

From: Robert Warren, Michelle Brugiere
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Date: 12/22/2021

To: Senators Bennet and Hickenlooper

Re: Hold BLM accountable to use the best available science to protect our area's bighorn sheep population.

Dear Senators,

My wife and I are active hikers, climbers, and skiers in the San Juan mountains and spend many days in these pursuits every week of the year. We have been blessed to observe Bighorn sheep in this area over a long period of time and been dismayed by the large numbers of domestic sheep that share their habitat. We believe in the intrinsic value of native wildlife and natural ecosystems. As the years roll by we see fewer and fewer Bighorn Sheep, healthy habitat, and other native species that coexist with the sheep.

I am a retired geophysicist and science educator and my wife and I have a keen interest learning about the San Juans and the native species that make it their home. From both our direct observations and study, we are aware that Bighorn sheep are at high risk for contracting a respiratory disease from domestic sheep. CPW identifies bighorn sheep as a species of great conservation need in their 2015 Colorado State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP.) The best available science finds 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 and notes the following consequences of disease transmission: 1) suppressed lamb recruitment/survival, 2) bighorn mortality and die-off events. BLM's analysis finds allotments in the project area to have "high risk" of contact between bighorn and domestic sheep. However, 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 disease from lack of effective separation in the project area is very high, and that makes this an urgent situation. Yet, the BLM has delayed a final decision, which is an egregious and irresponsible action because domestic sheep grazing will continue in the problem areas and Bighorn sheep will suffer. Ouray and San Juan Counties as well as the Town of Ridgway support closure of the high-risk allotments.

Thank you for your attention to this situation and we ask you to use your authority as our elected officials to hold the BLM accountable and use the best available science to protect bighorn sheep.

Robert Warren, Michelle Brugiere