

Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation & WGFD 12th Annual BHS Summit
Burgess Junction/Bear Lodge
June 19-20, 2014

In Attendance: Doug McWhirter, Hank Edwards, Jim Collins, Doug Brimeyer, Mary Wood, Ryan Amundson, Suzan Moulton, Cole Benton, Martin Hicks, Bob Sundeen, Mike Porter, Tim Woolley, Scott Smith, Greg Anderson, James Rhinehart, Mac Miller, Joni Miller, Bart Kroger, Scott Talbott, Dan Hinz, Kurt Eisenbach, Aly Courtemanch, James Hobbs, Kevin Hurley.

Welcome, Introductions, Board/Personnel Changes for WY-WSF& WGFD BSWG

Review Action Items from 2013 Minutes

ACTION: Doug M. will distribute both contact lists. Kevin H. distributed the WY-WSF contact list to the group. Update: Doug M. mailed the WGFD BSWG contact list to Kevin H. on 6/23/2014.

ACTION: Doug M. will make another offer to present an update for the September or November 2013 WGF Commission meeting. Update: Doug M. will work through Scott S. (and Bea) to get on the agenda for the September or November Commission meeting.

ACTION: Ryan A. will send out another request for input. Daryl L. will approach MDF for funding assistance and Ian T. will approach RMEF. Update: Ongoing.

ACTION: Doug M. will distribute the minutes and agenda earlier. Update: Minutes – distributed earlier, Agenda – not distributed earlier.

ACTION: 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. Update: Aly C. will produce a revised version of Bighorn Sheep Management Areas and distribute to the group.

ACTION: Hank E. will check with Dee Dee Hawk to see if genetic determination of the origin of wandering bighorn sheep is possible, and if not, if more sample collections would help. Update: Samples continue to be collected, but assignment of origin is not possible at this time.

ACTION: Doug M. will send out revised protocol to WY-WSF (Kevin H.) and present at 2013 Interaction Working Group Meeting. Update: Doug M. distributed on 6/23/2014.

ACTION: Tom E. will send a copy of the Pack Goat Closure Order to WY-WSF (Kevin H.). Update: Tim W. will follow up and distribute.

ACTION: Doug M. will ask USFS/BLM if vacant allotments are considered “active” in risk of contact modeling. Update: No, they are not considered active.

ACTION: Ryan A. will determine livestock class on Ferris Mountain allotments. Update: They are all cattle. There was still some question as to whether or not the Buzzard Ranch has an inactive domestic sheep allotment.

ACTION: Daryl L. will improve coordination among researchers and WGFD and BLM managers in the Seminoe Mountains. Update: Status unknown.

ACTION: With assistance from Kevin H., Doug M. will draft a white paper on ewe hunting in other jurisdictions. Update: Not Completed, In Progress.

ACTION: With assistance from Kevin H., Doug M. will draft a white paper on unlimited sheep hunt areas and distribute for review. Update: Not completed, In Progress. It was suggested that Shawn Stewart (wildlife biologist for MTFWP) be invited to the Cody Winter WY-WSF meeting to give a presentation on unlimited areas in Montana. The white paper should be completed by this time.

ACTION: Hank E. will investigate WWLDP funding for statewide surveillance efforts. Update: Completed. Currently satisfactorily funded through WGBGLC.

Statewide BHS Issues/Topics

BHS Population/Harvest Management

2013 Status Report (Statewide BHS harvest summary, population status) – Doug M. gave a status report. In postseason 2013 there were approximately 6,650 sheep in Wyoming and hunting seasons were held in 16 of 20 hunt areas (hunt areas 11, 18, 21, and 24 were closed). A hunt area by hunt area discussion of 2013 harvest statistics took place. Statewide, there were fewer sheep hunters than anytime since before 1983. Hunter numbers in 2013 were reduced due to tag reductions and fire-related carry-overs in Hunt Areas 3, 4, 5, and 7. However, hunter success has never been higher and hunter effort has never been lower than what was observed in 2013.

The second Type 6 ewe/lamb season was held in 2013, with 7 of 8 hunters harvested ewes for a 87.5% success rate. Since approval was given in 2008 to issue less than 4 licenses in a given hunt area (as long as the statewide 75:25 resident:nonresident split was maintained) a total of 39 sheep licenses have been issued that may not otherwise have been offered.

