

HOW WIDE IS THE SCOPE OF THE DESERT BIGHORN COUNCIL

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Abstract: How wide is the scope of the Desert Bighorn Council: It is within the scope of the Council not only to publish research findings but also to interpret the studies and research and take action based on the interrelations.

The Council cannot leave the action to others. To do so would constitute dereliction to its own objectives and purposes.

The scope of the Desert Bighorn Council must be determined by two things, (1) the objectives of the Council, and (2) by the nature of the organization which seeks to implement these objectives.

The first of these factors is quite simply stated by the Council, "to promote the advancement of knowledge concerning the Desert Bighorn Sheep and the long-range welfare of these animals."

The second, the nature of the organization, is also not difficult to define. It is composed in the majority of professional biologists who devote their efforts to the study of biology, and especially that of wildlife biology, if not entirely the biology of the desert sheep.

The greatest proportion is concerned with the study and management of wildlife, including that of the desert sheep. A few, like myself, are primarily concerned with research and the teaching of wildlife management in public institutions. A few are non-professional people who, nevertheless, are vitally interested in all phases of the stated objectives, and particularly the welfare of these animals.

All members regardless of their training and background have a special interest in wild desert sheep - otherwise they would not be here. It is important to keep this in mind for it has a most important bearing on what determines the scope of the Desert Bighorn Council, particularly as it relates to the second part of the objectives of the Council.

The purpose of the Council can be divided into two separate objectives, which while not unrelated are nevertheless quite distinct in the way in which they can be implemented and fulfilled.

The first can be implemented simply through diligent study and research and the publication of the results of these efforts. The Council is doing this to the fullest extent of its resources. It is gathering the information and publishing it in its transactions and making it available to all who are interested in it.

The scope of the first objective is not difficult to define -- anything and everything that relates either directly or indirectly to the sheep. It runs the endless gamut of subjects from the ancient to the modern history of the sheep and its past and present range, to the biology and all its complex ramifications related to the sheep internally or externally, individually or collectively and in its relationship to other animals.

The second part of the purpose of the Council "the promotion of the welfare of the animals" defines the scope of the Desert Bighorn Council in terms of the nature of the people who make up the Council, and their intent to achieve a goal which is not of purely academic interest, but may be actively and specifically subjective.

In this second part of the purpose of the Council we deal not with the gathering of information and its dissemination but in the translation of this information into decisions and actions that will have a definite effect on the welfare of the animals. This part of the purpose calls for action and the achievement of definitely stated results.

This part of the purpose of the Council is related to the first through the management of the animals. The Council's study will reveal what the management was in the past and what it is today. The professional makeup of the people who gather the information will make it possible for them to decide what management is needed now and in the future. The members of the Council must be able to, and should, examine critically their own management and administrative practices and policies and then make the necessary corrections without regard for politics or personal feelings.

Too often in the past, as well as the present, policies have been based on political expediency rather than the actual needs of the animal under consideration. Just one example with which all of us are well acquainted may be cited here. Consider the widely accepted "multiple use" practice policy which has been so widely heralded and accepted by government agencies and conservationists. It has been my experience and observation that in most instances this is only a politically expedient term for what is really a "multiple abuse and misuse practice policy." The Council must be able to carefully examine and review all such practices and policies and must be prepared to make recommendations for changes when and where needed. In fact it, the Council, is obligated to do this if it is to maintain and fulfill its objectives.

Although it is not difficult to define the objective and purpose of the Council, it must be kept in mind that the implementation of the objectives can be achieved only through those who are properly trained and fitted for this type of work, namely, professional biologists such as those who devote their entire energies to this end.

Long-range welfare through management can best be determined by those having intimate knowledge of the needs of the animals as they exist and as they should exist. Most important, the interpretation of this information and the implementation of the decisions can also best be made by those having the greatest knowledge and understanding of the needs of the sheep. The Council, through its members is best qualified to meet these requirements and standards.

What the needs of the animals are or will be can be determined only as the knowledge gathered becomes available to the Council. When such knowledge does become available to it, the Council will have to make a decision regarding the welfare needs and will have to act upon this decision.

It will be the objective and critical analysis by these people, passed on to the interested public officials, that will make possible the support of intelligent programs proposed by the professional biologist as well as the rejection of programs not based on sound biological knowledge by the uninformed or misinformed.

Just what is the scope of action that the Council can and must take to fulfill its professional objectives in its resolve to promote the long-range welfare of the desert sheep?

To develop long-range action, short-range action must also be taken. The Council cannot expect the future to take care of itself if it does not take care of the present. The present is the future of the past, and it is also the past of the future. What happens to the sheep today will determine whether the sheep have any future at all!

The Council should ask itself, "Can we influence the future by merely gathering and publishing information?" "Can this influence the critical and immediate present?" The answer is, "It MAY influence the present, and it MAY influence the future." However, that it MAY do so is not enough. It is the Council's responsibility to see to it that it DOES influence both the present and the future.

To be effective, the knowledge must be translated into decisive action, and this must be done when and where it is needed by those best qualified. The Council should, and must, see to it that this knowledge and its interpretation is carried out as quickly as possible, and must take whatever steps may be necessary to carry out their decisions.

Recently it has been suggested that the efforts of the Council be limited merely to the gathering and presentation of information and knowledge - nothing more - that the Council should at most make suggestions. This would, for all practical purposes, result merely in making suggestions to itself and would leave the decisions to others. Since the suggestions are those of the professional biologists, and since the implementation of these suggestions is to be left to "others", it must be assumed that the "others" are non-professional persons or groups involved in management.

The Council would be derelict to its own professional background and qualifications if it fails to act on its own decisions and if it fails to back its own convictions. To talk to oneself may be comforting, but it gets no work done!

The purpose of the Desert Bighorn Council can and must include action. If it does it will be just another group that is long on talk and short on action - waste of time and money. It is within the scope of the Council to take positive action to achieve its objectives. Only in this way can it achieve its objectives and only in this way can it justify its existence.

