

WSWG Teleconference  
November 9, 2011 – 10:00 AM (MST)

**(ACTION ITEMS IN RED)**

**ATTENDEES: (11 present):** Bob Henry (AZ), Tom Stephenson (CA), Janet George (CO), Tom Carlsen (MT), Eric Rominger (NM), Anis Aoude (UT), Doug McWhirter (WY), Kevin Hurley (WSF), Sally Butts (BLM), Melanie Woolever (USFS), Clay Brewer (Chair)

**Review of agenda/additions (Brewer)**

**Jurisdictions - Hot Issues (All)**

- Eric reported that New Mexico was successful in delisting desert bighorns
- Tom (CA)
  - Sequoia/Kings Canyon NP EA was approved (Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep research and recovery actions)
  - Inyo NF EA comment period closed 11-10-11 (helicopter landings)
  - Tom indicated that this may be the direction other jurisdictions will be required to go in the future
  - Approval for specific actions (numbers and time periods) 10 years in advance were required, which is tough to project
- Todd Nordeen (NE) requested that the following be presented
  - USDA is likely going to waive the TB/Brucellosis testing transplanting sheep from Alberta to NE and NV.
  - Haven't received anything in writing yet but since these tests were waived by USDA in the past for other transplants, they have told us they will most likely do it again.
  - Full steam ahead upon approval
  - Kevin recommended sharing the USDA/Vet Services experience/process with other jurisdictions when approved
- Froylan Hernandez (TX) requested that the group be informed of plans for transplanting sheep from the Beach, Baylor, Sierra Diablo meta-population to Big Bend Ranch SP this December (2<sup>nd</sup> year)
- Doug reported that WY had just received approval to go through the EA process on the Shoshone NF to allow helicopter captures in designated wilderness
- Bob indicated that AZ was diligent in early wilderness management planning efforts which has prevented major setbacks with current efforts (meets standards of EA process)
- Kevin suggested that wild sheep management within wilderness areas might be a great topic for the upcoming Wildlife Professional's meetings at the Jan WSF meeting (Eric: bridging the philosophical and management gap between state and federal management agencies)
  - Doug suggested an advance survey that provides info concerning what has been done in wilderness, success and failures, and others) that folks can use as a source of information
  - Tom (CA) suggested including information concerning what the EA should look like and level of detail

- Tom (MT) indicated no problems with sheep management in MT wilderness areas
- Tom (CA) inquired about the possibility of a programmatic EA that covered multiple forests within multiple jurisdictions
  - Melanie (USFS) indicated that wilderness watch groups would most likely not support this type of action but it might be worth exploring
  - Sally (BLM) indicated that it was a big effort to accomplish but worth considering
  - Anis brought up the implications for other species (mountain goats, wolves, wolverines and others were discussed)
  - The time-line required for completing EAs (> 1 year) was discussed
  - Melanie expressed concern resulting from the addition of other species to the process and suggested that it might be better to do them one by one
  - Sally supports the efficiency aspect but urged caution about making it too large by adding multiple species, especially lightening rod species such as wolves

**ACTION ITEM 1: Melanie will check on the possibilities of multi-species/jurisdictional EAs within the USFS.**

**ACTION ITEM 2: Sally Butts will check with BLM planning staff to determine if multi-species/jurisdictional EAs are possible.**

- Tom (MT)
  - Reported ongoing disease issues
    - Lower Rock Creek population: has flared up again since 2009 dieoff
    - Skalkaho population: haven't been able to get a handle on things yet
    - Plan to gather samples using ground darting in Lower Rock Creek and Skalkaho populations.
    - East Fork Bitterroots: extensive culling was performed following 2009 dieoff. Recruitment is good but want to perform additional sampling.
  - Augmentation of the population within the Tendoy Mts. is planned for this winter
  - EAs for 3 other potential transplant sites will go out by next week
  - Public outreach program being developed in cooperation with the Montana Wild Sheep Foundation and wool growers (some land management agencies and NGOs may be included)
  - Working on the initial stages of a recruitment research project
- Kevin reported on:
  - The Western Watershed Project appeal concerning the decision to allow domestic sheep grazing in the Bighorn Forest (not managing for viability of bighorn sheep)
    - This is counter to the State of Wyoming agreement with domestic sheep industry that recognizes certain areas as “non-emphasis” areas for BHS (example of federal law superseding state law)
    - The July 14, 2011 Shoshone National Forest Temporary Closure Order (short-term categorical exclusion for resource protection purposes) that prohibits recreational goat use in an effort to provide separation between domestic sheep within the Wapiti, Clarks Fork, Greybull and Wind River Ranger Districts (Kevin will send out to WSWG (sent during this conference call)

