

## **1994 NWS&GC MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSE: WASHINGTON'S BIGHORN MANAGEMENT PROGRAM**

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

Washington has a very general bighorn plan that is revised every few years. The plan is of little value because it is not used by field personnel. We are in the process of revising our species management plans at the present time and hopefully will have a more functional sheep plan in the future.

**QUESTION: What is your guiding policy statement?**

1. Maintain Population Status: Develop an improved system for measuring population parameters, trends and/or estimating populations.
2. Inventory, Protect and Improve Habitat:
  - 2A. Encourage controlled burning and other range improvement techniques to enhance bighorn sheep.
  - 2B. Identify and seek mitigation/compensation for impacts on bighorn range from logging, mining, road construction, etc., through review of environmental documents.
  - 2C. Encourage the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the Department of Natural Resources to pattern timber sales to protect habitat at 5-year action plan meetings.
3. Manage Harvest and Use: Evaluate population dynamics, harvest, and other pertinent data; make hunting season recommendations in accordance with data.
4. Obtain Game Law Compliance: Ensure that 90% of bighorn sheep harvested are lawfully taken.

5. Establish New Populations: Supplement introduced populations of bighorn 5 years after original release.

6. Control Wildlife Disease:

6A. Prevent contamination of bighorn ranges by restricting use by domestic sheep and cattle.

6B. Treat sheep to be transplanted with anthelmintics.

**QUESTION: How do/did you do management planning?**

Planning efforts change every few years depending on department priority. We have used the team approach and the single plan writer approach. We have had planning as a high priority function with a single person responsible in the agency for planning. At the present time, our emphasis is on Integrated Landscape Planning. Planning is done on specific geographic area (i.e., watershed) for all species.

**QUESTION: What are your management goals?**

We have outdated population and harvest objectives. Our population objectives are to increase populations from the 1970-79 mean of 450 sheep to 700 sheep by 1989. (We currently have about 900 sheep.)

Harvest objectives are to increase annual harvest from the 1970-79 mean of 8 rams to 10 rams by 1989 while maintaining the hunter success of 33%. (Last year 11 permits were issued and all were successful. Therefore, we exceeded our outdated objectives.)

**QUESTION: What methods do you use to reach them?**

We monitor hunting seasons by questionnaire sent to all hunters and a follow-up phone call if hunter does not return the questionnaire. All harvested sheep must be inspected and branded by a department agent or biologist.

Population surveys are done via helicopter or hiking routes. Bighorn populations in Washington are small and fairly isolated. Survey data vary from area to area, and surveys are frequently conducted in coordination with surveys of other species. Accuracy of survey data varies, but in many areas sheep are a priority species and biologists devote extra time to get better data than for other species.

**QUESTION: How much effort is devoted to reaching them?**

We recently initiated a Pittman-Robertson contract for special species (sheep, goat, moose, and cougar). Most of the effort is for surveys for sheep and goats. The contract identifies \$10,000 for sheep surveys. Unfortunately, the governor just directed all state agencies to cut budgets by 2%, and our state decided to cut all special survey dollars.

We have about 6 area biologists with sheep in their district. Time spent on sheep management activities totals 88 days or less than 40% of 1 FTE. Department expenditure for salaries, overhead, and benefits for department employees working on sheep is \$23,530.

**QUESTION: What is your operating budget for sheep management?**

Washington does not budget by species. As mentioned above, expenditures for salary, benefits, etc. total about \$23,000, and survey expenditures total about \$10,000. The overall budget for sheep excluding enforcement, land management administration, etc., is about \$33,000 per year.

#### **Other Agency Participation in Sheep Management in Washington**

Nearly all of the bighorn sheep in Washington State are on lands owned or managed by the Department of Wildlife. For that reason, very little participation has been received from federal agencies in sheep management.

A couple of years ago, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) was a cooperator in a sheep transplant to Lincoln County. This year BLM and USFS have volunteered to help with a sheep project on Mt. Hull. The cooperative agreement identifies a \$5,000 contribution from BLM and \$5,000 from USFS.

#### **Additional Funding and Foundation for North American Wild Sheep Participation**

The Department of Wildlife does not consistently ask the Foundation of North American Wild Sheep (FNAWS) for funding. At our request, FNAWS bought a domestic sheep grazing lease in central Washington a couple of years ago to prevent domestic sheep from coming into contact with bighorns. This lease cost about \$5,000 and was a 1-shot project.

This is the first year a local chapter of FNAWS has been formed. I believe their first banquet was in February 1994. We have not yet received any funding from the local FNAWS chapter.

The Washington Wildlife Commission decided this year to auction 1 sheep permit in 1994. Policies and procedures are being drafted to facilitate this permit. We expect 1 sheep permit will be auctioned in 1994 and auction revenues will be dedicated to bighorn sheep management.

#### **DISCUSSION**

Washington's sheep management program is less effective than it could be primarily because of lack of funding. To be perfectly honest, if we had funding we could develop a structured management plan, but without resources a structured plan is of little value. The proposed auction for 1994 could change that situation. We have drafted a plan on how to spend auction permit revenue, and that spending plan will direct the management plan. Our Wildlife Commission will have to review the spending plan and the department administration will have to make a decision on implementation. These political decisions will determine our future sheep management direction.