Written by Steve Frank
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A number of emails and callers reported a horse or horses in distress in the Vilas area, with one horse in particular that seemed to be abused. One woman who saw the horse down in the pasture tried to help get it up, according to Animal Control, but with the horse too sick, and the situation was called in to authorities. Sheriff Len Hagaman said he forwarded information to Animal Control, and they did respond to Dutch Creek Trails, according to a supervisor there. There, the older horse was found, still down in the field, and a vet called to assess the situation, but that animal ultimately had to be put down. Owner Keith Ward told Animal Control that he had been seeking to buy one horse, but had to take the older horse as part of the deal, and said he left town just after that, returning to find the horse in much worse shape. He told Animal Control investigators that he probably should have dealt with the animal before he left, according to the supervisor. She said that there were bales of hay for the horses to eat and water available at the Rubin Walker Road pasture when they arrived, but they cited Keith Ward—the supervisor not sure whether it was animal neglect or animal cruelty—but he was cited for the one animal's treatment. Watauga Sheriff's investigators expressed their willingness to get involved in the investigation if requested by the DA's Office.