Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation & WGFD 11th Annual BHS Summit

Burgess Junction/Bear Lodge

June 21st, 2013

Introductions were made and a request was made to share WGFD Bighorn Sheep Working Group and WY-Wild Sheep Foundation board member contact lists. **ACTION: Doug M. will distribute both contact lists**. Five Action Items were discussed from the 2012 Summit. These included; 1) Pulling teeth on all harvested ewes in order to obtain age information. This was completed although there was confusion among ewe hunters about the need to register their sheep and therefore some samples were not obtained. 2) Increasing permit numbers in Hunt Area 19. This was not done in 2012, but discussions continue. 3) Presentation of a Bighorn Sheep-Domestic Sheep Interaction Working Group update to the WGFD Commission. Contacts were made with the Director’s Office, but this update did not occur in 2012. **ACTION: Doug M. will make another offer to present an update for the September or November 2013 WGF Commission meeting.** 4) Relay information to Bridger-Teton National Forest regarding the lack of a pastuerella vaccine for domestic goats and recent findings of *Mannheimia haemolytica* in lethally removed stray goats from Shell Canyon. This has been completed. 5) Status and condition of existing fire signs. With several recent fires there may also be a need for new signs. It was mentioned that if sign boards could be returned, they could be re-used and save money. **ACTION: Ryan A. will send out another request for input. Daryl L. will approach MDF for funding assistance and Ian T. will approach RMEF.** Ryan A. will coordinate with Rawlins BLM and include Greg Hiatt and Jill Randall as there were significant fires in their regions.

Suzan Moulton from the National Bighorn Sheep Center in Dubois mentioned they are celebrating their 20th Anniversary on July 3, 2013. There will be a party at 11:00 am in Dubois.

A request was also made to distribute the minutes and agenda earlier to give more time for review. **ACTION: Doug M. will distribute the minutes and agenda earlier.**

**BHS Population/Harvest Management**

* Doug M. gave a statewide bighorn sheep status report. There are currently (postseason 2012) 6,700 bighorn sheep in Wyoming. Numbers increased over that of 2011 primarily due to slightly higher estimates produced by the spreadsheet models now used to estimate population size. As a result, numbers increased in the Absaroka and Wind River Mountains. An ongoing pneumonia event in the Gros Ventre Mountains resulted in fewer sheep estimated there. Of the 20 Hunt Areas in the State of Wyoming, hunting seasons were offered in 18 of them in 2012. Only Hunt Areas 11 and 17 were closed for the 2012 season.
* A total of 197 rams were taken by 252 hunters during the 2012 hunting season, equating to a hunter success rate of 78%. Statewide hunter effort was 10.6 days per ram harvested. Harvest and success by hunt area were covered. Concern over the very poor hunter success in Hunt Area 4 prompted a discussion of further permit reductions and/or the need to “split” hunting pressure between the Dubois and Cody portions of the Hunt Area. In response it was felt that current permit reductions (the lowest since at least 1970) should allow for recovery. However, if the level of success seen in 2012 continues, further permit reductions may be discussed.

Statewide trends in hunter numbers, hunter effort and success were discussed. Although hunter numbers have declined since the late 1980s early 1990s, hunter effort has steadily declined and hunter success has steadily increased. Still, hunter numbers have declined from 350+ hunters (from 1980-1990) to approximately 250 from 1990- 2012. This is due to fewer licenses in the Whiskey Mountain herd, as well as higher success following implementation of the preference point system. Permit reductions in Hunt Areas 3, 4, 5, 7, 18, 21, and 24 will result in only 212 sheep licenses in 2013 (217 with 5 Governor’s Licenses). This will result in the fewest number of licenses offered in the last 30 years.

* Type 6 Ewe/Lamb Licenses were issued for the first time in Area 5 in 2012. A total of 20 licenses were issued and 15 ewes were harvested. This first step was applauded and it was encouraged that any Hunt Area capable of supporting some ewe/lamb harvest should provide some opportunity. The sooner harvesting female sheep becomes commonplace, the better.
* There was discussion of areas with <4 licenses. In 2012, these areas (6, 12, 18/21, 20, 24) provided 8 hunters with opportunities to pursue bighorn sheep. In 2013 Area 18/21 will be removed from this list, as will Hunt Area 24. However, Hunt Area 17 will be added, reducing the total number of sheep tags offered in these areas to 6. Since 2008 (when <4 licenses/area were first issued), a total of 39 sheep tags have been issued in these areas.

