

Wyoming Statewide Domestic Sheep/Bighorn Sheep Interaction Working Group

January 8, 2020

10:00 AM – 2:00 PM

Warbonnet Room, The Inn at Lander

- In Attendance: Jim Logan, Doug McWhirter, Mary Thoman, Joe Budd, Doug Miyamoto, Chris Wichmann, Justin Williams, Kurt Eisenach, Steve Kilpatrick, Corey Class, Jared Rogerson, Scott Ratliff, Dave Cottle, Pat O'Toole, Mack Miller, Joni Miller, Steve Kozlowski, Steve Schacht, Mark Foster, Sara Domek, Joe Flower, Beth Bischoff, Jack States, Dave Neves, Ivan Laird, Dan Smith, Daryl Lutz, Sharon O'Toole, Siobhan Lally, Angus Thuermer, Jason Brengle, Casey McQuiston, Jennifer Fernandez, Lindy Linn, Pam Buline, Hank Edwards, Sam Allen, Andrew Pils, Randall Griebel, Amy Hendrickson; By Phone: Kevin Hurley, Jim Magagna, Holly Kennedy
- Minutes of the 12/13/2018 meeting were reviewed and approved.

Doug McWhirter opened the meeting and reminded the group of our mission statement. A brief summary of the Final Report and Recommendations (the Wyoming Plan) was also given. The Plan can be found on the WGF D website; <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/Wildlife-in-Wyoming/More-Wildlife/Bighorn-Sheep>

The update included core native areas, cooperative review areas, BHS non-emphasis areas, and BHS non-management areas. A brief summary of long-term BHS harvest trends and discussed native versus transplanted BHS herds. Statewide disease surveillance efforts and herd unit reviews. A summary of BHS lethal removal actions was given also, with two situations addressed in 2019, one in Baggs and one in Rock Springs, resulted in one ram being removed near Baggs.

Management of mountain goats in Grand Teton National Park (GTNP) was discussed, along with the recent Environmental Assessment completed by GTNP. Mountain goats sampled in GTNP have had at least some of the pathogens of concern to BHS populations.

Doug reviewed action items from the Dec 13, 2018 meeting.

Colorado Interaction Working Group Summary/ Update

Doug explained their agenda and process; some members of our WY group did attend the Colorado meeting on June 10, 2019. Doug read the letter sent from our WY BHS/DS work group to the Colorado BHS/DS working group expressing our support and advice to them encouraging them to use facilitation and collaboration among stakeholders.

ACTION ITEM - Kevin Hurley suggested sending out 7 page summary of the Colorado Interaction Working Group meeting to our group.

Science Summit

Jim Logan asked if Amy Hendrickson, Jim Magagna and Jim Collins agree that the Colorado meeting satisfied the need for information sharing.

Amy Hendrickson suggested there still is a need for follow-up on our original action item of hosting a “Science Summit” covering evolving science, policies, ongoing research.

The Utah Antelope Island BHS die off was a topic suggested for follow-up also.

We discussed a general time frame to hold a “Science Summit” meeting, and a committee was formed that included Amy Hendrickson, Doug McWhirter, Beth Bischoff, Jim Logan, and Steve Kilpatrick.

Pedro Mountains Wildfire – Bighorn Sheep Response

Darrell Lutz gave an update on the 25,000 acre Pedro Mountain wildfire and concerns that the fire may create BHS habitat and attract BHS into comingling situations with domestic sheep. WGFD has collared some BHS so they can monitor them for any movements they may make in that direction. If that occurs, lethal removal of some BHS may be necessary. The Pedro mountains are not within an established BHS herd, and WGFD does not desire BHS to occupy this area.

Southern Absaroka BHS Monitoring

Dan Smith gave an update on BHS-DS commingling concerns on the mix of public and private lands in the Owl Creek drainage. WGFD did an aerial survey and found 8 BHS rams that were alarmingly close to domestic sheep on private lands. When attempts were made to locate the rams for removal (attempted live-capture), they could not be found. No BHS were lethally removed.

Steve Kilpatrick stated the situation has the potential to impact both the BHS and DS and could possibly affect public land grazing. There is great concern about eventual commingling of the domestic herd with BHS, heightening the risk of a BHS die off. This isn't a situation of wandering BHS commingling with domestic sheep, but rather a case of domestic sheep on private land getting close to BHS habitat, and is a situation that perhaps could be avoided.

