Appendix F

Report from the Meeting on State-wide Issues Regarding Bighorn/Domestic Sheep Interaction
April 4, 2001, at the Rock Springs Holiday Inn

Participants
Bryce Reece, Wy. Woolgrowers (WWGA)
Doug McWhirter, Wy Game & Fish Dept. (WGFD)
Walt Cook, WGFD
John P. Erramouspe, rancher
Mary Arambel, rancher
Pete Arambel, rancher
Ron Micheli, Wy. Dept of Agriculture (WDA)
Kevin Hurley, WGFD
Truman Julian, rancher
Tom Thorne, WGFD
Terry Kreeger, WGFD
Mary Thoman, rancher
Dick Thoman, rancher
Fred Roberts, rancher
Bill Wichers, WGFD
Stephen Moyles, Wildlife Services (WS)
Ken Hamilton, Wy. Farm Bureau (WYFB)
Dorean Blackketter, Senator Thomas' Office

Facilitator. Bob Budd, The Nature Conservancy-Red Canyon Ranch (TNC-RCR)

Agenda
1. Where are we going as a group, what should a report look like
2. Habitat Committee report
3. Disease/Research Committee report

1. Disease/Stress/Research Committee really can't do more until there are advancements in research and science, which led to discussion that this group needs to meet annually for adaptive management reviews of new research and science and the past year's management efforts and results, and to formulate new recommendations, if applicable.

   It was agreed that a final report from this group should be broad ("need more fire in the Absarokas" for example), state-wide, and include reservation herds. Some recommendations will take changes in agency cultures and leadership. The report will balance Bighorn needs and domestic sheep viability issues. A proposed final report outline will be sent to all members for their review and comments. Carol and Bob will draft a final report and have it to the entire group for review by 7/1/01. Bob will present that report, at least as a preliminary effort, to the WGF Commission at their 9/10/01 meeting in Riverton.

   Although Kevin stated it was never a goal for this group to increase distribution of sheep, only to retain current numbers and good health of current populations in NW Wyoming, it was decided that Bighorn reintroduction projects at Sweetwater Rocks and Boxelder should be tried again, as pilot projects. Bryce will help, maybe can get Dennis Sun to help WGFD mend some fences there; WGFD should initiate it (rather than this group) as a ground-up effort by asking area residents what they think of the idea (rather than developing a plan and asking the residents what they think about it). It was decided that this group should recommend to the WGFD Commission that another effort be made on reintroduction, what process should be used, and that WGFD be directed to work with this citizen group on that effort. Because the taxonomy of the Bighorn sheep has been changed officially now (in the Journal of Mammalogy), the danger of a T&E listing petition is lower. More populations will reduce the possibility of a listing petition, as well. A recommendation of this group should be that a
group be established to develop a statewide Bighorn sheep management plan, using this group’s report; however, some of this group's members will undoubtedly sit on that group, as well. This group should review the draft plan. Reintroduced populations will be the same subspecies as the native Bighorns, but managed as a 2”d priority to the core native herds.

The domestic sheep industry needs to get more aggressive about saving the industry, need to educate their members and the public on the importance of no net loss of AUMs in Wyoming, and maybe WWGA and WSGA and other ag groups should start buying up sheep permits, like FNAWS is doing.

This group will recommend that a separate task group (though that will likely involve some of the same people that are in this group) should be set up to develop a statewide Bighorn sheep management plan, similar to the sage grouse and Black-tailed prairie dog plans being developed right now. Having that be a citizen group, rather than a WGFD group, will give the public more ownership.

2. Habitat and Management Protocols Committee - see handout, attached

There was discussion about the Riverton Ranger report on decreases in the Gallatin Bighorn sheep population - since there are no domestic sheep in the area, has it been determined why they are declining? We were told the report was very premature, that surveying is not yet complete.

There are 8 domestic allotments in core native herd management areas. WGFD will provide a map of those, and of vacant allotments (which play heavily into economic viability for individual producers). For example, Fred Roberts reported the B-TNF is planning to burn his whole allotment complex and that he needs someplace to take his sheep for 2 years. Vacant allotments could be useful here. The issue of net loss of AUMs to the domestic sheep industry as a whole came up, and the point was made that the federal agencies have said they have no capacity to offer any new or replacement AUMs, all the while they are reducing real AUMs -- ie, the grass is still there. No federal agency people were in attendance to answer this discrepancy.

