

WAFWA Wild Sheep Working Group 3/18/10 Teleconference (1000-1130 hours) notes
(Kevin Hurley; typed up 3/19/10; sent 3/20/10; finalized 3/31/10)

Participants (N=13): Becky Schwanke (AK), Bob Henry (AZ), Janet George (CO), Dale Toweill (ID), Tom Carlsen (MT), Bruce Trindle (NE), Mike Cox (NV), Eric Rominger (NM), Brett Wiedmann (ND), Don Whittaker (OR), Donny Martorello (WA), Kevin Hurley (WY), Melanie Woolever (USFS)

Unable to participate (N=8): Jim Allen (AB), Helen Schwantje (BC), Tom Stephenson (CA), Ted Benzon (SD), Clay Brewer (TX), Anis Aoude (UT), Jean Carey (YK), Amy Krause (BLM)

Teleconference began at 10:05 AM. Kevin sent out an updated WSWG roster (dated 3/17/10). **Action Item: please notify Kevin if there are any edits to be made to the revised WSWG roster.**

Kevin asked the WSWG to revisit the Action Items from the Feb. 2-3, 2010 meeting in Reno, NV:

Action Item: please send your revisions to Richard Jones (rejones@wavecom.net) ASAP, so this project can be completed. [Since the Reno meeting, only NE and ND (sent 3/11/10) have sent add'l material to Richard; prior to the Reno meeting, Tom C. thinks he sent Richard all the MT info; Kevin will check w/ Richard on ND & MT, and for any further submissions rec'd by Richard to date; Tom C. sent 1/28/10, re-sent 3/26/10!]

Action Item: Amy Krause will compile a memo to BLM state biologists, encouraging them to work with local BLM offices and state wildlife agencies to proof these maps closely; all changes/edits/information needs to be to Melanie no later than May 1, 2010. [Amy's memo sent to BLM biologists 2/5/10]

Action Item: After discussion at this meeting, it was agreed that Kevin would revise this letter once more, then send it to Jim Karpowitz and Larry Kruckenberg, for routing up the WAFWA chain-of-command, for final signature and submission to BLM Director Abbey. [WAFWA letter finalized, sent to Bob Abbey 2/26/10; at the N. American in MKE next week, it is anticipated that either Gray Thornton and/or Neil Thagard from WSF will follow up on this with Bob Abbey & BLM Washington, DC folks, and at the USFS and the Conservation Partners meetings]

Action Item: A draft will be provided by Kevin to the WSWG (including members of the original WSWG #1 that wrote the June 2007 document), no later than March 15, 2010, and comments are due back to Kevin no later than April 1. Mike Miller, Dale Toweill, and others offered to help with this revision. [Kevin sent draft report to WSWG +4 on 3/11/10, and pushed due date back to him to April 5]

Action Item: Given travel restrictions and agency budgets, we will request that Jim Karpowitz write a letter to state/provincial/territorial wildlife directors reminding them of the importance of sending their representative to the summer 2010 WSWG meeting in Alaska. [Kevin asked a straw poll of who anticipates attending the summer 2010 WSWG meeting in AK in July: Becky, Kevin, Dale hopefully, Bob perhaps, Clay yes; Kevin will address this letter/memo to Jim K. the week of March 22nd (sent to Jim K. 3/22/10); Dale requested a copy of Jim's letter/e-mail to the WAFWA Directors, as well; Kevin also asked a straw poll of who anticipates attending the 2010 NWSGC Symposium in Hood River, OR June 7-11: Thomas McDonough/ADFG; Janet +1/CDoW; Dale/IDFG; Bruce & Todd/NEGPC, Eric /NMDGF; Brett/NDGFD; Donny/WADFW; Kevin/WGFD; Melanie/USFS; Tom C.+2-3/MTFWP; Mike C./NDoW; the WSWG should anticipate an evening meeting, most likely Tuesday June 8th.]

