

WSWG Teleconference
April 29, 2015 (11:00 CST)

ATTENDEES (15 Total): Amber Munig (AZ), Bill Jex and Jeremy Ayotte (BC), Hollie Miyasaki (ID), Bruce Sterling (MT), Laura McHale (NE), Mike Cox (NV), Caitlin Ruhl (NM), Froylan Hernandez (TX), Dustin Schaible (UT), Doug McWhirter (WY), Troy Hegel (YT), Melanie Woolever (USFS-retired), Kevin Hurley (WSF), Rick Kahn (NPS), Clay Brewer (Chair)

Roll-call

Upcoming meetings (All):

- Summer WAFWA meeting: July 16-22, 2015 – Reno, NV – Peppermill Resort
- WSWG Meeting: Sunday, July 19 – 8:00-5:00
- NWSGC meeting: Week of May 9, 2016 at University of Idaho/Moscow AND Washington State University/Pullman.

WSWG Project updates (Brewer):

- **Thinhorn Conservation Challenges/Management Strategies publication:** This WSWG publication is the counterpart to the one produced last year for bighorns. Bill Jex, Troy Hegel, Darren Bruning, Helen Schwantje, Nic Larter, Jeremy Ayotte have taken the lead role and Vern Bleich and Clay have contributed as well. A solid draft should be completed within the next week for the thinhorn folks to review. The target audience is general public, directors and others. The goal is to distribute to the Directors by Summer WAFWA meeting.
- **Records of Wild Sheep Translocations, US and Canada:** All updates provided have been incorporated and each jurisdiction has been filtered by imports, exports and within, and will include tables/maps each. Richard Jones is in the process of updating the maps and has 20+ completed thus far. Clay is planning to distribute hard copies to the directors at the summer WAFWA meeting.
- **International Journal of Environmental Science paper:** Hurley and Brewer recently completed a journal article for the International Journal of Environmental Science called, “*The role of hunters in conservation, restoration and management of North American wild sheep.*” Copies will be distributed when published.
- **Advanced Bighorn Disease Training Workshop update:** Scheduled for the week of July 6, 2015 - most likely at Ft. Collins, CO. A total of 23 have signed up thus far. Funding for the workshop has been provided by the WSF and will go towards materials, supplies and travel for instructors.

Desert Bighorn Council Meeting Report (Brewer): The meeting was conducted April 14-17 at Borrego Springs, CA. Ben Gonzales served as the conference Chair. The conference theme was disease and key note speakers were Dr. Besser and Dr. Sri. A total of 104 attendees were present. The Council funded one project in 2015 in the amount of \$8,500, Carlos Gonzales (Borderlands Research Institute): *Spatial, temporal, and demographic characteristics of desert bighorn sheep in west Texas.* The next meeting is scheduled for 2017 (first 2 weeks in April), Springdale, UT (tentative).

WSF Report (Hurley):

- GIA proposals are due August and funding should be about like last year or better.
- Rocky Crate Endowed Chair, Washing State University: Dr. Sri is retiring and Dr. Besser has been named as his replacement by Dr. Michelle Hardy and will take place October 1. Dr. Besser has committed to 3 years in the position and WSF staff and will continue his work with Mycoplasma. WSF members and others have met with Dr. Besser to prioritize efforts and to discuss moving towards managing disease on the landscape. A GIA proposal is anticipated from Dr. Besser.
- WSF Chapter and Affiliates meeting is scheduled for Mid-June in Kelowna , BC

