



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

MAY 14 2015

Mr. Tony Wasley
President
Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
522 Notre Dame Court
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82009

Dear Mr. Wasley:

Thank you for your letter of February 18, 2015, regarding ongoing Forest Service Intermountain Region risk-of-contact assessments between wild sheep and domestic sheep and goats, as well as bighorn sheep viability analyses and the decisions and management actions that will occur. I apologize for the delayed response.

I want to assure you that the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service is very committed to being open and inclusive with State wildlife agencies as we conduct bighorn sheep viability analyses throughout the Western States.

In August 2011, and again June 2012, direction was provided to our Regional Foresters regarding a process of assessing the potential for contact between domestic sheep and bighorn sheep and the potential risk of disease transmission between the two species. This direction included a "Four Step Outline for Conducting Bighorn Sheep Viability Analyses" at the forest planning level. The assessment process was designed to be collaborative by coordinating first with State agencies to consider State wildlife management plans for bighorn sheep. The direction did not prescribe a singular method for determining the analysis. However, it directed that certain parameters be accounted for in the analysis, and it is in alignment with your expressed support for a policy of separation between wild sheep and domestic sheep and goats.

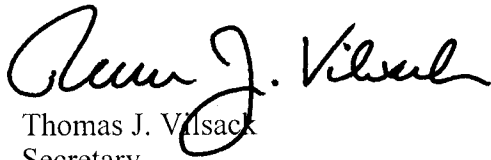
The Forest Service continues to develop information needed for risk assessments and different regions working with their respective States might have alternative means for information and data collection. Recognizing that, I have encouraged Regional Foresters to work with those States to develop the most appropriate means to gain the information and develop the assessments necessary for managing the potential risks and to cooperate in identifying management options when risks to wild sheep are unacceptable.

Since 2012, Forest Service leadership has held and will continue to hold face-to-face meetings with State wildlife agency directors. Leadership also attended regional fish and wildlife association meetings to facilitate the establishment of conservation relationships. The importance of these relationships and joint collaborative efforts cannot be overstated.

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Again, thank you again for writing and for WAFWA's continued partnership and participation in the management of National Forest System lands.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tom J. Vilsack". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tom" and the last name "Vilsack" clearly legible. The middle initial "J." is smaller and positioned between the first and last names.

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary