

Views on the Future Management of Bighorn Sheep in Alberta (March 2015)

Considerable discussion has been occurring amongst government and various interest groups and individuals regarding possible changes to sheep hunting regulations. The purpose of this summary document is to provide government with common concerns and suggested solutions from a number of interested groups and individuals including the WSFA, APOS, AFGA and SCI.

First, in a general examination of the status of Bighorn Sheep in Alberta, it appears that the provincial Bighorn Sheep population (approximately 6400 pre-hunting), the annual harvest of trophy sheep (less than 200 annually; 140 residents and 40 non-resident aliens) and hunter success has persisted under the current 4/5 curl regulation for several years. Observations and information have been presented and discussed as they relate to ages, recruitment and numbers of >4/5 curl sheep post-hunting including SMA 1 specific sheep population status.

Secondly, a Bighorn Sheep Management Plan is in preparation; however, it has not as yet been available for review by interested stakeholders.

Based upon these basic summarized understandings the following comments are provided as possible solutions or actions that should be considered by the Government.

1. **If there is not an immediate demonstrated conservation issue, do not make any significant changes to the current Bighorn Sheep hunting regulations** until the Bighorn Sheep Management Plan is drafted, reviewed and approved. A review by all stakeholders and an independent scientific review of the information should be part of the process. The information from the resiliency study should also be considered in this review. There is no support for any changes to the sheep regulations until the necessary documents and data are provided.
2. **The predation of sheep particularly by cougars requires immediate attention and action.** The Bighorn Sheep Management Plan must include cougar management in the new plan. Additionally, other predators including wolves and grizzly bears should be addressed in the Bighorn sheep management plan. Further, specific and immediate action must be a consideration.
3. **Bighorn Sheep habitat must be improved.** The status of the Bighorn Sheep habitat (range) is in the view of many stakeholders to be shrinking of reduced quality. The Bighorn Sheep Management Plan must include habitat improvement in the new plan. Further, specific and immediate action must be a consideration.
4. **A well-defined protocol for monitoring populations and specific population must be developed.** Concern for the validity of the data being collected on populations surveys, aging individuals and other parameters must be addressed and the raw data, not just the averages, must be made available to increase stakeholder confidence in the analysis.
5. **Provide a 2015 Draft Bighorn Sheep Management Plan for stakeholder review** that includes the key management actions that lead to an evaluation of results achieved to increase population stability and security into the future.
6. Incorporate two additions to the Bighorn hunting regulations in the future.
 - Align the opening hunting season dates across Alberta for sheep (i.e. August 25 for residents and one week later for non-residents).
 - Incorporate a statement/drawings in the Hunting Regulations Summary that encourages trophy sheep hunters to voluntarily select older sheep greater than 6 years of age. "Older is better"!

**Wild Sheep Foundation Alberta (WSFA); - Safari Club International (SCI)
Alberta Professional Outfitters Society (APOS)
Alberta Fish and Game Association (AFGA)**

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