

1994 NWS&GC MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSE: MONTANA'S BIGHORN SHEEP MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

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QUESTION: Does your state or province have an identifiable sheep management program?

Montana does not currently have a detailed sheep management program planning document. We are in the process of putting together a Programmatic EIS for the Wildlife Division that will cover bighorns, trapping, transplants, and hunting. This document is due out in 1997.

QUESTION: How do/did you do management planning?

Montana has been divided into 8 wildlife management regions. Sheep management is carried out on a herd basis within each region. The regional wildlife manager takes recommendations from field biologists on seasons, habitat acquisition or manipulation projects, transplants, and trapping; prioritizes them; and submits them to the divisional office in the state headquarters. The season recommendations are compiled by wildlife division administrative staff in the state office and must be approved by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission which is appointed by the governor. Trapping, transplanting, acquisitions, studies, and other projects based on regional recommendations to the division are prioritized, and spending on such projects is coordinated through the division.

This system works well and should continue to do so as long as open lines of communication exist between and among all levels of management. Occasionally, it breaks down when individual priorities are not shared at higher or lower levels within the management framework.

Other Agency Participation in Sheep Management in Montana

Other agencies that participate in bighorn management programs within the state include the National Park Service (NPS), the U. S. Forest Service (USFS), the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). A brief description of the level of these agencies' activities with sheep follows.

NPS has funded population and movement studies in Glacier National Park and provided partial funding of studies adjacent to and in Yellowstone National Park.

USFS has entered into several cost-share projects dealing with habitat manipulation to improve bighorn ranges. Prescribed burns and logging have been the main methods employed to date. USFS has also contributed money, manpower and administrative assistance towards several studies done in the state. They also monitor vegetation on several grazing allotments and other bighorn ranges that have been impacted with some type of development, and have adjusted grazing systems and made other alterations in management methods for bighorns.

USFWS monitors range and population parameters for transplanted herds on the C. M. Russell Wildlife Refuge (CMR) and the Moiese National Bison Range (MNBR). They have provided funding for studies on the MNBR and for population and vegetation monitoring on the CMR. USFWS has also helped to fund studies and aided in trapping and transplants through the Cooperative Wildlife Unit at the University of Montana.

BLM has provided funding for studies in various parts of the state. They have monitored vegetation and population changes associated with bighorns in the Missouri Breaks, and have helped fund and assist trapping and transplant operations.

Operational, administrative and study costs vary annually between the different agencies. It is estimated an average of \$10,000 per year is contributed by these agencies toward sheep management in Montana.

Additional Funding and Foundation for North American Wild Sheep Participation

Montana does provide a bighorn permit to be auctioned off by the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep (FNAWS). Dollars generated by the auction are earmarked for habitat improvement or acquisition, and trapping, transplanting, or studies of bighorns. In our 8 years of participation in the auction, the permit has raised \$789,000; 90% of permit earnings (\$710,000) has gone into the sheep program in Montana and 10% has remained with FNAWS for their grant program.

During the same period, Montana has received between \$5,000 and \$10,000 annually in grants for bighorn work in the state from FNAWS. It would appear that for this period, we are essentially getting full price of the tag we auction but no additional funding from the organization. We do feel that FNAWS offers the best opportunity to raise money through the auction of a tag, and we are ahead of the game in total dollars raised for the sheep program because of their ability to bring in the bucks for such an event. There are some

second thoughts, however, on the merits and morality of raising money using this method.

DISCUSSION

Montana's sheep management program, while not well documented on paper, runs smoothly and is providing the license holders and other interested publics a wide variety of opportunities in regards to bighorn sheep. The central coordination for spending programs such as trapping, transplants, and habitat acquisition and manipulation at the divisional level allows for statewide prioritization and enactment of these programs. Each region in turn is allowed the leeway to manage the populations within their jurisdiction as well as recommend transplants, studies, and habitat acquisition or alteration programs. It is a system that is driven from the bottom up rather than from the top down. This has resulted in a diversity of management strategies and season types being applied across a diversity of habitats rather than 1 or 2 management strategies being applied across the state.

As with any program, documented or not, when individual management directions are not held in check at the regional or state level a wreck is going to occur. Consequently, we have reached the point where it has become necessary to document broad regional objectives and lay out a statewide program that will still allow managers to deal with real sheep in real situations.