2013!
Slow time of the year, this is. In my area we are locked in the grip of winter, the driveway is hard-pack snow, and the morning temps at or below 0. Hard to conceptualize hiking right now, but I am trying hard to believe that I will eventually be able to get out into the mountains again.

The Current Lands Issue
Beings that patience is not really a strong suit (in fact it isn't, for me, a 'suit' at all!), and continuously thinking about how to deal with the dilemma we are in with the forest boys wanting to close down the forest to us, and not being content to wait for the Shoshone folks to make their decision (Fall-2013), I have decided to begin a fairly long-term research project in order to hopefully bring some sanity into the goats/disease discussion and take away the government's ability to use our boys as their so-called solution to the die-offs problem (Now your English teacher would call that a run-on sentence... and so it is).

Unfortunately, at this point, what that means exactly, is a bit nebulous, as I am thinking that I will have a better idea where I am going when I get partway there. In part because the available research will dictate where we can take this. It was illuminating to read a couple of days ago, a researcher in 2012 make the statement, "Note: I use the words 'may' and 'speculate' a lot in the summaries above. This emphasizes the point we are still not sure if we have one deadly bacterial species we need to look for or if the pneumonia problem is a result of some combination of the bacteria listed above. The pneumonia issue in bighorn sheep is complex and we still do not completely understand how all of these pathogens interact." Which is a heck of a long way from the statement by the Shoshone folks that, "An increasing body of evidence demonstrates that bighorn sheep in close proximity to domestic sheep and goats are at risk for disease transmission."

So, far I haven't seen any research that would indicate that our goats represent a 'clear and present danger' to their Big Horns. It does seem fairly clear that sheep in close proximity to the BHS are a threat, but not only are goats not automatically a threat, they can be tested prior to entering the woods to insure that they don't carry the current pathogens of interest.

And, what is for me, the real core issue, is that they have so far refused to consider that there is a major difference between our guys and a herd of domestic' goats, weed eaters or the like. You would not attempt to lump together a trained pack animal with a wild horse just brought in off the open range, you would not expect the same behavior from a llama that you just captured in the high country to be as worthy as a pack llama that has been trained for that exercise and therefore it is fallacious to lump our goats into the same behavioral framework as a herd of unsocialized animals that are used for weed-eating, or other herd-type activities.

I probably have said before, but when faced with the potential closure in the Winds, we proposed a number (12) of restrictions on ourselves, that we called our 'Best Management Practices', and that were designed to insure that land managers could be comfortable that we were not ever going to be a threat to the BHS. Suffice to say that our offer to insure our own accountability was soundly rejected. For those that are interested, those BMPs are available on the NAPgA website here: http://www.napga.org, click on Issues.

So at this point, it is a waiting game. It is aca-
demic that if the Shoshone NF decides to not allow packgoats in the Winds, we will appeal. After that, it would necessitate a court action, and our ability to do that will depend on our desire to continue funding this effort.

In my mind, based on the little amount of research that I have already done, when you look at maps of BHS ranges, along with the additional ranges that they intend to create by transplanting animals, there will be bloody little left for us. And that’s the truth!

Actually, I’m pretty certain that we all are. As a 72yo individual, I got into goat packing as a way to extend my hiking time, and now I find myself in a battle to hold onto the ability to do it at all. If you take a look at the maps of BHS ranges, when we are run out of those areas, there will be precious little territory left for us to hike in.

As for me, I am embarking on what I believe will be a several month research project in hopes of putting together a document that will refute their rationale used to eject goats from the forest. We, of course, already know that this entire goat business is simply a straw man erected in order for them to bail out of the public, and internal, pressure they are taking due to the big horn die offs. It is a scapegoat (to coin a phrase) pure and simple and bears no relation whatsoever to the real solution to the problem other than goats can, but do not necessarily, carry the pathogens of interest. Interestingly, one researcher just made the statement in 2012, “The pneumonia issue in bighorn sheep is complex and we still do not completely understand how all of these pathogens interact.” We still don’t understand it??? But we are going to eliminate goats from the equation to fix it?? As I said in a recent eMail, ‘Bull Shark’.

What I absolutely need from you is to keep me informed as to what is happening in your area.

If we are going to be able to marshall resources against this nonsense, I need to know what is happening everywhere.

Be advised of this, that with so many forest districts initiating this action at the same time, there has to have been an edict at some upper level to drive the agenda to eliminate goats. The difficult part is that it will have to fought district by district, and that will take way more funds that we have now or can presently raise. If we, the goat packers, do not get behind and support this fight, we will lose collectively. The outcome of our input to this issue in the Shoshone FS district (Wind River Range, WY) will go a long way towards making it easier or more difficult in the long run.

Please, when you have the opportunity, encourage others to join NAPgA and get engaged in the fight. It is going to be a long hard battle I suspect.

Larry

All of the above having been said, I am certain that in the short term there will be more closures.

This is the language from the Wallowa-Whitman’s proposed action:

"The use of domestic pack goats shall not be authorized or allowed within or adjacent to source habitat for bighorn sheep."

For me, with the threat that the Eagle Cap might be shut down, and my belief that it is the most beautiful area that I have ever traveled, I am thinking that if you are wanting to see this area, it better be this summer. I have changed one of my summer’s destinations in order to insure that I have at least one more chance to enter the Eagle Cap. Don’t hesitate to call or eMail if you want to know about this area.

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