



The NAPgA Bleat!

The Official Newsletter of the North American Packgoat Association

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NAPgA News, November 2012

A loyal supporter and friend of NAPgA recently made the relevant point that she had no idea of what NAPgA, specifically the BOD was up to. While I recognize that we have not been having newsletters for quite a while, and while I also realize that they are essential to retain our members from year to year, I really felt, and still feel, that I personally have quite enough to do without taking anything else on.

However, that having been said, I, like Jan Huffaker before me, have a deep and abiding interest in seeing that NAPgA is an active and successful entity, and provides a benefit to goatpackers as a whole, as that is our original charge and goal.

So, it is my intention to scale back what I would like to do with a newsletter, and attempt instead to produce on a monthly basis a summation of what I feel are relevant items of interest to NAPgA members.

For those that we have an eMail address for, it will be sent electronically. We will only be mailing a hard copy to those that have not provided an eMail. NAPgA is struggling to recover from our legal costs at this point, and money is very, very tight.

So What is the REAL Bottom Line?

On the following pages, you will read about our attempt to turn around what is a very real threat to goatpackers occurring right now in Wyoming's Wind River Range. And without question, that is where our efforts have been concentrated for the last year.

But is this threat in the Winds really the core issue??

We believe not. The real danger with this entire issue, is the threat to goatpacking everywhere, represented by this unsubstantiated threat to Big Horn Sheep represented by our goats. In essence, the Winds is only a test case for a much wider distribution of these closures. We are aware that Alaska has already had some closures, and both Alaska and Montana are watching the happenings in Wyoming.

And is that it, AK & MT? No, I just recently became aware that the Inyo NF in California is currently considering a proposal that parallels the Shoshone's closure order.

So...

In the very beginning, I postulated that if this effort by the Shoshone NF was successful, that in any NF with Big Horn sheep, the closures would begin to fall like dominoes, and in the end result, we could conceivably be locked out of anywhere where there are BHS. If this issue had any legitimacy, it would be heartbreaking enough, but knowing that it is entirely fallacious, and only a governmental display of raw power, is exceptionally disturbing.

The Threat to Goatpackers in the Shoshone National Forest

So, what has been happening vis a vis the BOD and NAPgA as a whole.

At this point, I feel a little bit like Inigo Montoya in the movie the Princess Bride, when he noted, "Let me explain,... no, *too much*, let me sum up!"

Sometime back in 2011, the Shoshone FS began talking about a so-called 'temporary closure' of the Wind River range to goats & goatpackers. Only goats. Not horses, not llamas, just goats. Those of us in the BOD could see that 1) this was not supported by any realistic objective data; and 2) it was a first-ever targeting of one class of user and eliminating them from the wilderness.

February 2011, Charlie Jennings and even Carolyn Eddy from Oregon motored up to Cody, WY, and met with the Shoshone FS in an effort to forestall this closure. In June, Charlie met with them again, and introduced several proposed 'Best Management Practices' in order to put the land manager's minds at ease regarding the potential for our goats to transmit any pathogens to their vaunted Big Horn Sheep.

However, even that effort was to no avail as in November 2011, Joe Alexander issued the Shoshone FS's 'temporary' closure order.

PDF: (http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5340051.pdf)

Internet:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/shoshone/news-events/?cid=STELPRDB5340102>

We were, to put it mildly, dumbfounded. We had bent over backwards, advocating a number of goatpacker self-imposed restrictions in order to prevent this eventuality, and they closed us out anyway. It was not a happy BOD at that time.

Subsequent discussions basically centered around two basic options: 1) roll over and play dead; or 2) take the unprecedented step for this organization of seeking legal help. We were eventually referred to Holland & Hart law firm as they were versed in dealing with outdoor issues, and so retained them to help with the FS on this issue.

Fast-forward to Fall 2012, and the FS comment period, August through October 2012 on their proposed DEIS. Once again, the BOD is surly. The proposed DEIS Alternatives, only had one alternative that applied to goats, Alternative E (remembering that the alternatives A & F are essentially throw-aways, alternatives that are completely outside the spectrum of what they want to accomplish, and would never be considered under normal circumstances). And Alternative E lumped domestic goats together with packgoats, and therefore ignored the exceptional nature of packgoats, and the control that we have over them, as opposed to a herd of goats used in weed-clearing or the like. To the BOD, it seemed very much like we were battling an unspoken agenda, and no matter what we did, they were not going to subject themselves to reason.

NAPgA felt that we needed to contact as many goat-interested folks as possible, in order to enlist their help in combatting this unreasonable order. Therefore we produced a cover letter with a summation of the issues, and a 'form letter', with an expansion of the issues involved, and which included a provision for folks who just didn't feel they could write their own letter to sign and forward the form letter to the FS. We also obtained a very large database of goat folks, had our documents printed, and Larry spent 1 week in September stuffing envelopes with these letters, finally taking them to a mailing service to mail under their bulk mail permit so as to save a number of dollars over what a 1st class stamp would have cost.

