

**2021 Burgess Junction Bighorn Sheep Summit**  
**Friday, June 18, 2021**  
**8:00 – 12:00**

**AGENDA**

**Introduction**

- Participant introductions
- History of Burgess Junction Bighorn Sheep Summit – Cole Benton

**Re-engagement of Domestic/Bighorn Sheep Interaction Working Group (IWG)**

- 2004 Wyoming Plan
  - Bighorn sheep management under the current plan and WY statutes.
  - BTNF Bighorn Sheep Forest Plan Amendment Comments
  - Updating Plan
- Annual meeting status
- Involved parties
- Where do we go from here with this IWG?
  - Who will Chair/Co-Chair the IWG, going forward?

**WGFD Bighorn Sheep “Plan/Document”**

- What are the specific goals and objectives of this document (WY-WSF & WGFD)?
  - What do we want to accomplish with this document?
    - How do we hope to use this product into the future?
  - Opportunities?
  - Limitations?
- What type of plan/document are we specifically looking to develop?
  - Mule Deer Initiative type treatise
  - Herd Unit by Herd Unit management and needs?
  - Statewide species-specific management plan?
- What is a realistic timeline to produce (and maintain) this type of document?
- How can WY-WSF and WGFD work together to make this a quality and effective document?

**Partnership into the Future**

- Long tradition of successful partnership
- What does our partnership look like into the future?
- WGFD Internal Bighorn Sheep Working Group?
  - Bighorn Sheep Working Group Leadership Succession plan?
  - Bighorn Sheep Working Group composition?
  - How can WY-WSF support the WGFD to best manage Wyoming’s bighorn sheep populations?
- Any future bighorn sheep projects WY-WSF can help WGFD with.
  - More opportunities for WY-WSF membership to help out
  - Plan in advance

### **Commissioner Licenses**

- WY-WSF is really appreciative of the Commissioner license program support.
- Will the 307 lawsuit affect how Commissioner licenses are allocated?

### **Whiskey Mountain Movie Project**

- Steve Kilpatrick working on project with National Bighorn Sheep Interpretive Center

### **Additional Topics/Discussion**

### **MINUTES**

Present: Zach McDermott, Jim Collins, Martin Hicks, Katie Cheesbrough, Tony Mong, Ryan Amundson, Bruce Perryman, Joni Miller, Mack Miller, Scott Smith, Pete Dube, Scott Butler, Cole Benton, Daryl Lutz, Brian Nesvik, Tara Butler, Dean DiJenno, Diane DiJenno, Aly Courtemanch, John Harris, Greg Anderson, Rick King, Doug Brimeyer, Christina Schmidt, Doug McWhirter, Dillon Herman.

### **History of Burgess Junction Bighorn Sheep Summit**

Cole Benton gave an introduction and history of the Bighorn sheep Summit. It started in 2003 and this is the 18<sup>th</sup> gathering. The Wyoming Chapter (WY-WSF) didn't feel there was enough emphasis on bighorn sheep in Wyoming and wanted more interaction with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD). At the first meeting, there was a WGFD representative from every herd unit in the state. WY-WSF feels good progress had been made over the years, but wanted more done with bighorn sheep and wanted a WGFD employee dedicated solely to working on bighorn sheep issues in the state. Sheep numbers were going down. Sheep are very important to the WY-WSF and we want to continue working with WGFD through this summit and other venues. WY-WSF can't do it alone, but recognizes WGFD field employees are too busy to dedicate time completely to bighorn sheep.

### **Re-engagement of Domestic/Bighorn Sheep Interaction Working Group (IWG)**

Katie Cheesbrough - The 11-year-old plan being put into law without updating is concerning. Some things in the plan contradict themselves. We want to talk about where to go from here and how you manage bighorn sheep when this is statute as well as abiding by other statutes that direct WGFD.

The Darby Herd letter from WGFD to Bridger-Teton National Forest (BTNF) was 'disheartening'. It seems WGFD has conceded that maps in the 2004 plan will be in place forever. "WY-WSF has put a lot of money into collars to look at sheep movement and to hear that all of that is for naught is concerning." WY-WSF is concerned that the Department's letter uses the same wording used in the Wyoming Department of Agriculture's (WDA) letter. Wants explanation and better understand how those comments and letter came about.

Doug Brimeyer and others joined the discussion defining occupied habitat, herd units, etc. and gave further clarification on the intent of the letter.

Cheesbrough – Appreciates and understands the explanation. She understands the Governor requires state agencies to speak with one voice. But if WGFD has to speak with one voice with WDA, where does that leave WWSF?

Brian Nesvik - There is not necessarily expectation that we will work with one voice. We do work in agreement when we can.

Doug McWhirter – Joe Budd was curious if we could write one letter and it became apparent we couldn't.

Aly Courtemanch – Read the scoping letter and agrees the department was in line with the law and we need to follow that. The Wyoming Plan has done tremendous good for bighorn sheep. Things like this come up, but we need to remember the good that has been implemented because of the State plan.

