd** [00:00:54] Okay. Well, good.

**David Todd** [00:00:55] Well, it is, let's see, Wednesday, January 26th, 2022. It's a little after 10:00 in the morning, Central Time. My name is David Todd and I am representing the Conservation History Association of Texas, and I am based in Austin. And we're very fortunate to be conducting a remote interview with Mr. Philipps, who is based in the Colorado Springs, Colorado area. Mr. Philipps is a Pulitzer Prize winning writer who has worked as a reporter for The Gazette in Colorado Springs and is a national correspondent for The New York Times. He is also a author. He's produced the book "Alpha, Eddie Gallagher and The War for the Soul of Navy SEALs". And for our focus on wildlife, his book, "Wild Horse Country: The History, Myth and Future of the Mustang", which appeared on bookshelves in 2017, is, of course, of special interest.

**David Todd** [00:02:04] So today we'll talk about his life and career to-date and especially work on understanding better his, his efforts to explain the controversies over mustangs in the United States.

**David Todd** [00:02:19] So with that, I'd just like to start with a question about your childhood and if there might have been any people who were a big influence, or events for that matter, in your interest in writing generally and then also writing about animals?

**Dave Philipps** [00:02:41] Yeah, I grew up in Colorado Springs, and both of my parents were essentially from New York, and they had moved out here in the early '70s, and my father, who was a really sharp man, a Fulbright scholar and a Ph.D. from Brown, he really, like, spent his life being a student of the West after they moved out here, and to him, that meant that we had a 1972 orange VW bus. And both my parents were teachers, and so they had most of their summers off. And he would just put us in that bus every summer and we would go all around the West and the national parks and historic sites and Indian reservations. And it was really

sort of a first-hand field education about the West - you know, both its beauty, its people, its culture. And I think that that really stuck with me.

**Dave Philipps** [00:03:50] I grew up in the West, but I don't know if I was really ever a member of it. You know, in a way, because I was in a family full of Easterners, we were ex-pats that just happened to live in this country. And so I don't know if I so much am interested in writing about animals as I am in writing about the West and where we fit into it and how our history shapes the land and how the land shapes our history.

**Dave Philipps** [00:04:23] And horses were so deeply embedded in our experience of the West. And when I say, "our", I mean, the Mexican and Spanish cultures, the indigenous cultures, and also the American European cultures that all collided here. All were shaped, you know, intimately, inextricably, by the horse. And so these horses that we still have are a legacy of that. And to understand the animals today is to try to understand the people, the values and the land of previous generations.

**David Todd** [00:05:02] That's really interesting. I think that, you know, our modern-day civilization is so based on wheels and, and mechanical things that that maybe it's easy to forget how important, you know, four hooves and, you know, horseflesh were for previous, previous times. And I guess there's a big sort of carry-forward of that, that culture that's so deeply embedded.

**Dave Philipps** [00:05:31] You can think of it, it's hard to think about it this way now, but think of the horse as a technology, a new technology, that was suddenly given to certain cultures. So the native people of North America didn't have horses until they had contact with the, uh, with the Spanish. And they, as soon as they were able to understand what the technology was, it was so attractive that it, it spread almost universally to every culture in the West.

**Dave Philipps** [00:06:05] And the technology was this, if you take the actual animal out of it, it was the ability to turn land into energy, you know, to turn grass into muscle, into speed, into strength, something that, that these people had never had, really. And it, within a couple of generations totally transformed their cultures.

**Dave Philipps** [00:06:27] And if you think about it, you mentioned roads and wheels - it's, those are different technologies that are essentially delivering the same promise, right? How do we cover space faster? How do we put more, you know, have more strength to give to our, our motion, our small, insignificant bodies? And so the horse was, was transformational for them, you know, as was it for the Spanish and the Americans coming from the East, but it was not so abrupt. So it's harder to see that transformation. But, but, you know, very quickly, the horse was so powerful in the open and spread-out, arid West that it became everything to, to indigenous cultures.

**David Todd** [00:07:18] Well, and so it sounds like your, your parents, and that bus, were an introduction to the West and of course, the horse being a big part of that.

**David Todd** [00:07:32] Maybe you can talk also about your formal education as you got older. I understand that you went back to the East Coast, went to Middlebury, took an environmental studies degree, and then later graduated from the Columbia University School of Journalism. In that phase of your life, did, did you find some influences in your goal to become a writer and a storyteller about, you know, various topics, but including the horse?

**Dave Philipps** [00:08:03] I had known that I wanted to be a writer for a long time, probably very early in high school, and I didn't really know how that would work. Certainly, there were a lot of people that I admired - John McPhee, Edward Abbey, people who wrote about the West. And, you know, in a way they were doing what my, my father had had taught me to do. They were going on field trips to see the people, the history, the land of the West. The only difference was they were writing about it and somehow making a living doing it. And to me, that was a really attractive idea, and I didn't know how that might work until I fell into the idea of journalism. And of course, it probably seems obvious to you that that what John McPhee or other narrative nonfiction book writers were doing is journalism. But, but to me, as a young man, it didn't.

**Dave Philipps** [00:09:04] And then I was fortunate to have breakfast once with a really great Western writer, a man who recently died named Barry Lopez. And I had been a big admirer of his work, and I had just graduated college and I told him, "You know, I'm thinking of getting an MFA in creative writing because I want to do what you do, and I really admire what you and others like you do. So I've applied to different schools, and that's what I hope my future is."

**Dave Philipps** [00:09:34] And he nodded very sagely and said, "You know, I did the exact same thing, you know, decades ago, and I got to the creative writing school and everyone was sitting around talking about what good writing was and critiquing each other's writing. And no one was actually producing any writing that anyone ever wanted to read." And I had suffered through enough undergraduate creative writing workshops that I kind of knew what that meant. And it was obvious to me that he had figured out the problem because he was, you know, a well-regarded writer who had gotten to travel and learn and write.

**Dave Philipps** [00:10:10] And I said, "OK, so what did you do?" And he said, "I quit the creative writing program after about two weeks and I joined the journalism program." And sort of a light went off in my head and I said, "Wait a minute, what this guy does is journalism. You know, it may be in book form and not newspaper form, but, but that's what it is." And I thought, "Great, how do I get into journalism?".

**Dave Philipps** [00:10:36] And the, the short answer was that Columbia Journalism, Columbia University's journalism school that is one-year school. And I thought, "Well, that seems manageable." And I was probably on the lower end of the spectrum of the people that they would normally accept. But I had the advantage of coming from a square state out in the West, and I get the feeling that most of their applicants are from cities in the East. And so they took me.