The above normal snow accumulations in the spring of 2011 triggered sheep mortalities in hunt area 3, 4, and 5. The number of ram pick-up heads increased in these areas, and especially in hunt area 5 where a total of 139 ram heads were registered from 2011-2013. Perhaps the bulk of the mortalities have occurred, as only 15 pick-up heads from hunt area 5 have been registered so far in 2014. Other areas of note in 2014 however, included 1 ram from hunt area 12 and 2 rams from Shell Canyon.

Winter aerial surveys were conducted in 2013-2014 in both hunt area 4 and hunt area 5. In both areas total numbers of sheep and total numbers of rams seen were down from that seen prior to 2011, but not at level that would be considered catastrophic. Ram:ewe and lamb:ewe ratios in both areas were quite good and not indicative of a continuing disease related event.

The 2014 bighorn sheep hunting season will see 212 licenses issued, with hunting occurring in 18 of the 20 established hunt areas in Wyoming.

Potential Transplants – Ryan A. gave an update on the public meetings held to discuss bighorn sheep transplant opportunities in the Sweetwater Rocks, Ferris Mountains, and Bennett Mountains area of south-central Wyoming.

BHS Disease Surveillance/Research

Disease sampling – 2013-2014 Results - Hank E. gave an update on disease surveillance efforts during the 2013-2014 winter. A total of 122 individuals were captured throughout Wyoming. Of particular note was the relatively ubiquitous finding of *Mannheimia haemolytica* and *Mycoplasma ovipneumonia* in most herds (*M. ovipneumonia* was not found in Devils Canyon, the Seminoe Mountains, or in Elk Mountain).

GYE Mountain Ungulate Initiative – 2013-2014 Results - There are currently 35 bighorn sheep and 18 mountain goats radio-collared as part of the GYE Mountain Ungulate Project. In 2013-2014, 20 bighorn sheep and 4 mountain goats were captured in the Absaroka and Beartooth Mountains, while 8 goats were captured in the Snake River Range. Disease surveillance work on these mountain goats indicate they too have *Mannheimia haemolytica* and *Mycoplasma ovipneumonia*.

Thorne-Williams Research Center Improvements - Mary W. gave an update on the recent and anticipated improvements at the Thorne-Williams Wildlife Research Center, which includes new fences, paddocks, and handling facilities.

Thorne-Williams Research Center Bighorn Sheep Research Status - Mary W. gave an update on the status of both the Gribble's Park sheep from Colorado and the Absaroka Mountains sheep from Cody.

Bighorn Sheep – Domestic Sheep/Goat Issues

Statewide DS/BHS IWG meetings (December 10, 2013, April 25, 2014 meetings) – Doug M. gave an update on recent meetings of the Statewide DS/BHS IWG, which focused heavily on Risk of Contact Analyses conducted by Region 4 of the USFS.

Chapter 56 BHS Removals – Since meeting last year three separate incidents occurred. On 8/7/2013 a 2-yr ram was euthanized near Lusk, on 8/17/2013 a 4-yr ram was

captured and moved to Sybille, and on 10/17/2013 a 2-yr ram was euthanized from Jackson Canyon near Casper Mountain. While at the meeting, notification of 5 rams from Nebraska were seen near Lusk. Coordination with Nebraska personnel was initiated.

ASI Payette Lawsuit/Congressional Letter - Kevin H. gave an update and presented drafts of a letter that will be sent to Dept. of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack regarding BHS/DS issues. Key to this letter were 4 recommendations that include; 1) allow USFS and BLM time to conduct a west-wide disease risk assessment, 2) utilize collaborative efforts to identify solutions that include change in class of livestock, alternate allotments (including vacant allotments and forage reserves), 3) timely identification of alternate allotments through Rescissions Act scheduling, and 4) delay of permittee relocations until NEPA analyses (including administrative appeals and judicial reviews) have been completed on allotments identified for relocation.

WSGA Resolution – Jim C. gave an update on the recent development of a resolution at the Wyoming Stockgrowers Association meeting in Cody restricting the transplant of bighorn sheep. Although meant as a response to Risk Analyses conducted by the USFS, this could potentially present a chink in the armor of the Wyoming Plan as it represents a departure from our Terms of Agreement. A WSGA subcommittee will begin to address this issue, but this will likely take 6 months or more to resolve. WGFD response is to put discussions regarding potential bighorn sheep transplant actions on hold.

