

FORWARD TO THE WORKSHOP REPORT ON MANAGEMENT REGULATIONS AND LEGAL DEFINITIONS, NORTHERN WILD SHEEP AND GOAT COUNCIL. CLARKSTON, WASHINGTON 14-18 MAY, 1990.

by

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Management of mountain sheep harvest in North America is accomplished through a bewildering array of regulations and definitions. These regulatory definitions exist for a variety of reasons, and are surprisingly dynamic. Whenever further regulatory changes are considered, seemingly logical questions include: "What are other Provinces or States doing?" "Why are they doing it?" and "How well is it working?" In order to provide current answers to these questions, the Northern Wild Sheep and Goat Council organized a workshop on this topic in 1990.

Presentations were solicited from all participating States and Provinces, and papers were requested. The following collection of papers was submitted.

After listening to the presentations and editing these papers, it is my conclusion that the question, "What are other Provinces or States doing?" is less relevant than why they are doing it and how well it is working. This is because the challenges of mountain sheep management differ, particularly with latitude.

Sheep management challenges south of Northern British Columbia appear to be generally different from those farther north. Northern populations exist in pristine, or near-pristine ecosystems, and are influenced by contrasting climatic influences, forage production regimes, and predator abundance. As a result, management goals, which determine regulatory direction, are oriented toward population maintenance or enhancement in the provinces of northern Canada and Alaska. In these areas, management for harvesting rams as trophies and minor restrictions on hunter participation are the predominant practices.

In most of the Western U.S. and in Southern Canada, mountain sheep do not exist in habitats which approach pristine quality except in small isolated populations or in National/Provincial parks. Many sheep populations have been introduced, and many compete with domestic livestock. These populations often do not have access to routes, or have not developed migratory traditions which take them to alpine ranges. Hence, food resource situations are highly variable. Ironically, the success of transplant programs, antihelminthic drugs, and lack of effective predators in temperate climates has put the lower latitude states and provinces into many situations where management program goals call for population reduction or maintenance at low densities. Furthermore, most harvest is closely regulated by limited-entry permit; and either-sex harvests and "any ram" seasons are becoming increasingly popular.

To compound this irony, the traditional ideal, stalking a mature ram in wild country, which drives sheep conservationists to fund and support these successful sheep enhancement and restoration programs, has frequently produced management situations which diverge radically from the ideal conservationists envisioned. Managers may be well advised to enhance communications with those who support sheep conservation and management programs to minimize the chances this divergence will disrupt a highly productive partnership.

To reiterate, what is being done is less important than why it is being done and how well it is working. Consequently, readers may wish to pay particular attention to the sections on biological rationale and pragmatic considerations. The Council hopes this group of papers will be helpful.

