

July 11, 2011

The Honorable Hal Rogers
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Norm Dicks
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

We ask for your support of the fiscal year 2012 Interior Appropriations as approved by the Subcommittee on July 7, particularly language sponsored by subcommittee chairman Mike Simpson regarding bighorn sheep and domestic sheep on federal lands.

Nearly one-fourth of the national sheep industry has a stake in the approval of this appropriations language. The \$628 million contribution to the American economy and over 7,200 jobs in America are threatened today and the Simpson language buys time for scientists, state and federal agencies, industry and bighorn sheep advocates to complete vaccine research and strategies for co existence of both sheep species.

In 2010, the U.S. Forest Service removed 13,000 sheep from grazing on the Payette National Forest in Idaho resulting in a dramatic reduction of sheep production on two of four ranches and putting a third ranch out of the business entirely. This decision was based on bighorn sheep, which are not on the threatened or endangered list and, in fact, are hunted annually in most of the West.

If such a bighorn habitat policy is extended to the entire forest system, fully 42 percent of U.S. Forest grazing allotments for domestic sheep would be impacted. This accounts for 23 percent of the entire domestic sheep industry. Loss of sheep grazing on forest lands would result in similar drastic reductions, as is the case in the Payette example, with ranches going out of business.

Lamb packing companies would not be able to supply grocery store accounts, wool mills would be short of supply to meet American military contracts and the local and national economy would be threatened with the loss of 7.2 thousand jobs.

Our organizations anticipate that we will be able to resolve the domestic sheep and bighorn sheep issues with new strategies including separation to manage the risk of disease and vaccination for disease prevention, which will enhance both species of sheep. However, if the several years provided by the Simpson language are not made available, the policy and lawsuit-driven decisions that removed domestic sheep grazing from federal lands will drive tens of thousands of breeding livestock out of the inventory and devastate lamb meat and wool companies and their employees.

We urge your support of the Simpson language and the domestic sheep industry.

American Sheep Industry Association

Public Lands Council