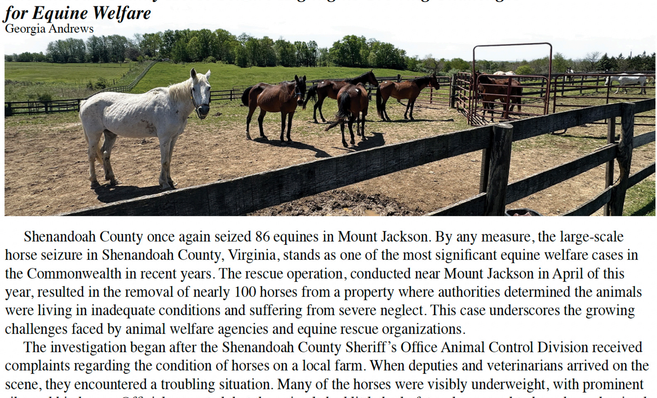
Shenandoah County Horse Seizure Highlights Growing Challenges for Equine Welfare

Georgia Andrews



Shenandoah County once again seized 86 equines in Mount Jackson. By any measure, the large-scale horse seizure in Shenandoah County, Virginia, stands as one of the most significant equine welfare cases in the Commonwealth in recent years. The rescue operation, conducted near Mount Jackson in April of this year, resulted in the removal of nearly 100 horses from a property where authorities determined the animals were living in inadequate conditions and suffering from severe neglect. This case underscores the growing challenges faced by animal welfare agencies and equine rescue organizations.

The investigation began after the Shenandoah County Sheriff's Office Animal Control Division received complaints regarding the condition of horses on a local farm. When deputies and veterinarians arrived on the scene, they encountered a troubling situation. Many of the horses were visibly underweight, with prominent ribs and hip bones. Officials reported that the animals had little body fat and appeared to have been deprived of adequate nutrition for an extended period.

Because of the sheer number of animals involved, the response required an extraordinary level of coordination. Three veterinary teams were assembled to examine the herd and assess each horse's condition. (In addition to the horses, the County seized over 60 cows). Law enforcement personnel worked alongside rescue organizations to document evidence and organize the safe removal of the animals from the property.

The operation quickly became a major logistical undertaking. Transporting nearly 100 horses requires specialized trailers, experienced handlers, temporary housing, veterinary evaluations, and substantial financial resources. Several Virginia-based equine rescue organizations stepped forward to assist, including the Shenandoah Valley Equine Rescue Network (SVERN).

SVERN alone accepted 19 horses, the largest intake in the organization's history. Rescue personnel



described many of the animals as being in poor physical condition and in need of immediate medical attention.



Some horses required hoof care, parasite treatment, and carefully managed feeding programs designed to restore weight safely. Rehabilitation of severely malnourished horses is a delicate process that can take months and must be monitored closely to avoid potentially fatal complications. Rescue volunteers are required to feed the most critical of horses around the clock.

The financial impact of such a seizure is enormous. Rescue groups suddenly found themselves responsible for feeding, housing, and treating over a dozen horses in addition to the horses already in their care.

For many rescuers, the case was both heartbreaking and frustrating. Equine neglect cases are particularly challenging because horses require significant land, feed, and management. When owners become overwhelmed by economic hardship, illness, or poor planning, conditions can deteriorate rapidly. In large-herd situations, the decline may go unnoticed until animals reach a critical state.



The Shenandoah County seizure also highlighted the broader pressures facing equine rescues throughout Virginia. Many organizations were already operating at or near capacity before the horses arrived. Yet despite limited resources, rescue groups collaborate to ensure every horse had a safe place to go.

Their response demonstrated the strength of Virginia's equine welfare network and the dedication of the volunteers who support it.

The road to recovery for the seized horses is expected to be long. While some animals responded quickly to improved nutrition and care, others required extensive rehabilitation. Rescue organizations are focused on restoring body condition, addressing medical issues, and evaluating each horse's temperament and training. Ultimately, many of the horses are expected to become available for adoption once they regain their health and the legal process has concluded.

Cases such as the Shenandoah County seizure serve as an important reminder of the responsibilities associated with horse ownership. Horses depend entirely on their caretakers for food, water, shelter, and medical care. When those basic needs are not met, the consequences can be devastating.

The horses remain in the custody of the Commonwealth for now. The case was heard by The Honorable Amy Tisinger, General District Court Judge on June 5th, 2026 and she upheld the seizure. That ruling has been appealed to the Circuit Court but has not yet been set for a hearing. The horses will likely remain in the care of the rescues pending any appeal. All rescues are under enormous stress. This magazine is published by and for the benefit of the Shenandoah Valley Equine Rescue Network.





Some of the 19 Horses From the Seizure That Will Soon Be Cleared For Adoption and Fostering.

Go to **www.Svern.org** and fill out an application to be First In Line!