

New Bighorn Sheep Transplant Proposals in Cooperative Review Areas

As part of the statewide Domestic Sheep/Bighorn Sheep Interaction Working Group effort to coordinate activities, this appendix outlines a process to review future bighorn sheep transplant proposals in identified Cooperative Review Areas (explanation below). The *Economic Viability, Loss of Allotments, and Distrust of Agencies* Subcommittee held meetings on July 16-17, 2001 in Riverton and September 13-14, 2001 in Rock Springs, to discuss this topic, among others. A statewide map was prepared depicting Bighorn Sheep Emphasis Areas, Bighorn Sheep Non-Emphasis Areas, and Cooperative Review areas (where proposed changes in bighorn sheep management or domestic sheep use will be cooperatively evaluated by the statewide DS/BHS Interaction Working Group).

Step 1. Internal Review (within Wyoming Game and Fish Department)

1. A potential transplant site is identified/suggested, either internally by WGFD or from an external source (e.g., Wyoming Chapter Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, Domestic Sheep/Bighorn Sheep Interaction Working Group, sportsperson's groups, private landowner(s), federal agency personnel, or interested publics).
2. The feasibility, suitability, and habitat evaluation for a potential transplant site is analyzed by WGFD, including Regional Wildlife/Habitat, Bighorn Sheep Working Group (BSWG), and Veterinary Services personnel, with input and tentative commitment of funding support, if needed, from WY-FNAWS et al. A source of sheep for transplanting should be identified, and the herd health history of that source population should be reviewed, to identify potential disease transmission concerns, if any. A map depicting the anticipated range/likely distribution of transplanted bighorn sheep should be prepared, based on the expected movement of translocated sheep (the mapped area should be as complete as necessary to include anticipated year-round habitat, but should not include areas bighorn sheep are unlikely to utilize). All domestic sheep (i.e., on private and/or public lands) occurring within the anticipated range/distribution of transplanted wild sheep should be identified, and a Risk Assessment to determine likelihood of contact between domestic and wild sheep should be completed. A post-season population objective for the transplanted herd should be established.

A recommendation to pursue the transplant is forwarded by Regional personnel and the BSWG to Wildlife Division Administration. From there, Wildlife Division Administration should make a recommendation to the Director's Office to proceed with, abandon, or modify the proposal. If the Director's Office agrees to proceed, contact should then be made with the WGF Commissioner in whose District the potential site occurs. If the effected WGF Commissioner(s) agree to proceed, external contacts should begin.

Step 2. External Review (outside Wyoming Game and Fish Department)

1. If the transplant site (and anticipated wild sheep distribution resulting from the transplant) involves public lands managed by a federal or state land management agency (e.g. USFS, BLM, Bureau of Reclamation, State Parks, etc.), discussions with appropriate resource personnel in those agencies should occur. Also, livestock grazing permittees within the boundaries of the anticipated project area should be contacted. Discussions with public land managers and livestock permittees on public lands within the boundaries of the anticipated project area should include a clear explanation of:
 - a) whether or not buffer zones (i.e., a minimum distance separating domestic from wild sheep) would be sought;
 - b) the "hold harmless" approach (i.e., no blame assigned in the event of co-mingling between domestic and wild sheep, with subsequent disease transmission/death of either domestic or wild sheep); and
 - c) the ability of public lands grazing permittees to graze cattle, domestic sheep, or other livestock on the public land allotments permitted to them.

Summaries of these discussions should be prepared, as part of the official record.

If the transplant site (and anticipated wild sheep distribution resulting from the transplant) involves private lands, individual discussions with potentially involved landowners/lessees should occur. Discussions with private landowners/lessees within, and adjacent to, the boundaries of the anticipated project area should include a clear explanation of:

- a) whether or not buffer zones (i.e., a minimum distance separating domestic from wild sheep) would be sought;
- b) the “hold harmless” approach (i.e., no blame assigned in the event of co-mingling between domestic and wild sheep, with subsequent disease transmission/death of either domestic or wild sheep); and
- c) the ability of a private landowner/lessee to graze cattle, domestic sheep, or other livestock on his/her private lands.

Summaries of these discussions should be prepared, as part of the official record.

2. Following individual discussions with potentially involved public land managers and/or private landowners/lessees, a group meeting of potentially involved public land managers and/or private landowners/lessees and members of the statewide Domestic Sheep/Bighorn Sheep Interaction Working Group should be held, to allow for a group discussion of the proposed transplant. If public land managers, and/or private landowners/lessees, and/or members of the statewide Domestic Sheep/Bighorn Sheep Interaction Working Group support further investigation of the potential transplant by WGFD, contact with sportsperson/conservation organizations should be made. Also, media (i.e., newspaper, radio) news releases announcing the proposal should be distributed, statewide, with help from WGFD I&E personnel. Public comment on the proposed transplant should be solicited/encouraged.
3. Based on feedback received from public land managers, private landowners/lessees, and/or sportsperson/conservation groups, open houses or public meetings to present/explain the proposal should be scheduled by WGFD in at least 2 towns (preferably the closest town to the proposed transplant site and one larger, centrally located town, like Casper). Written comments should also be accepted from interested publics. Comments should be recorded/summarized (perhaps even videotaped) to have an official account of public support/opposition. A complete summary of all public comment should be forwarded by the Region(s) to Wildlife Division Administration, then to the Director’s Office, then to the WGF Commission. If needed, Region(s) can meet with WGFD Staff and/or the WGF Commission to discuss the transplant proposal.
4. If approval to proceed with the transplant is obtained from the WGF Commission, Region(s) should firm up the schedule, secure funding, and proceed with the transplant. Media coverage of the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission decision to move forward with the proposed transplant should follow.

Step 3. Additional Protocol for New Bighorn Sheep Transplants in Cooperative Review Areas

1. If the decision is made to go forward with a transplant, attempts should be made to obtain voluntary agreements (with existing cattle permittees on affected public land grazing allotments and cattle producers on private lands) that conversion to domestic sheep will not be attempted for a period of 10-15 years within the *a priori* mapped reintroduction area, unless agreement has been reached through the Domestic Sheep/Bighorn Sheep Interaction Working Group that disease issues between domestic and wild sheep have been resolved. These agreements are not required for the transplant to proceed, but are encouraged.
2. If the decision is made to go forward with transplant, and if contact between domestic and wild sheep is subsequently suspected/documented, and/or if the transplant falters or fails, there shall be an *a priori* “hold harmless” agreement in place.
3. Utilize capture protocol to minimize stress and ensure adequate disease sampling on captured sheep.
4. Radiocollar as many transplanted adult bighorns as possible (preferably all), to facilitate post-release monitoring; satellite/GPS collars would be ideal for monitoring movements and habitat selection.
5. If there is known, suspected, or highly probable contact between domestic and wild sheep, wandering bighorns should be live captured and transferred to Sybille; if live capture can not be accomplished, bighorn(s) should be killed and transferred to the Wyoming State Veterinary Laboratory as soon as possible.
6. There should be immediate, mutual, two-way notification of interaction between domestic and wild sheep.