



WYOMING GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

5400 Bishop Blvd. Cheyenne, WY 82006

Phone: (307) 777-4600 Fax: (307) 777-4699

wgfd.wyo.gov

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Tim Woolley
Wildlife Management Coordinator
Wyoming Game and Fish Department
2820 State Hwy 120
Cody, WY 82414

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Bucky Hall
Chairman
Wyoming Public Lands Initiative
Park County, Wyoming
1002 Sheridan Ave.
Cody, WY 82414

Dear Mr. Hall:

In response to our conversation on the 20th October where you inquired about the status and effect of wilderness on bighorn sheep winter range in the High Lakes Wilderness Study Area (WSA) I have provided a brief summary. I reviewed the Forest Plan with Andy Pils, Wildlife Biologist for the Shoshone Forest, and we reviewed the crucial winter range protections, and forest maps. We found that, regardless of wilderness designation or not, bighorn sheep crucial winter range will receive the same protections from winter disturbance, similar to other big game species crucial winter ranges elsewhere on the Shoshone Forest. We also examined Forest Plan maps and found about half of all mapped big game (deer, elk, bighorn sheep) crucial winter ranges on the Shoshone Forest are not in wilderness areas. Wintering big game on forest is typically protected using timing stipulations that prevent human disturbance, usually from 15 November to 30 April as designated in the Forest Plan.

I checked into the background of crucial winter range in the High Lakes WSA, and it is part of a large overall winter range complex for the Hell Roaring Bighorn Herd that occupies habitats mostly in Montana. This designation has been documented over several years of winter flight observations by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks wildlife managers. Recently, Dr. Robert Garrott of Montana State University has been studying habitat use by bighorn sheep and mountain goats in the Greater Yellowstone Area and a subset of collared bighorns use some of

the crucial winter range in the High Lakes area. Hopefully this helps clarify the bighorn crucial winter range situation in the High Lakes area.

Respectively,

Tim Woolley
Wildlife Management Coordinator

TW/tw