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Dear Permittees,

The Forest Service is committed to the conservation of bighorn sheep and the continued grazing of domestic sheep on National Forest System lands. I recognize that grazing of domestic sheep remains an appropriate and important use of the land, supporting local economies and sustaining the historic ranching and farming lifestyle of the West. I also recognize that the conservation of bighorn sheep populations is of critical importance to our National Forests, sportsmen, and local communities. The Forest Service's goal is to balance multiple-use demands with management practices that support viable populations of bighorn sheep and a healthy domestic sheep industry.

The Intermountain Region is preparing a bighorn sheep risk assessment to identify possible contact between domestic and bighorn sheep on each national forest. I want to emphasize that the risk assessment is not a decision-making process. We have not made any decisions about changing or adjusting domestic sheep grazing allotments.

The Forest Service is working with key western states to discuss the risk assessment process, identify areas of high probability of contact that include domestic sheep allotments and trails, and to support a dialogue for identifying potential management solutions. In areas where a high probability of contact exists, affected permittees and other stakeholders will be engaged in an open and transparent process to discuss potential solutions. This could include application of best management practices to maintain species separation or search for alternative allotments. We have developed a regional list of vacant allotments that can be considered in this discussion.

The Forest Service is committed to involving all interested parties in the assessment process. I recognize there is a lot of concern among permittees and other stakeholders on potential outcomes of the assessments. I am reaching out to the Governor's office for each state, to State Agencies, permittees, and other interested stakeholders to discuss ways to define the best process for collaboratively developing management solutions together as we move forward. I am interested in exploring opportunities to use existing successful approaches and avenues to convene interested parties and facilitate discussions. I am committed to implementing a process that is collaborative with the states, interested publics, permittees, and other stakeholders to seek sound recommendations and rationale in exploring management options.

Sincerely,

NORA B. RASURE
Regional Forester

