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From: **Wick Coffee Co** <wickcoffeeco@gmail.com>
Date: Tue, Dec 28, 2021, 7:21 AM
Subject: Urgent: bighorn sheep safety concern
To: <John\_Whitney@bennet.senate.gov>, <Helen\_Katich@hickenlooper.senate.gov>
Cc: <jconnell@blm.gov>, <nculver@blm.gov>

Dear Senators Bennet and Hickenlooper

We write today with deep concern for our regional Bighorn sheep whose population is at risk due to proximity of domestic sheep grazing.

We own and operate Cimarron Coffee and Books, which has been an anchor business on Sherman St in Ridgway for over 30 years. Every year, we serve thousands of visitors who come from around the country to enjoy and recreate in the breathtaking mountains and wilderness of Western Colorado. We collaborate with local cultural, trail and naturalist groups, stocking books and posting educational materials to increase awareness of the history, geography and unique ecology of our area.

For example, we post educational signage in our restroom instructing hikers in how to properly dispose of human waste when visiting the Bluelakes trails and other local wilderness areas. Minimizing the harmful impacts of human activity, and adopting practices that support a healthy, intact ecosystem, is a responsibility of all who live, work and play here.

This responsibility compels us to write to you today with an urgent concern about risks faced by Bighorn sheep in our area:

Bighorn sheep are at high risk for contracting a respiratory disease from domestic sheep to which the bighorn have little resistance.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) identifies bighorn sheep as a species of greatest conservation need in their 2015 Colorado State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP.) It is noteworthy that bighorn sheep are the only ungulate listed in the SWAP. Best available science supports the only means of protecting bighorn from disease is spatial and temporal separation from domestic sheep. In order to achieve effective separation, high-risk allotments should be closed to domestic sheep grazing. CPW has detailed their concerns in their August 2019 comments which documents bighorn forays, domestic strays, commingling events, and the practice of euthanizing bighorn sheep that come in contact with domestic sheep in order not to spread the disease to the bighorn herd. CPW also notes the following consequences of disease transmission: suppressed lamb recruitment/survival, bighorn mortality and die-off events. BLM’s own analysis, utilizing the Risk of Contact model, found allotments in the project area to have “high risk” of contact between bighorn and domestic sheep.

However, we are concerned that the BLM’s draft decision does not adhere to the agency’s MS-1730 policy, which requires effective separation of the domestic and bighorn sheep. The risk of a catastrophic disease event from lack of effective separation in the project area is very high, and we want to emphasize the urgency of the situation.

The BLM choosing to not issue a final decision is a dangerous and irresponsible action as it allows domestic sheep grazing in high risk areas to continue.

Ouray and San Juan Counties as well as the Town of Ridgway support closure of high-risk allotments.

We ask that you utilize your position as elected officials to hold the BLM accountable for following the best available science to maintain effective separation between domestic sheep and bighorn sheep.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our urgent concerns.

 Sincerely,

Tera & Nate Wick

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Ridgway, CO 81432

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