12/23/2021

Dear Senator Bennet,

I am writing today deeply concerned about our regional bighorn sheep population and the BLM’s proposal to grant a ten-year permit for domestic sheep to graze in bighorn sheep habitat. I call on you to guarantee that the BLM uses best available science to maintain effective separation between bighorn and domestic sheep. As you and your staff are aware, the transmission of deadly respiratory viruses from domestic to bighorn populations put our bighorns at high risk.

I live in Ouray County and love to hike. I highly value seeing bighorn sheep during my hikes and on Highway 550. During the winter, sheep come down to the road just south of Ouray. In fact, I encountered a ewe and lamb just yesterday on the highway on my way back from cross-country skiing. I value seeing them in the spring when the local bighorn congregate just a few miles from my home. Last summer hiking in a high mountain valley above Silverton, I saw a large domestic sheep herd on one side of the valley and bighorn sheep directly across on the other side of the valley.

We must better protect our wild populations. They are vulnerable and rely on our protections. As we have witnessed over and over during the COVID-19 pandemic, we all depend in a sense on each other’s actions for our own health and wellbeing. The bighorn population depends on us for their protection from our human-permitted, domestic sheep diseases.

Ouray and San Juan Counties as well as the Town of Ridgway support closure of high-risk allotments. BLM’s own analysis found allotments to be in “high-risk” areas of contact. In order to achieve effective separation, high-risk allotments should be closed to domestic sheep grazing.

Thank you for your immediate attention to these concerns. Our elected official in Congress can and should hold the BLM accountable to the best available science to protect this valuable and irreplaceable regional asset.

Sincerely,

Judith Chamberlin

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