



WSF's 2014 Thinhorn Sheep Summit Action Plan Update
The Kevin & Janine Rinke Thinhorn Initiative

November 2014 Update

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“NO CONTACT IN THE NORTH”

Legislation is part of the solution

Recent Actions/Strategies:

- Focus outreach effort on NWT, given low agricultural pressure
- Develop policy statement/resolution with NWT Dehcho First Nations and natural resource management sector
- Improve input from Yukon representatives (Dan Reynolds, Troy Hegel, YFGA, YK-WSF Chapter, if created)
- Maintain engaged working group from all jurisdictions (AK, BC, NWT, YT)

Focus on NWT:

- Jeremy traveled to Fort Simpson NWT to attend 7th Biennial Dehcho Regional Wildlife Workshop Oct 21-22.
- This workshop is the primary wildlife workshop held in the Dehcho Region (Mackenzie River west to the Yukon border). The workshop was attended by First Nations, Parks Canada, and NWT Environment and Natural Resource staff.

Delegates from the following First Nations Bands were represented:

- Jean Marie River
 - Acho Dene Koe (Ft Liard)
 - Deh Gah Gotie Dene (Ft Providence)
 - Fort Providence Metis Local
 - Pehdzeh Ki
 - Liidlii Kue (Ft Simpson)
 - Nahanni Butte Dene
 - Ka'a'gee Tu
 - West Point
- Jeremy distributed WSF pamphlets, WAFWA WSWG recommendations, and Union of BC Indian Chiefs Resolution (example of First Nations policy statement to exclude domestics) to workshop delegates
 - Jeremy interviewed by Dehcho Drum newspaper editor; an article (attached) in the next issue was headlined on the front page (October 31, Vol 21, Issue 11). The Deh Cho Drum has wide distribution and readership across Dehcho region in NWT
 - The following presentation summary (paraphrased by NWT Environment and Natural Resource staff) will be published in the workshop proceedings and sent out to each First Nations Band.

Summary of Ft. Simpson Presentation:

The Wild Sheep Foundation (WSF) sent a representative from BC to give a presentation on domestic sheep and goats and how they can spread diseases to wild sheep and mountain goats. WSF would like to see a policy developed to restrict domestic sheep and goats from the Mackenzie River to the Yukon border. Contact between domestic and wild sheep in the south has decimated the wild sheep. It needs to be emphasized that Dall sheep in the NWT are immunologically naïve compared to wild sheep in the south. If domestic sheep disease reaches these northern wild sheep, the impact will be worse than what we have witnessed in the south. The disease is preventable through spatial and temporal separation of the 2 species. Low farming pressure in NWT should mean little resistance to new legal policy.

The disease that is decimating wild sheep is a respiratory disease; contact can result in an entire wild sheep herd die-off. Domestic sheep and wild sheep are attracted to each other; pneumonia outbreaks are difficult to manage after contact has happened. Southern bighorn sheep populations have been decimated by contact to domestic sheep. There are multiple cases throughout the US and BC of whole wild sheep herds dying off after contact with domestic sheep. Transplants from BC and AB have replenished some US states with wild sheep. There has been a lot of research done on disease transmission, immunity, vaccines and sheep habitat, but not a lot of action to stop contact.

There are no enforcement policies or legislation for wildlife officers to use. Fencing is expensive and not always effective. Government attempts to balance protecting wild sheep while supporting the domestic sheep industry. Union of BC First Nations Chiefs made a resolution in 2005 to stop contact between the 2 species, and cited an infringement on traditional rights to harvest wildlife for food. BC farmers have an act called the "Right to Farm" Act that they are using to defend their rights to have domestic sheep and goats farms. The main problem is sometimes these farms are in the vicinity of wild sheep and mountain goats. There is a need to keep domestic sheep and goats out of high-risk areas. There have been some documents, user guides and standardized GIS tools developed to support policy makers with good scientific tools.

Wild bighorn sheep populations in the south are scattered and diminishing, in many instances due to this problem. Thin-horn sheep and mountain goat populations in the north are flourishing and are in relatively in pristine condition. There needs to be more public awareness of the threats of the domestic sheep and goat disease. Need to develop a policy in NWT to prevent contact between Dall's sheep, mountain goat, and domestic sheep and goats.