R-4 Risk Assessments (Woolever): USFS is currently working on high risk areas/jurisdictions. 2015 occupied bighorn/domestic sheep allotment map updates have been completed and posted on the WSWG website. Miyasaki indicated that ID is currently updating core herd home range areas and is working with USFS on source mapping (no information received to date). Schaible indicated that UT will begin working with at the forest level on high risk areas. NV (Cox) indicated that he was meeting with USFS staff to validate data/maps. Cox inquired about alternative management options within problem areas. Woolever indicated that high risk areas will be addressed initially and then at a higher landscape level during FS planning (will not occur in the immediate future). Working at the local level will be important. Schaible (UT) indicated that the process has been stalled for a while. A briefing was given by the FS on contact rates and some overlap was identified. However, acceptable contact rates were not spelled out and impacted allotments were not identified. UT will continue to work with local FS to mitigate high risk allotments. Thus far, UT has had more contact with the region than local FS. Woolever indicated that it was rolled out to regions first and that it was just now being rolled out to the local FS. McWhirter (WY) indicated that they have a rollout meeting scheduled for June 11 with all stakeholders (Governor's office, Dept. of Ag, WGFD). Not sure how much detail will be presented. Overall, the process has been slow and they are still not sure what the acceptable contact threshold is. Hurley (WSF) indicated that a significant level of politics has entered the mix because of the "slow-down" by the FS. New WY legislation and a new sign-on letter that just went out were presented as examples. Stakeholders are frustrated with the lack of information from the FS. Cox (NV) inquired about the BLM position on the topic and indicted that nothing has been heard from the agency. Brewer indicated that at the North American, he had asked BLM leaders about the status of the "Bighorn Policy" document that has been discussed over the last 5 years. BLM indicated that State BLM Directors were currently reviewing the document, but they didn't know when it would come out. Brewer emphasized the importance of review by those who will actually be working with the policy on the landscape prior to finalizing the document. Jeremy Ayotte (BC Sheep Separation Project), discussed similar risk of contact efforts in BC. Habitat models with various layers are currently being developed for southern bighorn range and a pilot risk of contact model is underway.

Database-Disease Events/Proximity of Domestic Sheep/Goat to Bighorn Herds (Woolever): Melanie began compiling information for the database sometime back but the project was never finalized. She agreed to try and resurrect the document and distribute to WSWG members for input and development. Cox (NV) discussed the database that NV has been working on that contains information back to the 1980s that includes actual disease events and "close-call" events for out-of-place animals (bighorns or domestic). Cox emphasized the need for completing the database to include all attributes needed by the various jurisdictions. It was agreed that the NV database would be the starting point. Mike Cox will send out to WSWG and Cox, Brewer and other volunteers (Stephenson, Miyasaki, Hernandez, Harris, and Ayotte) would brainstorm, develop the attributes needed and send out to WSWG for entering data.

USFS Representative – WSWG: Woolever indicated that FS Directors met on April 10 and agreed that one full-time rather than 2 half-time person serve in this role. No other action has been taken to date.

Technology Briefing: A presentation was given by Craig Tew, Livestock Management Systems, LLC concerning newly developed Smart Ear-Tag/Reporting System/GEO-Fence (See attached information provided by Mr. Tew)

Adaptive disease management strategy (Cox and Brewer): A status report concerning a west-wide cooperative adaptive disease management strategy was presented. Cox agreed to send out a 1-page summary of the proposed project and to organize a sub-committee to move forward. The sub-committee will meet late May-early June to discuss the concept and to flesh out something more meaningful at the summer WSWG meeting.

Jurisdictional Hot Issues:

- ND: Wiedmann update members on the dieoff that began last July. Approximately 30% of the ND bighorn population has been lost to disease. *Movi* was detected and Dr. Besser (WSU) identified a unique strain never identified, which is a different strain than that identified in NE and MT. The good news, no mortalities have been observed since December 2014. Nine of 21 animals tested were *Movi* positive. A 70% lamb survival has been documented which indicated that this particular disease impacted adults more than lambs. No clinical signs observed during the last survey. Only 3 out of the original Alberta sheep have survived. ND is working with WSF and Mid-West Chapter donors who have pledged to support bighorn management. This effort will involve working on easements and with permittees where comingling occurs. Monitoring efforts will continue this summer.
- MT: Sterling reported on a dieoff north of Plains in NW MT (in the 90% range). Observations have declined from approximately 150 animals down to the teens. About 150 domestic sheep were brought into an area adjacent allotment in winter range about 4 years ago. Despite declined numbers, no clinical signs have been observed and no carcasses have been found. Will continue to monitor and sample live or dead animals. Bighorn hunting is being halted in this population (Unit 122) and the one near Gardiner. A decision was made to depopulate the Tendoy bighorn population through hunter harvest and then repopulate with healthy sheep. The EA is out and comments due by May 18. Sterling will send to Brewer for distribution to WSWG.
- BC: Ayotte reported on a population that dropped from 91 to 25 with no carcasses observed. Domestic sheep are located in the middle of summer and winter bighorn range. Radio-collared bighorns have been observed within the domestic sheep areas. In an effort to separate bighorns from domestics, funding was acquired to build an 8' fence to reduce risk of contact. An electric fence, rotation of livestock and guard dogs was also attempted. The fencing effort failed because of disagreements in fence design and funding was given back to donors. A separation policy is critical and this effort is being used for policy discussions. Development of regulatory framework (BC, YK and AK) that is intended to prevent contact between wild sheep and domestics was a key product from the 2014 Thinhorn Summit. Ayotte continues to meet with jurisdictions and government organizations (Renewable Resource Council and others) concerning development of resolutions, regulations, and policies that are aimed at prevent contact between wild and domestic sheep. More news will be coming out soon on this effort. Jex reported positive news concerning a "Government

Action Regulation” that is intended to prohibit domestic sheep and goat grazing on Crown land which should help reduce contact/risk of disease transmission (30 km buffer zone). Jex reported on the “Thinhorn Sheep Landscape Genetics” project and the importance to various thinhorn initiatives. Connectivity has been clearly demonstrated, which has helped emphasize the importance of disease risk and separation.

- NE: McHale reported on a 2014 disease outbreak that occurred in a population that was transplanted in 2012 from Alberta (30% of population lost). Lambs/yearlings survived better than adults (mortalities- 47% ewes, 27 % rams, 17% lambs and 9% lambs). *Movi* was found (different strain than ND). Schwantje emphasized the need for further investigations concerning the disease pattern associated with use of Alberta sheep to supplement populations. I think they are very naïve to pathogens Doesn’t appear that it helped but when the disease was first identified, darting with Zuprevo and Draxxin was initiated (72 total animals). Still evaluating the results. Additional sampling and radio-collaring of lambs is planned for this fall. McHale agreed to send out the NE sampling plan to Jex.
- WY: McWirther reported that one transplant occurred within the state this year (from Devils Canyon near the MT border to the Seminole Mountains in couth-central, WY). McWhirter to send Clay translocation information for the translocation records. Disease sampling efforts continue with over 100 bighorn sheep and 30 mountain goats sampled this year. Part of the sampling is being conducted as part of the Greater Yellowstone project with Montana State University. One of the biggest issues WY is dealing with is a domestic sheep herd on private land in important bighorn range in the Absarokas. Complicated and volatile issue involving trespass livestock and the WSF, WY Wild Sheep Foundation and WY Wildlife Federation are involved. Radio-collared animals have been employed to gather additional information on bighorn sheep which are adjacent to domestics. The need for the BLM policy guidance document could have helped with this situation and was emphasized. On the legislative front, 2 WY bills were introduced this session. One was based on the WY Working Group plan and becomes the WY bighorn/domestic sheep plan. The second bill resulted in the removal of bighorn sheep by WGFD if any judicial or federal actions resulted in the loss of domestic sheep grazing.
- ID: Miysaki reported on a potential fencing project near Challis (long-term problem) that is intended to separate bighorns from domestic sheep. Clay sent out an info request to members and Hollie will send out a summary of comments received to the WSWG.
- NPS: Kahn reported positive news concerning recent meetings between the Park Service in UT and UDWR to discuss issues of mutual interest, related to desert bighorns in the southern region. Hunting opportunities and other issues have been discussed. Kahn encouraged jurisdictions with NPS issues to contact him if he can be of assistance. The thinhorn situation in Alaska concerning use of domestic animals for pack use was given as a positive example of the results of these efforts.

Meeting adjourned at 12:45 PM (CST)