**Dave Philipps** [00:11:04] And I learned a lot and I went from, after one year there in 2001-2002, I started working for my hometown newspaper where I had been a paper boy, you know, years before, and I essentially spent 10 years writing a story every day, at least, and most of them were bad. I was easily a B-minus journalist if, if I'm being generous and most of them were forgettable and probably were, were thrown in the trash shortly after they were published.

**Dave Philipps** [00:11:40] But that was really helpful to me because 10 years of doing daily journalism taught me how to write. It winnowed out some of the bad habits, both in writing and reporting, in thinking about what important stories are. And you know, it introduced me to little bits of success that I then learned to replicate and build on, and, and really made me what I am.

**Dave Philipps** [00:12:07] And I'm really fortunate. I think that probably writers who are a little younger than me (I'm 44) won't have as much of that chance to be in a newsroom because newsrooms have shrunk so much. And the news, the newspaper business, is just a shred of what it was. But to be in a room full of other people who are also writing and to have your writing, both be consequential because, you know, maybe 100,000 people are going to read it the next day, but also temporary. You know, the newspaper is going to be recycled shortly after everyone reads it. So you don't have to produce art, you just have to tell people what happened. That was very freeing and a heck of a fun place to learn to do that, that craft.

**David Todd** [00:12:56] That's, that's really great, I mean, the opportunity to both practice and exercise and test your skills, but, but know that there's, there's not a huge penalty for mistakes because, you know, tomorrow's a new day and yesterday's news is is maybe, you know, fading. That's, that's a, I guess, a good way to learn.

**Dave Philipps** [00:13:19] It's a very Zen practice, you know, because it's, it's not about ego or permanence. You know you won't be judged on it. You know, it's just about focusing on the now. You know, it's mindfulness in a way. Right? It's just what's going on today.

**David Todd** [00:13:36] Well, so that brings me to another question, I suppose, is, it sounds like you were educated by sort of being in the culture, part of the culture, reporting on things that were happening day to day. Were there any sort of artifacts of, of the public media that were a big influence on you? Were there movies or books or TV shows that you found were influential in getting you started?

**Dave Philipps** [00:14:11] I mean, for sure. I was probably in high school, started reading The New Yorker in, and did it in a way that probably most people start reading, by first reading the cartoons and then maybe some of the shorter pieces. And that introduced me to just like the power of good writing, of writing that's, that's both really insightful, but not stuffy. To people, writers like Ian Frazier, who wrote a great book about the West called, "The Great Plains". And I just always remember thinking, like, "Man, I want to, I want to do that. Like, that guy just looks like he's really enjoying himself and learning at the same time. And that's fabulous."

**Dave Philipps** [00:15:01] And you know, by the time I was through school, like, through college, I realized I didn't want to stick around there and be an academic. I almost wanted to do, you know, the learning without the meetings. You know, I didn't want to have to, I didn't want to have to teach kids, and I didn't want to have to go to faculty meetings. I just wanted to do the cool research that that some of the professors that I most admired did or the writers that I admired did.

**Dave Philipps** [00:15:30] And like journalism seemed like a way to do that. For me, it was a way to stay on, you know, get paid to do field trips, you know? And I had been, I think I was just naturally, predisposed to want to do that, because if you think about it, it's a really weird thing to do to want to do journalism, to write about things that you know nothing about, to walk into rooms where you know no one and start asking questions of the people there who you don't know. And sometimes they are questions that are very pointed and maybe questions that their own family has never even asked them.

**Dave Philipps** [00:16:10] That's strange. It's not quite pathological, but it's certainly eccentric. And the people that want to do it are a certain breed of people. But I just, I've been doing it my whole life. I'd never been, I mentioned that I was sort of an expatriate in my own

community in Colorado. I had never been central to anything. I'd never wanted to join anything. I'd never been the captain of a sports team or a member of a church or really a member of anything. I was interested in stuff, but I was always on the edge of the room looking at communities that were not my own. And, and that probably just set me up to do journalism because that's now what I do for a living.

**David Todd** [00:16:56] It sounds like you were almost an anthropologist, that you're sort of a student and witness and observer.

**Dave Philipps** [00:17:02] I feel very lucky to be like that, without having to do all the, the academic jargon. I can just deliver it to you the next day.

**David Todd** [00:17:12] Well, and maybe you can talk a little bit about this of sort of practice of delivering stories and news. You've worked as a correspondent for The New York Times and earlier as a reporter for the Colorado Springs Gazette and also an author. You know, can you talk about your, your early days of, of, maybe we can start with your early days at the Times, since you spoke a little bit about the Gazette and being in the newsroom there. You know this, it must be a wonderful opportunity to work at the old gray lady. That's the, you know, record for so much of what happens in the world. What is it like there? How have you found it?

**Dave Philipps** [00:18:00] So I got hired there in 2014. Basically, I'd spent 10 years in journalism by the time I got hired there. And I, actually had spent most of those first 10 years assuming that I was going to get laid off from journalism and have to go do something else, because that's what was going on in, in small and medium towns all over the country. The newsroom that I came into when I first got hired was 125 people, and when I left, it was, I think, 61.

**Dave Philipps** [00:18:35] I never assumed that I was going to climb very high up in journalism, which was actually really helpful, because then I was free to do whatever I thought was important. And during that time, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were really impacting my community because we have a big army base there called Fort Carson. And tens of thousands of soldiers were going back and forth on deployments and really being impacted. And oftentimes the way they were being affected by combat, it was not recognized by the military or our community. And so I started writing a lot about that. I thought it was important. I cared about those people. And I didn't have to worry that, about what the consequences were because I was going to get laid off anyway.

**Dave Philipps** [00:19:24] And those stories got some attention. I was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for a series of them in 2009, and I won the Pulitzer Prize in 2014 for another series. And that got the attention of the Times. They called me up and said, "Hey, do what you're doing for the Gazette, but do it for us." And for a small-time journalist that's like getting called up by the Yankees. You know, you don't say, "No", you just, you just go and go to the big leagues.

**Dave Philipps** [00:19:55] And I, I kind of did the same thing. And someone explained this to me. Actually, it was a photographer at the Times, explained it to me, but they were right. Said, "You know, what we do here, is we find the little story that tells the big story." Because, you know, if you're covering a whole nation like my job at the Gazette, or excuse me, at the New York Times, is to write about the military and veterans. Well, the military on its own, is, is active duty is more than two million people, and then there's many more million veterans. So

there's no way that one guy can do that. And so you have to sort of look around and try to tell the small stories that represent some of the larger things.

**Dave Philipps** [00:20:41] And, and that really came down to talking about people - finding the people whose lives are impacted in ways that, that represent an issue that is, is impacting many tens of thousands, or maybe hundreds of thousands, of people. And you know, whether that is how our nation is, is increasingly diverse, whether that is our changing perceptions of gender identity, you know, which in the military is a huge deal, whether that's questions about race and how history affects race. All those stories are wrapped up in things that I do, as well as war and peace and clashing of cultures. And you just are looking for, for the people that that express those stories, that live them. And you spend time with them, with a very open mind and try and listen to them and then reflect what's going on.