Frank Robbins Domestic Sheep Situation – Much discussion took place regarding the domestic sheep grazing situation during the 2013 grazing season, BLM actions with respect to Robbins' allotment analyses, and appropriate WGFD/WY-WSF response/actions to safeguard bighorn sheep. **ACTION:** James R. will contact Steve K. to discuss potential buyer possibilities for the HD and High Island Ranches.

Miscellaneous Topics

Consistency in Bighorn Sheep Disease Recommendations - Following a discussion of the WGFD BSWG, apparent inconsistencies were brought to light. These include a Bighorn National Forest Recreational Pack Goat Closure Order, which is not consistent with allowing pack goat use in Cooperative Review Areas and Non-Emphasis Areas. The only area recreational pack goat restrictions are recommended is in Core Native herds. Another potential inconsistency is the recommendation against llama grazing allotments. Based on past information from Beth Williams, llamas have not been considered a disease risk to bighorn sheep. We allow recreational llama use in Core Native Herds, and should not restrict anywhere. In the Wyoming Plan, no distinction is made between recreational and commercial/allotment grazing of domestic sheep and/or goats.

A related and evolving issue is that of the potential transmission risk associated with cattle and how to respond to questions on this topic. **ACTION:** Mary W. and Hank E.

will conduct a literature review of llama and cattle disease information and return to the group with their findings.

Unlimited Hunting Areas – Although this Action Item from the 2013 Summit was not completed, a discussion took place about the concept. It was also mentioned that Unlimited Areas might present a solution to potentially undesirable mountain goat expansion, although it would require a departure from the once-in-a-lifetime license restriction currently in place. This could possibly be replaced with a once-in-a-lifetime harvest. Shawn Stewart (MTFWP Biologist, Red Lodge) will be invited to the WY-WSF in Cody to present the Montana experience with unlimited bighorn sheep areas.

Body Condition Sampling of Bighorn Sheep – This topic received considerable discussion. This topic first surfaced in 2013 when the possibility of doing a “pilot study” and coordinating body condition sampling with disease surveillance work was discussed. This did not occur during the winter of 2013-2014, and with the prospect of substantial funding and few projects in the 2014 WGBGLC Bighorn Sheep Account, a request to fully develop a proposal was asked of Dr. Kevin Monteith. Although further discussions about a “Pilot Study” took place, this proposal was not funded, and a similar request to the Wyoming Wildlife-Livestock Disease Partnership was tabled. The following can be said about these discussions;

There is general conceptual agreement that nutrition/body condition influences disease impacts. However, concerns about conducting such work include; 1) can the influence of body condition be detected among the natural variation and lack of complete understanding of bighorn sheep disease, 2) difficult logistics associated with aerial captures (weather, scheduling, coordination with disease sampling), 3) public acceptance of repeated captures, 4) Vet. Services workload (CWD, brucellosis) in November required for repeated sampling, 5) awareness/knowledge of technique validation.

ACTION: In association with ongoing disease surveillance, conduct body condition assessments once during winter. Ground-based capture efforts would be used in Jackson, Whiskey Mountain, and Cody. Captured individuals would be marked (radio-collar, ear-tag, PIT tag) for potential future captures. Hank E. will coordinate with Kevin M. to determine interest in this approach.

Devils Canyon Bighorn Sheep Management – As the Devils Canyon sheep herd approaches its population objective (200 sheep) there has been much discussion about increasing sheep licenses and means to slow the growth of the herd. Increasing licenses will necessitate discussions with area landowners, which will occur during summer 2014. Opportunities to reduce sheep numbers include transplants and/or ewe-lamb licenses, although it was felt that in-state transplants were preferable to ewe-lamb license or out-of-state transplants at this time. It was felt that a comprehensive summer aerial survey planned for July 2014 would be helpful in shaping plans for reducing sheep densities. Further discussion centered on the urgency of such populations

reduction, and the potential influence of the recent WSGA resolution on possible transplant plans.

The question was asked if there was any way to provide a “random” license in Hunt Area 12, as currently with only 2 licenses issued, there is no random license. This would require much more thought, as creating this possibility with less than 4 licenses might unduly complicate the drawing process. If more licenses are issued, then the possibility will exist.