Don discussed the 2010 NWSGC symposium; to date, abstracts have come in very slowly (N=2-3, so far). Folks were encouraged to submit an abstract by the 4/15/10 deadline; this might help justify travel requests. Mike C. inquired if abstracts were needed for presentations for the BHS dieoff workshop; Kevin replied no, he didn't think abstracts were necessary.

Kevin asked Don to briefly describe the “Survey Monkey” questionnaire on wild sheep put together by the ODFW organizers of the 2010 NWSGC Symposium. Don stated that launch of this questionnaire was imminent, would occur within days, and would be directed to the WAFWA WSWG reps (to start with). All WAFWA jurisdictions, + NWT, will be included in this survey; Ray Lee will be asked to provide information from Mexico. Jurisdictions w/ multiple sub-species of wild sheep should anticipate a bit more work than jurisdictions w/ only 1 or 2 kinds of wild sheep. Data/responses will come back to and be collated by two ODFW folks on the NWSGC organizing committee; it is anticipated that a synthesized handout/summary will be distributed to symposium attendees, upon registration/arrival. If anyone has any questions, contact Don in Oregon. Anticipated deadline for responses is late April/early May.

Kevin briefly described the 3/16/10 AFWA F&W Health Committee teleconference, and his presentation and the WSWG 2-page briefing paper on N=9 BHS die-offs this winter, in 5 western states. Kevin pointed out that he told the AFWA group that the plan was to have a 4-hour workshop @ Hood River specifically on these 9 BHS die-offs, to allow adequate time for states to fully present their reports/updates. Dale suggested including state wildlife vets from the various states involved w/ these BHS die-offs, as well. Dale mentioned a very recent report of a sick BHS on the Salmon River, above Mick Carlsen’s. Donny suggested all the states put together a summary, so information sharing can be expedited, in advance of the next round of BHS die-offs. Don spoke to inclusion of this information in the NWSGC Proceedings; Kevin pointed out the typical 12- to 14-month lag time for NWSGC Proceedings to come out, after the NWSGC Symposium.

Action Item: Kevin offered to put together 6-8 questions, route them (done 3/22/10) to the involved state WSWG reps (MT, NV, WA, UT, WY), with adequate time (due ≤ 4/9/10) for their review; once agreed-upon, those will be the base (minimum) questions that states should report on during this planned workshop. Tom C. and others agreed that it would be very valuable to have these summaries put together, AND published; also valuable for wildlife vets to be involved with these summaries, and the NWSGC workshop. Donny pointed out the obvious shortcoming is that long-term information (post-die-off) won’t be available by the June 2010 NWSGC symposium; those topics will necessarily be re-visited in future years, as data/information is gathered.

Kevin pointed out very recent information from Utah (via Jim K., Tuesday afternoon the 16th), indicating Utah had culled N=50 BHS in their N Goslin Unit, so folks should make that hand-correction to the 3/16/10 2-page briefing summary Kevin distributed Tuesday morning.

Kevin then described a draft set of bullet points that he put together Tuesday afternoon, following the AFWA teleconference; these are designed to form the foundation for some kind of WAFWA press release on these 9 BHS die-offs. Based on what heard back from WSWG reps, Kevin stated that he had discussed a potential WAFWA press release with both Jim Karpowitz (on Tuesday afternoon) and with Larry Kruckenberg (this morning), to get their sense on this possible option. Kevin pointed out the potential political sensitivity of what might be reflected in a WAFWA press release. Kevin feels, and Larry K. confirmed this morning, any press release on this subject would require Director-level review.