**BHS Disease Surveillance/Research**

2012-2013 Surveillance - Hank E. gave a presentation on disease surveillance efforts during the 2012-2013 winter. Sheep were sampled in Hunt Areas 1-4 near Cody, Hunt Area 7 near Jackson, and Hunt Area 20 near Newcastle. An additional 16 sheep and 18 mountain goats were sampled as part of the GYE Mountain Ungulate Initiative coordinated by Montana State University. A total of 62 sheep and 18 mountain goats were sampled as part of these efforts.

All core-native bighorn sheep herds sampled in northwest Wyoming had leukotoxin positive *Mannheimia haemolytica*, as did Elk Mountain. More common was leukotoxin positive *Bibersteinia trehalosi*, which was found in all herds except Whiskey Basin and Elk Mountain. *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* was found in all core-native herds in northwest Wyoming, but not in Elk Mountain.

All three Wyoming mountain goat hunt areas were sampled during the 2012-2013 winter, although a small sample (n=4) was gathered in Hunt Area 2. *Mannheimia haemolytica* was found in all mountain goat hunt areas. In fact, mountain goats in Hunt Areas 1 and 3 share most pathogens with bighorn sheep in Hunt Area 1-4. More sampling is necessary in mountain goat Hunt Area 2 to determine if they share pathogens with Hunt Area 6 and/or 7.

A question was raised about sampling body condition when conducting disease surveillance. This is not currently done, but the possibility was discussed of utilizing Dr. Monteith from the UW COOP, who has considerable experience, to assist in the future. It was also mentioned that similar information might be gathered by conducting on body scoring similar to that done for livestock.

An update was also given on current collaboration with Colorado Parks & Wildlife on tracking pathogens, disease, and overall health in several Colorado herds, and relationship to survival rates and lamb:ewe ratios.

Discussion of future sampling efforts occurred. At a minimum it would be desirable to re-sample all of the herds sampled in 2012-2013 (Hunt Area 1-4, 7, 20) as well as Whiskey Basin and mountain goat Hunt Area 1-3.

Sybille Research – Cole Hanson gave an update of current research being conducted by Dr. Srikumaran and his graduate students from Washington State University (in collaboration with WGFD). Eleven ewes from the Gribble Park herd of Colorado were brought to Sybille, as the CPW had exhausted efforts to clean up this herd and decided to remove all BHS. The research is focused on testing the efficacy of an antibiotic (zuprevo) to protect adults and lambs from Mannheimia induced pneumonia. Eight ewes were incorporated into the study, with four in the control group and four in the treatment group. Ewes in the treatment group were administered zuprevo two times (28 days apart). Six lambs have died (from both the control and treatment groups), with the majority carrying heavy loads of *Bibersteinia trehalosi*. Future work may include giving the antibiotic directly to lambs, giving it at a higher dose, and administering at the time we mostly capture sheep (winter). The possibility of continued sampling of these particular sheep after the research project’s completion was discussed.

Other Research - Doug M. gave a brief overview of bighorn sheep and mountain goat capture efforts associated with the GYE Mountain Ungulate Initiative.

**BHS – Domestic Sheep/Goat Issues**

Statewide DS/BHS IWG Meeting – Doug M. brought up an action item from the 2012 Bighorn Sheep-Domestic Sheep Interaction Working Group meeting that has since been clarified. The action item involved determination of whether or not verbal consent with a domestic sheep permittee is sufficient before lethally removing a wandering domestic sheep. This has been clarified (written authorization is required) and included in the most recent protocol for handling commingling of bighorn sheep and domestic sheep and goats.

The possibility of a standard “form” that a permittee would sign in such cases was discussed. WGFD Wildlife Administration would not approve of this, as it is important the permittee grant specific authorization in his/her own words.

Chapter 56 Bighorn Sheep Removals – A mature bighorn ram was killed on 1/12/2013 on the Meeteetse Creek road northwest of Meeteetse. This ram had been seen on 1/10/2013 crossing the South Fork Highway (Wyoming State Highway 291) approximately 3 miles from the Cody City Limits. Due to the unknown origins of this ram (he was at least 7 miles from the nearest occupied sheep habitat), the occurrence of domestic sheep and goats on private lands near where he was seen, and the presence of domestic sheep on private lands in the direction he was traveling, this ram was lethally removed.

