

WSWG Teleconference
April 29, 2014 3:00 Central

ATTENDEES (20 Total): Anne Hubbs (AB), Bill Jex (BC), Tom Stephenson (CA), Andy Holland (CO), Hollie Miyasaki (ID), Todd Nordeen (NE), Mike Cox (NV), Eric Rominger (NM), Don Whittaker and Colin Gillin (OR), Chad Lehman (SD), Froylan Hernandez (TX), Doug McWhirter (WY), Troy Hegel (YT), Melanie Woolever (USFS), Frank Quamen and Sally Butts (BLM), Kevin Hurley (WSF), Rick Kahn (NPS), Clay Brewer (Chair)

Roll-call (Brewer): Personnel changes within the WSWG were discussed. A welcome was extended to new member Frank Quamen (BLM - replaced Tom Rinkes).

Review of agenda/additions (Brewer)

- Update - WSWG Publication: Bighorn Conservation Challenges and Management Strategies for the 21st Century (Brewer)
- Briefing - March 12, 2014 meeting with key USFS representatives from the Washington Office (Brewer/Hurley)
- Briefing - Thinhorn Summit, conducted April 9-10, 2014 in BC
- WSF report (Hurley)
- Jurisdictional hot issues (All)
- Upcoming meetings (Brewer)

Update: Bighorn Sheep: Conservation Challenges and Management Strategies for the 21st Century (Brewer): Printing will be accomplished through the Texas Department of Corrections at a greatly reduced price. The authors have worked through multiple drafts and the final draft should be completed later today. The final draft will be sent out electronically for one final review with a short deadline. The document will be revised accordingly and printing completed in time for distribution to the Directors at the summer WAFWA meeting. Brewer asked members to let him know how many copies they wanted. The project has been accomplished entirely through donations.

Briefing on the March 12, 2014 meeting that was conducted with key USFS representatives from the Washington Office (Brewer/Hurley): Representatives from a number of conservation organizations including the WSWG met with key USFS leaders from the Washington DC office and other locations on March 12, 2014 at the North American Wildlife Conference for the following purposes:

- To emphasize the need for separation between BHS/DS/goats, to determine how committed the FS is to maintaining separation and how they plan to accomplish it.
- To emphasize the need for the FS to continue west-wide risk assessment and determine how they plan to accomplish the task.
- To emphasize the strong interest and broad support for bighorn sheep by NGOs and many others on USFS lands (those in addition to the livestock industry).
- To discuss the challenges associated with wild sheep management in wilderness areas.

A total of 23 attended the meeting including:

- Presenters:
 - John Gayle (National WL Federation)
 - Greg Dyson (High Country Citizens Alliance – Formerly with the Hells Canyon Preservation Council)
 - Terry Meyers (Rocky Mountain Bighorn Society)
 - Kevin Hurley (WSF)
 - Clay Brewer (WSWG)

- Other attendees
 - 12 USFS members including Melanie
 - Mary Wagner (Assistant Chief)
 - Jim Pena
 - Rob Harper (recently replaced Ann Zimmerman)
 - Brian Ferebee
 - Chris Iverson
 - Danielle Chi
 - Tom Franklin and Neil Thagard (Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership)
 - Harvey Nyberg (CO Wildlife Federation)
 - Others

Hurley introduced purpose of the meeting and the discussion items. The importance of USFS lands to bighorn sheep and the strong interest and support for wild sheep were emphasized and indicated that the multiple use mandate was clearly recognized. USFS representatives were asked to comment on the following key points:

- Main points (what we are here to discuss today)
 1. How committed is the FS in maintaining separation between BHS/DS and goats?
 2. What is the FS plan for achieving separation including process and time-line?
 - West-wide risk of contact modeling (where the potential conflicts are – CO used as an example)
 - Region 4 – Inter-Mountain Region (implemented first)
 - What is the plan for the other regions (when, how, by region or individual forests)?
- The broad support for wild sheep by those other than the livestock industry. NGOs have a history of working with USFS on DS grazing permits/allotments. How can NGOs continue to help and are buyouts still a realistic option?

Brewer presented discussion concerning the challenges associated with managing bighorn sheep on Wilderness including inconsistencies between states, regions and wilderness areas depending on the person in charge of the specific wilderness area and examples of these challenges were given for several jurisdictions including Inyo NF/CDFG, NM and NE. The 2006 AFWA document, “*Policies and guidelines for fish and wildlife management in National Forests and BLM Wilderness,*” was presented. The document is intended to provide the framework for enhanced cooperation between state wildlife agencies and the FS/BLM. The importance of the

management tools mentioned in the examples given and many others for achieving wild sheep restoration and management goals were emphasized.

