



File Code: 2620/2200

Date: June 11, 2012

Route To:

Subject: Bighorn Sheep Analysis for NEPA Documents

To: Regional Forester, R-1, Regional Forester, R-2, Regional Forester, R-3, Regional Forester, R-4, Regional Forester, R-5, Regional Forester, R-6

The relationship between bighorn sheep population viability and domestic sheep and goat grazing on National Forest System (NFS) lands continues to be an important management issue facing the Forest Service on western rangelands. On August 19, 2011, Deputy Chief for National Forest Systems, Joel Holtrop, issued a letter (attached) identifying the four-step outline for conducting a qualitative Bighorn Sheep Viability Analysis at the Forest Plan level. Implementation of the August 2011 letter and four-step outline is crucial to the Agency's continued efforts to minimize the potential for disease transmission through interactions between bighorn sheep and domestic sheep.

Recently, the first two steps of the outline were completed with the generation of maps and associated shapefiles that show occupied bighorn sheep habitat and domestic sheep grazing allotments. These maps also identify areas of potential overlap of bighorn and domestic sheep ranges and where disease transmission might be a concern. The maps are filed at (T:\FS\NFS\R02\Program\2600WildlifeMgmt\GIS\Final_BHSMs-Data_BLM_FS_Feb2012), and can also be located on the Forest Service Web site at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/biology/wildlife/curl.html>.

These maps represent a joint effort between the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Wild Sheep Working Group (WAFWA WSWG). NFS data, including active and vacant sheep and goat allotments, and vacant cattle allotments, were derived from the INFRA database using tabular data from November 2011 and spatial data from 2008. The intention is to update NFS layers annually in the late spring or early summer. It is imperative that units maintain current, accurate INFRA records. The occupied bighorn sheep layers were supplied by individual States as part of the WAFWA WSWG. The States will also keep their data updated as new information becomes available. Work on the remaining components/tools in the 4-step outline continues. Forests should use the State-based maps and the additional new tools to address the potential for contact and the risk of disease transmission between domestic sheep/goats and wild sheep. Field units should continue to work with State wildlife organizations, local stakeholders, and the livestock industry in striving for solutions.

/s/ Leslie A. C. Weldon
LESLIE A. C. WELDON
Deputy Chief, National Forest System

Enclosure