Kevin asked if WSWG reps in the states where BHS die-offs occurred this winter could fill in some of the missing data/#s in the table embedded in these draft talking points. Melanie stated her wish to have add’l information provided, including questions such as: ‘Was there known contact with domestic sheep or goats? Yes or No?’ ‘If not known, was there suspected or likely contact? Yes or No?’ ‘Were there DS/DG within proximal [define??] distance to where these die-offs occurred?’ This sort of information is very important to the USFS; Melanie also asked if some time @ the NWSGC Symposium in Hood River could be reserved for the Payette NF

folks to present their final information and decisions? Dale stated that IDFG just sent the final edits on Governor Otter's final letter to the PNF, and Dale further requested that information on co-mingling and/or the WSWG briefing paper on the 9 BHS die-offs be forwarded to the PNF for their SEIS, during their public comment period. Melanie re-emphasized the importance of including this type of known/suspected contact and DS/DG proximity information into any press release.

Tom C. stated that in MT's E. Fk. Bitterroot BHS die-off, FWP knows that there was mixing, and they were able to test 7 domestic sheep and 2 goats from "hobby herds" (willing landowner(s)); preliminary information and lab results don't show a lot of the same pathogens in DS and BHS; they know mixing occurred, and they suspect that contact resulted in this BHS die-off, but MTFWP was not able to identify a direct link. Donny agreed this was a real struggle, because while we already know that co-mingling can result in BHS disease events, co-mingling should not be the "front-and-center" issue we're dealing with. Eric thought we should state the instances where we know contact occurred, then discuss/describe the possibility of contact where we know DS/DG occur within "striking distance [define?]" of BHS, and quantify the distances that BHS are known to move. Focus on where we know contact occurred, but point out the possibility of contact occurring in other die-off situations, even w/out proof of direct contact. Tom C. concurred with stating things in that manner. **Action Item: by the end of next week, Kevin will send (sent 3/25/10) out a draft press release to the WSWG, for them to review/edit; based on edits rec'd (by close of business 3/31/10) , Kevin will clean up, then forward a draft press release up the WAFWA chain-of-command to Jim Karpowicz and Larry Kruckenberg.**

Becky offered her thoughts on making this press release more focused on how to prevent this sort of co-mingling, and how to avoid future die-offs in other herds; present the facts, but don't necessarily make this wholly accusatory. Given this discussion, Kevin reiterated his view that the WAFWA Directors would have final review/approval of any press release, so people should not expect a fast-track press release going out. Kevin repeated his request for WSWG reps where BHS die-offs occurred, or others that might suggest add'l bullet points, to please provide those to him by mid-week (March 24th). Tom C. pointed out that for example, in MT, FWP intends to fly/survey these involved BHS herds in the next couple weeks, and those results wouldn't likely be available for 2-4 weeks. Kevin stated that given the timeframe and review this press release will go through, there should be adequate time to incorporate those survey results. Kevin also pointed out that this methodical approach would likely not allow a press release to be sent to/considered by the PNF, as they approach their final decision. Dale recognized that, but inquired if WAFWA was going to be submitting formal comments on the PNF SEIS; Kevin indicated he did not think that the WAFWA WSWG would be submitting formal comments, but member agencies certainly would be. **Action Item: Kevin asked Dale, Donny, and Don if the WSWG could receive copies of the ID, WA, and OR final letters on the PNF SDEIS, once available.** Donny inquired if WAFWA commented on the Draft EIS? Kevin answered that as far as he was aware, WAFWA did not; Donny felt, in that case, that WAFWA couldn't comment on the Final, if they didn't comment on the Draft. Kevin offered that the 2-page briefing paper on these 9 BHS die-offs could certainly be provided to the PNF, as the most recent/current information we have on these die-offs. Donny felt that the PNF would certainly have to respond to, or be aware of, this type of new information.