Dehcho Workshop Delegate comments:

Delegates were interested in getting a copy of the BC First Nations Chief's resolution. ENR had received a copy of the resolution that is available. A delegate asked where the domestic sheep currently are in the NWT, and that the First Nations near there should be consulted. Some delegates mentioned that they didn't know much about wild sheep, but they were worried about other ungulates like moose and caribou.

Jurisdictional Updates:

- NWT (Dehcho): Nic Larter will distribute workshop proceedings in January 2015. Awareness about the disease spread has increased following the workshop presentation and newspaper article. Follow-up is now required to emphasize the importance of developing a specific policy statement excluding domestics from Dehcho region where risk of disease transfer is high.
- NWT (Sahtu): Brett Elkin (Wildlife Disease Specialist, NWT) sent a copy of 2005 Risk Assessment from Sahtu Region. This assessment was completed through funding from NWT Agricultural Policy Framework and will be distributed to our Thinhorn Initiative working group. Specific follow up is required with Brett Elkin and Heather Sayine-Crawford to discuss role of Sahtu Co-Management Boards, and how WSF et al. can support policy/legislation development from these boards. There will be cross-border benefits if we are able to work concurrently with Sahtu and Yukon Co-Management Boards.
- YK: Dan Reynolds (Co-chair of Renewable Resource Council) has been campaigning for action on this issue for 6 years. Dan recently voiced concern about lack of action on this issue. A second letter to the Yukon Chief Veterinarian will be written soon pushing for action (first letter was written last spring). The Fish and Wildlife Management Board and

Resource Councils in the Yukon have a lot of influence; it is a good idea/good timing for Jeremy to plan to travel to the Yukon in spring 2015 to help make the case for the need for action now and emphasize the catastrophic die-offs experienced in southern BHS range.

- YK: Gray Thornton reports strong interest from YK sportsmen/women in formation of a Yukon Chapter WSF; tentatively, a YK WSF Chapter could be established and in place by mid-January 2015, providing yet another organization of concerned sportsmen/women which could assist on this and other wild sheep issues.
- AK: Wayne Heimer, Kevin Kehoe, and Karen Gordon have been working on development of a Brief to support introduction of a new Bill in Alaska. Kevin K. has asked for collaboration and input from our Thinhorn Initiative personnel. A key point to emphasize in the Brief will be the concurrent effort happening across all northern jurisdictions to create this type of policy and legislation; Alaska is not acting alone. [Kevin K. to provide add'l details]

Actions to Implement:

- Continue to improve understanding of issue in each jurisdictional context:
 - public land management (are there concerns with public land grazing of domestic sheep/goats near wild sheep range? can we prohibit the use of sheep/goat/llama 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?)
 - regional protocols for confirmed contact (can this be developed within each region? such a protocol demonstrates critical importance of issue)
 - information management (is there a regional database with accurate thinhorn herd range polygons? are the locations of domestic sheep farms known being tracked?)
- Follow up with Nic Larter (NWT Dehcho) to provide support for the thinhorn disease action item that was developed at the Dehcho regional wildlife workshop: To create a statement of position or resolution to exclude domestic sheep and goats from thinhorn sheep range across the Dehcho region.
- Continue to work with Heather Sayine-Crawford and Brett Elkin to discuss specific status of request to develop policy/legislative in Sahtu region of NWT (how can we support this?)
- Continue collaboration with Dan Reynolds and Troy Hegel to support their effort in the Yukon (through Renewable Resource Council, YK Fish and Wildlife Management Board, within Yukon Government, YK Fish & Game Association, pending new YK WSF Chapter, etc.). Plan to make a presentation to RRC or appropriate forum to coincide with Dan's continued letters/requests for action.
- Work with Wayne Heimer/Kevin Kehoe to develop Brief to support introduction of new Bill to Alaska Legislature. [Kevin K. to provide add'l details]
- Coordinate conference call with Thinhorn Initiative working group to update everyone and emphasize strength of multi-jurisdictional approach.
- Distribute relevant documents to Thinhorn Initiative working group identified over past months: Sahtu Risk Assessment (2005), Association of Mackenzie Mountains Outfitters letter to Sahtu Management Board.