

WAFWA WILD SHEEP WORKING GROUP (WSWG) Meeting Minutes  
July 12, 2009

**1. Welcome, Announcement , Introductions, Roster update**

Kevin H. called the meeting to order at 8:10 AM; introductions were made. Attendees: WSWG members (or substitute reps): Kim Titus (AK, for Becky Schwanke), Jim Allen (AB), Jim Heffelfinger (AZ, for Bob Henry), Tom Stephenson (CA), Rick Kahn (CO, for Bruce Watkins), Jeff Gould (ID, for Dale Toweill), Ken McDonald (MT, for Tom Carlsen), Eric Rominger (NM), Clay Brewer (TX, for Calvin Richardson), Anis Aoude (UT), Kevin Hurley (WY), Melanie Woolever (USFS), Amy Krause (BLM). N=13 WSWG reps or their substitute reps.

Other attendees: Neil Thagard, WSF; Glen Contreras, USFS (ret.); Lee Howard, UT-FNAWS; Sonke Mastrup, CADFG; Raul Morales, BLM; Dale Rabe, ADFG; Gene DeGayner, USFS; Cliff Schleusner, USFWS; Bill Moritz, SCI; Keith Aune, WCS; Jim Lane, NMDGF; Eric Loft, CADFG; Curt Taucher, CADFG; Bruce Murray, CADFG. Other folks came and went throughout the day, but did not sign the attendance sheet; total # of estimated attendees N=30-35.

Kevin circulated the June 29, 2009 WSWG roster, asking for updates/corrections. With Calvin Richardson moving to a different position within TXPWD, Clay Brewer stated that he will now be the TX rep to the WSWG. **Action Item: Kevin will send Clay past minutes, correspondence, Doodle scheduling request, etc., to get Clay caught up. Rick K. stated that Bruce Watkins (CO) expects to retire in ~6 months, so CDoW will likely need to name a replacement WSWG rep. Rick/Bruce should check on CDoW's plans for a replacement.**

**2. Review of Agenda and Requests for Additions**

Kevin asked for any additions/revisions to the agenda; none were offered, except Kevin announced that the WSWG would recess at 8:40 AM, so those present could hear an agenda item presentation/discussion by Buck Buckner of the Boone & Crockett Club on Governor's/Minister's special licenses/permits at the joint Commissioners/Directors morning session.

**3. Review of Action Items from July 2008 & January 2009 Director's Business Meetings**

Kevin distributed a list of WAFWA Directors Business Meeting action items (maintained by Larry Kruckenberg, WAFWA Secretary) from 2008 & 2009; there were N=2 items related to wild sheep [see WSWG agenda item #9, below] for the WAFWA Wildlife Health Committee (WHC), and N=12 items for the WSWG. The group quickly reviewed the list, and concurred that all N=12 WSWG action items had been addressed. Kevin mentioned that he had been advised by Larry Kruckenberg that the WSWG did NOT need to appoint a Vice-Chair, as some other WAFWA committees and working groups had.

**4. Review of WSWG Action Items from 2/5-6/08 (Salt Lake City), 7/12/08 (Rapid City), 2/4/09 (Salt Lake City) meetings, + 5/29/09 and 6/29/09 WSWG 2-hour teleconferences**

Kevin distributed a ~5-page running summary of all WSWG action items to date (N=~65), including status (where known) of pending items. **Action Item: Rather than going through each item as a group, Kevin requested the WSWG reps to please review this "off-line", and apprise him of updates/edits. Kevin will maintain, date-stamp, and periodically send out newer versions of this list, so folks could track progress.**

**5. WSWG web-site update**

Kevin updated the group on the status of the WSWG webpage, and advised that he would submit items periodically to Jacey Garceau of Delaney Meeting & Event Management in VT, the WAFWA webmasters. **Action Item: Kevin asked WSWG reps to forward him items, summaries, new literature, etc., for possible placement on the WSWG webpage.**

[As stated above, the WSWG recessed at 8:40 AM; reconvened at 9:50 AM]

**6. USFS/BLM mapping of Wild Sheep distribution & vacant/active domestic S&G grazing allotments; USFS/BLM policy updates**