**David Todd** [00:21:46] You know, it's, it's wonderful, I guess the, the armed forces are such a sort of microcosm of our larger population and the changes that we're seeing in all of our communities. It's a, it must be a good beat to be on. And you've certainly done a wonderful job of covering it.

**David Todd** [00:22:09] I, I thought that we might also talk about your book about horses, which is a, you know, whole different focus, but I guess again, sort of rooted in your community in the West and going back centuries. Could, could you possibly tell us what the origins of your book, "Wild Horse Country: The History, Myth and future of the Mustang"? Where, how did that get started in your, your mind? And then once it sort of got down on paper, can you tell us about that process?

**Dave Philipps** [00:22:43] Yeah. So it started when I was a fairly young newspaper reporter at the Gazette, maybe around 2006. We got a press release from the Bureau of Land Management saying that there was going to be a mustang adoption event outside of town in on a weekend. And I was junior enough in the newsroom that I had weekend duty. I worked Saturdays. And I was always looking for some interesting story that you could do in a day, because if you're just hanging around the newsroom and you don't have something to do, some editor is going to find a really dumb parade for you to cover or some, some other story that, that just isn't very interesting. And so I got very good at not being in the newsroom.

**Dave Philipps** [00:23:26] And that looks great. You know, go cover an adoption event because quite honestly, when I saw the, the announcement, I didn't know that wild horses existed, or that you could adopt them. I mean, I figured that some small herds of wild horses existed somewhere in the West, you know, in some national park or something, but that there was an excess of them and they were up for adoption was interesting to me.

**Dave Philipps** [00:23:53] And so I went and spent the day at these corrals that were actually at a prison not too far from Colorado Springs. And when I got there, I was shocked. There was probably 500 wild horses in this, these government corrals. I didn't understand that there were so many excess horses that had been taken off the range. And I spent the day there and maybe about a dozen people came to the adoption fair. And I think about six horses got adopted. And these horses at the time were you could adopt them for \$125, you know, they were almost nothing.

**Dave Philipps** [00:24:33] And you know, at the end of the day, when the Bureau of Land Management employees were closing things up, there were still hundreds and hundreds of adopted or unadopted horses there. And I asked the obvious question, "What happens with,

with the rest of these horses?" And they said, "Well, we'll try and put them up for adoption again. And if no one adopts them, they go into long-term holding." And I said, "Well, what is long-term holding?" And what they explained to me is it's essentially a series of private cattle ranches that have been contracted out in the Midwest, in Oklahoma, mostly Kansas, the Flint Hills. And the government pays to keep those horses there until they can figure out something to do with them.

**Dave Philipps** [00:25:16] And I asked, "Well, how many horses are there now?" And at the time, 2006, there was about 6000 horses in storage, which seemed to me like an unreasonably high number. By the way, there's now about 55,000 horses in storage. And I thought, "Wow, that is just bizarre." That's bizarre, that here's this symbol of freedom in the West, that is, you know, we are paying a great deal of money to keep captive, and we wouldn't do that for any other animal. That is really interesting, and that I'm sure has something to do with, with the power and symbolism of the mustang.

**Dave Philipps** [00:26:03] Because look, I had grown up surrounded with the power and symbolism of the mustang. I caught a pop culture wise, like I caught the, the tail end of Westerns. Like, it's mostly my parents' generation that got that. But it still was all over our culture. And, you know, my elementary school - our mascot was the Mustang. It was just, it was everywhere. And so I understood that the power, the mystique of that symbol, and I thought, "You know, if I ever get a chance, I'd really like to, to tell that story."

**Dave Philipps** [00:26:41] And it wasn't, it was about 10 years later that I actually was able to publish a book on it. I got a little grant from the University of Colorado to take some time off and do some traveling around the West to look at this story and wrote it up. And by that time, the, the problem of how to manage horses in the West had just gotten worse. There were more horses in storage. There was a great deal of controversy over how to manage horses on the land. And people had very, even though we, we shared the same history, we had very different ideas of what the horses really meant and how you should manage them.

**Dave Philipps** [00:27:24] And so it was a story about horses, yes, but it was really a story about us as a nation, and how we, what we value and how we can try to protect those values.

**David Todd** [00:27:41] You know, it's, it's interesting to me to hear you talk about the, two things I'm hearing. One is the, the controversy in the second millennium, you know, the, you know, the 2000 era where you're, you're, you know, really full of controversy and conflict over what to do with these animals. But then there's the other side is this mystique this, you know, deep feeling of, I guess the symbolism for this, this animal, and that goes back centuries. And so I was hoping that maybe you can talk about that last aspect of the horse and the mustang and talk to us a little bit about the introduction of the horse to the New World, I guess, was really a reintroduction if I'm right, but, you know, back in 16th century, how did, how did the horse arrive here?

**Dave Philipps** [00:28:42] Yeah. So you're right. So the short answer is the horses arrived with the Spanish. The long and more complicated answer is that in a land like the western United States, where there were no fences at all and the land was wide open and just almost crying for an animal like the horse to populate it, it was inevitable that the horses would, would be here in some way, you know, like tumbleweed, they will find a way to come to land, that suits them.

**Dave Philipps** [00:29:17] But the first horses got loose from, from the Spanish, and very quickly native tribes, usually the ones closest to the Spanish people, like the Utes and the Apaches, learned how to use the horse. And once they learned how to use the horse, they passed it along. They bred horses, which wasn't difficult on this wide open land. And they traded horses.

**Dave Philipps** [00:29:40] And so it was only a matter of a handful of decades before the horse had spread from essentially Santa Fe to all of the West, or at least all of the open West. There are places in the Pacific Northwest with dense forest where, where the horse wasn't very useful and wasn't really embraced. Same with as you went farther East. It wasn't the transformative technology. But very soon it was, it was there.

**Dave Philipps** [00:30:09] And from, from the tribes, but also from the Spanish, and from, from American settlers,, horses got loose. And using that tumbleweed analogy, they soon spread all over the West, and there were vast, vast herds of wild horses. There are old maps of Texas, where, you know, parts of the western part of the state, it's just written over them, sort of vaguely, "wild horse desert." Because what explorers'd say is they would go out there and they would see these herds of wild horses that rivaled the herds of buffalo that we hear about: herds that you could see running on the horizon and they looked like the waves of the ocean. Herds that, if you were riding past them, might take an hour or two to pass - just millions of horses.

**Dave Philipps** [00:31:02] And those horses became for, for the people that came to the West, one of the resources that, that they used, you know, no different from, from the grass, or the timber, or the other things that, that settlers used to make their living. The horse was part of the bounty. It was there to be tamed and used if you had the grit to do it.

