

## **Teton Range Bighorn Sheep and Winter Recreation Collaborative Process: Successes and Struggles**

**ALYSON COURTEMANCH**, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Jackson, WY, 83001, USA,  
[alyson.courtemanch@wyo.gov](mailto:alyson.courtemanch@wyo.gov)

**SARAH DEWEY**, Division of Science and Resource Management, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY, 83012, USA

**CARSON BUTLER**, Division of Science and Resource Management, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY, 83012, USA

**JASON WILMOT**, Bridger-Teton National Forest, Jackson, WY, 83001, USA

**NATHAN YORGASON**, Caribou-Targhee National Forest, Idaho Falls, ID, 83401, USA

**STEVE KILPATRICK**, Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation, Cody, WY, 82414, USA

**MICHAEL WHITFIELD**, Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative, Driggs, ID, 83422, USA

**ABSTRACT:** The Teton Range bighorn sheep herd is a small, isolated population of approximately 125 sheep located in the Teton Mountain Range. The herd lost access to its traditional migration routes and low elevation winter ranges approximately 70 years ago due to human development and now lives at high elevations in both summer and winter. Winter habitat is limited to relatively small patches of wind-scoured ridges and south-facing slopes. The herd's range overlaps multiple jurisdictions and is cooperatively managed by the Teton Range Bighorn Sheep Working Group. In recent years, the herd has been pressed by a rapidly growing winter human activity: backcountry skiing. Past research has shown that Teton Range bighorn sheep avoid areas where backcountry skiing occurs, even if the area is relatively high quality winter habitat. The increase in backcountry skiing and impacts to bighorn sheep is a top concern for managers, however at the same time, backcountry skiing in the Tetons has a rich history, is highly valued by the local community, and is iconic on an international scale. Restricting access would be very controversial. Therefore, beginning in 2017, the working group decided to develop a public collaborative process that would engage the community in finding solutions to balance bighorn sheep winter habitat needs with winter recreation. This effort included over 30 one-on-one "coffee-cup" conversations with key stakeholders and influencers and five public workshops to which over 150 people attended. These efforts culminated in a final report that the working group released in October 2021 with over 60 specific recommendations, including sitespecific winter range closures, designated travel routes, habitat treatments, and public education and engagement. This presentation will share some of the specific successes and struggles that we encountered during this process and recommendations for other managers interested in similar efforts.

*Biennial Symposium of the Northern Wild Sheep and Goat Council 23:11; 2022*

**KEY WORDS:** backcountry recreation, collaborative process, Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, skiing, Wyoming.