Before engaging in this discussion, Kevin asked Jeff G., Jim A., and Tom S. to brief the WSWG on yesterday's Wildlife Chiefs meeting, at which Mark Atkinson of NDoW led a discussion on "Domestic/Bighorn Sheep Disease Debate and How It's Impacting Translocation/Augmentation Efforts". Apparently, and as discussed during the 6/29/09 WSWG teleconference, NDoW had a good BHS transplant planned, which had to be shelved when certain interest groups in NV pointed out to the NW Wildlife Commission what all was going on with the whole DS/BHS issue, particularly in ID and in CA. Ripples are being felt in other western states/provinces on BHS transplants/supplemental releases. Rick K. mentioned a recent MOU in CO between CDoW, CWGA, and others (including USFS and BLM, which were signatory to a portion of this MOU), and stated he was not aware of any active opposition, but also mentioned that CDoW hadn't proposed any transplants/supplemental releases recently.

Tom S. gave an update on the CA Sierra Nevada BHS situation, including mention of the multi-stakeholder, ~3-year process undertaken to define acceptable risk and develop BMPs (Baumer et al. publication). Tom stated that the USFS had completed a Biological Assessment (BA), which was given to the USFWS to respond to, with a Biological Opinion (BO); to date, USFWS has not issued their BO yet, it is expected in September 2009. Tom also mentioned that there was an upcoming publication (in *Biological Conservation*), due out this fall, on the CA SNBHS risk modeling effort, involving UC-Davis. Jeff G. pointed out that the same UC-Davis folks who worked on the CA SNBHS risk modeling effort have been contracted with the Payette NF in ID, for similar model development.

Jeff briefly updated the WSWG on recent developments in ID, including IDFG's intent to go forward with a statewide BHS management plan update/revision, which had been on hold but which Senate Bill 1232a called for. Jeff also stated that BMPs were being developed between IDFG and various DS permittees, for both their USFS grazing allotments, and in some cases, on their private lands. The question was asked who would be monitoring these BMPs, to assess their effectiveness? Jeff responded that IDFG and others would all be involved in assessing these BMPs. Jeff mentioned that the Nez Perce Tribe (NPT) was currently involved in a BHS telemetry project. Rick K. asked if the USFS would receive, and if so, how the USFS would view/use letters of certification of acceptable risk from IDFG? It was pointed out that IDFG letters of certification would not supersede federal laws and regulations. Melanie pointed out the difficulty created when a DS permittee had a letter of certification from IDFG, but USFS didn't necessarily agree that risk of contact was acceptable. Amy K. was asked about the Allison-Berg DS allotment on BLM lands; Amy replied that DS turnout was still anticipated in October 2009, and pointed out that the Cottonwood RMP revision had not been finalized, yet.

Kevin asked Melanie to go through the history and timelines of the USFS General Technical Report (GTR), the Data Quality Act challenge from ~35 ag groups in ~14 western states, the USFS response, and the current Request for Reconsideration (RfR). Melanie and Gene pointed out that there would be no judicial review after the next USDA panel issued their findings/recommendations on the RfR, due out sometime around August 1<sup>st</sup>. Discussion turned to "hold harmless"-type letters/agreements that various states might have with individual DS permittees and/or industry organizations (e.g., Wool Growers); Melanie stated that these type of letters/agreements are brought up when the USFS gets into discussions with DS permittees. **Action Item: Melanie asked if the WSWG reps would please send her copies of various MOUs and "hold harmless" letters, by 8/15/09.**