Reported sightings of free-ranging domestic goats in the Clark area surfaced in late September, 2012. Ownership was established and written authorization was given to lethally remove a domestic goat near the mouth of the Clarks Fork Canyon, it was discovered and lethally removed on 10/8/2012. Reports of 2 additional domestic goats near the Switchbacks in the Clarks Fork Canyon prompted contact with the State Veterinarian and an initiation of the Feral Livestock Statute. This required additional efforts (flyers, radio spots, additional landowner contacts, 2-day waiting period) to establish ownership. By the end of the 2-day waiting period, however, the validity of the reports of domestic goats near the Switchbacks were called into question. In the meantime, another domestic goat sighting was reported, and subsequently found to belong to the owner of the goat lethally removed on 10/8/2012. Attempts were made to capture to goat, but were unsuccessful. The reason these goats had dispersed initially is they were no longer being fed. Food was provided and the goat has remained nearby (but still free-ranging). The goats reported to be near the Switchbacks were determined to be strays on 10/18/2012.

Other sightings of wandering bighorn sheep include that of a bighorn ram seen twice in mid-November, 2012 6-8 miles south of Medicine Bow along the Medicine Bow River. Also, in mid-December, 2012 a group of 7 bighorn sheep, including 2 rams and 5 ewes, were seen on the Medicine Lodge WHMA. These sheep were at least 15 miles from the nearest known group of sheep in Shell Canyon. Although follow-up attempts were made, no additional sightings were made and no bighorn sheep were removed.

Discussion ensued about the value of capturing such animals alive versus lethal removal. WGFD protocol states that these bighorns should be live-captured if possible. Although an individual animal could be housed at Sybille, the facility is currently not capable of housing multiple such animals in need of quarantine.

**ACTION ITEM: Doug M. will send out a map of Bighorn Sheep Management Areas as described in the Wyoming Statewide Bighorn Sheep Domestic Sheep Interaction Working group Final Report.**

There was also discussion about the ability to determine origin of wandering sheep (once captured or killed) through DNA analysis. It was thought that perhaps there was not enough differentiation from similar efforts in the past, but this might be worth more inquiry. **ACTION ITEM: Hank E. will check with Dee Dee Hawk to see if such a determination is possible, and if not, if more sample collections would help.**

The first issuance of a Chapter 56 Permit to a domestic sheep permittee occurred in 2012. The permit was valid for 2 bighorn sheep if they were observed commingling with domestic sheep on the permittee’s allotments during the grazing season. This permit was not utilized.

The question was asked if a similar arrangement could be developed for the WGFD to remove domestic sheep. The answer is no, as there could be other domestic sheep operators involved that did not authorize removal. Other states have dealt with this issue through informal agreements (Oregon) and legislation (Utah). **ACTION ITEM: Doug M. will send out revised protocol to WY-WSF (Kevin H.) and present at 2013 Interaction Working Group Meeting.**

Medicine Bow-Rout National Forest/Encampment River Bighorn Sheep Herd/SF 76 – No action. Funding for the bill sunsets in 2015.

Bighorn National Forest Big 6 Allotment Appeal – No action. As part of the mitigation measures however, a recreational pack goat closure order has been implemented north of 14A. **ACTION ITEM: Tom E. will send a copy of the Pack Goat Closure Order to WY-WSF (Kevin H.).**

Frank Robbins Domestic Sheep Grazing – Southern Absarokas – A judge requested the BLM to produce a timeline to begin the process of awarding Mr. Robbins’ prior cattle grazing allotments back to him. The BLM responded that Standard & Guideline assessments would need to be done in order to move forward on re-issuing the allotments, and that Mr. Robbins’ allotments are not in their current schedule. It would be 4-5 years before the S&G reviews would be completed. The judge has not replied to the BLM, and there is interest as to whether he would force the BLM to move Mr. Robbins’ allotments to the front of the priority list. Mr. Robbins has purchased approximately 500 domestic sheep, and is reportedly grazing them in conjunction with a neighbor who is running 2,500 sheep.

USFS/BLM Risk of Contact Modeling – A webinar training session for USFS/BLM/State Agency managers was held to roll out the Risk of Contact Modeling Tool. The Shoshone National Forest has completed modeling, with a finding that there is no risk of domestic sheep contact from USFS grazing allotments in Hunt Areas 1-5, 9, and 10, and a low risk of contact from USFS grazing allotments in Hunt Area 11. Risk does exist (not quantified) from domestic sheep and goats on private lands adjacent to USFS lands. The Bridger-Teton has shifted this modeling effort to the Region 4 Regional Forester’s Office. WGFD is providing data to this effort, but not assisting in model development and/or application as our response to domestic sheep and goat contact risk is prescribed by the Statewide Bighorn Sheep – Domestic Sheep Interaction Working Group Final Report.

