
ALASKA BOARD OF GAME

Committee meeting regarding Unit 19C sheep

Web Conference | August 7, 2023

On-Time Comment Index

Ben Dubbe.....	PC1
Robert Fithian	PC2
Paul Forward.....	PC3
Pete Imhof.....	PC4
Michelle Quillin.....	PC5
Richard Ray	PC6
Mark Richards - Resident Hunters of Alaska.....	PC7



PC1

Submitted by: Ben Dubbe

Organization Name:

Community of Residence: Homer, AK

Comment:

I am writing in reference to the upcoming meeting on 8/7/23 for sheep in 19c.

The chair elected should not come from the outfitting or corporate sector. The outsized influence that outfitters and native corporations have had on the management of sheep in 19c has given us the situation we are in today.

For the formation of a working group I hope to see strong representation for the majority of the hunters in Alaska. That would mean the bulk of representation not coming from outfitting, commercial, or corporate interests.



PC2

Submitted by: Robert Fithian

Organization Name: Owner and DBA Alaskan Mountain Safaris and Taiga Resources Conservation.

Community of Residence: Klawock, Alaska

Comment:

Mr. Chairman and Board of Game Members,

Please know by these comment that I am in full support of development of a sheep working group for GMU 19C. Conservation of Alaska's wild sheep populations is integral to our responsibilities as stewards.

Please note that I am a dedicated conservationist who care's dearly about our Dall's sheep throughout the state, and have forty years behind me conducting professional guiding services within GMU 19C. This year is the first time in those forty years that I am unable to conduct sheep hunts within 19C and I am very concerned not only about the sheep conservation aspects we are dealing with, but also about what the future holds for professional guide service providers throughout Alaska's wild sheep habitats relative to actions taken by yourselves this past March.

There are a number of stewardship considerations that are promulgating as the result of your March actions and from at least my somewhat experienced seat in this arena, you are going to need a solid, focused and well led working group to help address this unfortunate situation to a successful conclusion.

Management for abundance, sustained yield and maximum benefit are integral to my beliefs for management and the sheep working group needs to be focused on these goals. Leadership of the working group should be thoroughly versed in all aspects of allocation dynamics and potential impacts.

My review of Dall's sheep management guidelines and annual ADF&G reports for GMU 19C since it was first created as a sub-unit, sheep management has been primarily for guided sport hunting and subsistence. Currently there is no allocation for either but the sub-unit is now wide open for general resident hunting. Additionally, your GMU 19C sheep

actions during this past March deviated from the long time proven science of full curl management which elevates concern for all of Alaska's professional sheep guides statewide.

Please know that I have provided ADF&G McGrath in depth annual reports of my observations on all fish and wildlife populations within GMU 19C for most of the years I have been guiding here. These reports may reflect a more consistent trend analysis than any other data set that may exist on GMU 19C Dall's sheep.

Although I do not agree with the actions you took this past March regarding GMU 19C sheep, I fully believe in the Board of Game/ADF&G process and am looking forward to helping you address these concerns.

Please establish a sheep working group for GMU 19C Dall's sheep population enhancement and place a chairman who is knowledgeable of all aspects of allocation dynamics.

Respectfully Submitted,

Robert (Bobby) Fithian



PC3

Submitted by: Paul Forward

Organization Name:

Community of Residence: Girdwood, AK

Comment:

Dear Board of Game,

My comments regarding the potential creation of a sheep working group for 19c consist of three primary points:

- 1) You have made your decision regarding the non-resident closure for 19c and I strongly encourage you to maintain it. It's unclear to me what new information has been provided that would potentially alter your decision. This was again made clear during the May meeting. If you form a working group, please take off the table the possibility of reversing course on your previous ruling unless there is very compelling new biologist supported information.
- 2) If the working group is formed, please place priority on assigning members who accept the biologist and scientific consensus that the cause of this decline is most likely related to dramatic changes in weather and habitat and that this is being caused by anthropogenic climate change. Without this acknowledgement, any plan going forward will lack critical insight. Based on all available information and overwhelming consensus, the trend we should expect is an increase in previously uncommon weather events that will likely adversely affect sheep. This has been demonstrated through extensive (and ongoing) study in the Chugach and elsewhere by state and academic biologists and ecologists. We cannot approach this problem by assuming or expecting that "weather will go back to normal like it has before". We must accept the new reality that these changes that adversely affect sheep and will likely only worsen in the future. We must accept this and begin planing for that future.
- 3) Please assign people to the working group with an open mind to alternative management practices. In other parts of North America and even in Alaska (DS141 for example) weapons restrictions hunts such as a transition to "archery only" have been used to maintain or even increase hunter opportunity while decreasing harvest. A transition to archery option was discussed at the March meeting in Soldotna and I think it deserves further consideration. If areas of concern for sheep were transitioned to archery only, closures like the non-resident one in 19c would potentially be unnecessary. Everyone could still hunt (they would just have to take a bow instead of a rifle) but the impact on the sheep population would be

greatly minimized. Please consider this when nominating members to this group. An open mind to such options could be greatly beneficial for sheep and hunters.

Thank you for your consideration of these ideas.

Paul Forward



Submitted by: Pete Imhof

Organization Name: Uploaded by Henry Leasia

Community of Residence: Wasilla, AK

Comment:

Comments for August 7th Sheep meeting

First I'd like to say a few things about myself. I'm 61 yrs of age and been hunting sheep since my Sophomore year in high school. I graduated from Chugiak High School. Saying that I've seen some changes in our sheep over the years...and mostly not for the good, even before the die offs. I'm just going to list ideas that I have for 19C.

1. 19C could be a model for other units to follow in the future. I don't necessarily believe we should eliminate non-residents from hunting sheep in 19C. Maybe start off with a non-resident draw, then move to an allocation as sheep numbers climb. For the guides that continue to hunt 19C, also as guides are displaced to other units, resident will fill the void of non-residents. So, what have we really gained??? Less conflict and not more sheep. We all know we can't continue down this same path. We might even consider residents go to a draw and one every 4 years. Just remember one thing 19C can and should be a model for other units to follow. We're not going to get it right the first year or even the second year, but we will continue to tweak the regs and adjust as we all see fit.

2. Please consider utilizing working groups when making decisions that affect us all, You the board have a wealth of knowledge in this state, use it.

3. Last fall there was a write in period that a bunch of folks and I wrote in on, what ever happened??? It would be nice to see some sort of update, maybe I missed it? I read a lot of good stuff from others that have concerns about our sheep and it would be nice to get updates from the board.

4. Not sure this will come out right or not. In 2022 we all knew sheep were hurting badly, we all knew it was going to be the lowest harvest on record with 2021 being the second worst in history. 2022 also had the highest illegal take, mostly due to 2014 winters followed by other bad winters, but we all sat on our hands hoping for a different outcome. We all can do better guys, it's about a very precious resource that needs our help...from wolf control, habitat, and over hunting when abundance is low. We created guide to guide conflicts and resident to guide conflict due to lack of sheep, ask yourself why?? We seen it coming for 8 years and did nothing. What do you think the guides that got displaced from 20C are going to do??? They have mortgages and plane payments, there moving to other areas and or more pressure on other resources to make up the loss...so were all looking at the same scenario in other units as we just witnessed last year in 20C, guide to guide conflicts to resident conflicts, transporter to guide conflict,, guys this is not what sheep hunting is about... once again get the right people involved for a working group...lastly this low in sheep numbers is not going away anytime soon...
I'd love a text or a e-mail that says you got it...