**Dave Philipps** [00:31:27] And because of that, it became a symbol of sort of the partner of the new American. You know, the wild horse was, was the companion of the trapper, of the cowboy, of the settler. And it took on in, in sort of the mythologizing of our stories of the West, it took on the values of America itself in a way. Because if you think about the wild horse, it's an immigrant, right? It was brought here by the Spanish. And the wild horse does not have any particular pedigree. It's not a thoroughbred. It's, it's just a scrappy immigrant that managed to carve out a life on new land.

**Dave Philipps** [00:32:14] So in a way, it's exactly like the majority of people who came to settle the West and the United States as a whole. There are people that oftentimes didn't come with much, or from much, and made who they were through their actions.

**Dave Philipps** [00:32:30] And so the horse really embodied sort of that idea that America is a place of grit and action, of liberty to carve out your own place on the land. And that really became, that idea became enshrined, that idea of like true American values of liberty and, and good morals and hard work, became enshrined in the dime novels and early Westerns that happened in the 20th century.

**Dave Philipps** [00:33:03] And in, in those stories, almost inevitably, the good guy rides a mustang. You know, his horse is a trusted companion that, that he somehow tamed and brought in from the wild. And it wasn't that the horse was overcome and subjugated. It's that the horse, somehow a wild horse, this, this free animal on the plains, somehow realized that the good guy could be trusted and so submitted to a kind of partnership.



**Dave Philipps** [00:33:38] I'll give you one example. I think that the Lone Rangers horse, Silver, in one of the tellings at least, was a wild horse who couldn't be tamed or caught. But then he was caught up in barbed wire, and it was only when the Lone Ranger untangled him and saved him that that they became partners.

**Dave Philipps** [00:33:55] And so there was that idea that, like citizenship in the United States, means trust. It means good deeds, it means hard work. And that was all tied up in the idea of, of the wild horse. The wild horse was the good guy, and he was the partner of the good guy and they would work together to make a just society.

**Dave Philipps** [00:34:15] And that's, that's kind of the background that everyone in the United States understood because it was in dime novels and Broadway plays and Hollywood movies over and over and over. It was that background that created laws that protected the wild horse. And the wild horse is one of only two animals that has specific protection laws protecting it passed by Congress. It's just the wild horse and the bald eagle. And I would argue that those are, have those two laws, because they are the symbols of our country.

**David Todd** [00:34:54] Oh, this is so, so interesting. Thank you.

**David Todd** [00:34:57] I, you know, I heard one thought that I wanted to go back to this, this story about the Lone Ranger and his taming or partnering up with his horse Silver. And I thought it was intriguing that it came by untangling the horse from barbed wire. And it sounds like one of the reasons that the mustang has gotten to the Great Basin was that there was this competition with the fencing that that was being introduced, and the livestock were being introduced, into much of the plains, as well as farming operations. Can you talk a little bit about this sort of competition between the feral horses and then the, the domestic livestock that were being introduced?

**Dave Philipps** [00:35:54] Yeah. So I should say that that myth of the West that I just talked about was really invented in the East by Easterners and, and consumed largely by people who didn't have daily contact with wild horses. But there were a lot of people in the West who did have daily contact with wild horses. And if you look at states in the West during that time, the 1890s, early part of the 20th century, they overwhelmingly saw the wild horse as a pest. They saw it as a pest because it would compete for grass with sheep and cattle, but also it would come and knock down fences and steal away domestic horses. And so to them that, that tumbleweed analogy is really apt. They saw it as, in some cases they called it the "range robber," you know, as this weed that got in the way of their, their, you know, domestic ranching and farming.

**Dave Philipps** [00:37:01] And so in Western states, pretty universally, there were programs to try and get rid of the horse. They did not see it as, as a romantic symbol for the most part. They saw it as vermin. There were bounties, of course, you know, that you might get paid by the state, or by a certain county or cattle association, for shooting horses. There were concerted round-ups to get horses off of the land and take them away. And when economically possible, they would ship them East. And those horses would end up doing all sorts of different work. They might pull streetcars in busy cities like Manhattan. They might pull plows in the South. They might end up actually going to canneries, which, which hundreds of thousands, or maybe millions, of them did.

**Dave Philipps** [00:37:56] You know, like any other part of the West, if Westerners could commodify it, ship it East and make a buck, they would. But sometimes, especially, in rough

country, it just wasn't possible. And so in in the roughest parts of the West, you know, parts of the Great Basin - Utah, Nevada, Oregon, Idaho - wild horses remained. They survived that annihilation campaign, and they stayed into the modern, modern era where, you know, effectively what happened was the myth overcame the ability of Westerners to, to resist it. And, and federal laws were passed to protect horses, saying you could no longer ship them to the cannery. And, and that, those laws, which the last one, was passed in 1971, those laws sort of started a new modern era where wild horses were a federally, federally protected species under federal management instead of under local management. And, and so we've had to sort of figure out what that federal management means.

**David Todd** [00:39:10] I guess one of the early federal programs was created under the Taylor Grazing Act, if I'm not mistaken, that opened up BLM land to, to domestic livestock and I guess put pressure on the feral horses that were already there. Is that right?

**Dave Philipps** [00:39:33] Yes, it is. I mean, the Federal Grazing Act was essentially an attempt to put a referee in place on a game that had already been being played for years without any rules - to protect people who lived on the land and had been grazing, from new people who are coming in. And once you had organization, the grazers all sort of recognized, hey, one of the things that's, that's impacting the amount of grass out here, and the amount of cattle and sheep you can produce, is the horses. And so having that federal referee was the first time that you could have a concerted effort, and some funding, to do roundups.

**Dave Philipps** [00:40:16] And so throughout the 1920s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, the Bureau of Land Management really saw the wild horse as a weed, as something that it should get rid of, because its job was to maximize the sustainability and production for domestic animals.

**David Todd** [00:40:44] So it was, I guess, trying to maybe put some, some dollars in the bottom line where these, these horses, I guess, were or not an easy thing to commodify that far West. Is that what you're getting at?

**Dave Philipps** [00:41:01] Yeah, and I think it was a different era, and there was a, there was a big recognition that, hey, if we manage things, if we organize, if we work together, we can do things better. You know, this is an era when you have clearcutting and then coming in and planting saplings in lines to, to replace those forests, which they thought was, was progress. And of course, it was because what had happened before that is no one even bothered to plant new trees after they clearcut. Right?

