



WSF's 2014 Thinhorn Sheep Summit Action Plan Update

The Kevin & Janine Rinke

Thinhorn Initiative

In August 2014, BC wildlife biologist Jeremy Ayotte was contracted for an initial 11-month term by the Wild Sheep Foundation to help coordinate a multi-jurisdictional effort to develop legislation, regulations, and policies that will avoid contact between Thinhorn sheep (Dall's & Stone's) and domestic sheep and goats in northern jurisdictions (AK, YK, NWT). This effort is in addition to Jeremy's ongoing work throughout British Columbia as program coordinator for the BC Sheep Separation Program.

Funding for this important new WSF Conservation Committee Initiative was provided through a dedicated conservation grant by WSF Life Members and Marco Polo Society inductees **Kevin and Janine Rinke** of Michigan.

From WAFWA WSWG 2012 *Recommendations for Domestic Sheep and Goat Management in Wild Sheep Habitat*:

"It is widely recognized, but needs to be re-emphasized, that thinhorn sheep (Dall sheep, Stone sheep) in northwestern Canada and Alaska are immunologically naïve compared to wild sheep occurring in southern Canada and the remainder of the western U.S. Additional precautions should be taken to ensure that absolutely no contact occurs between naïve thinhorn sheep and domestic sheep and goats."

To date, we have developed a contact list of representatives from AK, YK, and NWT, + BC. This THS working group has met once in September for an introductory conference call. Representatives bring an understanding of Thinhorn sheep management and more importantly, the unique legislative and regulatory processes within each jurisdiction. General information on the risk of disease spread and specific policy documents and legislative language used in other jurisdictions have also been provided to this THS working group through program coordinator Jeremy Ayotte.

Jurisdictional Updates:

- NWT: Nic Larter has circulated copies of WSF 2014 disease pamphlet (*Separation is Part of the Solution*) to all First Nations in his region (Dehcho). Jeremy Ayotte will make a presentation at the biennial Dehcho Wildlife Workshop in Fort Simpson NWT (October 21- 22, 2014). Delegates from 10 different First Nations groups will attend this conference. The objective is to generally heighten awareness of the disease threat in the NWT and specifically propose an action item for delegates to the NWT Environment and Natural Resources to exclude domestic animals from the Mackenzie River west to the Yukon border.
- NWT: Heather Sayine-Crawford understands the role of Co-Management Boards in her region (Sahtu). Information has been sent to Yellowknife (Department of NWT) to begin request for policy/legislation that would exclude domestic animals from specific areas.
- AK: Wayne Heimer identified the key issue in AK as farm flocks and the need to seek enactment of legislation limiting/excluding them from high-risk areas. For the upcoming legislative session, Wayne Heimer has proposed drafting a "sponsor's statement" to eventually introduce and manage a legislative Bill. The AK Board of Game has also recently passed legislation restricting the use of some pack animals (e.g., domestic sheep and goats, llamas, alpacas).

Actions to implement in coming months:

- Articulate unique jurisdictional legislative contexts:
 - public land management (are there concerns with public/Crown land grazing of domestic sheep/goats near wild sheep range? can we prohibit the use of sheep/goat/llamas as pack animals? are there permitting processes we can use?),
 - private land regulations and politics (are private farms the key concerns? are there agricultural acts/regulations protecting farm practices?)
 - wildlife management (what is our lobby strength? what is the role of First Nations?)
 - jurisdictional protocols for confirmed contact (can this be developed within each jurisdiction? such a protocol demonstrates critical importance of issue)
 - information management (is there a jurisdictional database with accurate thinhorn herd range polygons? are the locations of domestic sheep farms being tracked?)
- Develop further involvement in this program from the YK. We have recently contacted Troy Hegel with YK Government to request his involvement in our working group to improve representation and context from YK. Follow up with Dan Reynolds in Dawson, (rep to Renewable Resource Council in Yukon).
- Contact Bill Jex, Smithers regarding his work in BC to introduce language into the provincial government's Ungulate Winter Range management process. This could become another example of government policy/legislation to use to support requests for development of similar management of domestic animals on public land in NWT, YK, and AK.
- Contact Wayne Heimer/Kevin Kehoe regarding AK Board of Game Regulations that were passed to preclude pack animal use in specific areas (was this related to disease concerns). Again this can be distributed and used as another example of existing government policy/legislation.

WSF and the thinhorn sheep resource are indebted to the vision and generosity of **Kevin and Janine Rinke** for making this important work and added Conservation Committee capacity a reality through their dedicated conservation grant. Their exceptional support epitomizes *"Putting and Keeping Sheep on the Mountain™!"* Thank you!