3. Disease/Stress/Research Committee - the group watched a video using infrared remote sensing technology as a survey tool. It's effective and the plane can fly at 2000’ above the ground, so it doesn't stress the animals. However, WGFD can't afford to pay for the technology. Bryce is working with Jim Foreman on this, there may be a way for grant funding or some group to buy the equipment for the state to have for anyone's use. Perhaps there could even be a state/federal/private partnership developed to buy it.

The committee thanked the Taliaferro’s for their generous hospitality at the last committee meeting.

The group needs to send a letter to our Congressional delegation asking for funding for research by the Wildlife/Livestock Research group that's been formed with the help of this group. Bryce and Tom will draft a letter and send it to Bob Budd to sign and send out. Everyone at the meeting was encouraged to send their own letter of support.

Tom Thorne and Kevin Hurley will send out a table to the whole group showing sheep counts (including in YNP), when they were done. Then a press release should be issued which explains the general status of Bighorns in Wyoming.

We need a specific literature review on the effects of predators on Bighorn sheep (see C on page 10 of the draft Bighorn Sheep Disease/Stress/Predators/Research report, attached). While there were concerns that such a review might be used for anyone's agenda, it was noted that conclusions can't be drawn in the review but that it's needed to frame the discussion. Tom Thorn suggested Fred Lindsay could do an unbiased, annotated lit review that would help identify gaps where more research is needed. The group asked that Fred critique which reports were based on good or bad science as part of his review.

New Business-

Kevin gave an update of FNAWS efforts to assist domestic sheep producers relocate their allotments. There is one effort involving Shoshone Forest permittees (Regan Smith and Nogles from Casper), and another in the Caribou-Targhee Forest to help Idaho rancher Robert Ball move out of high grizzly conflict allotments in Wyoming. Another similar effort is underway in Wyoming, but those permittees don't want to be identified yet. Discussion included suggestions that these vacated allotments

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be held for grass banks rather than be closed or retired. Bighorn sheep health and numbers in these areas are not being monitored because they can't get to them to do that.

The issue of no net loss of Wyoming AUMs for the domestic sheep industry (rather than for individual permittees) was discussed. Bryce said the Wy Wool Growers will oppose all future sales/closures unless there is a concerted effort to open up equivalent AUMs elsewhere. Although he understands and supports an individual permittee's right to realize financial gain from their permits (a private property issue), the Wool Growers has to be concerned about the viability of the sheep industry as a whole. When asked if WWGA is going to oppose any future buy-outs, Bryce said WWGA won't oppose buy-outs if FNAWS will work just as hard to identify replacement AVMs in those deals. He is opposed to FNAWS' work, thinks it is great that they're doing that for both the Bighorns and individual permittees - what he objects to is the federal agencies using FNAWS' efforts to further their agenda. It was noted that FNAWS should consider spending money on predator control and research, pasteurella research, etc., besides just buy-outs.

It was suggested that this group might want to advocate inter-Forest and inter-agency (federal /or state agencies) to work together to realize a goal of no net loss of industry AUMs. The agencies should also be encouraged to extend the 3-year non-use limit and activate suspended AUMs (Region 2 said that's do-able, Region 4 says it's impossible. BLM is much more flexible). This group should also take a stand on things like grizzly expansion and management for them outside recovery zones, etc. The final report needs to recommend that vacant or returned allotments be used for grass banking.

The Nature Conservancy is trying to get land in Powell as a grass bank - FNAWS is hopefully t1ng involved in that effort.

**Action Items:**

- Betty Fear's subcommittee on public process should develop recommendations for WGFD that specifically aimed at the two reintroduction projects.

- Kevin Hurley will draft an outline (only) of a statewide Bighorn management plan for the LIP to review at the 12/6-7/01 meeting in Dubois.

- Bob Budd and Carol Kruse will draft final report by 7/1. It will be sent to group members for a 45-day review. Bob will present the report (incorporating comments received) to the WGF Commission on 9/10 in Riverton. Bob will draft an outline for that report in the next week or so, and Carol will get it out for everyone to review as quickly as possible.