2014 WGBGLC BHS Funded Projects [May 14, 2014 Total of \$196,500 in 8 projects]

- Atlas of Wildlife Migration:Wyoming’s Ungulates (\$10,000 requested, \$2,500 funded)
- Nutritional Carrying Capacity of Wyoming’s Ungulates (\$2,000 requested, \$0 funded)
- Nutrition and Disease in Bighorn Sheep (\$70,035 requested, \$0 funded)
- Bryan Flats Habitat Enhancement (\$10,000 requested, \$10,000 funded)
- Red Rock Fire Ungulate Nutrition Project (\$8,000 requested, \$6,000 funded)
- Statewide Radio Telemetry Relocation Flight (\$18,500 requested, \$10,000 funded)
- Statewide Disease Surveillance of Bighorn Sheep (\$98,000 requested, \$88,000 funded)
- Forever Wild Educator Resources (\$2,000 requested, \$0 funded)
- Forever Wild Family Program (\$5,000 requested, \$5,000 funded)
- Elk Mountain Cheatgrass Project (\$20,000 requested, \$25,000 funded – BHS took deer portion)
- Bighorn Sheep Handling Facility Improvements (\$77,092.35 requested, \$50,000 funded)

2014 WY-WSF Funded Grant-in-aids (GIAs) [May 31, 2014 Total of \$12,000 in 3 projects]

- Thorne-Williams Research Technician (\$1,172)
- NBCSIC Taxidermy Work (\$2,5000)
- BSA Camp Buffalo Bill Shooting Range (\$5,000)

WGBGLC Topics

Coordination of WGBGLC & WY-WSF Projects/Project Application Leads – There is a need to continue and improve coordination between WGFD and WY-WSF regarding WGBGLC Projects, which the annual Sheep Summit plays an important part. More attention needs to be given to shared WGBGLC/WY-WSF-funded projects by Project

Leads to ensure funds are spent, costs are tracked, and appropriate reports are completed.

WGBGLC Business/Fiscal Processes – A brief update was given on discussions that took place at the 5/14/2014 WGBGLC meeting in Casper. Frustration was expressed over lack of timely billing by WGFD and the impact of this upon project budget tracking. To eliminate this situation it was even suggested that other entities besides WGFD submit projects to avoid Wyoming Wildlife, The Foundation funds from being routed through WGFD.

Also discussed were potential options for distribution of unspent funds remaining at the completion of a project. One possibility was if remaining funds total less than 10% of the total funds, then they can be directed to the WGFD Access Yes Program. As it is currently, maintenance of these remaining funds is problematic. **ACTION:** Scott S. will look into the situation and ongoing WGFD attempts to remedy.

Interim WGBGLC Project Proposals – Based on discussions between WGFD and WY-WSF, the following projects will be developed and presented to Wyoming Wildlife – The Foundation, for interim funding in fall, 2014;

- 2 drop nets for capture use statewide (anticipated \$5,000 each)
- Devils Canyon Bighorn Sheep Transplant (n=25 sheep)
- Snake River Canyon Mountain Goat Captures (n=?)
- Southern Absaroka Bighorn Sheep Captures/Disease Surveillance/Monitoring (n=20 sheep). Rams and ewes collared, potentially use Iridium GPS collars for real-time information. ACTION: Bart K. coordinate with Pat H. (WRIR) to evaluate possibility of captures on WRIR.

Normal Cycle WGBGLC Project Proposals –

- Disease Surveillance – Jackson (Wilderness Captures, Horsethief Canyon), Targhee (Iridium GPS collars), Francs Peak (Dennison/Spring Mountain), Laramie Peak (Sybille Canyon).
- Elk Mountain Water Developments
- USFS Cheatgrass Control

NWY-WSF GIA Project Proposals –

- Targhee Aerial Survey
- Elk Mountain Water Developments
- USFS Cheatgrass Control

Future Meetings

- 2014 Winter Meeting in Cody (Dec. 5-6, 2014)
- 2015 WSF Convention in Reno (Reno-Sparks Convention Center & Peppermill Resort & Casino Jan 7-10, 2015)
- 2015 WY-WSF Convention in Casper (Parkway Plaza, June 5-6, 2015)
- WY DS-BHS IWG, August 22, 2014, Casper WGFD Office.
- 2015 WGFD/WY-WSF BHS Summit – June 25-26, 2015, Burgess Jct.