Since we mailed over 2100 letters that cost would have indeed been significant.

And at this point, the value of our legal person, Andy Irvine in Jackson, WY, came to the fore. After Charlie & I put together a paper summing up what we felt the issues were, he went to work and drew up a first class response to the FS that it would seem could not be ignored. That document is available on the NAPgA website under 'Issues'.

At this point, we are engaged in a waiting game. The comment period was extended until the middle of November, which is notable, since it originally was to end November 1, and we will have to see what they come up with in the face of what we believe was an overwhelming response from goat packers everywhere.

Points to Ponder

Things to Keep in Mind

... while you ponder these issues...

1) When did the die-offs begin? For the answer to that one, I don't have a specific date. What I do know, is that before anyone had even thought of taking a goat into the wilderness, the die-offs were occurring. The reason that John Mionczynski began to use goats as pack animals, is because he was charged with researching the die-offs, and goats were the only pack animal that could get him and his equipment into the areas he needed to access. So, the die-offs were occurring at least 40 years ago. So restricting goats from the wilderness to purportedly 'protect' the BH sheep is fallacious in the extreme. It is simply an eye-wash solution to what for them is a really large problem that they do not have an answer to, and are under pressure to come up with something, even if it eventually will be proved to have no effect on the die-offs. What it does, is keep folks in my age group out of the Winds long enough so that by the time it becomes patently obvious that goats are NOT the problem, I will be too old to go there except in a wheel chair.

2) Another thing to consider, and that is, if these animals are so valuable, and apparently somewhat fragile, one would think that one of the approaches would be to do everything possible to improve the gene pool. Are they doing that? In point of fact, no! What they are still doing is issuing permits to hunters to take so many mountain sheep each year. Now, consider what sort of animals a hunter is looking for. Are they interested in any old male, no matter how scrawny or obviously unhealthy? Hardly. What they are after are the most healthy, largest animals, with the biggest horns, in other words the animals that would naturally serve as the best gene reservoir for the

herd, and the most likely animals to prevent the sensitivity to the pathogens that are currently a threat. Why? Reduced down to the lowest common denominator, it is about what it always is in these cases, money. The permits bring in a very large amount of cash, especially from out-of-state, or even out-of-country hunters. So, essentially, what they are doing is talking out of both sides of their mouth. They purport to solve their thorny die-off problem with a scientifically indefensible solution, but continue to take out the best, most healthy animals each year. You decide.

3) In the closure order, there is a sentence that states, "An increasing body of evidence demonstrates that bighorn sheep in close proximity to domestic sheep and goats are at risk for disease transmission."

Well, there is NO increasing body of evidence, and when asked to present it via a FOIA, they have not. What there is, is one report of one scientific study that indicated that there was indeed a threat from domestic sheep, but **NO threat from domestic goats**. That study was done in 1994 by William Foryet,

Effects Of Controlled Contact Exposure Between Healthy Bighorn Sheep And Llamas, Domestic Goats, Mountain Goats, Cattle, Domestic Sheep, or Mouflon Sheep

WILLIAM J. FOREYT, Department of Veterinary Microbiology and Pathology, Washington State University, -- Pullman, WA 99164.

The determination of this study was that 'Contact experiments between bighorn sheep, domestic goats, llamas, cattle, and mountain goats did not result in respiratory disease or death of any of the animals'.

4) Lastly, there have been two newspaper articles done recently, and reprinted in Goat Tracks, that indicate that as a stronger and more aggressive species, non-native Mountain Goats are presenting a threat to Big Horn sheep and in some cases forcing them from their native ranges.

So... it ain't over 'til it's over, and it is clear that this one isn't over yet!



George Bogdan, an Update

Some may already be aware, but on the evening of the 4th of October, George B. suffered a stroke which put him in the ICU of St. Al's in Nampa. It was a stroke of a kind that I was unaware could occur, in that, instead of an artery blockage, it involved hemorrhagic bleeding on the brain. Naturally, as a result of brain involvement, he has had issues with speech, and vision and coordination.

From St. Al's in Nampa, he was moved to St. Al's in Boise, so he could be seen by a neurologist.

From there he was moved to a Care Facility in Nampa, and on the 26th of October to the Elks Rehab facility in Boise, where he undoubtedly will remain in rehab for a number of weeks.

I dropped in on him on Sunday, and his speech, although slow, was easily recognizable. It is obvious that his thinking is clear and sometimes outpaces his ability to translate his thoughts into words. ;-)

Even if you are not close enough to come to see him, it would be wonderful if you could send him a card or a note.

Remember that George, as soon as he learned that John M. was using goats for a pack animal, immediately traveled to WY to see John, and basically is the one who brought goatpacking to Idaho. A lifetime member of NAPgA, he contributed much to goatpacking and we all reap the benefit.

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