

## ***Chronology of the Sweetwater Rocks Bighorn Sheep Transplant***

### **June, 1987**

- Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Lander Resource Area Management Plan Record of Decision states a transplant of bighorn sheep is feasible and BLM agrees to work with WGFD to conduct transplant (See attachment).

### **February, 1998**

- WGFD Bighorn Sheep Working Group reopens the discussion of a Sweetwater Rocks transplant. The Group also discusses the possibility of using California Bighorns as release stock.
- Working Group asks Lander Region to begin preliminary examination of the project's feasibility.

### **March-April, 1998**

- Lander Region informally checks into availability of California Sheep from Oregon and Nevada.
- Lander Region reviews genetic and taxonomic literature to determine compatibility of California and Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep.
- Lander Region begins discussions and coordination with BLM.

### **May, 1998**

- Bighorn Working Group and Chief Game Warden, Jay Lawson, direct Lander Region to begin coordination efforts with BLM, landowners, sportsmen, and other affected publics at the Working Group meeting in Cody, Wyoming to proceed with the transplant.

### **June, 1998**

- Lander Region personnel make preliminary landowner contacts. Parks, Suns, LDS Church, McIntoshs, and Bakers are contacted. These people represent the majority of landowners within the primary Sweetwater Rocks release area and Herd Unit. Some concerns are expressed, but most people appear neutral or in favor of the project. Only Norman and Gaynell Park state outright that they would oppose the project. Based on these contacts, Lander Region decides to proceed with inquiries into the availability of sheep, BLM coordination, etc.
- Lander Region makes contact with Wyoming Chapter of the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep at their annual summer meeting in Thermopolis, Wyoming. Wyoming FNAWS advises the Department it is supportive of the transplant and encourages department personnel to proceed.

### **July, 1998**

- Department sends letters to the Oregon and Nevada Wildlife Departments inquiring into the availability of California Sheep and formally requesting sheep.
- Lander Region begins estimating financial costs of the project.
- Lander Region and BLM personnel begin preliminary field reconnaissance of potential water development sites in the Miller Springs Wilderness Study Area.
- Lander Region requests Wildlife Services of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service to provide an annual cost estimate to intensively manage predators in the release area.

### **August - September, 1998**

- Wildlife Services provides cost estimates for annual predator management.
- Department formally requests BLM assistance with the transplant, including developing water sources in the release area's 4 Wilderness Study Areas and dedicating personnel time to proceed with development of an Environmental Assessment.
- Bighorn Working Group tours the Savage Peak area and visits with Norman Park. BLM personnel accompany Department personnel and help refine locations for water developments in the Savage Peak Wilderness Study Area. Because Savage Peak has the best combination of forage and cover parameters, the Working Group decides this is the best location for an initial release.

- Bighorn Working Group, with Wildlife Division concurrence, approves use of \$30,000 from resale of the 1998 Governor's bighorn sheep license for use on the Sweetwater Rocks transplant.

#### **September, 1998**

- Lander Region begins writing a document for the Commission which examines pros and cons of using California sheep for a transplant into the Sweetwater Rocks.

#### **October, 1998**

- BLM begins its scoping process by sending letters to all affected landowners and other publics. Sixty-two letters are sent and solicited comments begin to be compiled by BLM personnel.
- BLM earmarks \$2,500 for development of 2 water sources in the Savage Peak WSA during the summer of 1999.

#### **November, 1998**

- The BLM and Department co-host 2 open houses to solicit additional scoping comments. The meetings are held in Lander and Casper and a total of 15 people attend. Bryce Reese of the Woolgrowers Association initially expresses concern with the release, but after discussion publicly states his organization could support the transplant as it was a "win-win" situation. Some additional concerns are brought forward at the meetings, but agency personnel feel the issues are mitigable.
- BLM summarizes written comments received. Only the State Department of Agriculture and Ms. Virginia McIntosh provide negative written input. Most other comment is favorable or neutral. Norman and Gaynell Park do not provide any written input.
- Scoping ends on November 15 and based on comments received during the process, BLM decides to proceed with development of an Environmental Assessment.
- Lander Region continues work on the Commission report.
- Lander Region develops a rough "time-line" for work duties leading up to an initial transplant for January, 2000.
- Department Environmental Services personnel are called in to a meeting with the Governor's Office, State Clearinghouse personnel, and representatives from the State Geologist's Office and State Agriculture Department to address possible bighorn sheep concerns with leasing granite to private mining interests in the Sweetwater Rocks.

#### **December, 1998**

- Lander Region finishes the Commission report and forwards it to WGFD Staff for review and comment.
- Wyoming FNAWS commits \$11,000 toward the Sweetwater Rocks transplant. The moneys are earmarked for predator management efforts to support the transplant and are contingent on Commission approval of the project.

#### **January, 1999**

- Commission report is revised based on Staff comments and sent to Commission members for review prior to their February meeting.
- An additional \$5,000 of funding is acquired from Ms. Gloria Erickson from Nebraska. Ms. Erickson won a contest and decided to commit some of the prize money toward the transplant. She is currently trying to match her \$5,000 with other moneys.
- Lander Region personnel meet with WGFD Staff to discuss the transplant. Following the discussion, Staff approves of the project and allows the proposal to be brought before the Commission at its February meeting.
- The Oregon Department of Wildlife officially commits 20 California bighorns for the transplant effort for January 2000.
- WGFD commits \$2,500 in matching money toward development of 2 water sources in the Savage Peak WSA.

#### **February, 1999**

- Lander Region and Staff appear before the Wyoming House Agriculture Committee to testify concerning HB 0322 - Transplanting of Bighorn Sheep, Requirements. After a lengthy discussion, the bill is killed in Committee.
- The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission approves the importation of California Bighorns for the Sweetwater Rocks area by a unanimous vote.
- Press coverage of the Commission decision triggers an immediate response from Norman and Gaynell Park. They contact all landowners between Sweetwater Station and Pathfinder Reservoir and pass on faulty information gleaned from newspaper accounts of the Commission meeting. They then contact Department and BLM personnel and are given factual information. Parks request a meeting between local landowners and local Department and BLM personnel to discuss the transplant.
- Based on events following Park's actions, BLM decides to "reopen" the scoping process and accept additional public comment on the transplant.
- BLM and Department personnel decide to hold a local landowner meeting. BLM sends letters to 29 area landowners, including many who live 15-20 miles away from the proposed Herd Unit boundary. This was done at the insistence of Norman and Gaynell Park.

### **March, 1999**

- The local landowner meeting was held on Tuesday March, 16. Approximately 42 people attended the meeting. Attendees included local ranchers and agency personnel, but also included Larry Bourrett (Farm Bureau Federation), Bryce Reese (Woolgrowers Assoc.), Rob Hendry (Stockgrowers Assoc.), Ron Micheli (State Ag. Dept.), Don Christiansen (State Ag. Dept.), Lois Herbst (Fremont Co. Grazing Advisory Board), and Dick Loper (Ag. Consultant). Agency personnel made a presentation outlining the transplant and opened the floor to questions. Every attempt was made to address concerns as they were raised. Two petitions were circulated among attendees. According to Norman Park, 30 people signed opposing the transplant and 1 signed in favor of the transplant. The Mormon Church representative stated the Church would not sign either petition, essentially remaining neutral. As of April 2, 1999, neither BLM nor Department personnel have received copies of these petitions.