

## ***FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET***

**Meeting Date:** November 16, 2014

**Agenda Item:** Big Horn Sheep Transplant

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Endorsement to Proceed

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 minutes

**Background:** Transplanting bighorn sheep is an effective tool for augmenting existing populations, establishing new populations, and for reducing sheep numbers if necessary. Such projects require F&W Commission endorsement. At the October Commission meeting, FWP requested authorization from the Commission to reduce the big horn sheep population in HD 482 by trapping and relocating up to 50 sheep to South Dakota. Trapping is proposed because difficult access to some population portions can result in other portions receiving a disproportionate share of comparable ewe harvest. The FWP Commission approved reducing sheep in HD482 but did not approve an out-of-state transplant.

FWP has again queried regional staff re: availability of potential transplant or augmentation locations. Because of inadequate habitat, lack of public access for hunting, proximity to domestic sheep and/or goats that pose a disease threat, or concern over inadvertent disease transmission to healthy herds, no suitable transplant or augmentation sites are available at this time. As stated in the Big Horn Sheep Conservation Strategy (p. 42), “The protection of the integrity and health of existing populations and metapopulations has to be the first priority in management of bighorn sheep as opposed to creating new metapopulations.”

Bighorn sheep in HD 482 (Missouri Breaks south of Missouri River) are currently over population objective and at greater risk of disease (Population Objective = 325, July 2014 count = 436). Because of this need to reduce the population and because there are no acceptable in-state transplant sites confirmed at this time, FWP is again requesting authorization to transplant up to 50 sheep from HD 482 to South Dakota,. All animals would get a health assessment at capture. South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks will pay all expenses associated with capture, disease testing, and transport. FWP would also like to have the option of potentially capturing some sheep (<10) north of the river in HD 680 (functionally the same population) if necessary to complete the capture goal.

**Public Involvement Process & Results:** The issue was discussed extensively at the October 2014 Commission meeting, and will also be discussed at the November 2014 Commission work session. There is opportunity for public input at the November Commission meeting as well.

**Alternatives and Analysis:** Because there were no acceptable in-state transplant or augmentation sites found this year and because many of the HD 482 sheep are difficult for hunters to access, the only alternatives at this time are to do nothing and risk a disease outbreak, use agency staff to implement an agency control, or authorize movement of sheep to South Dakota.

**Agency Recommendation & Rationale:** FWP recommends transplanting sheep to South Dakota.

**Proposed Motion:** I move the F&W Commission endorse reducing sheep numbers in HD 482 by capturing and moving approximately 50 bighorn sheep out-of-state to South Dakota.