Kevin informed the WSWG that he was due to respond to an action item that came from the mid-November 2009 Wyoming Statewide DS/BHS Interaction Working Group, namely, a cooperative, multi-party discussion on experimentally, intentionally co-mingling DS with BHS, in a range (i.e., non-captive) situation. Kevin recounted that he and Mike C., and he and Tom C., among others, had discussed such an experimental approach, and the relative pros and cons of such an experiment. Kevin described an idea advanced by WY Woolgrowers and others,

to take surplus BHS, that no one had a sentimental attachment to, transplant those to a new area, well away from existing BHS, probably on private land where access can be managed, let them establish themselves for a period of time, then, with an approved experimental design, intentionally graze domestic sheep on top of these BHS. An alternative to starting a new BHS herd would be to intentionally introduce/graze DS on an already-established BHS herd somewhere, where good, long-term data on herd health, population demographics, lamb recruitment/survival, etc. were already available. Kevin described this sort of experiment as almost equivalent to “binding arbitration”, where everyone agreed up-front on the study design, and everyone agreed to live by the outcome(s). Something of this nature would take incredible up-front work on, and agreement on, the experimental study design. The “perfect” situation would be an island (either surrounded by water, or by inhospitable BHS habitat, with no chance of connectivity to any other BHS) where this type of experiment could take place. Control for all variables except one, the “presence” or “absence” of domestic sheep.

Kevin asked the WSWG for their suggestions on where such “island” situations might already exist? Don said what is being described is a landscape-scale, challenge experiment; one experiment won’t work. Multiple replicates are needed. This is such a multi-factorial question, and we don’t have any idea who and where we’d get comments/criticism from. Local sportsmen, wild sheep NGOs, etc. would all have to weigh in, and Don estimated a 10-12 year timeframe, for all the pre- and post-interaction monitoring. Dale stated that with current/recent Animal Use, Care, and Ethics protocols, it would be doubtful that approval to proceed with this type of experiment would likely ever be received. Janet thought 5 to 10 to 15 different herds would need to be experimented with, to make this a viable experimental sample size (again, “replicates”). Don concurred, and asked what percentage of our existing BHS herds are we willing to sacrifice in this kind of experiment? Mike C. asked how many/what % of our herds have we lost over the past ~50 years? 100 years? 200 years? Melanie suggested tracking down, identifying, and studying farm flock/hobby herd situations where DS/BHS contact is alleged to occur (sometimes for years/decades), with allegedly no adverse consequences to BHS; why don’t we study those situations? Dale stated that sort of work had already been done (e.g. Karen Rudolph, N-RAMP gene work), showing a certain % of BHS have heightened resistance/immunity; that’s why die-offs don’t wipe out an entire BHS herd. Melanie responded that contentions have been made (e.g., WY, NV) of successful, non-lethal co-mingling situations; why don’t we focus on/investigate those? Tom C. stated that MT has had situations such as this, and eventually the BHS died off, for whatever reason. Melanie stated she has always been doubtful of those alleged situations where nothing adverse supposedly happened to the BHS; if so, we should go look at those. Tom C. stated, for this type of big experiment, there would have to be specific objectives, such as attempting to prove that disease transmission occurs in the wild, and that BHS die as a result of co-mingling; realistically, some groups out there would never be satisfied w/ the answer/outcomes to this sort of experiment. Tom felt that was what we really needed to demonstrate, that indeed, BHS die after disease transmission occurs, in the wild. Kevin offered, in his view, this wouldn’t take multiple years, unless you attempted to start a brand-new BHS population, which would likely require years of “pre-contact” data collection; if you opted to introduce DS into an existing, known BHS herd, the timeframe to document results would be much shorter. Kevin repeated this would require advance buy-in, from all parties, with agreement to live with the results (i.e., “binding arbitration”). Janet repeated that a sample size of only one would not suffice. Dale pointed out that you would have to tag/mark respective pathogens in DS, so you would know which pathogens were transmitted, and which were responsible for killing the BHS; otherwise, you could never back-track to a DS pathogen. And, if that was the case, why bother? What are you trying to prove? No one would accept the results. Tom C. argued that the DS industry would have to be deeply involved with the experimental design, up-front. Janet offered that in a true experiment, you need a control vs. a treatment; has anyone thought of what a control might be? Kevin responded