Jim Collins – We need to remember there was law proposed to outlaw reintroductions of bighorn sheep not long ago. If you look at this plan and what we started with, our bighorns came out really well. I know this isn't perfect. Domestic sheep producers gave up more than WY-WSF folks did. I think we have done well and had good personnel in the meetings. But we didn't get it done early enough. Fears the decline of bighorn sheep is expanding beyond Whiskey. Allotment buyouts had good timing since producers had conflict with predation. Problems came on before the plan was done.

Chessbrough – It is a good plan, but concerned that it is stuck and needs to be updated.

Collins – Disagrees. Plan allows for a lot of opportunity. Sweetwater Rocks is a priority. We have to be able to sell it to the domestic sheep producers. The way we do that is have a subcommittee with WDA, Wyoming Stockgrowers Association (WSGA), Wyoming Woolgrowers Association (WWA), and WY-WSF and WGFD and get this group smaller so we can talk more openly and honestly among ourselves. We need to include producers. If we have a good viable project, we can get it done, but we need to go to the group with the right plan.

McWhirter – We have pathogens that have likely been cycling in these populations for decades due to intermingling with domestic sheep that could have happened a long time ago. Separation where we can is a good goal, but we can't always pin disease outbreaks on current intermingling with domestics – they have outbreaks within herds that have just always been present.

Mack Miller – Seems producers want some areas back as they are concerned younger generations can't come into the business.

McWhirter – There was general support to buy/close allotments from domestic producers until 2017. Allotment negotiations were seen as private transactions between permittees and groups funding the buyout. However, WDA eventually came out against an individual producer's agreement and said it was bad for the industry as a whole. The landscape has now changed. The industry might feel pushed far enough in non-emphasis areas and it is not worth pushing the

envelope. There are a lot more opportunities in Cooperative Review Areas, and perhaps more focus should be directed there.

Collins – Some antagonism comes from decisions by USFS.

Bruce Perryman – Hearing the explanation from WGFD today, it clears some confusion and WGFD should reach out to BTNF to clear any confusion about the Darby Herd letter and we support the amendment. Brimeyer agreed WGFD could do that.

McWhirter – Gave short presentation on history of the Bighorn Sheep-Domestic Sheep Interaction Working Group and the Wyoming Plan. He also mentioned there are currently resolutions opposed to transplants of bighorns into various areas of the state, and which could be considered contrary to the Wyoming Plan.

Collins – Feels the Livestock's Board's resolutions are contrary to the Wyoming Plan and this should be brought to WDA's attention.

Nesvik – Was at the meeting when WDA passed these. What prompted it was USFS doing viability surveys in other parts of state and producers felt they were going to be limited. They believed groups weren't holding up their end of the plan, particularly the federal government. Believed that USFS/BLM would change standards and use bighorn sheep as the excuse. The way success comes is when landowners and producers bring this forward. When we are willing to stand up for the plan, we gain credibility. Where there is potential to be effective, work in the spirit of how the plan was developed. There are also property rights involved. He asks the group to be patient. We remain committed to the plan. We support making recommendations to USFS to not change grazing plans. (in the Wyoming Range?)

Scott Smith – USFS-BTNF will be in tricky position since bighorn sheep are designated sensitive species in entire forest, but have also said they will acknowledge and follow the Wyoming Plan. Shouldn't be, but could be contradictory?

Collins – Producers feel pressure and threat from federal land management changes. WGFD and WY-WSF should be in agreement to stand up for producers when necessary to make sure the Wyoming Plan is being followed.

McWhirter – USFS is subject to litigation that may force them to be contradictory to the Wyoming Plan.

Cheesbrough – Wants clarification that non-emphasis areas/herds are not being written off. Wants clarification that habitat projects, etc. can still be pursued for non-emphasis herds.

Collins – Need to recognize the plan does not address private land issue/property rights. Activities on deeded land versus USFS/BLM land are very different issues.

McWhirter – Producers are subject to market and other forces so want to influence what they can which includes this plan. In Medicine Bow National Forest years ago, WDA and WGFD

directors together went to USFS to get a regional forester's decision overturned in support of the Wyoming Plan and domestic sheep producers. This bought a lot of goodwill with producers for a long time.

Everyone understood that producers fear federal management agencies may be compromised in following the plan due to potential litigation from outside groups and possibly by their own designations. The question was raised as to whether or not there is a benefit to approaching Western Watersheds or other groups that are/may pursuing litigation against the BTNF to find common ground or compromise?

There was general agreement that all signatories need to continue to follow the Wyoming Plan and not stray from it. Communication should be re-established with the WDA and producers to make sure everyone understands the Wyoming Plan and understands their roles in following it.

Collins feels someone needs to visit with the WDA that by opposing future bighorn transplants in certain areas they are not abiding by the Wyoming Plan. There should be a retraction of the resolutions that are being passed that are contradictory to the Wyoming Plan.

There was also general agreement there should be some clean up of terminology in the Wyoming Plan, but that no attempt be made to change/revise the content. There was discussion about possible small map revisions that would update the current status/distribution of bighorn sheep herds throughout the state without changing the Wyoming Plan. These revisions would have to be done in collaboration with the WDA. Changes to the Wyoming Plan could be made in regulation (as per Chapter 66) and not require legislative action.

