

USDA Forest Service Update

August 2011

Subject: Disease Transmission from Domestic to Bighorn Sheep



Key Points:

- Where healthy bighorn sheep populations are an objective, the agency has adopted management practices to spatially or temporally separate wild sheep from domestic sheep and goats. There is a large body of peer reviewed and published literature, spanning several decades, on the topic of disease transmissions due to bighorn sheep and domestic sheep interactions.
- In July 2010 the Payette Forest Supervisor signed the Record of Decision for the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and Forest Plan Amendment Identifying Suitable Rangeland for Domestic Sheep and Goat Grazing to Maintain Habitat for Viable Bighorn Sheep Populations. This decision restricts domestic grazing over portions of the Forest.
- Multiple appellants filed appeals to this decision. The Reviewing Officer (Regional Forester) reviewed the appeals and issued nine separate appeal decisions. The Payette NF Forest Supervisor's decision was affirmed on all appeal points.
- A preliminary review of the ROD was conducted by the Washington Office in April 2011. The agency elected not to exercise a discretionary review regarding these appeals.
- In early June 2011, a core team of range and wildlife staff was assembled at the Washington Office to outline policy implications of the Payette NF, review bighorn sheep viability analyses and suggest a strategy and timeline for completion of national directives.
- **Current FS Strategy** - The agency has four active objectives:
 - Facilitate a multi-partner resolution of wild and domestic sheep conflicts by providing information to States for wild sheep management plans and federal agencies for land management plans.
 - Contribute to scientific literature on wild and domestic sheep management and improve efficacy of the resulting management techniques.
 - RMRS-GTR-209: *A Review of Disease Related Conflicts between Domestic Sheep and Goats and Bighorn Sheep* is being updated and will be reissued.
 - Provide tools to the field to assist in attaining separation. Maps of occupied wild sheep habitat, active domestic sheep and goat allotments and vacant livestock allotments are available.
 - GIS decision support tools are in development making use of currently occupied bighorn sheep habitat information provided by the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agency (WAFWA) member States.
 - Update Forest Service Manual 2600 to include consistent national direction for potential conflicts between wild and domestic sheep on National Forest System (NFS) lands. The development of this national guidance is being coordinated with the Bureau of Land Management.

Background:

While there clearly are gaps in the knowledge base on the causal factors and mechanisms of bighorn sheep die-offs and the potential for disease transmission between domestic sheep and bighorn sheep, the vast majority of this literature supports the conclusions that: 1) a disease transmission between the species is clearly a concern; 2) bighorn sheep die-offs in close proximity to domestic sheep have been documented; and 3) the management option of keeping these species separate to prevent disease transmission is warranted. Further, there is no peer reviewed literature that suggests bighorn sheep can be grazed with domestic sheep without concern for disease transmission.

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