

Maricopa County Sheriff's Office seeks gunman who shot at Salt River horses, killing at least 1

Nicole Hernandez , The Republic | azcentral.com 6 p.m. MST October 24, 2016



A herd of Salt River horses graze at Butcher Jones Recreational Area in Tonto National Forest located near Mesa, Ariz., on Thursday, August 6, 2015. Isaac Hale/The Republic



(Photo: Republic file photo)

Authorities are searching for a man suspected of fatally shooting at least one wild horse in the Pirate Islands area of the Salt River in Tonto National Forest. Witnesses told deputies they saw the gunman shoot three horses shortly before 6 p.m. Friday, and a foal was found dead Saturday in the area of the shooting, according to the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office.

Sheriff Joe Arpaio said Monday evening that he will send a "mounted posse" of seven to 20 volunteers into the Salt River area starting Tuesday morning. The posse members who ride horseback typically aid in searches for missing people, according to Arpaio.

"We are going to launch the posse in the morning and build it up," he said. "My mission here is to see if there are any more dead horses."

The sheriff also asked for the public's help in identifying and finding the shooter. The gunman was described as a male wearing black shorts and a dark green shirt, and witnesses said two other people were with him.

Deputies searched the area for hours, by air and on the ground, but did not find the gunman Friday evening, the Sheriff's Office said.

A foal, about 7 to 10 months old, was discovered Saturday with apparent gunshot wounds to the head and neck. Two other horses are believed injured or dead, but they had not been found as of Monday.

"This is a crime that goes beyond animal cruelty. Killing an innocent horse is as dangerous as it is disturbing. What else is this person capable of doing? We need to end this senseless slaughter of wild horses," Arpaio said.

John Schill of the Schill Law Group is offering a \$1,000 reward for any information that leads to an arrest.

Anyone with information is asked to call the Sheriff's Office at 602 876-1011 or 602-876-1681.