

**WSWG Teleconference
September 22, 2014 11:00 Central**

ATTENDEES (14 Total): Amber Munig (AZ), Tom Stephenson (CA), Hollie Miyasaki (ID), Bruce Sterling (MT), Todd Nordeen (NE), Mike Cox (NV), Eric Rominger (NM), Don Whittaker (OR), Froylan Hernandez (TX), Rich Harris (WA), Doug McWhirter (WY), Troy Hegel (YT), Melanie Woolever (USFS), Clay Brewer (Chair)

Roll-call (Brewer)

Review of agenda/additions (Brewer)

- 2015 Disease workshops
 - Overview/preview workshop
 - Advanced workshop
- Die-off Table
- Update on current North Dakota die-off
- WAFWA letter to The Wildlife Society/AAWV requesting a joint position statement concerning risk of disease transmission between domestic sheep/goats and wild sheep
- Thinhorn Conservation challenges publication
- Mapping Projects
 - Translocation mapping project
 - Occupied bighorn/domestic sheep allotment map update (Woolever)
- Adaptive disease management
- Jurisdictional hot issues

2015 Bighorn Disease workshops (Brewer): The planned workshops are a product of recommendations from the 2014 Bighorn Respiratory Disease Workshop that was convened to update recommendations on bighorn herd health screening with an emphasis on respiratory pathogens. Both workshops are geared towards implementing standard approaches for investigations of bighorn respiratory disease problems west-wide. The overarching goal of these workshops is to provide more consistent and comparable data on regional bighorn respiratory disease investigations as a foundation for developing adaptive management approaches to minimize or mitigate impacts on herd health and performance.

- Overview/preview” workshop:
 - January 2015 - WSWG meeting/WSF Convention at Reno, NV
 - Goal: Provide managers and biologists with brief reviews and updates on recommendations and advances since the 2014 workshop as a prelude to a smaller, hands-on “advanced training” workshop.
 - Attendance is not limited.
 - Organizers: P. Wolff & C. Brewer
 - Target audience: Managers, biologists, and wildlife health workers.
 - Instructors: P. Wolff, K. Fox, H. Edwards, Jennifer Jennings-Gaines
 - Topics covered:
 - Revised recommendations for investigating bighorn respiratory disease outbreaks

- Diagnostic tests, what they mean and how their results compare to one another
 - Techniques for improving field sampling results
 - Bighorn herd health comparisons based on a standard sampling scheme
 - Open discussion/Q&A on bighorn respiratory disease investigation techniques
- Advanced training workshop: Designed to provide representatives from participating states and provinces with first-hand experience in field and laboratory techniques.
 - July 2015 - Fort Collins, CO (tentative),
 - Organizers: M. Miller, L. Wolfe, K. Fox, and H. Edwards
 - Two-day, hands-on training session is intended for agency wildlife health workers who will then be leading further training on field and laboratory techniques within their jurisdiction.
 - Participation will be limited to two per WAFWA state/provincial/territorial jurisdiction.
 - Instructors: P. Wolff, K. Fox, L. Wolfe, H. Schwantje, H. Edwards, J. Jennings-Gaines
 - Topics covered:
 - Revised recommendations for investigating bighorn respiratory disease outbreaks
 - Field handling and sampling techniques (hands-on using live bighorns)
 - Postmortem exam and sampling techniques (hands-on using bighorn carcasses)
 - Updates and discussion on new diagnostics
 - Updates and discussion on findings from recent field investigations
 - Open discussion/Q&A on bighorn respiratory disease investigation techniques

Dieoff Table (Brewer): A request for updating the west-wide bighorn die-off table was sent out to WG members on August 22. Several jurisdictions have submitted updates and the importance of maintaining the information was emphasized. Brewer encouraged those who have not submitted updates to do so. Revising the table to include other important information was discussed. In addition to incidental observations, proximity of domestic sheep, status of populations that have gone through a die-off, movement of domestic sheep and exotics, mapping forays, and others were discussed. Stephenson emphasized the need for maintaining a spreadsheet or database of known incidents. Brewer volunteered to maintain the database and asked for assistance in setting it up. Stephenson agreed to assist. Cox emphasized the need for members to commit to submitting timely information such as that for the die-off table, translocation information and other information as needed.

