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## E-News - For Immediate Release

*"Here's Your Chance to Help the Future of Wild Sheep Everywhere!"*

*Cody, Wyoming USA - December 22, 2008*

*For more information please contact - <mailto:nthagard@wildsheepfoundation.org>*

**Wild Sheep Need Your Help!** For more than 30 years the Wild Sheep Foundation has been engaged in federal land policy issues that promote restoration of wild sheep and to their native habitats.

The most important piece of policy that could ensure the future existence of wild sheep on federally managed lands is being considered in Idaho. The U.S. Forest Service, through the Payette National Forest Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (DSEIS), is considering reducing domestic sheep grazing in wild sheep habitats – to further enhance the recovery of wild sheep. However, new policy will not be decided until the public comment period has ended, which has been extended to March 3, 2009.

It is extremely important that you let the Payette National Forest know about your support for bighorn sheep. Your comments are needed – this is your chance to help *“Put & Keep Wild Sheep on the Mountain!”*

In 2004 several groups, including the Nez Perce Tribe, appealed the Payette Forest Plan because they felt the Payette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan did not provide enough protection for bighorn sheep. The Chief of the Forest Service, in his decision on the appeal agreed and said that the viability of the bighorn sheep across the entire forest were threatened by continued domestic sheep grazing in occupied bighorn sheep habitat. Because of this appeal the Forest Service has developed a draft SEIS, their plan on how to add more protection for bighorn sheep. WSF has worked closely with the Nez Perce Tribe, The Wilderness Society, Idaho Conservation League and the Hells Canyon Preservation Council to develop and promote concepts to include in the Forest

Service management to protect bighorn sheep.

The Draft SEIS can be found at the following web site:

[www.fs.fed.us/r4/payette/publications/big\\_horn\\_sheep\\_documents\\_index.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/payette/publications/big_horn_sheep_documents_index.shtml) &  
[www.fs.fed.us/r4/sawtooth/arevision/revision.htm](http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/sawtooth/arevision/revision.htm)

If you would like more information, go to the Payette National Forest Website at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/payette/> under the heading “Links to High Interest Items” you can click on “Bighorn Sheep Science Documents” and find the “Science Panel Executive Summary”. The summary is the recommendations of a panel of nationally known scientists who considered the risk of disease transmission from domestic sheep to bighorn sheep. The science panel suggested, as a prudent measure, until the disease transmission is better understood, that federal agencies should separate the domestic sheep from the bighorn sheep. The Payette National has largely based their approach on this recommendation.

We have reviewed the proposed changes and concur with the direction in the preferred alternative which proposes reductions in domestic sheep grazing to create separation of domestic sheep and bighorn sheep.

Comments may be submitted via U.S. mail to:

Payette National Forest  
Attention: Bighorn Sheep Comments  
800 Lakeside Avenue  
McCall, ID 83638

Or via e-mail to: [payettebighorn@fs.fed.us](mailto:payettebighorn@fs.fed.us)

The Forest Service is asking comments on the following questions:

**1) Are opposing viewpoints and uncertainties surrounding the science considered?**

WSF suggested response: Although the mechanism that promotes disease transmission from domestic sheep to wild sheep is not understood, it is clear that when they were placed together in enclosures at Washington State University bighorn sheep die. It is clear they must be kept separate for the bighorn sheep to survive.

**2) What level of risk of contact is acceptable?**

WSF suggested response: The risk of contact brings the risk of disease transmission. The Forest must manage for a “no contact” standard.

**3) What other options/methods can we analyze to achieve separation between domestic and bighorn sheep?**

WSF suggested response: Eliminating domestic sheep grazing in occupied bighorn sheep habitat is a prudent first step. To maintain separation over time we suggest creating “no grazing” buffers between the occupied bighorn sheep habitat and the remaining domestic sheep allotments to allow room for the bighorn sheep to expand into without the threat of contact with domestic sheep.

**4) Are there potential actions to minimize contact that have worked in other parts of the country?**

WSF suggested response: We are not aware of any management practices such as more herders or additional guard dogs in domestic flocks that have been effective in creating or enhancing separation between domestic and bighorn sheep and we recommend the forest therefore not rely on so called “Best Management Practices” to create or maintain separation.

**5) What suggestions do you have to improve implementation of standards and guidelines?**

WSF suggested response: Idaho Department of Fish and Game bighorn sheep trend surveys affirm that bighorn sheep have declined on and adjacent to the Payette National Forest, in some instances by as much as 70% over the last 25 years. The domestic sheep and the bighorn sheep are attracted to each other. The domestic sheep graze in large flocks. Domestic sheep straying from the band are unavoidable. The Forest Service must establish their standard is “no contact” between domestic sheep and bighorn sheep. The standards should support ensuring over time that there is no risk of contact.

**6) What other options or alternatives are missing from the analysis?**

WSF suggested response:

A) The Forest Service proposes that the two GPR’s can be reduced or expanded over time based on information. These areas are the areas where domestic sheep grazing will not be allowed in order to create separation between bighorn sheep and domestic sheep. The WSF asserts that the GPR’s must never shrink. The GPR’s represents a proposed reduction in domestic sheep grazing based on the current bighorn sheep populations. The current populations of bighorn sheep are only a fraction of what existed in the early 1980’s in the Salmon and in the 1990’s in Hells Canyon and a shadow of what was present historically. The GPR can not shrink if the population of bighorn sheep are to grow. We suggests your comments should reflect the size of the GPR adopted should not be reduced below what is adopted in this plan because the bighorn sheep populations are reduced to a level the US Forest Service agrees is not viable.

B) The WSF encourages the Forest Service to find alternative grazing allotments for domestic sheep outside of suitable historic wild sheep habitats. The Forest Service does not make a commitment to search for alternate allotments for the domestic sheep producers that would be affected by a reduction in domestic sheep grazing on the forest. We suggest that the additional grazing be located, even if it exists outside Idaho, in an effort to keep the amount of AUM’s available to the producers similar.

C) WSF encourages the Forest Service to consider converting domestic sheep allotments to other livestock types such as cattle where ecologically feasible.

We need you to tell the Payette National Forest that the permitted grazing must change to protect bighorn sheep and the habitat they rely on. Please comment now while you are thinking about the issue.

If you have any questions or need assistance in your comment efforts please contact:

Neil Thagard, Director of Operations  
Wild Sheep Foundation