



TALKING POINTS
RESPIRATORY DISEASE IN WILD SHEEP

WAFWA Wildlife Health Committee/Wild Sheep Working Group
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- Wild sheep are extremely vulnerable to respiratory disease. Recurring outbreaks, chronic illness and reduced lamb survival in bighorns can limit abundance and cause long-term harm to affected herds.
- Respiratory disease in wild sheep can result in the mortality of a large proportion of the population. Effects of the disease have been documented in over 70 peer-reviewed scientific publications.
- Several species of bacteria, along with viruses, other agents, and ecological factors can contribute to respiratory disease outbreaks in wild sheep.
- Domestic sheep and goats carry disease-causing organisms which typically cause few deaths and little illness in domesticated adults and juveniles. Controlled studies have confirmed that harmful bacteria can be transmitted to wild sheep upon contact with, or proximity to, domestic sheep or goats.
- Not all disease outbreaks and reduced recruitment in wild sheep can be directly attributed to contact with domestic sheep or goats.
- The gregarious nature, dispersal, migratory, and exploratory behaviors of wild sheep, and intentional translocations of wild sheep, can increase the potential for contact with domestic sheep/goats and the risk of pathogen transmission and disease outbreaks.
- Maintaining appropriate and reasonable spatial and temporal separation between wild sheep and domestic sheep and goats is currently the most effective tool available for minimizing the risk of disease transmission between these species.
- The overall health and ecological characteristics of source and recipient herds, and the risk of increased connectivity and its implications for transfer of pathogens among populations should be carefully evaluated prior to translocations of wild sheep.
- Proactively protecting and managing the health of wild sheep populations is essential to the continued success of restoration, conservation and management efforts in North America.