that one possibility might be paired mountain ranges (e.g., NV “basin & range” country), with similar elevations, vegetation, precipitation patterns/amounts, BHS densities, etc., with the only variable being presence/absence of DS. Bob offered that the only/best way to demonstrate treatment vs. control would be take an existing BHS population, and split them in two; that way, you’re starting w/ the same source BHS. There are just too many variables, otherwise. Janet asked if there was a middle ground between captive, paddock situations vs. in the wild, perhaps with large, fenced, controlled, but largely natural settings, that would allow a better handle on managing variables (e.g., wandering BHS from “outside”, etc.)? Kevin agreed that would be a better situation, where you could control all variables; however, not many wild sheep captive-rearing situations occur. Dale repeated his belief that BHS are not the pathogens; we have to know, and prove, what the pathogens are that result in adverse effects to BHS. Janet disagreed, that w/ enough replicates, you don’t need to know the pathogens, you need to know that BHS died. Mike recalled discussing this idea w/ Annette Rink years ago, but those discussions ended w/out any resolution; Mike repeated that these are multi-factorial die-offs, and we need to understand the interplay between those many factors. Bob concurred, and thought because there were so many factors/variables, there were too many to allow any conclusive outcomes. Don recounted a “meta-analysis” done at Univ. of Idaho years ago (during/after Hell’s Canyon die-off), and wondered about possibly augmenting that analysis with add’l data/information on wild sheep herds, then complete some sort of landscape-scale epidemiological analysis. Kevin described a very similar notion on landscape epidemiology that Mark Drew advanced to the WAFWA Wildlife Health Committee (with some discussions w/ the WSWG) last summer, for a potential National Conservation Need (NCN); this concept never gained sufficient interest/traction, and was never advanced beyond the WHC. Don thought an analysis such as this would help identify which factors the management agencies need to be keeping track of, and this might help shape agency responses, when die-offs occur. Testable hypotheses and experimental designs could come from such a landscape-scale analysis. Kevin stated again the interest that some in Wyoming had in this type experiment, and noted that Bryce Reece of WY Woolgrowers stated “we don’t have a lot more to lose”; Melanie disagreed, and was concerned this might be another delay tactic, to avoid the hard decisions that have to be made. Melanie feels enough science/data is known, and rather than gathering more data, as biologists are wont to do, we need to recognize the political realities of this whole situation. Kevin promised to keep the WSWG informed as this Wyoming discussion continues.

Dall sheep (thinhorn) Initiative: Kevin recounted that yesterday afternoon he and Becky visited about a controversy brewing with Dall sheep in AK. Apparently, Wayne Heimer of Alaska –Wild Sheep Foundation and Dane Crowley of Alaska – Sportsmen for Fish & Wildlife are arranging a “Dall Sheep Summit” meeting in late July 2010 in Anchorage, with an expected outcome being a Dall sheep management policy/plan being drafted. At this point, it is not entirely clear what the controversy is, or how ADF&G will engage or be engaged in this “Summit” meeting; suffice it to say, there is dissatisfaction being expressed with the downward trend in AK Dall sheep numbers, declining overall ram harvest, partitioning of harvest between resident and non-resident hunters, “exclusive” vs. “wide-open” guide area authorizations, etc. It is also not clear if Dall (thinhorn) sheep managers from adjacent jurisdictions (e.g., YK, NWT, BC) would be surveyed or contacted for their input. Becky indicated that ADF&G Dall sheep managers would be meeting as a group (perhaps for the first time, ever) in late April 2010; if that session occurs, there should be composite data/opinions/recommendations/strategies arrived at, at least within ADF&G. Kevin mentioned that the “Survey Monkey” questionnaire for the 2010 NWSGC Symposium might help frame/identify some of the management issues and challenges for AK Dall sheep.