The following solutions were offered:

- Consistent interpretation and application is vital
- Better coordination between FS Wildlife and Wilderness Programs (from Washington Office down to local units)
- Programmatic EAs that cover required management strategies once not repeatedly that cover multiple forests within multiple jurisdictions
- Wilderness Training for both state agency and FS personnel either through the Missoula/Carhartt Center or mobile training sessions throughout the west

Pena responded to the following:

- Separation: The multiple use mandate and the requirement of complying with existing standards and laws were explained. Maintaining viable populations for wildlife is important to the FS. Less than 12% of bighorns occur in high-risk areas and those are the focus areas of separation. All existing BMPs will be used to maintain separation. This issue is viewed as risk management and if the risk is too great, the FS will then deal with domestic sheep allotments. The primary objective is to minimize interaction between bighorn sheep and domestic sheep but it is not black and white in every instance. The FS is committed to both separation and grazing as mandated.
- Wilderness: Efforts are underway within AFWA to update wilderness training but it has been stalled because of other priorities (John Kennedy has the lead). Understanding everyone's obligations is important and it is also important to continue dialogue with states. Not everyone's view is the same and the solutions Brewer mentioned can help us get closer to working together. Introducing clarity concerning expectations (on all sides) is important. The examples Clay gave were pinch points but there are other examples where things worked well. The FS manages for many species not just bighorn sheep. Balancing competing mandates and uses is a challenge and there are many interests not represented at this meeting. The FS will continue to improve skills in evaluating risk and working through the various options to maintain separation and impacts to wild sheep. We need dialogue with states where we choose to reintroduce bighorn sheep and the FS wants to be involved up front (more than in the past) since they are the land manager. Problems arise when the upfront discussions do not occur. The FS wants to work with states more effectively in wild sheep management in Wilderness. The Wilderness Act and the many different expectations including ours is a challenge. Some wilderness areas are large enough where expectations are realistic while others are not and man's role in those large areas is very different. A minimum tool analysis is a requirement. FS is working on processes that are more replicable from place to place. Partners see inconsistencies but there are many variables that cause this. Training (others outside of wilderness) is a must. Certain things in the wilderness act set up unrealistic expectations. It was agreed that we need to do a better job in communicating, giving each other ample lead time accomplishing the task at hand (not wait until last minute). Hurley emphasized the importance of coordination between wildlife and wilderness from the Washington office down. Rob Harper indicated that "landscape" is complex and bighorn sheep occur outside of wilderness as well. This will require a wider set of solutions.

Ownership/conflicts are complex. Brian Ferebee stated that the process worked in the NE situation. Lack of what was agreed to is often the problem and it depends on where it lands in the system. Turnover is also a problem and it doesn't work in all situations but works better now than has in the past. The need for distributing the AFWA agreement to newer employees was emphasized.

- Risk of Contact Modeling: Not prepared to present a plan for assessing various populations but we will learn from Region 4 and the preference would be to apply it to all other regions.

Iverson discussed the ongoing Region 4 risk assessment process. He stated that Jim Pena's letter of August 2011 made it clear that the FS is committed to maintaining separation where population viability is at risk, using whatever opportunities are at their disposal. The letter says that there are certain steps required for performing risk assessment. Much was learned from the Payette, however, the Payette benefit from a rich data set (years of data) that were used to employ the different modeling projects (2006-present). The Payette was the gold standard for that issue but will certainly not fit all future risk analysis. The letter was important because it committed to separation, viable BHS populations, and risk assessment processes. Region 4 is living with the Payette process and the consequences and they are well aware of other flash-points within the region. Region 4 leadership decided to embark on the analysis because they wanted consistency, based on the best available science and they wanted to make sure it was defensible. Risk analysis is currently being conducted in Region 4 on a forest by forest basis. Maintain separation/population viability (forest by forest) is important and how we approach solutions is a critical-priority. The Region 4 risk assessment will be completed sometime in August. They plan to do whatever it takes to maintain viability for bighorn sheep while maintaining multiple use obligations by maintaining a viable domestic sheep industry where they can. 17% of permittees are a potential risk based on a domestic sheep industry study. We hope that the process will provide some certainty and indicated that they do not want to conduct assessments at an inappropriate scale. The solution phase will start later this year and will take several years to complete.

Hurley discussed the significant investment of NGOs towards solutions such as incentives to waive a permit back (buyouts), asked how NGOs can engage and help resolve conflicts, and indicated that there is much interest from permittees for this type of solution (buyouts). Hurley asked how the FS deals with AUMs/waivers and Pena indicated that from the national perspective – if a permittee chooses to waive his permit back, the agreement is not a business decision with FS and can be reallocated to others. The FS would go through risk assessment process and if not a risk, it would be reallocated. Providing grazing opportunity where suitable is important to the FS and there are no guarantees on allotment waivers until evaluations are completed. The FS would be evaluating more allotments and using risk of contact model and its use would be accelerated if manpower was available. Mary Wagner indicated that the FS is interested in both bighorn sheep and domestic sheep grazing. The game today is collaborating, fair vision, and finding what works and indicated that buyouts are different for every situation. Ferebee stressed the importance of bringing everyone to the table and developing a common understanding among all stakeholders. Pena indicated that analysis will dictate decisions

concerning shutting down or reissuing and that the FS is not a party of a permittee decision to waive permit back.

