



September 23, 2016

Honorable Ken Calvert  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-0542

Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
Chairwoman  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, Dc 20510-0203

Dear Chairman Calvert/Chairwoman Murkowski,

On behalf of more than 88,000 sheep producers throughout the United States, and their 45 state sheep associations, the American Sheep Industry association requests the inclusion of language regarding grazing allotments in the FY 2017 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill and Conference Report.

First, allow me to thank you for your support and inclusion of report and statement of managers' language in the FY 2016 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill and Conference Report. This language has proven to be extremely helpful in guiding the Forest Service towards a more inclusive and multiple use friendly approach. However, there remain substantial challenges that can only be addressed by continued congressional direction.

In 2010, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) prohibited 13,000 sheep from grazing on their historic allotments within the Payette National Forest in Idaho, driving one ranch out of business entirely and drastically reducing the operations of three others. The *supposed* reason for this reduction was an obscure regulation of the National Forest Management Act allegedly requiring each national forest to maintain "minimum viable" populations of all vertebrate species found there. Environmental activists argued that by allowing domestic grazing to persist, the USFS violated this regulation. Despite a multi-year fight that included appeals of agency decisions, judicial reviews and even action by Congress, the original Forest Service prohibition to eliminate grazing within bighorn habitat was unjustly upheld in court. Unbelievably, the court upheld the original decision, even while acknowledging that the plaintiffs were correct in their assertion that the USFS deliberately failed to utilize the research expertise at the USDA Agricultural Research Service.

Not only are Payette decision impacts spreading to other national forests with bighorn sheep populations, the Bureau of Land Management is considering grazing restrictions on federal lands

under its administration, creating a west-wide issue that threatens a substantial part of the domestic sheep and wool industry. In April 2014, Region four, Forest Service officials indicated that within the year, they would make decisions on the future use of “*high risk*” allotments grazed by domestic sheep, even though only 3 percent of federal sheep allotments overlap with occupied bighorn habitat. While it is impossible to accurately predict the total impact of this approach, at a minimum 400,000 domestic sheep, and the families who raise and care for them, may be affected. The impacts are serious, affecting not only sheep operators and their employees, but meat packing plants, woolen mills, and even the military, which purchases twenty percent of the nation’s wool production to help equip America’s service men and women.

The facts:

- Domestic sheep and bighorns have co-existed in many of the same areas for decades without, apparently, decimating bighorn herds.
- There is no single, identifiable pathogen responsible for the most common respiratory diseases in bighorn sheep that can clearly be tied to contact with domestic sheep on the open range. In fact, there are documented die-offs of bighorns in areas far removed from any domestic sheep.
- USDA is heavily involved in research to identify the causes of bighorn diseases and transmission vectors. The sheep industry strongly supports this research. Yet, research conducted by USDA’s intramural science agency, the Agricultural Research Service, is specifically being *ignored* by USFS. In abject contravention to congressional direction.

The language we are requesting is a simple and equitable solution: find suitable alternative allotments for those sheep operators whose permits in bighorn habitat have been reduced, before kicking them off of long-standing allotments. Finally, additional congressional direction requiring the utilization of USDA’s own science and consultation with permittees and state wildlife officials is essential if we are going to address these issues without destroying an industry and way of life.

Again, thank you for your efforts to date and consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Burton Pfliger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline.

Burton Pfliger, President  
American Sheep Industry