**ACTION ITEM 3: Kevin Hurley will send out the “Temporary Closure Order” for domestic goat use on the Shoshone National Forest: Wapiti, Clarks Fork, Greybull and Wind River Ranger Districts (accomplished during conference call).**

- Eric reported:
  - Delisting of desert bighorns (state-listed since 1980)
  - First wild sheep transplanted in NM from Turners Ranch in the Fra Cristobal Mts. 75 total sheep captured, 45 transplanted (20 ewes - Peloncillo Mts. and 25-Big Hatchet Mts.) and 30 radio-collared and released on site
  - Anticipates 18 desert bighorn hunting permits next year

**WSF Update (Hurley)**

- WSF Board approved a wild sheep/domestic sheep policy statement on 9/7/11
- WSF et al. attempting to have Section 442 removed from the DOI FY12 Appropriations Bill
  - Melanie inquired about Section 415 and the potential for various actions to occur without going through the NEPA process and emphasized the need for scrutinizing other sections
  - Hurley also reported on Sections 118, 119, 120 and 419.
  - Stephenson asked Hurley how optimistic he was about the removal of Rider 442
  - Hurley wasn't sure but emphasized the need and continued push for it to not appear as currently written
- The value and importance of completing the mapping effort (14 western states) was emphasized
- WSF supports vaccine research by Dr. Sri (Washington State University)
  - Gray Thornton requested a letter from Dr. Sri that stated:
    - Experimentally, a wild sheep vaccine may be developed w/in 5 years, but it wouldn't be available for widespread field implementation for possibly 10-15 years
    - work continues, and holds promise, to render domestic sheep less lethal than at present, by overgrowing *Mannheimia haemolytica* leukotoxic bacteria with other, more benign bacteria
    - Both would require field trials, agency permission and a pharmaceutical company willing to produce it
  - Sri's emphasis is reducing shedding of lethal bacteria by domestic sheep
  - 95% of research should be focused on domestic sheep vaccine, not on wild sheep
  - Pushing ASI to help fund research (with industry dollars, not appropriated dollars)
  - A call to the industry has gone out by ASI leadership
- Kevin will be attending a joint meeting of the Idaho-Wyoming Woolgrowers in Sun Valley on November 12, 2011
- WSF attacking the wild sheep/domestic sheep issue very different than other groups
  - WSF checking on the numbers presented by ASI (claim: 1/4 of US domestic sheep industry could be impacted if Payette decision went west-wide)
  - ~42% of domestic sheep on USFS grazing allotments fall in or within 10 miles of bighorn habitat

- Kevin/WSF working on a spreadsheet that lists all “Best Management Practices” reflected in multiple documents to compare for common/conflicting recommendations
- Grant-In-Aid process
  - Still working on revamping the process
  - \$200K was budgeted this year, ~18 requests received under old system and 2/3 of the funds have been allocated
  - Need to do a better job getting the word out
  - Some project funds are available but WSF will be very selective on what gets funded
  - Hope to have better procedures in place by next year
  - Dr. Sri is currently seeking \$850K over next 5 years for his research
    - \$250K requested from WSF
    - \$106K already contributed by Wyoming sources (WY-WSF \$6,000; WY Governor’s Big Game License Coalition \$20,000; WY Wildlife/Livestock Disease Partnership \$80,000)
  - Anis inquired about contributions by local and jurisdictional chapters for national projects

**ACTION ITEM 4: Kevin Hurley will re-send the recently developed WSF Wild Sheep/Domestic Sheep policy statement.**

**Update on the push for a WSWG position statement concerning wild sheep vaccines (Brewer)**

- Clay:
  - Reported on discussions that had surfaced concerning the official WSWG position on wild sheep vaccines (Desert Bighorn Council, wildlife health community and others)
  - Clarified that any position on this or any other issue would be a WAFWA position statement, not that of the WSWG
  - Indicated that the issue could be brought to the Directors if the WSWG thought it was important enough to do so
  - Opened the topic for discussion
- Kevin indicated that 2 separate issues are represented: 1) Research –is worth doing but needs to focus on domestic sheep and 2) Vaccines for wild sheep is not practical or realistic
- Tom (CA) expressed support for doing anything we can to stop the push for wild sheep vaccines
- Janet emphasized the importance of making sure that other work not be decreased or stopped by any action taken by the WSWG
- Anis asked if there was really a need to pursue this since we have not really been asked for anything and stated that vaccine research will go on regardless if a position statement exists or not.
- Kevin stated that the consensus of the group should be, vaccinating wild sheep is not the primary way to go.
- **It was decided to leave it alone for now and weigh-in later when the need arises**