Update on the North Dakota Die-off (Brett Weidemann): The topic was postponed because Brett was unable to attend the teleconference.

Request for joint position statement from The Wildlife Society and the American Association of Wildlife Veterinarians (AAWV): The recent request for the joint position statement addressing the risk of disease transmission between domestic sheep and goats and wild sheep was discussed. The letter of request was written by the WAFWA Wildlife Health Committee (WHC).

Update - Thinhorn Conservation challenges publication: A draft of the publication has been completed by Bill Jex, Helen Schwantje, Troy Hegel, Darren Bruning, and Jeremy Ayotte. The draft was sent out to WSWG members prior to this teleconference. The draft has been sent out for review and edits and will be revised Oct/Nov. A final draft will then be sent out to the WSWG for review. Information from the WSF Thinhorn Summit has been incorporated in the document. Brewer would like to distribute to the Directors in time for approval at the mid-winter WAFWA meeting.

Translocation Database/Publication: Brewer requested updates for the translocation database and inclusion in the History of Wild Sheep Translocation publication that is currently in progress. Brewer and others are planning to complete a draft of the publication soon and would like to distribute to the Directors in time for approval at the mid-winter WAFWA meeting.

Adaptive Disease Management (Cox): Previously discussed at the summer WAFWA meeting at the WSWG and WHC meetings, this project is currently in the planning stages. A planning team comprised of ≤ 10 members will be formed to discuss strategies, hypotheses, and the basic framework for kick-starting the effort. Identification of herds that have or have not been exposed to disease, and status of herd recovery need to be identified for key jurisdictions. The goal is for the planning team to meet before Christmas so that the project can be discussed at the mid-winter meeting.

Bighorn sheep occupied habitat/domestic sheep grazing allotment mapping: Woolever discussed our commitment to annually revise the bighorn Sheep Occupied Habitat and Domestic Sheep Grazing Allotments maps annually. A request for jurisdictional descriptions concerning how units are defined was sent out in July. Members were asked to send her these definitions if they haven't done so. Problems exist within some of the jurisdictions such as in UT where discrepancies between the core herd home range in the model and the occupied habitat map is reflected. Other issues may exist as well and Woolever asked members to let her know if any problems are found. These issues need to be worked out soon.

Jurisdictional Issues (All)

- NE – Nordeen: Over the last 5 weeks, symptoms of respiratory disease have been observed within the Sow-belly population. Three adult ewes have been lost thus far. Hank Edwards of WY performed the analysis and *Mannheimia haemolytica* has been isolated. The extent of the potential die-off is unknown at this time. There has been no known contact with domestic sheep.
- OR – Whittaker: Staff has responded to 2 forays in the last few months. Both were in the middle of a wheat field and one was removed but the other was not. Fire season is in full force and staff has spent time adjusting hunting opportunities resulting from the fires.

Several transplants are planned for this winter. The primary transplant will involve moving 40-60 animals from Deschutes/John Day herd to ?. Plans are underway to relocate a population that was established 6-7 years ago and an experimental transplant to move animals that have been in contact with domestic sheep is also planned.

