



USDA Forest Service Update

July 2014

Subject: Domestic and Bighorn Sheep Management

Issue: Management of Domestic Sheep (DS) and Bighorn Sheep (BHS) to reduce potential for disease transmission.

Background:

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. The Forest Service has supported an emerging but unofficial policy to promote separation of BHS and permitted DS and goats on National Forest System lands where BHS are a management objective.

Summary/Key Points:

- The Forest Service continues to prepare information needed for risk assessments in the western states as outlined in the Four Step Outline for Conducting Bighorn Sheep Viability Analysis (at Forest Planning Level). This outline was provided to Regions 1-6 in a letter to Regional Foresters from the Deputy Chief, National Forest System, August 19, 2011.
- Work is in progress on the remaining two steps in the Four Step Outline:
 - The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) Wild Sheep Working Group is collaborating with the Forest Service to develop a geospatial layer identifying bighorn sheep habitat, whether occupied or unoccupied. Drafts have been developed for all western states and are in collaborative review. The layers for Idaho and Colorado are validated and complete. Validation of the Wyoming, Utah and Nevada layers will be completed by the fall.
 - The Forest Service in collaboration with the Bureau Land Management (BLM) has developed geospatial tools that analyze (model) the risk of contact when domestic sheep are grazed in proximity to bighorn sheep and bighorn sheep habitats. The model was released in January 2013 and training was conducted for FS, BLM and State agency personnel. The recorded training, User's Guide and model components are currently available by request.
- The Intermountain Region is using a comprehensive framework to provide national forests with tools and options for managing domestic sheep and bighorn sheep conflicts. The framework will evaluate bighorn sheep population viability against agency NFMA requirements for the species. Forest Service leadership will also explore and develop management options and tools, then use the best options to address specific allotment conditions.
- The FY14 Appropriations Bill - "The Forest Service is urged to collaborate with the Bureau of Land Management and the Agricultural Research Service on research involving the risk of disease transmission between domestic and bighorn sheep." That collaboration is ongoing.

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