It was asked if the occurrence of vacant allotments would increase risk in these analysis. **ACTION ITEM: Doug M. will ask USFS/BLM if vacant allotments are considered “active” in risk of contact modeling.**

There was a question as to whether or not BLM allotments in the Ferris Mountains still retained domestic sheep/domestic goat classifications. **ACTION ITEM: Ryan A. will determine livestock class on Ferris Mountain allotments.**

**WAFWA Wild Sheep Working Group**

GIS Mapping of All Wild Sheep Translocations – Nearing completion but still problems with data quality in some jurisdictions.

Management Challenges Publication – WAFWA WSWG members currently writing chapters of this new publication for a draft presentation to WAFWA directors in July. This informational publication will cover such items as habitat quality and quantity, human encroachment, grazing competition, disease, predation, population management, translocations, harvest strategies, climate change, organizational challenges, funding and staffing shortfalls, and management restrictions.

**Herd Unit Updates/Issues**

In the interest of time, a comprehensive review of each herd unit was not given, but rather specific herds were discussed. Following is a record of those discussions.

Absaroka Mountains (Areas 1-5) - Pick-up Head Analysis – due to concerns over the impacts of recent winters on several Absaroka Mountain sheep herds, an analysis of pick-up heads was conducted. An average of 45 pick-up heads/year are registered from Area 1-5, while a total of 79 were registered in 2011 and 99 in 2012. Substantially more pick-up head were registered in Area 3, 4, and 5 in 2011 and 2012, corresponding to those areas we have the greatest concern. In 2013, 36 pick-up heads have been registered from Areas 1-5.

Targhee (Area 6) – Mountain goats and their potential impacts to bighorn sheep within Grand Teton National Park remains an issue. Recent analyses show backcountry recreation causes bighorns in the Tetons to altogether avoid some otherwise suitable wintering areas. Bighorn use of closed domestic sheep allotments has been documented and seems to be expanding. Prescribed burning habitat improvements for bighorn sheep (and other species as well) are being prevented by Forest regulations to protect lynx habitat..

Jackson (Area 7) – In 2012 sheep numbers were returning to numbers seen prior to the 2001 die-off. Winter 2011-12 surveys found 420 sheep, with a ram:ewe ratio of 64:100 and a lamb:ewe ratio of 28:100, while 2012 surveys yielded 243 sheep, a ram:ewe ratio of 62:100 and a lamb:ewe ratio of 21:100. Numerous pneumonia-related mortalities of radio-collared sheep however, indicate an ongoing disease event. At present time it is not felt this disease outbreak is as significant as the 2001 die-off. Numbers of pick-up heads have not increased recently.

Whiskey Mountain (Areas 8, 9, 10, 23) – A record number of sheep (170) were observed during winter surveys in Areas 8&23 in the Upper Green River, and yielded very high ram:ewe (68:100 and 74:100) and lamb:ewe ratios (55:100 and 68:100). Winter classifications in Hunt Area 10 also yielded high lamb:ewe ratio (41:100).

Devils Canyon (Area 12) – Survey flights in summer 2012 yielded fewer sheep (97), but a subsequent ground survey yielded a count of 140. In addition approximately 40 rams known to be in the area were not seen, which translates into a population of perhaps 180-200 sheep (the population objective is 200 sheep). A recent ground survey yielded 25 ewes with 16 lambs. This herd continues to do well and may be ready as a source herd for transplants into the Seminoe Mountains, or other locations. If this herd is to serve as a source population for transplants then herd health data should probably be collected. For this reason sheep from Devil’s Canyon should be included in statewide disease surveillance efforts.