**Dave Philipps** [00:41:37] But they didn't recognize that that, you know, old growth forests and diverse forests have their own value. In the same way, they saw the wild horses as like a bug in the system, something that was eating grass and not feeding anybody. There was no use to it. And everybody in the BLM and everybody who had a seat at the table was white men, essentially, who produced cattle and sheep. And so they had a very specific mindset that was, "Hey, all these things are doing is stealing from our bottom line, and they are interfering with our best management practices because we can't manage them. They're wild. They don't listen to our grazing rotations or, or look at our charts about how many animals should be in each, you know, pasture for how long. They just do what they want. So we've got to get rid of them, so we can essentially put, put our domestic grazing plan into action."

**Dave Philipps** [00:42:37] And they got pretty close, I should say. By the late 1960s, the millions and millions of horses, you know, maybe about two million horses that once populated the West, they'd been winnowed down to perhaps 20 - 25,000. So there were very,

very few. And those that were there were only in in sort of the most remote places in the West: rocky, steep, dry places that really most domestic grazers had very little interest in.

**David Todd** [00:43:15] This is so curious, it sounds like a part of a, an effort to sort of rationalize and commercialize land use, you know, to make it sort of more Cartesian and predictable and really not in keeping with what a wild animal's interests might be.

**David Todd** [00:43:41] So, so maybe you can talk a little bit about the, the pushback against this. You know, I've read a little bit about some of the work of Velma Johnston. And I guess she started out with some local ordinances and then worked on state and federal campaigns to protect the mustang. And maybe you can fill us in about her role and the larger campaign that she helped build.

**Dave Philipps** [00:44:12] Velma Johnson was a secretary who had grown up in Reno, Nevada, a city, and she definitely was more of a city girl than a ranch girl, but a city that's surrounded by wild horse country. And so seeing wild horses, knowing about them, was not strange to her. It was just outside the city limits. And pretty, pretty early on in her adult life, she happened upon a bunch of horses that, that some locals had rounded up on their own and, and were hauling off to the fertilizer factory to get turned into fertilizer.

**Dave Philipps** [00:44:51] That was totally legal at the time. As, as I said, the West viewed wild horses as vermin and there was no protections against them. But what she saw was horses that were suffering, horses that had been rounded up in a way that, that really grievously injured them, and horses that, that she viewed as, as, as beautiful and the symbol of all the values that we had talked about, needlessly being hauled off to be turned into chicken feed, essentially.

**Dave Philipps** [00:45:21] And she was, it's funny, but, like, her power in, in changing policy was that she was, was a secretary by trade and she turned all her secretarial, organizational skills towards you, relentlessly typing letters to different people in power, telling them what was going on, organizing local groups of schoolchildren and, you know, library groups and really grassroots stuff to say, "Hey, we are going to lose our last mustangs if we don't do something."

**Dave Philipps** [00:45:56] And her message, which really started to spread in the 1950s, fell on a population that was primed to hear it - a population where in the 1950s, some absurd number, like one out of every four Hollywood releases was a Western, where people all knew the mythology of the West and of the wild horses, a trustworthy and noble companion. And so people who had been slaked in that culture were ready to receive this message that we have to do something, we have to save our wild horses.

**Dave Philipps** [00:46:36] And she also, her timing was perfect, because it was really during the awakening of the conservation movement in the United States, a recognition that, hey, we can't just keep exploiting all of our natural resources, because they will be gone. And so through the '50s and '60s, this idea started to spread and really became a mainstream value. And in the 1960s, you see a flurry of federal, like sweeping federal laws to protect clean air, clean water, endangered species. And in that time, Velma Johnson is building this grassroots coalition that very quickly includes thousands of people, people all over the country, and they successfully lobby Congress to protect the horse to say, treat this like an endangered species. Don't let people round these up. We need to save them before they disappear. The days of sending them to the fertilizer factory have to stop.

**Dave Philipps** [00:47:46] And in 1971, they passed a law that essentially says the BLM will take care of these horses, will manage them sustainably. And if anybody tries to round them up, or harass them in any way, or hunt them, that's a federal crime that will be prosecuted.

**David Todd** [00:48:08] You know, I think it's intriguing that, that maybe some of her, her first successes tapped into the sort of environmental movement that was really gaining steam during the '60s. And yet a lot of the tension in subsequent years has been about sort of the collateral environmental damage that these animals wreak on pretty sensitive habitat. But can you talk about that tension between the different kind of concerns that that revolve around the horse?

**Dave Philipps** [00:48:51] Right. And so it's, so it's, it's notable that the wild horse isn't included in the Endangered Species Act. It has its own law, and that's because it's not a native species. And environmentalists have really had a hard time to know what to do with the wild horse, because it is in, in, I think, the majority of their minds a feral invasive species. It's, it's kudzu. It's, it's the tumbleweed. It doesn't have a place in the native ecosystem that they want to protect and preserve.

**Dave Philipps** [00:49:29] And so except for very early on, you know, maybe in the very early '70s, the environmental community has kind of stayed out of the wild horse debate. They don't want to criticize it because, of course, this is a really charismatic animal. And so, you know, it's relatively rare that, that any major environmental group will say anything negative about the horse. But they also don't support it. It's kind of its own, it has its own activists who are not the Sierra Club or the, you know, the Nature Conservancy.

**Dave Philipps** [00:50:11] What's interesting is that there is sort of a, a group of conservationists who say, "Well, wait a minute. You know, what is a native animal, you know, and how do we decide whether an animal decides or belongs?" And what they say is, "Hey, look the wild horse evolved in North America 50 million years ago, and it thrived all over North America for that entire time and really grew, you know, carved out a niche within the native landscape." About 10,000 years ago, the wild horse disappeared. And that disappearance is really kind of a mystery. It coincides with when humans first showed up in North America. And so there's some evidence that they were hunted out by early cultures there, but it may be something else. But short story is that just like the mastodon, and the mammoth, the giant sloth, all these other animals, large mammals disappeared from North America around that time, so did the horse.

**Dave Philipps** [00:51:27] Now, unlike the mammoth, the horse is back. And a lot of the American West is not so different from it was when the horse disappeared. It's mostly dry land. It's very similar plant and animal species. And so there are ecologists that argue, "Hey, the horse has a place here, and, and we should try and understand that and work with it." I should say that that's, I think, a very minority view. But it's certainly one that has become larger in the last couple of years.

**David Todd** [00:52:13] You know, you were talking earlier about Ms. Johnston, and it sounds like aside from sort of surfing the environmental wave, she also must have tapped into people's sort of humane treatment concerns. I mean seeing these horses that had been abused in the roundups and were being taken to a slaughterhouse. And that seems a little bit apart from, from the environmental concerns about biodiversity and ecological balance, and maybe

more about, you know, how do you treat animals humanely? And can you talk a little bit about, you know, that aspect of the support for her concerns going to the current day?

