



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

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Meeting Date: August 13, 2020

Agenda Item: Bighorn Sheep Restoration in the Tendoy Mountains

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background:

In June 2015, the department prepared and submitted an environmental assessment addressing depopulation of the remaining bighorn sheep in the Tendoy Mountains and reestablishment of that population at a later date through translocation. Hunters were the primary tool used to depopulate the bighorn sheep herd, with some assistance from the department. The commission was briefed and authorized the hunter take.

The department is prepared to begin restoration efforts through translocation of bighorn sheep into this historical habitat. During winter 2020–2021, the department intends to capture 20–30 bighorn sheep from Wildhorse Island, of which four to five will be males that are 2 years old or less. The remaining bighorn sheep will be predominately ewes with some lambs. Another capture of 20–30 bighorn sheep from the same area is likely in 2021–2022, although another similar source may be used as well.

Public Involvement Process and Results:

The department prepared an environmental assessment and shared that with the commission in June 2015. Most of the comments at the time addressed the depopulation of the remaining bighorn sheep. Region 3 Supervisor Sam Sheppard signed a Decision Notice recommending that the commission approve the project on June 9, 2015.

Alternatives and Analysis:

The depopulation of the Tendoy Mountains was intended to be temporary, and a future release and reintroduction of bighorn sheep was anticipated in the environmental assessment. The department believes introducing bighorn sheep from Wildhorse Island is consistent with the original environmental assessment and fulfills those objectives. Not releasing bighorn sheep into the Tendoy Mountains remains another alternative.

Agency Recommendation and Rationale:

The department recommends proceeding with a translocation to restore bighorn sheep to the Tendoy Mountains beginning during the winter of 2020–2021, with added efforts as needed.

Proposed Motion:

I move that the commission vote to reaffirm and endorse the department's plan to reintroduce and restore bighorn sheep to the Tendoy Mountains in southwestern Montana.