- Bryce Reese and Tom Thorne will draft a letter from the group to our Congressional delegation asking for funding for research by the Wildlife/Livestock Research group that's been formed (with encouragement from this group). Bob Budd will sign it and send it out. Everyone at the meeting was encouraged to send their own letter of support, in addition.

- Tom Thorne and Kevin Hurley will send out a table to the whole group showing sheep counts including in YNP), when the surveys are done. Then a press release should be issued which explains general status of Bighorns in Wyoming.

- Fred Lindsay will do an unbiased, annotated literature review focused specifically on the effects of predators on Bighorn sheep. The group asked that Fred accompany that review with a critique on whether the reports were based on good or bad science.

**Enclosures**

- Big Horn Sheep habitat Subcommittee Information and notes from their 1/16/01 meeting
- Draft final report from the Bighorn Sheep Disease/Stress/Predators/Research committee
Direct Habitat Influences
Existing habitat condition, capability and trend (forage, migration corridors, winter vs. summer range)/habitat quality
- Conifer encroachment/horizontal structure/visibility impairment
- Vegetation changes (species composition and production) due to domestic grazing or lack of domestic grazing
- Overgrazing
- Fragmentation of habitat
- Mineral licks
- Mineral/nutritional deficiencies
- Site productivity/soil erosion hazard and general soil conditions (i.e. escape terrain = high soil erosion hazard)

Condition and trend of potential/suitable but vacant habitat

Fire suppression

Indirect Habitat Influences
BHS limited ability to disperse (herd memory)
- Fragmentation of habitat/barriers to migration
- Landscape scale migration routes - i.e. probability/possibility of genetic interchange among different "herds"

Sub alpine winter ranges especially important

Quality of available habitat vs. population numbers

BHS population/genetic viability

BHS ecological (and social) "role"

Displacement
- Recreationists (summer and winter, i.e. snow machine trespass into wilderness and other wildlife winter ranges)
  - Domestic sheep/herders/dogs

Competition
- Other wildlife
  - Domestic livestock (cattle, sheep, recreation horse/llama/goat stock)

Predators

Disease transmission

Stresses not mentioned above
- Weather
  - General bhs health (internal/external parasites, pink eye, etc)
- Hunting
- Timing and duration of external stresses

Loss of habitat quality from existing roads/travel ways (decreased forage production; fragmentation of habitat)
Short term and long term risks to habitat

**Historic vs. current vs. potential distribution**
- Causes for historic decline
- Current crucial ranges (winter, lambing, summer, migration routes)
- Potential suitable ranges
- Observation data
- Herd unit objectives
- Crucial range delineations
Objective:
- Provide overall working group with specific recommendations for sheep habitat improvements.

Goals:
- Decrease nutritional stress by increasing habitat quality via habitat improvements. Consider nutrition, security, separation of domestic and wild sheep, and fragmentation of habitat.
- Suggest guidelines to determine priority areas or projects. Recommend overall group support to pilot project.

Recommendations/Priorities:
- Focus first on core native herds within occupied habitat; need to define existing (occupied) and potential (unoccupied) habitat.
- What is the limiting factor? Assess existing quality/condition first, such as nutrition (body score, survivability, productivity/reproduction - lamb-ewe ratios; lamb weights, etc) and security (predators, human impacts, etc.). Also assess habitat quality/quantity from these aspects ... i.e. nutrition, security, etc.

Consider:
- Habitat improvements that might naturally separate domestic and wild sheep.
- Improve agency flexibility in grazing management with vacant allotments, required rest after burning (i.e. does it HAVE to rest 2 years?), burning opportunities within wilderness.
- Habitat treatment should cover sizable acreage.
- Will treatment result in competition with another species?
- Other avenues to encourage greater use in areas with limited or no use (i.e. mineral blocks to lure sheep into areas, opening travel corridors) ... ways to change the herd memory.

To prioritize work, concentrate on areas with most "problems". These also relate to above "recommendations".

1) Poor quality habitat (short-term immediate need)
2) Solve conflicts
3) Maintaining habitat (long term)

Examples of Priorities:
- No. 1 - Core herds within occupied habitat.
- No. 2 - Individual core herds - one with the most problems. Concentrate on limiting factors from the recommendations above.

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