### **Management Plans (Brewer)**

- Clay informed the group that management plans for jurisdictions who have them have now been posted on the WAFWA WSWG Web Site
  - Most reflect agency websites and some are PDF files
  - Plans can be added later if needed or desired
  - No push if jurisdictions don't have a plan – the intent is to provide available plans at a central location
  - Requested that he be notified of changes to PDF formatted plans so that revised documents can be posted on the WSWG webpage

### **Revision-Recommendations for DS/Goat management in Wild Sheep Habitat (Brewer)**

- Clay reported that the WSWG had voted unanimously to revise the document and presented the following:
  - The intent is not to change the original purpose of the document
  - The document has changed from a “report to the Directors” to wide-spread distribution (approximately 6,500 copies have been requested by jurisdictions)
  - It is the signature document of the WSWG and needs to be professional
  - The purpose of the revision will be explained up front in the revised document
  - The goals for revising the document:
    - Change the primary message from, “we think” to “we know” that domestic sheep carry and transmit deadly bacteria to wild sheep (based on new science)
    - Clean up some of the problems (grammar, punctuation, eliminate redundancy, improve consistency and others)
    - Make the document clear and concise (means it will be shorter and cheaper to publish)
    - Not change the other messages within the document
  - The revision will be accomplished jointly by Clay and Vern Bleich (one of the authors of the original document)
  - The first round of edits has been completed for the bulleted recommendations and literature citations
  - Time-line:
    - Revision completed and submitted to the WSWG by Dec 1
    - Revise accordingly and upon approval, submit to the Directors by Dec 15 for prior review before the winter WAFWA meeting in Jan
    - Seek approval from the Directors on the document and to proceed with publishing
  - Timely feedback/approval from the WG was requested
  - Clay emphasized that this is a WSWG project not Clay's or Vern's revision
  - Bids have been acquired, a publisher selected and lined out and donations have already been acquired for publishing
  - We can move forward upon approval by you and the Directors
  - Additional photos requested for inclusion in the document
  - The document will be something the WSWG will be proud
- Kevin requested copies of the revisions as we move forward so he can revise other documents (e.g., BMP comparison spreadsheet) accordingly and indicated that this was an extremely valuable undertaking

**ACTION ITEM 5: Revision-Recommendations for DS/Goat management in Wild Sheep Habitat: Clay will provide drafts of the various revisions to whoever wants them.**

**Draft - Conservation Challenges – Management Strategies (Brewer)**

- Clay sent out a draft of the conservation challenges-management strategies document he has been working on and discussed the following:
  - The purpose of the document is to educate folks about the important challenges we are facing
  - The target agreed upon by the WG was the general public which means minimal scientific jargon, no citations and others
  - The goal: provide a clear and succinct description of the challenge, background and direction/potential solutions
  - Goals, objectives and strategies was the delivery method selected
  - A request for guidance concerning:
    - The approach - Is the WG ok with the direction Clay is heading with the document?
    - The document title: “NA Wild Sheep Conservation Plan” or “Conservation Challenges – Management Strategies”
- Tom (CA) asked why Clay thought it was important to reduce each topic to one page and indicated that the WAFWA position on these challenges would be extremely beneficial when dealing with controversial issues such as predation, and clarifying potential management needs. As written, this might not be the best document for him to use.
  - Clay indicated that a different approach could be used if the WG wanted to go a different route. He stated that he had visited with interpretive staff on the length/message and others in choosing the approach. Future projects can focus on greater level of detail.
- Kevin indicated:
  - That a good approach might be: 1st page-statement of problem and view of WSWG on issues, 2nd page-synthesis of problem, and 3rd page-objectives, strategies and what we want to accomplish
  - That this was very germane and pointed to the WAFWA Directors which should be the first target audience since clearance from the Directors is needed
  - The draft Clay presented is a reformatting of the old problem statements and he supports the approach (not too detailed)
  - Clay discussed the original problem statements which were primarily brief paragraphs describing which jurisdictions were impacted by the issue. The original predation statement was very detailed which is something we should shoot for in a future document. The goal for this draft was to briefly present the issue without tremendous controversy or detail
- Tom (MT) stated:
  - That jurisdictional management plans provided for the specific needs of the jurisdiction
  - Some of the issues discussed in the summaries within this document are not a high priority in Montana. Predation was used as an example. It is not an important or limiting factor in MT because they have a functional system (harvest) for managing predators.

