

Assessment of Need (Justification) CRIS and Enforcement Plan

1. Background. The areas included in the closure order contain bighorn sheep populations, or key habitat for this species, or are used as a migration corridor. Bighorn sheep are the only species of native wild sheep in the western United States. The subspecies found in New Mexico include both the Rocky Mountain and the Desert bighorn sheep. Both subspecies, saw massive population declines following European settlement of the American west and was nearly extirpated from the State of New Mexico by the early 1960s. Since then, collaborative efforts by federal land management agencies and New Mexico Department of Game and Fish have taken place to help reestablish bighorn sheep populations in historic and related suitable habitats in New Mexico. While we have seen a rise in numbers, populations of bighorn sheep are highly vulnerable to diseases (particularly bacterial pneumonia) due to exposure to domestic goats and sheep. The majority of the Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep on the Carson and Santa Fe National Forests are found within alpine habitat, which is abundant in the listed Wilderness areas. They are also readily found along scree slopes and canyon walls associated with the Rio Grande gorge. This closure order prohibits possessing, storing, or transporting any domestic sheep or goat within the listed areas, including the use of these species as pack animals. Domestic goats and sheep are vectors for multiple diseases known to have an intensely negative impact on the survivability of bighorn sheep, and exposure always results in a high mortality rate of native bighorn sheep. The domestic animals often carry harmful bacteria without showing any signs of illness. These same bacteria can have disastrous results to populations of bighorn sheep, often resulting in the complete die off of entire populations of bighorn sheep within a mountain range. Preventing contact with domestic goats and sheep has been identified as a highly successful management tactic in helping to restore and maintain native bighorn sheep populations to historic habitats in New Mexico. The areas identified are all associated with known bighorn sheep populations, and function as refugia from domestic goat and sheep exposure.
2. Intent of Subpart B order. It to protect a Special biological community.
3. NEPA Compliance: The proposed action for the temporary closure of the described area under FSH 1909.15 Ch.31.12 (1), “Categories Established by the Chief; Categories for Which a Project or Case File and Decision Memo Are Not Required; Orders issued pursuant to **36 CFR Part 261**- “prohibitions to provide short-term resource protection or to protect public health and safety”. This action does not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment and therefore is categorically excluded from documentation in an EIS or EA. This documentation will serve as sufficient basis for the action to be taken, and for the record.
4. Civil Rights Impact Statement: This Order does not constitute a “major action” as defined in FSH 1709.11, 31.1, Exhibit 01. It merely restricts an area minimizing the dangers to human health and safety equal to all; as such, no one group is expected to be displaced or experience a disproportionate burden as a result of this Order.
5. Enforcement Plan. The following activities will occur in order to implement this special order in a manner that results in public acceptance and safety:

<u>Action</u>	<u>Responsible Official</u>	<u>Date</u>
Prepare proposed order	Santa Fe and Carson National Forest,	4/20/2021
Review proposed order (Law Enforcement)	Dan Reed, Patrol Captain, Southwest Region, USFS	4/20/2021
Approve proposed order	Forest Supervisors, Carson National Forest and Santa Fe National Forest.	
Post order in accordance with 36 CFR 261.51	Volunteers, Forest Service FPOs, and all available staffs	
Prepare news release for local media describing the order and management objectives/post to website/notify COIDC/copy to each receptionist/frontliners	PAO	
Notices will be used at access points advising of the closure for implementation.	Appropriate Staff Forest Protection Officers Cibola National Forest Employees & Volunteers	

Enforcement Plan approved for implementation:

Date
Forest Supervisor

Date
Forest Supervisor