Mary Thoman asked about the actual risk. She feels that stress is the one factor we don't address sufficiently. Doug McWhirter stated that we realize pathogen transfer may not always occur in instances of BHS/ DS contact or proximity, but the question remains of how much risk can we accept? In this case it appears there is significant risk.

Several stated that right now the only tool is separation. It was recognized that private land issues are very sensitive and have become more of a problem recently.

Pat O'Toole stated that Wyoming does not currently have a BLM Director and that the situation appears to be less a public lands issue than an individual issue “personal problem” with BLM. Steve Kilpatrick believes it is a public lands grazing issue and a personal issue.

Doug McWhirter asked Kevin Hurley about similar situations in the Missouri Breaks. Kevin said discussions with private landowners are ongoing but there is no resolution at this time.

Sharon O'Toole stated that perhaps the Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA) mediation program could be employed to help "negotiate" facilitation a solution if the landowner would be willing to work with them & BLM.

Steve Kilpatrick suggested a letter from the co-chairs of our group to the stakeholders asking them to enter into a mediation to resolve the situation. There was discussion about the logistics & benefits of this with both pros and cons expressed by several members.

Further discussion advised that Steve Kilpatrick could have a conversation with the landowner and ask him if he would be willing to work with the WDA mediation program to seek resolution to the issue. Chris Wichmann suggested that the primary stakeholders would be the landowner & the WGFD.

Some were uncomfortable discussing the issue without the landowner being present to address the issue from his perspective. BLM was not represented at our meeting either. Mary Thoman stated that we should recognize the issue but not discuss further without the landowner present.

Whiskey Mountain Update

Darrell Lutz gave an update on the Whiskey herd near Dubois herd. In 2019, 14 lambs were captured and monitored, with 12 mortalities of those lambs determined to have been pneumonia caused. This project continues, and will be expanded to include the Upper Green River, where lamb survival is much higher and will provide an interesting comparison.

Amy Hendrickson stated that the loss of lambs after being collared should be reviewed considering the stress of capture and collaring on the mortality.

U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Updates

Randall Griebel gave a USFS update on vacant allotments, including a review of recent discussions and meetings on vacant allotments. There are currently 18 vacant allotments across the Bridger-Teton National Forest, but not all due to BHS concerns. A letter will soon be going out to stakeholders involved in these discussions, describing what BTNF will do and establish timelines.

Pat O'Toole mentioned that the only way young people can get into the sheep business is by using public lands allotments. Most of the Interaction Working Group's discussions are about how to keep BHS healthy, the discussion needs to include both BHS and DS needs and concerns.

Dave Cottle gave an update on Ecological Site Description (ESD) efforts. Funding for monitoring tall forb communities in Wyoming Range Forage Reserves was provided by the Sublette County Conservation District, the Wyoming Governor's Big Game License Coalition, and the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation. A summary of 2018 monitoring is complete, but 2019 information has not yet been summarized, other than the broad assessment that no tall forb

community met the 80% ground cover criteria set out in the plans for the Wyoming Range and Triple Peak Forage Reserves.

Better data is needed, which is why development of ESDs for tall forb communities has been proposed. Approximately \$100,000 was gathered in 2020 to assist in this effort, and has included data mining and site identification. These efforts should result in the establishment of 3-5 new ESDs and help support grazing decisions.

Chris Wichmann referenced the Region 4 Handbook with regards to the 80% threshold specified in the Forage Reserve plans, and hoped that ESD efforts do not exclude or delay decisions on vacant or forage reserve allotments. Dave Cottle replied that the ESDs will inform whether or not the 80% threshold is correct/appropriate. The issue of foliar versus basal cover can also be addressed with this assessment.

The ESD discussion does have relevance to the K-17 allotment complex, as basal cover may be the best metric on domestic sheep driveways where soil horizon loss has occurred, but in areas with no soil loss canopy cover may work.

Steve Kilpatrick applauded the Sublette County Conservation District and the BTNF for their help in better understanding tall forb communities and encouraged others to give more help to them in the field.

Voluntary Grazing Permit Retirement Act

Introduced by Rep Adam Smith, this act is intended to reduce conflicts on federal public lands and increase flexibility for federal grazing permittees, and would provide grazing permit holders the option to voluntarily waive their permits to graze on federal lands in exchange for market value compensation paid by private parties.

Jim Magagna stated that WSGA respects the rights of permittees to waive their permits but would never support the government permanently closing allotments.

No one at the meeting was aware of the current status of the bill.

Meeting adjourned @ 1:40 PM