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July 28, 2011

The Honorable Michael K. Simpson
Chairman, House Interior and Environment Appropriations Sub-Committee
United States House of Representatives
2312 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: FY 2012 House Appropriations Bill, Sec. 442 "Domestic Livestock Grazing"

Dear Representative Simpson:

The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) respectfully submits this letter concerning Sec. 442 of the draft FY 2012 House Appropriations Bill. Our respective agencies are charged with the public trust management of wildlife throughout the West, for the benefit of all citizens. With 19 of our 23 jurisdictions managing a wild sheep resource, we are very familiar and actively engaged with the long-standing controversy over interaction between wild sheep and domestic sheep and goats.

Collectively and individually, our member agencies embrace collaborative processes to ensure that all public interests are served, as allowed by the laws of the United States and our individual jurisdictions. We recognize that grazing of public lands by domestic livestock is important to the future of wildlife and to the future of rural communities and economies.

As recently as 2009-2010, disease outbreaks in Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah and Washington devastated bighorn sheep populations, resulting in loss of more than 50 percent of some herds. Concerns about the likelihood for bighorn sheep to sicken and die following exposure to domestic sheep resulted in WAFWA convening a working group in 2007 of some of our best scientists and managers to seek solutions for minimizing risk to public resources, while continuing to recognize domestic sheep grazing on federal lands. We firmly believe that risks may be minimized by a policy of spatial and temporal separation of the two species. As a result, our Wild Sheep Working Group developed and published comprehensive recommendations to implement a strategy of effective separation on public and private lands: (<http://www.wafwa.org/documents/wswg/WSWGManagementofDomesticSheepandGoatsinWildSheepHabitatReport.pdf>).

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We are aware of language that was inserted into the FY 2012 House Appropriations Bill (Sec. 442) that precludes use of funding for carrying out any action or agency regulation for managing bighorn sheep. We believe that this provision, if approved, will end collaborative processes that have been ongoing for more than a decade. Such an outcome is most assuredly not in the best interest of bighorn sheep and other wildlife, the livestock industry, western communities or economies.

We respectfully request that you remove Section 442 in the best interest of a cooperative spirit and common sense approach towards resolving these issues. WAFWA stands ready to offer our collective experience and assistance towards acceptable solutions.

We appreciate your thoughtful consideration of this request and look forward to hearing back from you on this vitally important matter. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Paul Conry, President
Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

PC/CB:llk

cc: WAFWA Directors
The U.S. House of Representatives Appropriations Committee (Full)
The U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee (Full)