

Wild Sheep Capture And Disease Testing Protocol

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Summary of discussion on Draft 2 of the wild sheep capture and disease testing protocol.

In 1999 at the 2nd North American Wild Sheep Conference (Thomas and Thomas, 200) a need was identified to develop guidelines for the capture and relocation of bighorn sheep. By May, 2001 draft 1 of this document was developed by members of the Northern Sheep and Goat Council and draft 2 was presented for editorial comments at the 13th biennial symposium in Rapid City. Copies of draft 2 were available at registration with a request that attendees review the document and be prepared to present editorial comments at the work session scheduled for April 25th.

Draft 2 was titled Wild Sheep Capture Protocol. Major sections in the draft were: Requirements for Importation of Bighorn Sheep from Canada to the U.S. Animal Health and Standard Testing. Capture and Handling Procedures. Capture Methods. Transport. Release. Personnel Assignments and Duties.

Many comments and ideas were provided during the work session, Most of these comments were directed toward very specific items presented in the document and most will be incorporated into the next draft. Following are the major topics discussed during the work session and decisions made.

In the title “protocol” infers that the methodology presented is the only appropriate way to capture and handle bighorn sheep. Consensus was reached that this document will be guidelines for the capture and handling of bighorn sheep, primarily for relocation. Therefore, the

title should be changed to “Guidelines for the capture and handling of wild sheep”, recognizing that every capture operation is different and there are no absolutes.

Animal Health and Standard Testing:

There was considerable discussion regarding standard treatments versus emergency treatments given during the handling process. It was decided that a sub-committee including Helen Schwantje, DVM, Emily Jenkins, DVM, and Susan Kutz, DVM would re-write portions of the animal health section, retaining a list of standard and emergency treatments for consideration but directing the user to select these treatments under direction of a veterinarian.

A paragraph on ectoparasites and their treatment is needed and will be developed and added.

It was recommended that a paragraph be developed regarding appropriate helicopter pursuit times, recognizing the impact of ambient temperature on stress.

Helicopter transport techniques were discussed, relating to slinging sheep by hobbles under the helicopter, versus putting them in specialized bags, versus transporting them inside the ship. All of these techniques have been used successfully but there is the social perception that slinging by hobbles looks bad, but for short distances does not pose a health risk. Transporting inside the helicopter poses a safety risk if an animal slips a restraint. The most important consideration is that animals be

transported sternum down whenever possible and that we identify the risks associated with the specific types of helicopter transport.

Capture Methods

Most of the discussion focused on ways to improve the presentation of the various methods. The section on chemical immobilization will require major revision and it was decided that the veterinarian sub-committee rewriting portions of the animal health section also would revise this section. Norman Swanson has an effective trap design for catching individual sheep and will provide the information for inclusion.

There was considerable discussion regarding the length of time it should take to clear captured animals from a drop net. An effort will be made to improve this topic.

When Draft 3 is completed it will be sent to the Desert Bighorn Council technical advisory committee for review. After receiving those comments the final document will be completed and made available.