John Gayle thanked everyone for attending and stated that we want to work together with USFS and emphasized the importance of making sure that one multi-use does not come at the expense of an important resource like bighorn sheep. We are solution oriented and the risk of contact model is critical.

Greg Dyson thanked FS representatives for attending, stressed the importance of continuing this conversation, and asked about the next step.

Brewer agreed to allocate time during the WSWG meeting in July for a FS update by those who attended the meeting. It was also agreed that updates on Region 4 risk assessments and activities occurring at the national level would be presented. Brewer offered the assistance of the WSWG to the USFS wherever needed and stressed the need for common sense approaches.

Update Thinhorn Summit – Update (Hurley, Jex, Hegel, Brewer): Hurley provided a summary of the background, justification and results of the Thinhorn Summit that was conducted April 8-11, 2014 in Vancouver, BC. This has been a priority for the WSWG and WSF for some time. The conference was successful with a total of 70+ attendees from Alaska, BC, Northwest Territories and Yukon. Attendees were comprised of agency representatives, sportsmen, outfitters, First Nations, NGOs, wild sheep advocates and others. The purposes of the summit were to: identify ecological and footprint challenges that thinhorn sheep face; prioritize the importance of the challenges identified by jurisdiction; and then to develop a prioritized list across thinhorn range. Tim Schommer was contracted to take notes/minutes and to complete a synthesis of the results of the conference. Drafts have been completed and currently under review by PRAB. Action items and assignments were included in the synthesis. The summary is supposed to be completed within 30 days. The meeting was good but the focus is the action items/outcomes. The following were identified as priority items: 1) the need for comprehensive management plans; 2) the need for completing risk assessments and preparing for potential conflicts with domestic sheep; and 3) access/travel management. Thinhorn jurisdictions are looking for help from those who have already gone through similar challenges. Hegel commented on the similarities rather than differences of the issues identified across thinhorn range. Jex indicated that the conference helped open up dialogue between jurisdictions. Clay will send out the final summary and other correspondence on the subject upon completion.

Jurisdictional Hot Issues

- Nordeen (NE) updated members on recently introduced mountain lion legislation that would impact hunting and thanked the WSF and other organizations for helping on the issue. The issue is not over yet.
- Rominger (NM) reported on the ongoing drought situation; NM is hosting the National Wildlife Disease Association meeting in July; and reported on the fallout from the overturn of the Turk court decision (4 days after draw was conducted) concerning non-resident hunting (went to 84% resident and 10% resident guided hunting or 6% non-resident non-guided).

- Whitaker (OR) reported on the potential for ewe hunting as a management tool. Cox reported on the Jan approval of ewe hunting in NV with 85 ewe tags recommended for the 2014 season. Holland discussed the strong support for ewe hunting in CO. Efforts to ensure that ewe hunts do not impact preference points or life time requirement for ram hunts are being discussed.
- Stephenson reported on the recent disease outbreak in Mojave. Planning a get together with NV and AZ on May 19, 2014 to discuss issues associated with the outbreak. Clinical symptoms within the population subsided but eventually resurfaced. Mike Miller (CO) will lead a panel discussion at the NWSGC meeting concerning management actions taken within various jurisdictions. Recently introduced Sierra Nevada sheep populations in Sequoia NP are doing well.
- Hurley reported on the Santa Catalina restoration effort NE of Tucson. Started with 31 sheep and have had 16 mortalities to date. No losses in the last 6 weeks and 5 new lambs reported. Three mountain lions have been removed thus far. Year 2 capture is planned and a Tonto NF scoping letter was sent out with an April 28 deadline concerning helicopter captures over the next 10 years in 5 different wilderness areas to facilitate AGFD desert bighorn management efforts. The department is working through a 9-member citizen's advisory committee and there is much interest from various groups.
- Woolever reported on a new brochure concerning hiking safely in Mountain goat country.

WSF Report (Hurley): WSF GIA will be accepted in July. Discussion concerning a potential grant through the ND Oil and Gas Board to be split 50:50 with Dr. Sri and Dr. Besser and information concerning the newly created Rocky Mountain Goat Alliance were presented. Hurley will be attending a Peninsular Desert Bighorn Workshop in CA on May 1, 2014. The workshop is being conducted by the Nature Conservancy and San Diego Zoo.

Upcoming meetings

- Summer WAFWA Meeting: July 17-23, 2014 Westin Hotel in San Antonio
- WSWG meeting: Sunday, July 20 (8:00-5:00)
- NWSGC Meeting: June 2-5, 2014 Ft Collins, Ft Collins Marriott
- Next WSWG meeting: possible "mini" meeting at the NWSGC meeting

Meeting Adjourned 4:39 PM