**Dave Philipps** [00:53:06] You know, and I, I think we can't just say, how do we treat animals humanely, because the horse is more than, than most animals to humans. You know, there's very few animals we consider companion animals, animals that can make a really lasting and meaningful relationship with humans. But the horse is one of them. You know, because it has its own complex social structure within the herd, to a certain extent, that built a bridge between humans and horses. And it is not hard to find people who've had really meaningful relationships, working relationships, emotional relationships with horses. Right? They, they have a bond to us that's much greater than, for example, our bond with the feral hog. And we still have problems in a lot of the country with, with wild pigs. And there's no laws that protect them and they're shot all the time. So I think that that that emotional bond is, it has to be understood, and it can't, you can't just dismiss it. It is absolutely the driver between why we value horses so much and why we want them to be protected.

**David Todd** [00:54:29] That's interesting. Well, I guess it goes back to the Lone Ranger and his partner, Silver, that there's kind of a, there's a friendship there, and a working relationship, and, and I guess Velma tapped into a really deep connection that people feel to these animals. Maybe I'm...

**Dave Philipps** [00:54:48] Yeah. And I think that her connection was very real. She had horses, I think, her whole adult life and loved them, and that meant something to her.

**Dave Philipps** [00:54:57] I should say I never, I grew up around horses. I learned to ride horses. But I never owned a horse and I never had a personal relationship with a horse. So I'm only telling you this second-hand. But the number of people that I know, and have known over the years, that, that do, you know, it's a really powerful thing.

**David Todd** [00:55:18] Yeah. But I guess there is this ecological problem of, of maybe too much of a good thing. Can you talk a little bit about the, the impact on the BLM lands and actually those lands that are used for long-term storage in Kansas and Oklahoma?

**Dave Philipps** [00:55:44] Yeah. So the bottom line is, is that if you have too many grazing animals in the arid West, they're, they're going to eat everything down to the dirt. And that won't just affect those animals. It'll affect all the other animals - the lizards, the sage grouse, the butterflies, the coyotes, the mountain lions. Everything suffers if, if that foundation of grasses and shrubs is destroyed. And it's not like you can just pull horses off of that land and things will start growing back. If you, if you do the deep damage, if you ruin seed stock and root stock, it would take a long, long time to come back and there's no guarantee that, that it would ever come back in our lifetime.

**Dave Philipps** [00:56:37] So the risk to our rangelands of having too many grazing animals on that land is real. And in some places, wild horses do very well and will multiply and, and the BLM says that they are way over what is a sustainable level of population. And so they remove horses and they say, "If, look, if we don't remove them, we're going to get this this ecosystem collapse", that I just described. And so for about 50 years, the BLM has been removing horses from all over the West via helicopter roundups. You know, when they decide a herd's gotten too big, they'll come in and remove 20 percent, maybe 50 percent. And those horses go into the storage system. Some of them get adopted. Most of them don't.

**Dave Philipps** [00:57:29] And over the years, the way the BLM has, has removed hundreds of thousands of horses. So it's a pretty serious and expensive operation.

**Dave Philipps** [00:57:42] Now, in the long term, holding in the, in the, in the Midwest, in the Great Plains, it's a different story, because these are private contract ranchers who are essentially getting paid a per diem for each horse and they won't take more horses than their land will, will sustain. And in addition, because of where they are, I mean, it's some of the greatest grassland, certainly in North America and maybe in the world. It's very robust, very hardy. And if you manage it right, it can feed a lot of horses. So those areas are not being impacted. In fact, you could say that the horses are helping to keep them healthy. But certainly in the West, the government has a real concern that, that wild horses are impacting the land. And I think that it's hard to argue with that, in some places, they are.

**Dave Philipps** [00:58:38] Now, it's a really touchy subject, excuse me, it's a really touchy subject, see, because what horse advocates will say is, "Hey, look. The number of wild horses in the West are only a fraction of the number of domestic cattle that graze the West. And so the real impact is not cattle, or is not horses, it's cattle." And those numbers are certainly accurate. There's many, many more cattle than horses. I don't know if arguing over that is going to change things because the people that run those cattle have a legal right, and a spelled-out, sort of, it's almost like a property right, a grazing lease that allows them to do that. So you're not going to get rid of cattle.

**Dave Philipps** [00:59:24] And so the question is, how do you sustainably manage the number of horses that you think can, can be sustained on, on the portion of the range that, that they do have access to?

**David Todd** [00:59:38] That's interesting. So the, the ranchers, I guess, are sort of a proxy for, for their cattle and sheep and goats. And, and then you've got maybe a more loose and public constituency for the, the mustangs. And the two are sparring over access to these same plants.

**Dave Philipps** [01:00:02] Right. And actually, let me just add that it's become a really polarized cultural issue because overwhelmingly, the wild horse advocates are urban and almost all women. And overwhelmingly, the ranchers, and the people that support them, are rural and almost all men. And so it's one of these, one of these like cultural divisions where people from different worldviews who rarely actually come in contact with each other, just have very different ideas about how our values should be prioritized.

**David Todd** [01:00:39] Wow. Just a collision between two, two foreigners who don't really know each other, except for this one concern that they have about the horse.

**David Todd** [01:00:54] Well, so, I guess there's been this long-running discussion then about how best to manage the population. And I think you've mentioned one of the, the major tools is just to remove the horses and then put them in long-term storage, you know, in the Midwest.

**David Todd** [01:01:12] Is there been any sort of success stories with the adoption, which I think you've mentioned a couple of times, but it sounds like it's been, had sort of marginal progress there.

**Dave Philipps** [01:01:29] So I actually think that the adoption program is amazing, and you don't have to look very hard to find examples of people who have adopted wild horses and

really been happy with them. They've used them as working horses. They've used them as show horses. And they're great. The issue, I guess, is that the number of people who want to adopt a wild horse and can train a wild horse in 2022 is limited. You know, we're not, we're not a country that grew up with horses, or at least not anymore. And so that the demand for wild horses has not met the supply for decades. There's always a surplus.

**Dave Philipps** [01:02:20] And what do you do with that surplus? There are a lot of people who say, like, "Well, you know, we should just put him up for sale. And if people don't want them as, as companion animals, they can just go to slaughter. And then at least there's some use for them. And you won't get, you won't have to spend a lot of money to, to store them, because the United States government has spent a billion dollars gathering and storing horses. And with the horses, it's already gathered that are in storage, it's going to spend a billion more. So that's really expensive."

**Dave Philipps** [01:02:59] But there's never been public support for just slaughtering the surplus horses. People don't want it. People don't like it. And, and as you probably can imagine, no member of Congress in their right mind would advocate and vote for the Let's Kill Wild Horses bill. You know? I mean, there are a very few from, from rural states who have done that over the years. But, but the bills never get traction, because a lawmaker from ... the majority of voters live in urban areas where wild horses are valued as a symbol and not seen as a pest. And therefore you will never get the majority of politicians who represent those voters to vote to, to slaughter wild horses.

