

Salt River wild horse found dead Monday morning

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Netherlands would like to see the signage along Bush Highway changed, motion-sensor lights installed and the speed limit lowers. (Source: KPHO/KTVK)

MESA, AZ (KPHO/KTVK) -

Just one week after protests shut down a plan to round up wild horses in the Tonto National Forest, one of those horses is dead.

The horses roam free on forest land, but they do occasionally cross roads in the area. The Salt River Wild Horse Management group said a 2.5-year-old horse named Thunder was found dead on the side of Bush Highway Monday morning.

"It's pretty devastating to us," said Simone Netherlands, president of the group. "It's very sad."

Thunder was found near a horse crossing on Bush Highway at milepost 30. The Maricopa County Sheriff's Office said its investigators cannot confirm whether

Thunder was hit by a passing car, but there were skid marks in the area.

"It's very unfortunate timing," Netherlands said

Last week, the U.S. Forest Service planned to remove the wild horses from the Tonto National Forest to prevent situations like this. The agency put the plan on hold after the community fought it, lawmakers got involved, and a lawsuit was filed.

Netherlands said she's now worried the U.S. Forest Service will move forward.

"Because they are using that as an excuse," she said. "Basically, 'Oh, it's not safe.'" She said she will meet with the U.S. Forest Service this week to discuss solutions to the safety concerns.

Netherlands hopes the speed limit in this area of Bush Highway can be lowered, and she would like the signs changed.

"We'd rather see a sign that says 'horse crossing' because that really lets people know this is where the horses cross," she said.

She'd also like to see motion-sensor lights in the area.

"We're doing some research to see if that would really work," she said. "What it would do is it would sense the horses if they were there and the light would start flashing so that people would really know, 'Hey there's horses coming.'"

The U.S. Forest Service said it is not moving forward with anything yet.

The agency is taking another look at the proposed roundup of wild horses in the Tonto National Forest and exploring alternatives.