Everyone agreed that pushing the envelope in non-emphasis areas will jeopardize efforts in Cooperative Review Areas.

### **WGFD Bighorn Sheep "Plan/Document"**

Dean DiJenno – Approached WGFD in 2017 to identify projects with big funding needs so they could articulate this to large donors. Fundraising is most beneficial when target projects/amounts are identified.

Perryman – Wants WGFD help on identifying specific projects for specific herds and how they can help/provide funding. A list of priorities would be positive.

Zach McDermott – There has been good clarification today on the plan versus management needs. Have much better understanding of the plan and how management efforts might fit within it.

Daryl Lutz– A project list has been provided along with estimated costs. However, WGFD was hesitant in the initial drafts to provide numbers on cost as those change constantly. Rather, the management/needs/projects document is meant to be a living document, routinely updated to provide guidance on priorities.

John Harris – Willing to take requests to donors that are above current available funding but need specific projects to highlight. Donors want to support specific projects.

Greg Anderson – Donors and others should recognize that some projects are long term and can take years to develop/receive approval from various involved entities.

Collins – NEPA is a big hurdle in getting some big habitat projects done. Can money be provided to have an outside entity do it to speed the process?

Harris – Please communicate with us when a short term project becomes available, not necessarily outlined in the WGFD management plan, but something we could potentially help with. We are aware of the taskforce and are very interested in continuing to watch their work even though they were not chosen to participate on the taskforce.

DiJenno – Who should be the initial WGFD contact when a potential donor approaches WY-WSF? Local field personnel? Administration?

Rick King suggested this be determined on a case by case basis. Local field personnel could provide more detail on the project(s), while recognizing that some donors may be more interested in talking with administration for the bigger picture.

The question was asked if conservation easements were addressed in the WGFD Project document. Response?

There was agreement that WY-WSF and WGFD need to annually work together on the Project Document, best determine what is appealing to donors, and how WY-WSF can prioritize GIA requests to achieve mutual goals of the WGFD and WY-WSF.

### **Partnership into the Future**

Collins – Considers it important to keep summit going with WGFD and WY-WSF. Including federal agencies and others might prevent open and honest discussion. WY-WSF depends on WGFD and this is the chance to get things done. Appreciates the WGFD Bighorn Sheep Working Group getting together to discuss issues the day before the summit so that members are prepared to answer questions from WY-WSF.

Tony Mong – It is helpful to him to include federal partners as projects cannot go forward without them. Perhaps identify specific people who will be partners/decision makers.

M. Miller – Maybe put thought into when and where it is best to bring them in for discussions.

Benton – Possibly WGFD/WY-WSF meeting in morning...meeting with USFS or others in afternoon?

McDermott – As an agenda is formulated for meetings and topics identified, can decide at that time who is most appropriate to invite.

There was general agreement that time for just WY-WSF and WGFD to meet was important and would be built into future Summit agendas.

Cheesbrough- WGFD Bighorn Sheep Working Group – how does it work and what is plan of succession?

Brimeyer – WGFD Wildlife Administration looks at regional wildlife managers and what commitments personnel already have at the regional level so we don't overwhelm workloads. Wildlife Division Chief and deputy wildlife chiefs discuss and decide who has good experience and expertise to participate.

DiJenno – What can WWSF do to support WGFD?

Nesvik – Important to support the plan and its implementation. It is the envy of other states. Keep lines of communication open as this helps prevent misinformation and misunderstandings. We appreciate the chance to discuss and answer questions.

McWhirter – Appreciation for the WWSF's work and fundraising and a recognition of the hard work it takes to fundraise. Important that WWSF feels ownership in projects and not just providing funding. It is a good partnership.

Lutz – Need more communication. We need to be partners in the common goal and keep good communication open.

M. Miller – WGFD input helps WWSF decide where to spend money and have best impact. Honest conversation is important.

Cheesbrough – Donors appreciate being invited to help with projects. Membership is very interested in hands on and willing to help. Please let them know when you want help.

### **Commissioner Licenses**

Not discussed in detail.

### **Whiskey Mountain Movie Project**

WY-WSF Board has not been briefed on this project, and is not familiar with project objectives. WGFD has questions regarding the need for such a project and if Whiskey Mountain is the right place to highlight in such a project.

WGF Commissioner Pete Dube – Please work to maintain the view of producers as partners, we need landowner assistance on a variety of issues, not just sheep and we need to work together. The Wildlife Fund is a good potential partner for WY-WSF. The Wildlife Task Force is addressing a variety of issues that WY-WSF may want to watch, from issuance of Commissioner tags to resident/nonresident licenses splits.

**ACTION ITEMS:**

WGFD will reach out to BTNF to clarify Darby Herd letter; WY-WSF was unclear on its meaning and BTNF may be also. Doug Brimeyer will follow up.

A Bighorn Sheep-Domestic Sheep interaction Working Group meeting will be scheduled for late fall (November-December). Doug McWhirter will arrange this meeting.

A subcommittee meeting of WGFD, WDA, WSGA, WWA, WY-WSF should be arranged prior to the Bighorn Sheep-Domestic Sheep interaction Working Group meeting. Assignment?