

JACKSON HOLE



WILDLIFE FOUNDATION

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Bruce Pasfield
President

Leslie Steen
Vice President

Ross MacIntyre
Treasurer

Caroline Baker-Donza
Secretary

Daniel Bernstein

Mary Ellen Fausone

Mark Newcomb

Jennifer Newton

William Rudd

Gregg Servheen

Dawson Smith

Kathryn Turner

David Watson

Ben Wise

STAFF

Renee Seidler
Executive Director

Kate Gersh
Associate Director

Kyle Kissock
Communications Manager

Hilary Turner
Program Coordinator

June 20, 2022

Chip Jenkins
Superintendent
Grand Teton National Park &
John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway

Re: Bighorn Sheep Winter Habitat Protection Plan

Dear Chip, Grand Teton National Park Wildlife Managers, and Public Affairs Office,

We are writing to provide Scoping Comments on the Bighorn Sheep Winter Habitat Protection Plan. The Jackson Hole Wildlife Foundation advances wildlife conservation driven by science, collaboration, and a community of volunteers. We work closely with our agency partners who protect wildlife and the landscape of habitat needed for wildlife to thrive. We collect scientific data to inform management decisions, we remove obsolete fences and modify those still in use to improve landscape permeability for wildlife and we support actions to improve wildlife connectivity across roads.

We appreciate this opportunity to comment on Grand Teton National Park's (GRTE) plan to protect bighorn sheep on winter range and we support the collaborative process that the Teton Range Bighorn Sheep Working Group has engaged in. We understand that GRTE is trying to balance the needs of bighorn sheep with the wishes of winter backcountry recreation users in accordance with the National Park Service Organic Act of 1916. At the Jackson Hole Wildlife Foundation, we appreciate the desire to access relatively remote and wild winter recreation opportunities. However, we are gravely concerned about the long-term persistence of the GRTE bighorn sheep population, which has suffered severe declines due to human developments and infrastructure, nonnative species introductions, disease exposure from domestic species, and recreation.

Jackson Wyoming's economy relies on continued high levels of tourism by visitors from around the globe. Locally, we have long boasted about the full complement of native large ungulates in this ecosystem, which is currently represented in GRTE, including bighorn sheep. Bighorn sheep in GRTE continue to have a tenuously balanced persistence and science demonstrates that a multitude of human influences threaten their survival. If GRTE does not take critical actions now, we fear that bighorn sheep will no longer be part of GRTE and eventually this ecosystem. Such a loss will not only impact our economy based in tourism, but it will remove an important element of Jackson Hole's character, it will disrupt a healthy ecosystem balance and it will set a precedent that opens the door for elimination of other native species. We do

not want to be the generation that watches the loss or decline that leads to loss of bighorn sheep in GRTE and we hope that decisions are made by GRTE managers in alignment with this sense of duty to retain, as best we can, our native wildlife landscape.

We do not believe that one single action is sufficient to protect GRTE bighorn sheep and we support GRTE's proposed actions to "increase public outreach and education; [create] new signage and map products; enhance monitoring of both bighorn sheep populations and winter recreation use; [protect] new or expanded winter habitat areas for bighorn sheep; [designate] areas where recreational access is maintained; and designate travel routes through some bighorn sheep winter habitat zones." We support the management decisions of the Park, education of public, and enforcement of closures as needed to protect bighorn sheep.

We look forward to reviewing the draft Environmental Assessment of additional management strategies to protect bighorn sheep winter habitat within the Park.

Sincerely,

Renee Seidler

Renee Seidler

Executive Director

Jackson Hole Wildlife Foundation

renee@jhwildlife.org

307-739-0968