Thanks for reading
your friendly resident sheep hunter
pete imhof



Submitted by: Michelle Quillin

Organization Name: Tanana Chiefs Conference

Community of Residence: Fairbanks

Comment:

I would first like to thank the members of the board who voted in support of forming this working group in response to the conservation concerns around 19C Dall sheep, as well as for their service on the board. My name is Michelle Quillin, and I'm Koyukon Athabascan from Hughes, Alaska. I have a bachelor's degree in wildlife biology & conservation and I'm working towards a master's in natural resources & environment. I have lived and worked in Alaska for my entire life. While I do share significant concerns for the conservation of sheep populations in 19C, followed by the lack of research to adequately inform managers, there is another issue that exists, and I hope to help bring it to the forefront.

The local people and tribes have been left out of the conversation, while guides and others with financial interests exclusively take up a majority of the space within the room and conversations. It is the local people and tribes who are impacted the most by management decisions and have a lot of knowledge pertinent to Dall sheep conservation in 19C. I spoke with Chief Vernon John of the Nikolai Edzeno Tribe, and he emphasized the importance and need for keeping the Tribes involved, especially when decisions are being made that impact their subsistence food security and traditional way of life. Furthermore, I would like to nominate Chief John to serve on the working group as well as others from the Nikolai Edzeno Tribe. Their unique perspective and valuable understanding will be fundamental in addressing conservation concerns. This working group is an opportunity for more inclusivity and representation, providing equal access for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized.

There isn't an adequate public process, this three-day comment period exemplifies the need for an improved public process that is reasonable for people living in rural communities, who are likely out fishing right now and have limited access to internet and email. I would like to see more effort by the board and state officials in involving local tribes and ensuring there is enough representation where discussions around food security and Indigenous people's traditional way of life are being discussed.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to attending future meetings.



Submitted by: Richard Ray

Organization Name:

Community of Residence: Chugiak, Alaska

Comment:

I have a few comments concerning the upcoming meeting for a 19c workgroup.

First, I have never hunted 19c and have great concern about pressure in the area I hunt from guides that have been displaced. There need to be some effort to curb the excess pressure and still stay the course on 19c to see the results after 5 years.

The pressure on sheep is excessive in many areas - 19c certainly is among the heaviest in pressure. It will be interesting to see the results after 5 years. Hopefully sheep numbers improve as well as hunter success. Some care should be given when the area is opened up to curb excessive pressure. Maybe limiting the nonresident tags - maybe non resident tags should be limited by unit all across the state. This would provide a better quality hunt and should improve non-resident hunter success and eliminate some conflict with residents.

As a resident, I have been refused transportation to a guide area. I feel pretty crappy to be told I cannot hunt in an area because of guiding. I do understand that this is the livelihood of people, but this must be balanced with the sheep population and the rights of Alaska residents. Other states limit the take of sheep to 10% by non residents. Granted they do not have harvest tags, which grossly inflate the Alaska resident tag numbers. Alaska needs to look at the right way to reduce nonresident hunter pressure. As an Alaska resident, my chance to hunt sheep in another state are very very limited. It is an injustice to be crowded out by nonresident pressure.

Lastly, I would gladly serve on your workgroup to look for the solutions to improve sheep populations and improve hunter success as well as opportunity.

Thank you,

Richard Ray



unapologetically **FOR ALASKAN RESIDENTS**

PO Box 60095, Fairbanks, Alaska 99706 (907) 371-7436
email info@residenthuntersofalaska.org web www.residenthuntersofalaska.org

August 3, 2023

To: Alaska Board of Game Sheep Working Group Committee

Re: August 7, 2023 meeting to elect a chair and have preliminary discussions about forming a working group for Unit 19C sheep.

Dear Chairman Burnett, Member Hoffman, and Member Fletcher,

At the previous meeting on July 20, 2023, the board voted 5-2 to form a committee comprised of Chair Burnett, member Hoffman and member Fletcher, that would then form a new Sheep Working Group (SWG) to delve into Unit 19C sheep issues and make recommendations to the full board.