**Dave Philipps** [01:03:46] So we have a situation where the government both is every year, removing thousands of horses that it doesn't know what to do with, and it isn't able to, so far, find what seems like a sensible solution.

**David Todd** [01:04:06] I've heard some proposals that the horses should be sterilized so that at least a bad problem doesn't become worse. What do you think about that?

**Dave Philipps** [01:04:19] I think it's impractical, and for two reasons. One, sterilizing horses means that you first have to round them up and then you have to somehow do sterilization in the field. And the BLM cannot manage to even round up as much horses as it would like every year. So logistically, somehow rounding up and sterilizing the number of horses that you would need to each year, I just don't think that the agency has shown that they'd be able to do that, no matter how you feel about it politically. I just don't think that logistically they've, they've shown that they could do something like that. And the second is that that every time they've tried to do it in the past, wild horse advocates take them to court and they say, "Look, the federal law doesn't allow you to do this." And each time that that's happened, the Bureau of Land Management has kind of backed off.

**Dave Philipps** [01:05:18] So they've, they've tried some small pilot programs with this over the years, so, you know, several times over three or four decades, but they've never used it, showed it that it's an effective management tool.

**Dave Philipps** [01:05:32] So I should say that there's, there's something that's, that's different from sterilization and that's fertility control. Think of it like a birth control pill. Fertility control is delivered by a dart gun that you essentially shoot the females in the rump and for two or three years that, that fertility control will keep them from having foals. That has been shown to work, and that's being used in a small minority of herds in the West. And overwhelmingly, it's been used in places where volunteer groups, almost all of them middle-

aged women, are, are, have gotten together, taught themselves how to use dart guns, and, and really implemented one of these management programs. And where you can do that, it works. I don't think that's controversial at all.

**Dave Philipps** [01:06:24] But it takes a good deal of human involvement to know all these horses, to dart all these horses, to catalog the horses that have been darted. It's certainly a great deal harder than calling a contractor that the government has worked with for years and having the contractor bring in a helicopter and a corral and take away 500 horses. And so the Bureau of Land Management has been really reluctant to, to use fertility control programs, and has never rolled out any sort of large-scale dart gun management.

**David Todd** [01:07:08] So another option that I've heard is, is that, that perhaps protecting predators in the West - mountain lions, wolves and so on - would help bring these mustangs under some control. Do you think that's got any sort of feasibility?

**Dave Philipps** [01:07:33] One of the reasons that wild horses' populations grow so quickly out in the West is, is that effectively over, you know, more than a century, ranching interests in the West have removed predators from the land. And so there's nothing that could naturally prey on a horse.

**Dave Philipps** [01:07:56] When I first started learning about wild horses, of course, this is something that occurred to me. It's like when you hear, "Oh, there's a wild horse population problem", the first thing you say is, "Well, couldn't you just encourage mountain lion to eat them?" And what the Bureau of Land Management said to me and what they've said repeatedly over the years is, "That won't work. Mountain lions do not prey on horses." And when, and in the process of my research for my book, what I realized is that they are completely wrong, just utterly wrong, and wrong in a really fascinating way.

**Dave Philipps** [01:08:34] Because, as I mentioned earlier, the wild horse has been in North America for 50 million years. The mountain lion has been in North America for about 20 million years. So the mountain lion has had 20 million years to learn how to prey on wild horses. And in fact, it's learned how to do it really well. And it does it in the same way that, that lions in the Serengeti prey on large animals there. It will wait at the watering holes, or the places where it knows that the horses will have to come. The mountain lion does not run out onto an open plain and try and chase down a group of full-grown horses. It looks for the young, it looks for the old, and it ambushes them at places where it needs to go.

**Dave Philipps** [01:09:27] And what's interesting is that every biologist in the West that's looked at this has found that, that the lion is actually really good at doing this, and an active wild mountain lion population can absolutely regulate a horse population. And sometimes it is so good at what it does that it will shrink a horse population.

**Dave Philipps** [01:09:51] But so one of the barriers to understanding this is that, that dichotomy that we talked about earlier where the wild horse, or the horse, is not seen as a wild animal. And so there are all sorts of biologists that want to study wild animals, but don't want to study this feral tumbleweed of an animal that happens to be wandering around the whole West. And so there's any number of people who have gone out into the field to try and study, you know, how do mountain lions prey on deer or bighorn sheep? And the wild horse almost interferes in their research because mountain lions keep eating horses. And rather than recognizing that as important data, a lot of times these graduate students or whomever is



doing the field research will say like, "Oh, you know, asterisk, our data on, on bighorn sheep was, was interfered with by horses."

**Dave Philipps** [01:10:54] And so there's all sorts of studies where it shows up that mountain lions are eating horses all the time. And yet it's never, no one ever tries to understand it, or very few people have, because they don't see it as legitimate science. They see it as noise, background noise, to what they're actually trying to get to.

**Dave Philipps** [01:11:11] The Bureau of Land Management has certainly never tried to understand what is the dynamic between these two animals and how can we encourage it? And in fact, one of the things that I've found just maddening when, when I did research for my book was the federal government is spending tons of money to remove excess horses from the West, and it also is spending a good deal of money to remove mountain lions from the West. And a lot of times, mountain lions that are getting removed from the West are getting removed in the exact same areas where there are wild horses. So we're actually working against ourselves to find a wild, natural, sustainable solution.

**Dave Philipps** [01:11:52] Now, I don't expect that all over the West, you could just say, let's use mount lions and it would happen. There may be some sites, some locations that where just not a good fit. But there may be a lot of locations where it is a good fit, where we can do basic, simple things to encourage this wild relationship. And that conversation never really happened. There's nobody trying to develop that program. Instead, we're just shipping horses to the long-term holding pastures.

**David Todd** [01:12:23] You know, it's this conflict between the, the two arms of the federal government, with their lion efforts and their mustang efforts that reminds me of another conflict between, you know, one end of the government and another. And that's that apparently from what I've read, the sage grouse is under serious consideration for listing under the Endangered Species Act. And you know, its, its habitat is being damaged from what I've heard by the mustang. And I wonder if that, that kind of listing and possible protection would tip the balance in some way in the way the mustang is, is being handled currently.

**Dave Philipps** [01:13:08] It's a good question, and I hate to dodge it, but I just never really looked it at the relationship between the horse and the sage grouse. A lot of that stuff started happening after I had finished my research. And it may be true. And certainly the Endangered Species Act has a lot of teeth and, and if the, if the grouse gets listed, that would probably have a real impact on how horses are managed. But I don't know how and, and I also don't know - you know, wild horses have existed with sage grouse for, again, millions of years, and obviously the domestic horse that was reintroduced is a little different and situations with fences and, and water availability and things like that in the 21st century are not what, what they have been in the past. But I, I don't, I'm uncertain, whether the two can't coexist, and I haven't read that, so I think it's an open question. But certainly something that has the power to change things a lot.