Ferris-Seminoe (Area 17) - Six radio-collared sheep died from apparent starvation during the winter of 2012-2013. As fire burned through the area and suppression efforts took place, sheep remained onsite and never left even though forage quantity was greatly reduced. A winter storm was the last straw for these individuals. There was some concern over the frequency of monitoring as this situation developed and coordination among WGFD and UW researchers. **ACTION ITEM: Daryl L. will improve coordination among researchers and WGFD and BLM managers.**

Sheep continue to use the Bennett Mountains, and have been seen in close proximity to the recently installed guzzler. A conversion from domestic sheep to cattle on the Q Ranch is in progress, which would make it possible to pursue additional transplants into the Bennett Mountains. There may be additional opportunities for water developments in this herd unit as well. Fire damaged guzzlers in the Ferris Mountains, which were replaced by BLM. BLM recently submitted bills for the Seminoe Fire from remaining funds. The possibility of a future transplant into the Ferris Mountains was mentioned.

Laramie Peak (Area 19) – A potential sheep transplant into Boxelder Canyon was discussed. There already has been considerable work done on this effort and internal WGFD field tours are scheduled in the near future. Caution was recommended, as issues/problems that suspended previous efforts still exist. Permission to proceed is still needed from Wildlife Adminsitration.

Dubois Badlands (Area 22) – There was apparently a significant die-off four years ago that was Badlands-specific. Lamb recruitment was very low in 2012. There were 120-130 sheep observed in Hunt Area 22, now there are 60-70. It would be valuable to sample these sheep during statewide surveillance efforts.

Sweetwater Rocks (Area 16) - The Lander Region is beginning the process of evaluating landowner support for a transplant into the Sweetwater Rocks. Appendix L of the Statewide Bighorn Sheep – Domestic Sheep Interaction Working Group Final Report is being followed as this effort proceeds.

Darby (Area 24) – Currently conducting mid-winter flights when weather permits. Very difficult to monitor, but numbers appear to be down. Hunting season was closed for 2013 and will remain so until surveys indicate mature rams are available for harvest. Concern was raised over motorized travel (motorcycles) on bighorn sheep summer ranges and snowmachines on sheep winter ranges.

**Population Management/Trapping/Transplanting/Ewe Harvest**

Prompted by concerns from the WGFD Bighorn Sheep Working Group, the matter of how to address increasing sheep densities and population objectives that have been exceeded received significant discussion. It is probably wise to contemplate management actions now rather than once population objectives are exceeded. Whiskey Mountain was used as an example; if lamb:ewe ratios continue to remain high (41:100 in 2012) it may not be long until numbers grow again and the need to remove sheep will resurface. This raises several questions; Can we deal with this solely with Type 6 licenses? Will the public accept 200 Type 6 licenses in Hunt Area 10? Should trapping be used to supplement these removals? If trapping is used, who wants our “dirty” sheep?

There were comments made that at current levels there are still too many sheep on Whiskey Mountain (currently estimated to be 1,000), let alone the objective of 1,360 sheep. This same comment was made in regards to Hunt Area 7 in the Gros Ventre. One way to look at it is either we remove a lot of sheep, or we manage for lower populations that require fewer removals. The comment was made that we must establish the normality of ewe hunting as soon as possible. The sooner we issue Type 6 licenses in more areas, the more commonplace it will become. **ACTION ITEM: With assistance from Kevin H., Doug M. will draft a white paper on ewe hunting in other jurisdictions.**

It was also mentioned that there would be little risk associated with transplanting Whiskey Basin sheep into the Southern Winds (Temple Peak herd unit), as there have been no documentation of sheep movements from Temple Peak to Whiskey Mountain. There would be some concern over commingling with domestic sheep on the west side of the Continental Divide on the Bridger-Teton National Forest. If this possibility exists, then it would be imperative that any transplanted bighorn sheep not find their way back to Whiskey Mountain. As Temple Peak is a Cooperative Review Area, it is important that any bighorn sheep management activities not adversely impact domestic sheep producers. If such an effort gains traction, the possibility of habitat improvements in anticipation of sheep transplants should be considered.

**Hunting Opportunity – Unlimited Hunt Areas**

Prompted by observations of the advanced maturity of bighorn sheep advocates and the likelihood of waiting 15-20 years to draw a bighorn sheep license, a discussion was held about the use of unlimited hunt areas as a way to offer sheep hunting opportunities and get younger people excited about sheep conservation.

Sheep hunter success is approximately 25% across North America, largely due to the unlimited opportunity offered in the Canadian Provinces and Alaska. This is in contrast to the lower 48 where hunter success typically runs much higher and sheep hunting is managed through strictly controlled licenses. In the lower 48, Montana is the only state to offer unlimited hunting opportunities, and does so through a harvest quota of ¾ curl rams. Appropriate areas in MT have difficult access, and areas close with 2 days notice. In addition to call-in updates, status of the quota in each hunt district is announced across local radio stations. Areas are not overrun with hunters, as purchase of unlimited licenses removes all preference points accumulated. Once a hunter harvests a ram on an unlimited license, they may not apply for another license for 7 years.