On Monday, July 31, 2023, the public was notified that there would be a meeting on August 7, 2023, to elect a chair of the new board committee, and to "have preliminary discussions about forming a working group for Unit 19C sheep." The public was given three short days to send in comments!

The formation and makeup of this new SWG is the most important aspect of this process that the board SWG committee will decide, and we – along with others – interpreted the statement in the public notice on July 31st to mean that the "preliminary" discussion at the August 7 meeting could result in the board deciding who is on the SWG, how many, etc. Which is why we are alarmed at the rush-rush atmosphere of this when hunters and guides are already in the field or getting ready to head out sheep and caribou hunting.

We hope the board is not going to be making any decisions on the formation of the SWG at this meeting. You should allow ample time outside hunting seasons for the public and Advisory Committees to weigh in and express their thoughts on the makeup of this SWG.

RHAK has already sent in a letter requesting that we have a representative on the SWG. Advisory Committees are on break right now and they also may want to be represented.

We want to stress that this is **not** just a local Unit 19C issue. Sheep hunters across the state hunt in most every mountain range and this affects all of them. The SWG if it is formed needs to have broad representation from the public and Advisory Committees.

As far as funding for this SWG, the Department has told you that they do not have the funding for this, and there were a couple of comments made by board members at the July 20 meeting that essentially stated that the

\$60,000 estimated price tag (we believe it will cost much more) was no big deal. Chairman Burnett stated that it was just the cost of two guided sheep hunts, which was a strange way of discounting the fact that the Department does not have the funding for this. There was a suggestion that funding may be available from the Alaska chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation (AK-WSF) as long as the SWG did not focus on allocation issues. We want to thank the AK WSF for being willing to provide funding for the SWG. However, allocation issues are a major part of conservation efforts, especially during sheep decline, as the board knows. If the Department does get funding from a non-profit organization, we don't want that funding to have any caveats or stipulations as to what the SWG can discuss or provide an opinion on.

In closing, there is no realistic possibility to allow the public to weigh in on this, form a SWG, hire a facilitator, and have meetings that will provide recommendations to the board before next year's Region III meeting. It was clear at the July 20 meeting that that is what the board was hoping to do. Again, rushing this process is not in the best interests of anyone. and we recommend the board slow down and allow ample time for the public and ACs to weigh in after hunting seasons have concluded. The board should not make any decisions on the formation of the SWG until the public has ample time to comment.

Sincerely,

Mark Richards

Executive Director Resident Hunters of Alaska (RHAK)



unapologetically **FOR ALASKAN RESIDENTS**

PO Box 60095, Fairbanks, Alaska 99706 (907) 371-7436
email info@residenthuntersofalaska.org web www.residenthuntersofalaska.org

July 21, 2023

To: Alaska Board of Game

Re: New Dall Sheep Working Group

Dear Chairman Burnett and members of the Board,

At your July 20, 2023 meeting, the board voted to form a committee that would then form a Sheep Working Group (SWG) for the purpose of making recommendations to the board for future management of Dall sheep in Unit 19C.

There was no indication of what the makeup of that SWG would be, and this letter requests that a Resident Hunters of Alaska (RHAK) representative be involved in this SWG and process.

There was some discussion at your July 20 meeting that this new SWG should involve only local Advisory Committees. This is **not** just a "local" issue whereby only Advisory Committees close to Unit 19C should be involved. Nor is it an issue whereby representatives from organizations who have long been involved in the board process and sheep management issues should be excluded.

As you know, we did not support another SWG as we believe we don't need to spend more money on something already hashed out in previous sheep working groups. However, since the board decided a new SWG was needed, we respectfully request to be involved.

In addition, we recommend that this new SWG also look at Unit 20A as the problems there are nearly identical to the problems in Unit 19C, and make recommendations on Unit 20A sheep management as well.

Sincerely,

Mark Richards

Executive Director Resident Hunters of Alaska (RHAK)