Interaction Working Group Meeting 12/12/21 Summary

Attendees

WGFD: Doug Brimeyer, Rick King, Doug McWhirter, Daryl Lutz
WY Woolgrowers: Amy Hendrickson, Cat Urbikit, Ivan Laird, Regan Smith
Lander BLM: John Elliot
WY Dept. Ag: no one present
WY-WSF: Jim Collins, Zach McDermott (virtual), Kevin Hurley (virtual), Katie Cheesbrough

Updates from WGFD:

Rick King provided updates on actions taken by WGFD since last meeting

- Public meetings held in Jefferey City and Lander.
- Review of 1730 BLM Policy
    - It is clear why there's concern from Ag producers
- Director Nesvik met one-on-one with Sean Smith (Uinta County Producer)
    - Issues with his allotments after transplants done in Utah.
- Nesvik toured state with officials from USDI and USDA and made Sweetwater Rocks Discussion a priority for the state
    - No commitments or promises were made from these folks at this point, but it is now on their radar at a very high level,
- Nesvik has had discussions with Doug Miyamoto (Dept. of Ag) and BLM State Director.
- Department released the Habitat Assessment & Risk of Contact Model Report of Monteith

WGFD Next Steps:

- Public Meetings in Jefferey City (12/14) and Lander (12/15) at 6:00 pm
    - Inform the public on backing off the original transplant timeline to work with BLM to get the assurances needed for the producers and make sure we do this right.
- Will continue with disease testing the Devil's Canyon and Ferris/Seminoe herds to prepare for future transplant
    - Tests are considered valid for 18 months
- Ram removed from the Gas Hills area NE of Jefferey City on 11/20
    - Young ram (~2 years old), likely from the Laramie Peak Herd Unit based on unique pathogen (Mannheimia).

Needs and Assurances Discussion

- Updated them on most of the needs/assurances in stated in the document we prepared.
- Presented the idea of having a supplement or amendment for BLM Policy 1730 specifically for transplants in WY, through the BLM State Director.
    - Based on Nesvik's comments at our winter meeting that we needed something stronger than and MOU
    - Lots of discussion on this. A few circular arguments were had.
        - WWA kept bringing up all the issues that 1730 created, but struggled to see how this would alleviate their concerns.
        - Helpful to have someone from the BLM in the room to bring concerns to State Director.

    - Potentially update Wyoming Plan so that the BLM has a solid State law/regulation that supports what we're trying to do.

- Habitat Assessment & Risk of Contact Report
    - WWA had some concerns with the Risk of Contact output.
    - Misunderstanding of how the Risk of Contact model is used.
        - It's a relative measurement to determine what level of risk we are willing to accept. Not necessarily to way to determine a buffer zone.
        - Does not take into consideration that WGFD removal of wandering sheep drastically reduces risk of contact.

- What happens if domestic sheep wander into the Bighorn Sheep area?
    - What are the roles and responsibilities of the sheep producers?
    - What will the response to this be?
        - Kevin made comment about Senate File 8 which allows the WGFD to work as a subagent of the State Vet., allowing WGFD to remove domestic livestock.
        - To say the least, this ruffled WWA's feathers…
    - Backed up to say that we nobody wants to kill domestic sheep, we just need a response plan.

- Does NEPA need to be conducted in order to release wild sheep?
    - WWA seemed very concerned about this.
    - NEPA is only required if it's a federal action or has a federal impact.
    - Not necessarily needed if sheep are released on private and WGFD doesn't ask for federal mitigation
    - No NEPA required for Devil's Canyon or Ferris transplants
        - These were proposals made by WGFD
        - "We don't need BLMs permission to do this" -Rick King

- Other options/avenues we could pursue
    - Something similar to the Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAA) – implemented for Sage Grouse
        - Voluntary conservation agreement between federal agency and private landowners with the intention of addressing the needs of at-risk species by providing additional incentives and assurances that limit future conservation obligations.

NEXT STEPS:

- Need to find out if we can supplement/amend BLM 1730 or create state policy for newly established or reintroduce bighorn sheep
    - What are the legal concerns from both the State and the BLM
        - WGFD will consult the State AG
        - BLM will talk to State Director and consult BLM Solicitors