



DESERT BIGHORN COUNCIL

Established to promote the advancement of knowledge concerning the Desert Bighorn Sheep and the long-range welfare of these animals.

26 April 1996

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

The Desert Bighorn Council was founded in 1957. It is comprised of wildlife biologists (many of whom are certified by The Wildlife Society), scientists, administrators, managers, and others interested in the welfare of desert bighorn sheep.

The Council has four primary objectives: 1. Provide for the exchange of information on the needs and management of the desert bighorn through annual meetings and published transactions; 2. Stimulate and coordinate studies in all phases of the life history, ecology, management and protection, recreational and economic values of desert bighorns; 3. Provide a clearing-house of information among all agencies, organizations, and individuals professionally engaged in work on the desert bighorn; 4. Function in a professional advisory capacity, where appropriate, on local, national, and international questions involving management and protection of the desert bighorn.

The Technical Staff of the Desert Bighorn Council was recently requested to review and comment upon the propagation of desert bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*) by interspecies embryo transfer using domestic ewes (*Ovis aries*) proposed by Texas A & M University.

We offer the following points:

** There is the possibility that these crossbreeds would pass domestic livestock diseases to native populations. Wild sheep have been, and continue to be, decimated by diseases introduced by domestic animals. The wildlife literature fully supports this. The loss of 200+ Rocky Mountain bighorns in 1995-1996, along the Snake River in Idaho, Washington, and Oregon, following contact with a single feral Nubian goat, is a classic example.

** This proposal confuses the issue for acquisition of limited financial resources to restore native species to their historic, or suitable vacant, habitats.

** There are negative genetic implications in this process: it would be possible to end up with an animal that is habituated to humans and has no protective wildness; there is the strong possibility that bighorns would be selected on the basis of horn size, rather than traits that increase their fitness under natural conditions.

** In our opinion, the resulting animal would be a domestic animal, and therefore would not qualify for Boone and Crockett scoring competition.

Based on these points, the Technical Staff is strongly opposed to the concept. Bighorn populations in North America are up as a result of active trapping/transplanting, and reintroduction into historic or suitable vacant habitats of native animals. There is no need for such a program.

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Chairman, Technical Staff