- Needs to be a statement that clarifies where certain issues are or are not limiting factors or problems. Clay suggested spelling it out up front in the document (these issues do not impact all jurisdictions)
- Kevin emphasized the value of the original prioritized (1-7) color-coded maps that clarify where the issue is important and where it is not and stated that the maps still have merit
- Tom (CA), Kevin and Tom (MT) suggested that the color coded maps might be extremely helpful in clarifying the issues
- Kevin re-emphasized the importance of embedding the maps within each issue section and stated that it would be good for the Directors since they haven't seen it in 5 years
  - Clay asked if folks like the numbers reflected in the map and suggested maps that reflected priority levels (low, moderate and high) as a better format for the public
    - Doug indicated that the Directors would be interested in the rankings but it might not be as important to the public (depends on primary audience)
    - A separate report to the Directors was discussed
- Clay agreed to go back to the drawing board by describing where issues are or are not important and include maps and:
  - Stated that he may send out several options for the group to consider
  - Asked members to review the draft document and provide recommendations on the format
  - Stated that he plans to continue working through the remaining topics and to send the entire document to the WSWG for review/assistance later
  - Indicated that he would include the revisions he has received thus far but will be requesting detailed review later
  - Stated that he would work on this document when time allows but emphasized that revising the recommendations for DS mgmt document is his first priority through mid-Dec
  - Stated that he plans to report progress on this deliverable to the Directors in January
  - Indicated that his goal was a final draft by the Summer WAFWA meeting
- Clay asked the group for thoughts on the title of the document
  - Kevin, Janet and Tom (CA) indicated that it didn't have the depth for serving as a conservation plan and suggested that we stick with conservation challenges and management strategies
- **It was agreed that the title of the document will be: Conservation Challenges – Management Strategies**

**ACTION ITEM 6: Clay will continue working on the draft Conservation Challenges – Management Strategies document and will revise the format to reflect priority levels within jurisdictions and include the previously developed priority maps. Options will be sent out for consideration.**



## **A mechanism for reporting, recording and summarizing comingling of domestic sheep and wild sheep (Brewer)**

- Clay emphasized the need for pursuing some type of incident reporting system (spelled out in the WSWG Recommendations) and reported/discussed:
  - He had visited with the person who maintains the WAFWA WSWG website and that she indicated that hosting some type of incident reporting system should not be a problem depending how complex we make it
  - The toughest part is getting the word out to the public on where and how to report
  - We have to decide what the objective is or what we want to accomplish
  - Reporting or notification can be as simple as: a person enters an incident report and it automatically sends an email to all working group members who would then notify whoever they need to in their jurisdiction
  - Reporting and summarizing: Clay could summarize and record reports or a system could be developed that notifies working group members and summarizes the info into some type of data base
    - Identifying persistent problem areas or permittees or an overall picture based on these reports could be valuable
    - Another option would be for each jurisdiction to compile their own reports rather than by Clay
  - The specifics of what needs to be included in the incident report. A simple approach would work best:
    - Person reporting
    - Contact information (phone/email address)
    - What they observed
    - Where they observed it (GPS coordinates or description)
  - Clay asked for everyone's thoughts
- Kevin suggested visiting with Mike Cox in NV to observe how NDoW summarizes their reports and stated that it would be an extremely valuable tool that we should get out to wild sheep organizations, NGOs and the public. A simple report that goes back to WSWG members would provide tips on problems that we wouldn't have known about otherwise.
- Tom (CA) liked the idea and thought a database would be valuable

**ACTION ITEM 7: Clay will check with Nevada to determine how incident reports are summarized and will continue to work on an incident reporting and summarizing system.**

## **Mapping Project Update (USFS/BLM Mapping of Wild Sheep Distribution and vacant/active DS&G Grazing Allotments (Woolever)**

- Melanie
  - Occupied habitat with allotment information
    - BLM has completed a draft and are ready to go
    - USFS will release final draft before Christmas (still need: CA, OR, WA, and edge matching for NV and ID). The edge matching is critical (sheep do not stop at state boundary).
    - Plans to release as is, if the information is not provided