- NM – Rominger: Good rainfall in the Bootheel (5” in 24 hours). The Bighorn Biologist position is open through September 25th. The transplant from Wheeler to the Jemez Mountains (White-Rock Canyon) has resulted in considerable movement of bighorns with one ram observed in downtown Los Alamos.
- ID – Miyasaki: Efforts are underway to summarize the state’s disease testing and evaluate translocations including survival and productivity within source and recipient populations. Inclusion of this information within the die-off table was discussed.
- WY – McWhirter: Staff is currently going through data sharing for use in risk assessments. A good system for documenting observations has been in place since the 1970s. Much work is required in cleaning up the data (e.g., duplicate and data entry errors, incorrect hunt areas, unknown herd of origin for animals identified outside of occupied habitat) for use in developing the model. Jurisdictions scheduled for risk assessments need to begin gathering and cleaning up data well in advance. Efforts are in progress to collect GPS collars from study animals for a research project related to bighorn sheep (n=25) and mountain goats (n=75). ID and MT are also involved in the project. A research project will be initiated this winter with Dr. Kevin Monteith concerning nutrition and body condition. Approximately 100 bighorns will be captured this winter for disease surveillance to identify pathogen presence. A transplant for this winter is currently in the planning stages. Facility upgrades are underway at the Tom Thorne/Beth Williams Wildlife Research Center at Sybille.
- MT – Sterling: The Madison transplant is back on and scheduled for January 2015. A 6-year research project investigating disease, habitat and body condition through Dr. Bob Garrott, Montana State University is currently in the planning stages. Study animals will be radio-collared in 6 different herds throughout the state.
- TX – Hernandez: Good rainfall over the last couple of months and improved habitat conditions were reported. Population increases in some herds have resulted in surplus animals. A transplant is planned for January of 2015 (100-130 animals).
- AZ – Munig: Transplants are planned for both Rocky Mountain and desert bighorn herds this year. Rocky Mountain herds adjacent to a mine near Morenci are opportunistically being moved north. Lack of Rocky Mountain habitat in AZ is a problem and where suitable habitat exists, issues with hobby domestic sheep/goats and “drive-ways” also occur. One ewe moved approximately 50 air-miles to near hobby herds and was eventually moved back to the release site at South-fork. Attempts to gather family-units have been made in an effort to minimize movements. A desert bighorn transplant from Kingman to an area where 2 previous releases have occurred is planned. A third release is planned with sheep being moved from a herd near Phoenix to the Catalina Mountains

near Tucson. The Catalina population is doing well however, problems have occurred with approval to capture sheep within wilderness. The population will be supplemented from several locations. The EA process is currently stalled because of the large number of comments related to the Catalinas. Predation within the area has slowed down.

- CA – Stephenson: Captures are planned for this fall. The Mojave disease outbreak is currently the greatest concern. Efforts to better understand the disease outbreak will be expanded. A number of mortalities were identified following captures during the winter but things have been fairly quiet recently. Lamb recruitment has been impacted in a number of herds. Recovery efforts in the ? Peninsular? Sierra Nevada or Peninsular? I'm would say Sierra Nevada, since WSF has a GIA in hand... bighorn recovery effort are moving along well. A translocation is planned for this winter. Efforts to document occupied habitat in the recovery plan are near completion. Down-listing may occur within the next few years.
- Forest Service – Woolever:
 - Foray Discussion: Questions concerning foray distances are anticipated. Known forays need to be documented. An informal jurisdictional survey of known/documented foray distances, number of animals, kinds of animals, time of year, and other information needs to be completed. Melanie and Mark Peninger are working on a database. Rominger indicated that GPS collars should help with the effort and the differences between initial releases and established herds. Melanie will send the database out to members and Clay agreed to maintain the database on the WSWG website to make it easy for members to populate. The information will be important in addressing challenges related to the model. Whittaker indicated that not all the information will be from radio collars (some will have to be observational).
 - Region 4 Risk Assessments: Efforts are moving along well. UT is near completion. For WY, efforts to incorporate NPS data and core herd range information and validate source habitat maps are in progress. Data for NV is currently being reformatted to fit the model and efforts are under way to acquire all the necessary data for completing the project. Many of the NV points are for desert bighorns and the model will have to be tweaked to account for desert habitat issues. ID is scheduled to follow. Some groups are opposed to the “risk assessment” effort.

Next WSWG Meeting: A teleconference will be scheduled for November. Brewer will send out a doodle poll.

Meeting adjourned at 12:09 PM Central