There was some agreement on the benefits of unlimited areas, and recognition that where such a management approach would be applied could elicit much excitement (perhaps both good and bad). The possibility of offering such a license only to youth was mentioned, but is not possible under WGFD license issuance rules. Hunt Area 9 was mentioned as a possibility, as it definitely fits the “difficult access” criteria. The possibility of adopting this approach for managing mountain goats in areas where goat expansion is discouraged was also raised. **ACTION ITEM: With assistance from Kevin H., Doug M. will draft a white paper on unlimited sheep hunt areas and distribute for review.**

**Funded Projects/Future Projects**

Time did not allow for a detailed discussion of recently funded projects from the Wyoming Governors Big Game License Coalition (WGBGLC) and the Wyoming Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation. They are presented below.

2013 WGBGLC BHS Funded Projects [May 15, 2013 Total of $73,000 in 5 projects]

* Ecology of Snake River Canyon Mountain Goats ($20,000 requested, $18,000 funded)
* Mountain Goat Videos ($7,600)
* Wyoming Atlas of Big Game Migration ($10,000)
* Bighorn-Domestic Sheep Monitoring Flights ($5,000 requested, $4,000 funded)
* Forever Wild Family Workshops ($5,000 requested, $4,000 funded)
* Iron Mountain Prescribed Fire ($35,000)

2013 WY-WSF Funded Grant-in-aids (GIAs) [June 1, 2013 Total of $12,000 in 6 projects]

* Ecology of Snake River Canyon Mountain Goats ($2,000)
* Bighorn-Domestic Sheep Monitoring Flights ($1,000)
* Forever Wild Family Workshops ($1,000)
* Iron Mountain Prescribed Fire ($5,000)
* Elk Decoy – Jackson Region ($500)
* Domestic Sheep Allotment Buy-Out – Beaverhead Mtns, MT ($2,500)

Several significant developments came out of the May 15, 2013 WGBGLC meeting. Following funding decisions in 2012, a total of $155,638 remained in the Bighorn Sheep Account. This was done intentionally, as several expensive, high-profile projects were in the works, but depended upon potentially rapidly evolving situations. These situations did not develop into proposals, and the sale of 2013 Governors License Bighorn Sheep tags added an additional $233,100 into the Bighorn Sheep Account. In addition, $25,000 from one approved project from 2011 had to be rolled back, bringing the total amount in the Bighorn Sheep Account to $413,738.

Due to the amount of money in the Bighorn Sheep Account, $100,000 was distributed to the other species working groups ($25,000 each) to fund projects as they wished. A total of $73,000 in projects was funded from the Bighorn Sheep Account, leaving a balance of $240,738. The amount of money in the Bighorn Sheep Account should not be interpreted as a lack of need for funding, but rather the difficulty planning projects with unknown implementation schedules. It was recognized that funds could not be retained indefinitely for projects that may never transpire. With this realization, it was made clear that interim project proposals would be delivered to the WGBGLC for consideration this fall. A prioritization of those projects is listed below. Names associated with each project will be responsible for developing proposals.

1. Statewide Disease Surveillance (Hank E., Doug M.)
2. Serial Sampling of Sybille Bighorn Sheep (Hank E.,Jessica J.G., Cole H.)
3. Southern Absarokas Bighorn Sheep Monitoring (Bart K., Tim W. Benge B., Kevin H.)
4. Torrey Rim Prescribed Burn in Wilderness (Greg A.)
5. Sybille Research Unit Upgrades (Cole H.)
6. Whiskey Basin Winter Range Fertilizer Application (Greg A.)
7. Arapahoe Wildfire Rehabilitation (Ryan A., Martin H.)
8. Aerial Survey Flights (Doug M., Tim W.)
9. Palisades Mountain Goat Captures (Scott S., Gary F.)
10. Sweetwater Rocks Transplant
11. Elk Mountain Conservation Easement
12. Elk Mountain Cheatgrass Control
13. Whiskey Basin Lamb Mortality Study

