



www.mtsheep.org

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**MONTANA
WILD SHEEP**
FOUNDATION

www.montanawsf.org

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Governor Bullock, Director Williams, and Montana Fish and Wildlife Commissioners:

On behalf of *Montana Wild Sheep Foundation* (MTWSF) and *Montana Woolgrowers Association* (MTWGA), we are writing jointly to request Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) move forward in conducting additional scoping to determine the feasibility of establishing a new bighorn sheep herd in the Bridger Mountains. Our two organizations feel that the Bridger Mountains may be an appropriate habitat location for a bighorn transplant, while offering additional hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities for the public. What is more, the Bridger Mountains location is proximate to Montana State University – Bozeman, which such scenario could provide an opportunity for developing and evaluating science-based strategies that are effective in minimizing co-mingling of wild and domestic sheep.

The Montana Bighorn Sheep Conservation Strategy lists (11) statewide objectives. FWP has completed many of the objectives listed including establishing herd health monitoring strategies and improved understanding of the genetic background of the various herds in Montana. However, objective (6), which is to “*establish (5) new viable and huntable populations by 2020*”, has not been satisfied.

Originally proposed as a reintroduction area in 1993 and again in 2013, we believe the Bridger Mountains provides an opportunity to start meeting objective 6, set forth above. All of the necessary expertise to accomplish a successful transplant is geographically concentrated close to the Bridger Mountains. Important partners include FWP personnel, woolgrowers, wild sheep interests, Montana State University (MSU) scientific expertise in both the College of Agriculture and College of Letters and Sciences, local recreational and commercial producers, and a wool mill owner. With the input and participation of these groups and entities, specific protocols and separation strategies could be developed and evaluated for this specific herd using the latest science and technology.

We believe that a Bridgers transplant may be more feasible if the transplanted herd were given an experimental, non-critical population designation. Such a designation would allow the department more flexibility in terms of risk tolerance both in habitat and in developing bighorn sheep wild sheep separation strategies. An experimental designation could be coupled with or dependent upon increased monitoring and increased pathogen testing and controls. Further, the management strategy for this population could benefit from agreements by and between FWP, Montana State University, and the Federal Sheep Experiment station located in Dubois, Idaho.

In short, our respective organizations believe that restarting the public scoping and comment process on a Bridger Mountains reintroduction may prove fruitful not only for domestic and wild sheep interests, but also for the department in meeting the goals set forth in the 2010 conservation strategy. This scoping effort would build upon and enhance the collaborative work performed by our two organizations during the last three years. Examples of this collaborative work include:



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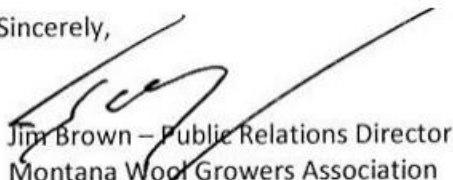
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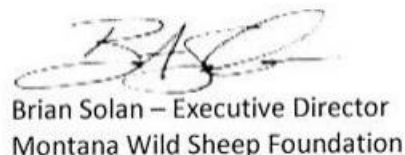
- The 2016 op-ed co-signed by Brian Solan (MTWSF Executive Director) and Dave McEwen (former President of the MWGA), ...” *Both organizations firmly believe in sound conservation practices, defined as prudent use of our natural resources, with a strong desire to see Montana’s bighorn health and herd sizes increase while maintaining Montana’s ranking in the top 10 domestic sheep producing states in the U.S. We jointly believe there is room on the Montana landscape for both domestic and bighorn sheep, just not in a manner that allows for comingling.* “
- The MWGA, MTWSF, Wild Sheep Foundation (WSF), and FWP sponsored and hosted a statewide symposium, “*Sheep in Montana-Domestic and Wild, the State of Things and What We Know About Disease*”.
- Ongoing and continued discussions between key members of the MTWGA and MTWSF, building trust and a shared need for action, we acknowledge:
 - The MWGA and MTWSF’s willingness to compromise and work together for the natural and agricultural resources of the great state of Montana.
 - The valuable work of FWP’s herd health program, furthering the knowledge of respiratory pathogen disease investigations and developing genetic profiles of wild sheep in Montana.
 - Dr. Robert Garrott’s research, which is supported by both WSF auction tag revenue of Montana’s legislatively authorized bighorn sheep auction tag during their annual “sheep show.” and PR matching funds from FWP. Dr. Mark Jutila and colleagues, MSU Colleges of Agriculture Sciences domestic sheep respiratory disease research efforts.
 - Kurt Alt’s (WSF) efforts in identifying and emphasizing the need for cooperative respiratory disease research for domestic and wild sheep and working on behalf of both MTWSF and WSF to build trust among agencies, woolgrowers and various stakeholder groups.
 - MTWSF and WSF in providing strong support as an intervenor for the Greenhorn MOU and the USFS and FWP evaluations of the Gravelly sheep allotments, and the FWP bighorn sheep permit for the Greenhorn Sheep population.

Thank you for your time and attention to this joint request for the Department and the Commission to consider undertaking a further scoping effort as to carrying out an experimental Bridger Mountain bighorn sheep reintroduction. We appreciate your consideration of this proposal and our respective organizations are on standby should you need additional information, clarification or assistance.

Sincerely,



Jim Brown – Public Relations Director
Montana Wool Growers Association



Brian Solan – Executive Director
Montana Wild Sheep Foundation

Cc: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission
Ken McDonald, FWP
John Vore, FWP