Kevin then displayed N=14 maps for the WSWG jurisdictions (excluding TX, AK, YK, BC, AB) for which maps have been drafted. The WSWG reviewed each map, and pointed out some examples where occupied BHS habitat abruptly (and probably incorrectly) ended at a state boundary. **Action Item: WSWG reps should review/error-check these 14 draft maps, to make sure that occupied BHS habitat was correctly displayed, including crossover at state line boundaries; please return marked-up maps or send an e-mail stating the maps are OK, to Melanie, no later than 9/30/09. Please include known stock driveways and DS/DG trailing routes, if known.** Melanie stated that at some point in the near future, the USFS (and BLM) would like to receive a letter from WAFWA endorsing these maps as of a certain date (i.e., "snapshot in time"). Glen C. and others pointed out that these maps need to be date-stamped, and a qualifying statement should be included as to limitations (e.g., scale, scope, exclusion of tribal lands, etc.) of these maps. Amy stated that BLM would be issuing a data call and revised Instruction Memo to BLM field offices, which would work up through BLM state offices; BLM would have their DS/DG allotment information (including pasture-level info) at the Washington office by the end of September, to then be integrated with existing USFS allotment GIS layers, etc. Discussion turned to including historic BHS distribution as a layer in this GIS analysis. **Action Item: WSWG reps for these 14 states should identify and send historic BHS distribution to Melanie W. and Janice Wilson by 9/30/09.** Discussion then focused on distinguishing historic vs. historic and still-suitable BHS habitat. Following up a February 2009 action item, Anis A. will get with Payette NF GIS specialist Chans O'Brien on the LandFire mapping effort the PNF undertook. **Action Item: if WSWG reps have access to Habitat Suitability Indices or GIS models of BHS habitat suitability, please send those to Anis by**

9/30/09. Melanie pointed out that it would really be beneficial to USFS (and BLM) to know in advance where states would like to have, or are planning, future BHS transplants/supplemental releases.

## 7. Revision of WSWG Report #1, to Address Wandering Wild Sheep per Curt Mack, Nez Perce Tribe

Kevin reminded the WSWG of Curt Mack's (NPT) 2/4/09 presentation in SLC, UT and request that the WSWG consider revising the 2007 report "WAFWA Recommendations on Management of Domestic Sheep and Goats in Wild Sheep Habitat", to clarify language dealing with "wandering wild sheep". After considerable discussion on the WAFWA recommendations/guidelines, it was agreed that the 2007 report would not be revised/reissued; rather, a clarifying letter should be put together, distinguishing between colonization and gene flow vs. disease transmission risk. **Action Item: Kevin will draft a clarifying letter on this topic, route it to the WSWG for review; upon finalizing this letter, Kevin will send it up to Jim Karpowitz for possible action by the WAFWA Directors, and possible subsequent distribution to the WAFWA agencies.**

## 8. Update on GIS mapping of all wild sheep translocations

Kevin updated the WSWG on status of this GIS mapping project; Kevin distributed a summary from Richard Jones, showing status, by jurisdiction. Kevin displayed N=17 draft maps (excluding AK and YK), and the group proofed/reviewed each map. Tom S. stated that he would have the CA data to Richard by 8/15/09. It was pointed out that the map showing a movement of BHS from SD to CO was in error [Ted, please check this!] and needed to be corrected. Kevin characterized this project as 55-60% completed; Richard will have draft maps (with attribute tables, etc.) ready soon to send back out to the WSWG reps, for their review. Kevin reiterated his intent to have this GIS mapping project completed by the end of calendar year 2009.

## 9. Coordination with WAFWA Wildlife Health Committee

Kevin stated that he would be attending the WHC meeting Tuesday afternoon the 14<sup>th</sup>; Kevin repeated the 2 WHC action items from the WAFWA Director's summary:

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- 17). That the Wildlife Health Committee continue to develop standard protocols for monitoring sheep health, testing for transplant, and investigating disease events or mortalities, as outlined during the 2007 annual meeting.
- 19). That the Wildlife Health Committee prepare a "white paper" on diseases other than *Pasteurella* pneumonia complex that affect wild sheep, in support of the WSWG's efforts to identify and manage factors limiting wild sheep populations. Colin Gillin (ODFW) to have the lead.

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[Footnote: included here is an excerpt from the WHC 7/14/09 meeting minutes/summary]:

### 8. Wild Sheep Herd Health Monitoring Recommendations

- a. Mark Atkinson (NV) presented Wild Sheep Herd Health Monitoring Recommendations that were developed by a subcommittee of the WHC at the request of the Wild Sheep Working Group (WSWG).
- b. Adoption of the Recommendations is pending a review and vote by WSWG and WHC members, scheduled to occur by August 16.

### 9. "White Paper" on Disease other than Pneumonia that Affect Wild Sheep

Colin Gillin (OR) reported that he is working with Canadian colleagues on this project, and expects a draft to be completed by the WAFWA mid-winter meeting.