Kevin mentioned that in 90 minutes from the conclusion of this WSWG teleconference, he would be representing the WAFWA WSWG (via speakerphone) at the British Columbia Domestic/Bighorn Sheep Separation Project annual meeting in Kamloops, BC, being chaired by Dave Zehnder, BC MoE.

Kevin then filled the WSWG in with the final decision from WGFD HQ in Cheyenne, that his current position will end on January 31, 2011. We discussed this likely scenario on Feb. 3rd in Reno, but now this constitutes a “final answer”. Kevin mentioned his 2/1/10 and 3/16/10 discussions with Jim Karpowitz, and with Larry Kruckenberg this morning (3/18/10), trying to investigate options for possibly continuing, but working directly under contract for WAFWA, rather than one of the member agencies. Jim’s feeling is that this WSWG is important, and doing good work on important issues, and he would like to see the WSWG continue, with Kevin continuing as Chair. Jim indicated a willingness to bring this up as an item on the Director’s Business Meeting agenda in July in AK. At next week’s North American in Milwaukee, Jim K. will not be present, but his Deputy Alan Clark will be, and Jim was going to brief Alan on this situation, prior to the N. American. Melanie indicated she would be in MKE, too, and was intending to visit w/ a number of Directors, encouraging the continuation of this WSWG and Kevin’s Chair position. Kevin wanted to avoid any confusion, as the Year 2 \$ assessments (\$3,000/year/agency) will likely be sent out in early April 2010 by WAFWA Treasurer Steve Barton; Year 2 is adequately funded, but Year 3 (or beyond) is what’s being potentially discussed. Kevin also mentioned recent discussions with Gray Thornton, President/CEO of the Wild Sheep Foundation, about the possibility of Kevin coming to work for national WSF, again in some kind of part-time, contract position.

Kevin recounted the Feb. 3rd discussion in Reno, and the level of verbal support expressed by the 15 agency reps on hand at that meeting. Kevin opened this discussion, to hear what folks had to say, now that there is certainty on Kevin’s 1/31/11 termination date with WGFD. Mike C. acknowledged that while he was a bit skeptical at the beginning, he feels it is imperative to keep this WSWG going, due to all the terribly important issues we’re all working on. Further, Mike doesn’t feel any of the current WSWG reps would have the time to devote to chairing this WSWG, so he thinks we need to do whatever it takes to keep Kevin hired and the WSWG going. Donny agreed, and asked Kevin to put together a ~½-page summary with bullet points, so the WSWG reps could see, from a two-year, biennial (rather than annual) perspective, what might be needed from respective WAFWA agencies. Tom C. also stated the value of this WSWG, and the need to keep it going, and keep Kevin on as Chair. Dale inquired if there was a possibility of actually increased assessments to the WAFWA agencies, to allow Kevin to work full-time, for WAFWA. Kevin responded that his discussions to date with Jim K. have focused on a 50% or 60% position (rather than full-time), due to the difficulty in raising necessary \$ for 100% work. Dale thought that he, and many others, had discretionary \$ that could be directed toward this sort of position, and Dale expressed his willingness to do so, to keep this WSWG (and Kevin) going. Mike C. concurred that each jurisdiction had proceeds from their (wild sheep) auction tags, and some of those \$ could be directed. Kevin stated he would continue to work with Jim Karpowitz to further investigate the possibilities. **Action Item: Kevin will get a short summary on funding needs for Years 3 & 4 for the WSWG Chair position out to the WSWG reps, ASAP.** Dale wondered about the possibility of a ½ time WAFWA position and a ½ time WSF position? Donny restated his support for trying to arrange agency funding, to continue the important work of this WSWG, with Kevin as Chair. Kevin restated the need for the WSWG agency reps to help secure the \$ to keep this going. Bruce indicated that NEGPC was entering into their out-year budget process very soon, and he asked for specific \$ needs for this position, to take to his Administration.

Teleconference adjourned 1130 AM.