

WELCOMING REMARKS TO ATTENDEES OF THE 2ND NORTH AMERICAN WILD SHEEP CONFERENCE, APRIL 1999, RENO, NEVADA - KEVIN HURLEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NORTHERN WILD SHEEP AND GOAT COUNCIL

On behalf of the Northern Wild Sheep and Goat Council (NWSGC), let me welcome you to Reno, and the 2ND North American Wild Sheep Conference. We in the Northern Council are very grateful to the Desert Bighorn Council (DBC) for co-hosting this historic conference. In the spring of 1997, I attended my first DBC meeting, to establish a connection and begin a relationship with our desert counterparts. As I listened to the papers presented there, similarities between our respective conferences kept coming to mind. Issues discussed, management challenges involved, composition of the attendees, and the energy and commitment of all struck a familiar note. As I visited with several key players in the Desert Council about a joint meeting, I received very positive feedback. At the DBC business meeting, I offered the possibility of a joint conference between the two councils (something which had never been done in their histories, going back to 1957 for the DBC and 1968 for the Northern Council, respectively). The 60+ people attending the DBC business meeting were unanimous in support of the idea. Northern Council members and the Northern Council board gave an equally warm reception to the idea. So, we embarked on a two-year journey, which has led us to this point. I have often used the terms “cross-pollination” and “hybrid vigor” to describe the anticipated exchange of ideas and perspectives which is about to happen; it’s very exciting!

Over the past two years, a number of actions have occurred to help this conference become a reality. We received official sanction for both the DBC and the NWSGC from the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the umbrella organization for wildlife management in western North America. This sanction should support current and future efforts of both councils, improve attendance at conferences in this era of shrinking budgets and travel restrictions, as well as heightened interest and success in wild sheep management.

Over the past two years, the seed planted at the 1997 DBC meeting has grown into a very focused, management-oriented conference, with input from numerous people. We have relied heavily on products of two previous conferences. In 1971, Colorado State University and the Colorado Division of Game, Fish, and Parks organized a conference in Fort Collins advertised as the North American Wild Sheep Conference. During the course of 2 days, 111 attendees heard status reports from 5 states (AK,AZ,CO,NM,UT). Technical sessions focused on Physiology and Pathology, Research Techniques, and Management Problems/Needs/ Procedures. The transactions of that conference captured the state of knowledge at that time, and remain a historic reference.

In 1974, Boone and Crockett Club, National Audubon Society, and the Wildlife Management Institute

(WMI) organized and co-hosted a ***Workshop on the Management Biology of North American Wild Sheep*** in Missoula, Montana. This 3-day workshop attended by 78 people was the first truly international effort addressing wild sheep management in North America; it served as a template for what we are attempting here 25 years later. Status reports from 18 states/provinces/territories and from Mexico were presented. Keynote remarks from Dr. Valerius Geist on theoretical considerations of wild sheep management were heard, and challenges and strategies for wild sheep management were identified by subspecies working groups. This workshop resulted in a classic reference book titled “The Wild Sheep in Modern North America”, edited by James Trefethen of the WMI. In a great show of support for this conference, we are pleased to announce the Boone and Crockett Club has graciously donated 220 copies of this book, so that every attendee at this conference can have a copy for their reference library. These books will be available at the publications table.

About this conference, known as the 2ND North American Wild Sheep Conference. Here is how we envision the next four days. Rob Ramey will shortly offer his views on the evolution and current taxonomy of wild sheep in North America. Wayne Heimer will describe his ideas on developing working hypotheses for wild sheep management, and we have recruited Wayne, Bill Wishart, Dale Toweill, and Ray Lee to present overviews of the history, current status, and working management hypotheses for different subgroups of wild sheep, based in part on questionnaires from each state/province/territory. Fernando Colchero will describe a desert bighorn sheep program in Mexico. Seven sessions will be held over the next 3 days, each one focusing on a different facet of wild sheep management identified as important in the overview just described. Our hope is for a good mix of presented information and interactive discussion, and we have selected very capable session chairs to assure that will happen. On Friday, we hope many of you will stay for what we are calling a “working day”. We anticipate breaking up into smaller groups of 10-25 species oriented people to discuss management challenges identified in the working hypotheses manuscripts and the various sessions. Our goal for Friday is to come away with a management-relevant outline for the workshop section of the conference transactions, which we envision as a “Wild Sheep Management Techniques Manual”. Aside from publishing the technical papers and presentations you’ll hear over the next 3 days, our ambitious goal is to provide a science-based blueprint for wild sheep management for the next 25 years.

To assure a timely publication, we have hired Allan Thomas, a recently-retired BLM biologist from Idaho, as our Technical Editor. Our intent is to have the transactions done and distributed by mid-year of 2000. Allan will be working with the conference/program/session chairs and the authors, to complete this task. We respectfully request your assistance in helping us meet that timeline.

As conference co-chairs, Rick Brigham and I are deeply indebted to a number of people who helped make this a reality. First and foremost, our program co-chairs Amy Fisher (DBC, New Mexico) and Wayne Heimer (NWSGC, Alaska) deserve a big thank you for a terrific agenda, focusing on issues of great interest and significance to us all. I would like to thank Don Armentrout and Darren Divine for taking care of some of the nitty-gritty details.

At this point, I would like to acknowledge our sponsors for this conference. Both the BLM and the U.S. Forest Service have committed significant dollars to this effort, and we thank them. I have already mentioned the gracious contribution of 220 books from the Boone and Crockett Club. Most gratifying to me is the involvement and contribution from the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep (FNAWS), and its chapters and affiliates. As you can see in your program, 18 of the 20 chapters/affiliates of FNAWS, plus the national organization, have contributed to underwrite this conference and our publication. Many of those organizations are represented in the room today, and we welcome and thank them.

When the 1971 and 1974 conferences were held, FNAWS didn't exist, nor did the network of wild sheep advocates which has developed over the past quarter-century. The synergy between wild sheep managers and wild sheep enthusiasts over the past 25 years has been incredible, and the accomplishments many. I believe that the status and management of wild sheep, as we know them today, rest squarely on the partnership between the advocates and the agencies which serve them. We owe each other our mutual respect and a great thanks.

Once again, thank you all for coming. We look forward to your input, and we hope you enjoy the conference.

**WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS - WILLIAM R. (RICK) BRIGHAM,
CONFERENCE CO-CHAIR**

I want to welcome all of you to Reno. This is the 2ND North American Wild Sheep Conference; it is also the 43rd annual meeting of the Desert Bighorn Council (DBC).