**David Todd** [01:14:16] OK. You know, something else that I guess may have gathered steam somewhat more after your book came out, but a really serious drought seems to be settling over the West and, you know, maybe related to climate change. And I guess this puts that whole ecosystem in further stress where these mustangs are. Do you think that that could change the dynamic?

**Dave Philipps** [01:14:45] I, it certainly changes how the rules that the Bureau of Land Management has to play by. In a normal year, if we have normal years in the West, they have a process of public comment and environmental review and things like that that they have to do, before they round up horses. And in drought years, they can have what are called emergency gathers, essentially where they get to, to shortcut some of the oversight and speed things up. It's easier. And I think that's a good thing because while I'm an advocate for the wild horse on, on the land and finding a sustainable solution, there are real risks that we have seen in the living past to letting wild horses herds grow too fast on, on dry ranges. And the impact to every animal involved, including the wild horses, is pretty severe. So if we can do, you know, find ways to limit that, I think that nearly everybody, well, I think the most reasonable voices in the, the discussion over wild horse management, all believe that the horse herds have to be, their numbers have to be, managed in some way, and it's just a question of what's the best way to do that.

**Dave Philipps** [01:16:09] But drought and, and lack of management? Boy, that would be hard on a lot of, of animals, and a lot of people, who rely on that land for their livelihood.

**David Todd** [01:16:24] Wow, what a puzzle. And so where do you think this leaves us? What do you foresee for the future of the mustang?

**Dave Philipps** [01:16:33] You know, I can't ... early on, I thought that eventually the Bureau of Land Management would, would move more towards fertility control, these dart gun programs that will cut the, the number of new horses being born. But I've been watching this for 15 years, and they actually do darting less now than they did in the past. So I no longer expect some, some big shift to something like that that seems more cost sustainable and, and common sense. And that's happened over a Republican and Democratic administration. So I think no matter who is in the White House, that's, that's unlikely to change.

**Dave Philipps** [01:17:24] What I see now is less sustainability all the time. There's more horses on the range than there has been in 50 years now, no, maybe 100 years. There's about 100,000 horses on the range. There's about 50,000 horses in government storage at great expense. I don't think that the federal program is any longer able to keep up with its old management processes. And so that number on the range is likely only going to grow because they can't round up enough to remove. And I think that maybe if things get dire enough on the land there, they, the public, will accept a more drastic solution, and that could be something as simple as shooting horses on the range. Cheap, fast, super controversial now, but maybe not if things get, get dire enough.

**Dave Philipps** [01:18:30] Now, I should say that's not the future that I'm hoping for. And it's not the future that we have to have. But if we want a different future, we have to really start looking at different solutions. And it's not just going to be one solution. You know, it will have to be many and, and that will mean more for fertility control. It will mean predator programs. It'll mean all sorts of stuff.

**Dave Philipps** [01:18:56] But I haven't seen any move away from the old management programs, so I think that those other futures that, that likely we all want are unlikely.

**David Todd** [01:19:11] So this is a little bit of a detour, but before we wrap up, I just did want to just ask you, you know, in the 19th century, there were still, you know, large herds of mustangs from what I've read. But then in more modern times, they've, it really hasn't been an issue here. But I understand that we have sort of a, a sort of a smaller problem with burros

out in West Texas and similar sort of politics revolving around that where they're, you know, the biologists seek to control them. And then there are, you know, really strongly-felt community of people who love these animals and want to see them, you know, continue on the landscape. And I was curious if you see, you know, kind of a similar playing out of this, this drama, but, but in Texas and with burros.

**Dave Philipps** [01:20:24] I think it's interesting. So there's this, the wild horse federal laws also protect wild burros. But those laws only apply to federal public land - you know, whether that's Bureau of Land Management land or Forest Service. And in fact, they don't even apply in all federal land because national parks don't have those protections. And for a long time, there were wild burros in the Grand Canyon, burros that had gotten away from miners and from operations that used to take tourists down into the canyon on burros. And in the, I believe, '70s and '80s, the National Park Service annihilated all of them, hunted them to extinction. There's no burros in the Grand Canyon anymore.

**Dave Philipps** [01:21:07] And so a similar thing in West Texas. They, those burros are not under federal protection. They may be under different state protection.

**Dave Philipps** [01:21:19] But ultimately all these laws are made by the people. Right? And we have to decide what we want to do with, with these wild resources and how we want to do it. And, and that involves, you know, coming together, talking, listening, and, and certainly that's not easy. But what else are we going to do?

**David Todd** [01:21:44] Well, I guess I would have just one more question for you. You have put yourself in, in the unenviable situation of, of covering, you know, these military conflicts and then these, these conflicts over horses and land management, where in both cases it's really hard to find the truth or at least the truth that we're comfortable with. And, and I was wondering, if you'd just look back over your career to date, and talk a little bit about what you think of your work?

**Dave Philipps** [01:22:23] Well, I think that I'm really fortunate to have gotten to do it. I, I loved getting a chance to go out into the West and the country where wild horses live and listen to everybody, you know deeply about it, you know, whether that's a rancher who's been on the same land for five generations, or, or an advocate who follows the roundups all around the West. You know, I got to walk through the geological formations where I was, I could pick up wild horse teeth from 50 million years ago. And to get to bring people that deeper understanding is really cool. And I hope it leads to an ability to, to have better conversations about, about these animals or about war also.

**Dave Philipps** [01:23:14] I mean, in the same way, when I write about conflict, I'm writing about the people who do the work, the, the consequences that happen after the shooting stops, the trade-offs of our policies and how we do them. And I find it really valuable and it's not, it may seem a lot, maybe kind of controversial, but I actually think that getting down to human level and just like presenting people's lived experiences, is not. And, and you can generally find a lot of common ground there, and I feel fortunate to get to do it.

**David Todd** [01:23:56] Well, you do it very well, and you've been really generous to tell us about your life and your work today, so thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

**Dave Philipps** [01:24:08] Thank you. It's been a real pleasure to have this conversation.

**David Todd** [01:24:12] Well, I've learned a lot. Thank you so much, I wish you the best, I will continue to follow your journalism.

**Dave Philipps** [01:24:19] Thanks. And if you have any other questions when you're wrapped up with recording, just let me know.

**David Todd** [01:24:24] OK. That's very kind. Thank you again. Hope you have a good day.

**Dave Philipps** [01:24:29] Thank you.

**David Todd** [01:24:30] All right. Bye now.

**Dave Philipps** [01:24:31] Bye.