- The maps need to be posted on a non-government web-site and the WAFWA WSWG website would work great if the space requirement can be met.
    - Requests for maps are starting to come in
    - Clay asked Melanie to check on file types and sizes so that he can pursue a website
  - Source habitat mapping Project
    - Janet stated that the model held up well for CO and that the project was near completion
      - Based on several large data sets that add up to approximately 55,000 data points (summer only), 6-7 herds distributed around the state
      - Goal was coverage of 80-90% of points
      - CO will recommend a higher canopy type, moving slope down from 31% to 27% [can't be correct % figures...]
      - Alpine habitats were discussed
      - GIS person will provide a write-up on the project
    - Kevin inquired about the possibility of shifting lead roles/responsibilities from federal agencies to states, based on issues surrounding Rider 442.
      - If 442 passes, could funding be passed through to states to continue mapping project since it is a cooperative effort (states and feds)
      - Melanie:
        - Inquired as to what would the motivation be for not having the federal agency in some type of leadership role, since this is a Forest Service grazing issue
        - Expressed concern about the issues being difficult politically for states to deal with and stated that some level of protection is provided by federal agencies
        - Melanie discussed the problems states lacking GIS support, funding and other problems
      - A shift to states would be plan B if Rider 442 is not removed to prevent the project from coming to a halt. Would have to be funding behind it.
      - Janet clarified that it was allotment issues on federal land.
    - Doug stated that the model has worked well for Wyoming and that he would like to try some of things CO has done with the manipulations to make it work even better
    - Melanie stated that the maps are working pretty well overall. May be some tweaking required in some areas. She is planning a webex call to roll this out west-wide

- Kevin reported that the wild sheep translocation mapping project Richard Jones is working on is going great, but it's still up to individual states to do quality-control on Richard's draft spreadsheets/summaries.
  - Melanie stated that the maps have been extremely valuable in responding to claims that jurisdictions are releasing wild sheep on top of domestic sheep allotments (how many bighorn sheep have been transplanted in proximity to domestic sheep)
    - Maps indicated that no bighorn sheep had been released on top of domestic sheep with a few releases occurring in close proximity
  - Kevin will check with Richard on the status

**ACTION ITEM 8: Clay Brewer will pursue a website for housing the mapping projects that will provide for large storage space requirements.**

**ACTION ITEM 9: Kevin will check with Richard Jones on the status of the source mapping project.**

#### **Upcoming Meetings**

- Winter WAFWA Meeting – Jan 4-7, San Diego, CA, Reno Sparks Convention Center
- WSF Convention - Jan 18-21, 2012 in Reno, NV
  - **WSWG Meeting: Jan 17 (1:00-5:00) and Jan 18 (8:00-12:00), Room A6**
  - Wildlife Professionals Meeting: Jan 18, 2012 (1:00-5:00), Room A6
- Northern Wild Sheep/Goat Council Symposium - Mar 12-15, 2012 in Kamloops, BC.
- Meeting formats was discussed
  - Clay asked the group about the meeting format and if there was any interest in a field trip or something different
  - Melanie mentioned that the Virginia Range release site is only 15 minutes away from Reno but indicated that it would be tough to fit it in
  - Kevin indicated that the WSF convention schedule is crammed. Monday (possibly ½ day morning trip on Tuesday) might be the only day to accomplish a field trip
- Kevin pleaded one last time for topics for the professionals meeting and threw out a few ideas

**Other business** – None reported

**Meeting adjourned at 12:25 PM**

## SUMMARY OF ACTION ITEMS

1. **Melanie will check on the possibilities of multi-species/jurisdictional EAs within the USFS.**
2. **Sally Butts will check with BLM planning staff to determine if multi-species/jurisdictional EAs are possible.**
3. **Kevin Hurley will send out the “Temporary Closure Order” for domestic goat use on the Shoshone National Forest: Wapiti, Clarks Fork, Greybull and Wind River Ranger Districts. (accomplished during conference call)**
4. **Kevin Hurley will re-send the recently developed WSF Wild Sheep/Domestic Sheep policy statement.**
5. **Recommendations for DS/Goat management in Wild Sheep Habitat: Clay will provide drafts of the various revisions to whoever wants them.**
6. **Conservation Challenges – Management Strategies: Clay will continue working on the document and will revise the format to reflect priority levels within jurisdictions and include the previously developed priority maps. Options will be sent out for consideration.**
7. **Clay will check with Nevada to determine how incident reports are summarized and will continue to work on an incident reporting and summarizing system.**
8. **Clay Brewer will pursue a website for housing the mapping projects that will provide for large storage space requirements.**
9. **Kevin Hurley will check with Richard Jones on the status of the source mapping project.**