## 10. Recent Significant Actions and Events Affecting Wild Sheep Management

- a. Kevin Hurley (WY) presented summaries of current wild sheep management-related legal and other issues in CA, ID, NV, CO, AK, WY, UT, and NV.
- b. Melanie Woolever (USFS) and Amy Krause (BLM) reported on their agencies' activities related to wild sheep.
- c. There was some discussion during the meeting of several states' recent efforts and successes at getting agreements and/or legislation passed that allow the timely removal of stray domestic sheep and goats from areas occupied by wild sheep.
- d. There was also some discussion during the meeting about whether state wildlife agencies should continue sending certain wild sheep samples to the Caine Veterinary Center at the University of Idaho, considering the recent allegations against the Center Director.

## 11. Wild Sheep Health as a National Conservation Need (NCN)

- a. Chair Kristin Mansfield distributed a draft Letter of Intent prepared by Mark Drew (ID) to submit a NCN proposal for a landscape level analysis of wild sheep population and disease data to assess risk factors for management actions.
- b. Once all committee members have an opportunity to provide input, and agree that the idea has merit, the letter and project concept will be forwarded to the WAFWA Directors for further consideration this fall.

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**Action Item: WSWG reps are asked to please review the draft Wild Sheep Herd Health Monitoring Recommendations developed by a subcommittee of the WHC, and provide any comments to Kevin no later than 8/12/09; Kevin will compile and send a combined set of comments back to Kristin Mansfield no later than 8/14/09.**

#### 10. WSWG Communications – Monthly/Bi-Monthly Teleconferences

Kevin briefed attendees on the WSWG teleconferences, and stated that minutes/action items from those teleconferences would be posted to the WSWG website. Kevin also asked WSWG reps to please log on to the Doodle scheduling request site at their earliest convenience, so date(s) could be selected and WSWG reps notified, ASAP.

#### 11. Round Robin discussion – each jurisdiction

Given the theme of the 2009 WAFWA workshop on “Energy – Wildlife – Water”, a brief discussion ensued on alternative/renewable energy exploration/development in wild sheep range. **Action Item: Jim H. (AZ) will e-mail Kevin a link to the new Guidelines for Solar Development in Arizona; Jim A. (AB) will send Alberta’s guidelines to Kevin. Kevin will check w/ John Emmerich on Wyoming’s guidelines on wind energy development and oil/gas mitigation. Rick K. will send Kevin a link to Colorado’s Oil & Gas Commission website for the CO oil & gas recommendations/mitigations. Kevin will send all these out to the WSWG.** Eric mentioned that NM was going to trade N~300 pronghorn to Mexico for 10 desert bighorn rams.

12. **Identify/Finalize Ongoing Working Group Activities for Period July 2009 – June 2010** Covered above.

#### 13. FY 2011 Federal Budget Priorities

Kevin stated that Larry Kruckenberg had included this item on each committee/working group agenda. Kevin brought up the example/model that the USFS currently uses, with Melanie W. functioning at the policy/national level/programmatic lead, while Tim Schommer functions as a technical/field-level wild sheep biologist. Kevin asked if the WSWG thought a similar approach should be utilized by the BLM. After much discussion, it was recommended, and Kevin will present to the Directors at their Business Meeting, that a WSWG recommendation for the FY2011 federal budget would be to seek adequate funding (either reallocation of existing \$, or addition of new \$) for  $2 \geq 0.5$  FTE positions within both BLM and USFS; one position in each agency to focus on policy/national level wild sheep issues, and one position in each agency to serve as a wild sheep technical resource for BLM/USFS work units in the field. **Action Item: Kevin will work with Jim Karpowitz, Melanie Woolever, and Amy Krause to pursue this funding recommendation.**

#### 14. Other Business

Kevin reminded the WSWG that their next face-to-face meeting would be in Reno, NV (just prior to the Wild Sheep Foundation annual convention), the afternoon of Tuesday February 2, 2010 and Wednesday morning February 3, 2010. The WSF annual Wildlife Professional’s meeting will be held from 1:00-5:00 PM on Wednesday February 3<sup>rd</sup>, and the doors to the WSF convention would open at 10:00 AM on Thursday February 4<sup>th</sup>. The next WSWG teleconference will be held in late August 2009; Kevin reminded WSWG reps to log on to the Doodle scheduling request, ASAP.

15. **Closing Comments & Adjourn** adjourned 1650 hours.