



# Scientific Research Needed To Determine Grazing Impact on Bighorn Sheep

Bighorn sheep are mountain sheep found in North America. Due to transplanting bighorn sheep from existing populations to vacant areas, their population is currently near 70,000 in the U.S. and growing. For example, in 1996 the population of peninsular Bighorns hit a low of approximately 280 animals. Since then, numbers in that region have grown to about 600 animals.

## Current Policy Issues

For years, domestic sheep have pastured on public lands in close proximity to Bighorn sheep without any issue.

However, recently some U.S. Forest Service (USFS) officials and environmental groups are claiming that the presence of domestic sheep adjoining the habitat of Bighorn sheep is endangering the health of that species. These organizations blame decreases in Bighorn sheep populations on the reduction of natural food sources from livestock grazing and the spread of pneumonia from domestic livestock. However, there is little evidence to support these claims.

## The PLC Perspective

The Public Lands Council (PLC) encourages federal and state agencies to wait for better intelligence stemming from ongoing scientific research before making decisions about the Bighorn sheep.

Recently, scientists identified the main microbe responsible for disease in the species and there is still much to learn. It is still unknown why some herds are impacted while others thrive. Additionally, work on a vaccine is well underway.

We recommend that the federal government support the development of reasonable scientific studies conducted by independent scientists to determine if there is any actual influence of domestic sheep on the health of Bighorn sheep.

Further, the U.S. Forest Service must stop implementing a zero risk management regime for Bighorn Sheep and discontinue the practice of elevating wildlife over all other legally mandated multiple uses.

PLC will continue to pursue actions that will protect rancher's livestock grazing privileges as well as herd health for both species of sheep. We are interested in learning more from conclusive scientific evidence that can show the origins of potential disease spread among these animals.



**The greatest threat to Bighorn sheep populations continues to be a loss of habitat due to development and predators like mountain lions, wolves, bobcats, coyotes and golden eagles.**



For more information, visit: [www.publiclandscouncil.org](http://www.publiclandscouncil.org)

