

Board Meeting 10/28/2021 7:00 pm

Attendees: Katie, Scott B., Dean, Pat, Zach, Joni, Bruce, Kurt, Scott S., Zach, Mack, Greg

Absentees: JW and Jimmy

Guests: Doug McWhirter, Daryl Lutz and Jim Collins

Zach started off by explaining that this meeting was to educate the board on the process of introducing Wild Sheep into the Sweetwater Rocks and to make sure we were all on the same page for the upcoming Bighorn Sheep-Domestic Sheep Interaction Working Group Meeting which will be held on Tuesday, Nov 2 at 10am in Lander at the Inn in Lander (Best Western Hotel). He welcomed our Guests and turned the meeting over to Doug and Daryl.

Doug told us that the only topic on the meeting agenda for Nov. 2 is Sweetwater Rocks and that the agenda along with the last meeting minutes would be coming out on Friday.

Daryl then proceeded to tell us where we are in the process and how that process will unfold. The most important item to understand is that we are going very strictly with the Wyoming plan agreement and that it is Appendix L of that agreement that sets out the steps to follow. There have been several attempts to reintroduce wild sheep into the rocks over the last 20 years and landowner resistance has always killed those plans. This time it is a landowner proposal by the Pathfinder Ranch that brought the idea back to the Game and Fish department. The Sweetwater Rocks are in a cooperative review area per the Wyoming plan, and this would be the first-time wild sheep have been reintroduced in a cooperative review area via this plan.

The G&F has completed their one-on-one meetings with area landowners and there appears to be quite a bit of support for the project. The common theme for those opposed or on the fence is that this may result in the BLM changing domestic grazing regulations to the detriment of the landowners.

After the meeting of Nov. 2, the next step will be public meetings to listen for feedback from people who attend. These will take place at the Fire Hall in Jeffrey City on Thursday, Nov. 4 and in Lander on Nov 9.

Nov. 2 - Interaction Working Group, 10-2 Inn at Lander

Nov. 4 - Jeffrey City, 6-9 p.m. at the Firehall

Nov. 9 - Lander, 6-9 at GF

Dec. 14 - Jeffrey City, 6-9 at the Firehall

Dec. 15 - Lander, 6-9 at GF

Kevin Monteith from UW was tasked with conducting a habitat analysis and risk of contact assessment for this proposal. The draft results are available, and it is favorable. The final report will be available by the end of November.

The next step will be for the G&F to develop a recommendation letter for the proposal by the end of November. This will be followed with another series of meetings to share the recommendations with the public. Jeffrey City on Dec 14th and Lander on Dec 15th. There may be an option to attend the Lander meeting via ZOOM.

The G&F final decision will come before the end of this year and go in front of the G&F commission during their meeting the third week of January.

Following this presentation, the board had the opportunity to ask questions. These have been reduced to a minimum for the brevity and clarity of these minutes.

What are the boundaries of this proposal? North is the Cooperative Review area boundary, East is Hwy 220, South is Hwy 789, West is the Ore Haul Rd. Wild Sheep will probably not venture further west than the Agate Flats Road.

Is there public land available for possible future viewing or hunting? Yes, there is great public access and several two track roads to get into the area.

Are there sufficient forage and water opportunities for wild sheep to stay in the rocks? Yes, plenty of both.

What will be the carrying capacity of this reintroduction? The G&F is developing herd objectives.

Will wild sheep end up on the hay meadows? Probably, landowners do not seem to object to sharing their private land with the wild sheep.

Will there have to be a NEPA process? Since the wild sheep will be introduced on private land, the G&F does not believe this process will be invoked.

Will there be a predation problem from Mountain Lions? Yes, that is a concern, and the G&F will probably undertake some predator removal actions prior to transplanting wild sheep.

Will the wild sheep wander to the Forgy Ranch and interact with domestics? That is very unlikely to happen due to the distance between the sheep and the habitat in between them.

What foray distances were used in the assessment model? Doug and Daryl were not ready to reply to this question, but they will review the draft results and consider which set of distances were used.

How do the Stockgrowers and Woolgrowers view this proposal? Individual discussions are taking place at the highest level of the G&F. It is not anticipated that either group will be vehemently opposed at this time.

Have Fremont County officials been consulted? Yes both Fremont and Natrona County officials have been consulted

Which landowners are opposed to this proposal? No single landowner was singled out as being in opposition at this time, we will know more after the first public meetings next week.

Will there be other topics on the Nov. 2 meeting agenda? It is common for people to show up and raise other topics but right now this is the only thing on the agenda.

Is there anything in the Appendix L that involves bringing this matter up to the Animal Damage Management Board? No but it would be wise for the Wyoming Chapter to take this step on behalf of the proposal. The time to do this may be by late Spring of 2022.

Is there an issue with the three Wilderness Study areas in the rocks? We don't think so, they are quite small and if adopted they will not limit vehicular access.

Are there any updates on the Darby Herd? Forest Supervisor, Tricia O'Connor is drafting a letter to summarize the next steps to take with this herd and area of the Bridger Tetons.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:12.

Dean DiJenno for
Pat Pace, Secretary