Project Discussion/Details

1. This project might include captures in Hunt Areas 1-5, 7, 10, 12, 20, and 22 and would be accomplished through the use of ground darting, drop nets, and aerial net-gunning. Radio collars would be deployed in some situations. The possibility of conducting some sort of body condition sampling/scoring at the same time was discussed. The possibility of pursuing funding through the Wyoming Wildlife Livestock Disease Partnership was raised. **ACTION ITEM: Hank E. will investigate WWLDP funding for statewide surveillance efforts.** The possibility of funding from other WSF chapters was also suggested.
2. This project would entail repeated sampling of captive sheep at the Sybille Research Unit, and perhaps assessment of antibiotic (zuprevo) administration to lambs.
3. This project would attempt to document bighorn sheep distribution and risk of contact with domestic sheep. Possibilities range from periodic observation/distribution flights to aerial capture, disease sampling, and radio-collaring of bighorn sheep to assess movements and risk of commingling. It was clear that WGFD would not support using WGBGLC money to conduct aerial flights to document trespass livestock.
4. This project received a high ranking because it involves prescribed fire in the Fitzpatrick Wilderness, a USFS-Designated Wilderness with special language allowing such activities for the benefit of bighorn sheep. It was suggested that this project would be perfectly suited for funding from the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust Fund (WWNRT).
5. The Sybille facility will likely be an important component of the program to increase emphasis on disease-related bighorn sheep research and monitoring. However, fencing upgrades are necessary in order to conduct future work safely and to minimize any risk to resident bighorn sheep in Sybille Canyon. A suggestion was made to embrace a multi-year plan to fund and incrementally work on such upgrades at Sybille. The current proposal could be part of such an effort, and would be compartmentalized in order to complete upgrades with available funding each year.
6. This project was also felt to be appropriate for WWNRT funding, and perhaps that of various WSF Chapters.
7. With the amount of wildfire that has occurred on the landscape of the Laramie Peak sheep herd, there is much to be done in terms of post-fire assessment and cheatgrass prevention.
8. With increasing WGFD constraints (increasing costs, decreasing budgets) on aerial surveys, the possibility of supplementing WGFD flight budgets and/or conducting non-traditional surveys in specific areas was suggested. If flight budgets are cut further, those cuts may come from elk, deer, and antelope flights as there is more money to be saved with these species. Regardless, it is understood that WGBGLC funding is not to be used to supplant WGFD M&O funding.
9. Funding was provided in 2013 to conduct ground-based captures of mountain goats in Area 2. The goal was to capture 15-20 mountain goats and radio-collar 8 of them, but due to advanced green-up and goat movements away from winter range, only 5 goats were captured and 3 radio-collared. This proposal would involve capturing the remaining 5 mountain goats on summer ranges using aerial net-gunning. This operation would be coordinated with elk captures in the Jackson herd unit and mountain goat captures in Idaho by the same animal capture vendor.
10. Although this project will definitely need funding in the future if it does proceed, there is no current need for funding.
11. This project is not at a point where funding is needed.
12. This project is not at a point where funding is needed.
13. This project received much discussion, and although an important topic, it was felt that it may be tremendously expensive and logistically difficult to complete. In addition, much could be learned from collaboration with the Colorado Parks & Wildlife on herds in similar situations. The possibility of conducting this work in a captive situation at Sybille using Whiskey Mountain sheep was also discussed but ultimately abandoned.

Additional project suggestions included fence replacements (replacing woven-wire with 3-strand) on the Stone Ranch allotments in the Ferris and Seminoe Mountains.

Another suggestion was to examine the potential of using portable drop nets (similar to the one used on Elk Mountain in Hunt Area 20) to capture bighorn sheep in specific situations. This approach might also work to capture mountain goats as well.

Upcoming meetings of interest include;

The WY-WSF winter meeting will be in Wheatland on December 6-7, 2013 and will include a behind the scenes tour of the Sybille Research Facility.

The WY-WSF summer meeting will be May 30-31, 2014 at the Parkway Plaza in Casper.

2014 WSF Convention in Reno (Reno-Sparks Convention Center & Peppermill Resort & Casino Jan 22-25, 2014).

Northern Wild Sheep & Goat Council in Fort Collins, CO (June 2-5, 2014).

WSF Chapter and Affiliates Meeting, Phoenix, AZ (June 27-28, 2014).

The 2014 WGFD/WY-WSF Sheep Summit will be June 19-20, 2014 at Bear Lodge. **ACTION ITEM: Tom R. will check with Director Talbott on his availability on these dates.**