



USDA Forest Service
Okanogan Wenatchee National Forest
Briefing Paper

Domestic and Bighorn Sheep

June 23, 2016

Issue

The relationship between bighorn sheep population viability and domestic sheep grazing on National Forest System lands continues to be an important wildlife and range management issue. Where management objectives include maintenance or enhancement of bighorn sheep populations and sustainable grazing, the potential for disease transmission from domestic sheep to bighorn sheep must be addressed.

Background

The Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest (OWNF) has nine domestic sheep allotments under one permittee and ten bighorn sheep herds. Tribal trust responsibilities for the Yakama Indian Nation are involved in these bighorn sheep herds. There has been no documented history of disease transmission between domestic sheep grazing on the Forest and bighorn sheep.

2016 Consolidated Appropriations Act

Report language (technically the "explanatory statement") states: Bighorn Sheep Conservation - In order to ensure the Nation does not lose its domestic sheep industry or Bighorn sheep conservation legacy, the (Forest) Service and the Bureau of Land Management shall implement a variety of solutions, including the following directives:

- The agencies are directed to complete risk of contact analyses using appropriate data sources, such as from the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and to share the findings with the public. **Completed in February 2016** (*Seven of the nine domestic sheep allotments have a high risk of contact rating with the other two allotments having a low risk rating*). *Over a number of years, the permittee has gone to great lengths to reduce the risk of contact between domestic sheep and wild bighorn sheep through the annual operating instructions process and day to day movement of domestic sheep.*
- The Service is expected to engage the Agricultural Research Service to ensure the best scientific understanding of where disease transmission occurs and the degree of that risk and to assist the Forest Service with identifying all allotments that are suitable for sheep grazing. **OWNF has engaged with Dr. Donald P Knowles, Research Leader at the USDA-ARS Animal Disease Research Unit at Washington State University.**
- The Service and Bureau of Land Management also are directed to identify and implement actions to resolve issues on allotments with a high risk of disease transmission, including, if agreeable to the directly affected stakeholders, the re location of domestic sheep to allotments with a low risk, pending any site-specific environmental analysis. **Pending. OWNF expects to start NEPA analysis of domestic sheep grazing in the fall of 2016.**
- Together, the agencies are encouraged to convene a meeting of stakeholders interested in collaborating on strategies and solutions to address the risk of disease transmission and to report to the Committees on implementation of these directives within 60 days of enactment of this Act. **OWNF has coordinated with the TAPASH Sustainable Forest Collaborative to convene a meeting with the Yakama Tribe and interested stakeholders. Meeting was scheduled for June 27, 2016 but was delayed to August 1, 2016 in order to allow for increased stakeholder participation.**

Contact

For more information, please see our Domestic Sheep Grazing/Bighorn Sheep Conservation web page at: www.fs.usda.gov/goto/domestic-bighorn-sheep or contact Gregg Kurz, gkurz@fs.fed.us, 509-664-9349.