



Legislative Outdoor Heritage Caucus Advisory Council

April 14, 2015

Bruce Dale, Director of Wildlife Conservation
Alaska Department of Fish and Game
333 Raspberry Rd
Anchorage AK 99518

Dear Director Dale:

Collectively we represent the leadership of several influential groups here in Alaska concerned about the future of sheep conservation and hunting. There are many issues revolving around the status of sheep populations and hunting that need to be addressed in a constructive and inclusive manner. The undersigned groups are conceptually in favor of a working group to address several important issues and request the Department's assistance in forming such a group.

It is clear from comments in the recent Brinkman Survey and public testimony that there are several concerns involving sheep populations and hunting; however, it seems to our group that regardless of whether the issues are real or perceived, they are nonetheless issues that must be resolved if we are to be able to find solutions that are acceptable to the majority. We believe the structure of the Board of Game process precludes the kind of stakeholder discussions among affected parties that will lead to acceptable solutions. Therefore, we submit the best way to resolve this dilemma is to appoint a working group.

In order to be successful we are aware that more data is needed along with competent analyses of that data. We also would like to encourage the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADFG) to initiate the process for developing an updated management plan creating a platform from which the stakeholders could work. Hopefully such a plan would provide vital information on sheep ecology as well as sustainable harvest levels.

While such a plan is being constructed, the working group could begin the process to address the other issues related to sheep and sheep hunting of which there are several. Some of those would be access, allocation (especially between residents and nonresidents), early season crowding, sustainable harvests and management prerogatives to maintain those, conflicts among user groups and federal intrusion.

For the working group process to work, the ADFG will need to provide some professional staff for biological information, and for clerical support. Also, there will be a need for a facilitator. In order to have appreciable buy-in for whatever solutions the group develops, this will have to be an open process with meaningful participation by many groups. Those groups may include, but would not be limited to NGO's representing active hunters interested in wild sheep, federal biologists and land managers, Board of Game representation, Advisory Committee representation, Federal RAC member(s), commercial users, Alaska Native Corporations, Alaska Department of Natural Resources, non-hunting conservation groups and a sheep expert not employed by the State or Federal Government.

While a management plan may take the ADFG some time to develop, we are hopeful that the working group would be given some guidance from that process. We envision the working group to be engaged in seeking solutions for approximately the next 11 months. Meetings should take place during the year outside of the sheep hunting season to avoid omitting participation due to members being out in the field hunting.

It has been many years since the ADFG created or updated a sheep management plan and we believe that the time is right for such an undertaking. Furthermore, the demonstrated tension among the various user groups clearly shows the need for some kind of effort to develop mechanisms for resolving conflicts and potential conflicts, real or perceived, to provide the hunting public with an improved experience. With all the controversy surrounding this issue, including recent Board of Game actions, it is our view that the time is right for pursuing alternative avenues for alleviating those elements of the current situation causing that controversy.

It is our hope that ADFG leadership will agree with the wisdom of this approach and will set forth on an effort to bring a resolution to this problem. We the undersigned stand ready to assist the ADFG in any way that we can, and want to thank the Department for any consideration you may give to our request.

Sincerely,

Eddie Grasser, Chair
LOHC Advisory Council

Kevin Kehoe, President
Alaska Chapter Wild Sheep Foundation

Brett Barringer, President
SCI Alaska Chapter

Spencie Netschert, President
SCI Kenai Chapter

Sam Rohrer, President
Alaska Professional Hunters Assoc.

Mark Richards
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

John Frost, M.D.
Alaska Bowhunters Assoc.

cc: Sam Cotten, ADF&G Commissioner
Kevin Brooks, ADF&G Dep. Commissioner
Tony Kavalok, ADF&G DWC
Ted Spraker, Board of Game Chair
Board of Game Members