

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: August 10, 2017

Agenda Item: Bighorn Sheep and Mountain Goat Augmentations

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 Min

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Background: Augmentation to bolster struggling herds is an effective management tool that requires Commission approval to capture animals at one site and move them to another. Any final Commission endorsement for such actions would come after formal public comment. FWP is proposing two augmentations: one for mountain goats and one for bighorn sheep. The proposed augmentations are:

1. Mountain goat – Move 20 animals to Cube Iron Mountain north of Thompson Falls sometime during the winters of 2017-18 to 2019-20. This herd is currently about 20-30 animals and the target population is 75-100. The area has been closed to hunting since 1978, and recruitment has been low most likely because of natural mortality and mountain lion predation. Augmentation should boost recruitment to the point of population viability. Donor animals would most likely come from the Crazy Mountains.
2. Bighorn sheep – Move 40 animals, mostly ewes with some young rams, to the HD 122 St. Regis cutoff herd sometime during the winters of 2017-18 to 2019-20. This herd has recently declined from 100-130 to 20-25. Cause is unknown, but disease is highly suspected. 25-30% of the remaining sheep have been tested and no Movi found. Donor herds would likely be the Middle Missouri Breaks (HD 622) and/or Petty Creek (HD 203). This action is consistent with the Montana Bighorn Sheep Conservation Strategy.

All animals captured for augmentation would be given the standard battery of health and disease tests. Further information is found in the Commission packet.

As information only, if deemed necessary by the local biologist and conditions permit, we may augment the bighorn herd reintroduced into the Madison Valley's Wolf Creek during the 2017-18 winter using animals from the original source herd near Hebgen Lake. This augmentation is already covered in the Commission-endorsed Environmental Assessment and Decision Notice and requires no Commission action.

Public Involvement Process & Results: Public comment was open from June 7 through July 16. We received 13 comments – 11 supported the proposals, one opined that all money should be spent on predator control and one was against moving sheep to areas that have lost sheep to Movi. Flathead Wildlife, Inc., while in support of the proposals, said that limiting factors should be identified and mitigated. All comments in their entirety are found in the Commission packet.

Alternatives and Analysis: If either or both proposed augmentations are not done we risk losing those herds in the foreseeable future. There is the risk of introducing disease that has been undetected in the donor herds, but given the circumstances, that risk is acceptable.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends that the Commission adopt the proposed mountain goat and bighorn sheep augmentations.

Proposed Motion: I propose the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopt the proposed mountain goat and bighorn sheep augmentations as presented by FWP.