



Minister's Wildlife Advisory Council

"Wildlife and their habitats thrive, are resilient, and support and enrich the lives of all British Columbians"

April 2, 2024

Minister Nathan Cullen, Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

Dear Minister Cullen,

Re: Transmission of Disease to Wild Sheep

Your Wildlife Advisory Council Co-Chair Nancy Wilkin recently attended and spoke to the Wild Sheep Symposium organised by the Wild Sheep Society of B.C., the Syilx Okanagan Nation and Regional Provincial biologists. This included attendance from many Indigenous representatives from B.C. and the United States.

In Council's letter of August 2023, we identified the severity of risk to wild sheep from transmission of *mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* (MOVI) from domestic sheep. We recommended strengthening the commitments and policy and regulation reforms that address disease risks and achieve effective physical separation of domestic and wild sheep (recommendation #26, attached)

At the Wild Sheep Symposium, we were pleased to learn that the Okanagan Nation Alliance has passed a Tribal Resolution regarding Syilx Domestic Sheep & Goat Health Protocol for the Protection of Wild Sheep. The Yukon Government has passed a Sheep Control Order (2020), requiring owners of domestic sheep and goats to comply with several conditions that are aimed at reducing contact with wild sheep and mountain goats. Copies of these are attached.

A key takeaway from this Symposium was that, despite efforts from B.C. staff working together, there is still a lack of policy, regulation or legislation in British Columbia to protect wild sheep. While we understand that your Ministry is looking at addressing this in part through the Wildlife Act Review, it will take several years to get this legislation in place.

A further challenge is that the *Wildlife Act* will not supersede the *Right to Farm Act*. This means it is not currently possible to remove the risk from wild sheep habitat.

This disease issue is transboundary. For example, herds in Osoyoos area are in contact with herds south of the border, where they also lack any policy or legislation.

Symposium participants were clear that immediate action is required. We would like to repeat the need for urgent action to protect wild sheep, and suggest the following priority actions:

1. Amend to the *Right to Farm Act* to remove the risk from wild sheep habitat.
2. Issue a control order similar to the Yukon Animal Health Order.

3. Amplify the resources for voluntary programs, MOVI testing, and communications with domestic sheep farmers.
4. Initiate communication with bordering governments, at the executive level, to open up cross-border dialogue about aligning regulations.
5. Adopt actions and best practices being undertaken in other jurisdictions to achieve sheep separation (including Alberta, Yukon, NWT, and the U.S.).

We appreciate your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Simoogit Hleek (Chief Harry Nyce Sr.) and Nancy Wilkin

Co-Chairs, Minister's Wildlife Advisory Council

Attachments:

Sylix Domestic Sheep & Goat Health Protocol for the Protection of Wild Sheep
Yukon Sheep Control Order (and resolution from Yukon Renewable Resources Council)
MWAC recommendation #26 (re wild sheep)

Cc: Lori Halls, Deputy Minister, Water, Land and Resource Stewardship
Minister's Wildlife Advisory Council
First Nations – B.C. Wildlife and Habitat Conservation Forum
Provincial Hunting and Trapping Advisory Team
David Muter, ADM, Land Use Planning and Cumulative Effects, WLRS
Jennifer Psyllakis, A/ADM, Resource Stewardship Division, WLRS
Logan Wenham, Executive Director, Wildlife, WLRS
Michael Burwash, Associate Director Wildlife, Fish & Wildlife Branch
Jen Walker, Director, Strategic Initiatives and Partnerships, WLRS
Avril Nagel, Manager, Together for Wildlife Implementation
Kyle Stelter, Wild Sheep Society of BC
Okanagan Nation Alliance



OKANAGAN NATION ALLIANCE

#101 – 3535 Old Okanagan Hwy, Westbank, BC V4T 3L7

Phone: (250) 707-0095 Fax (250) 707-0166 www.syilx.org

TRIBAL COUNCIL RESOLUTION

2023/24 No. 508
Natural Resources

SYILX DOMESTIC SHEEP & GOAT HEALTH PROTOCOL FOR THE PROTECTION OF WILD SHEEP

June 11, 2023

WHEREAS: throughout the Syilx Nation, both domestic sheep and domestic goats exist adjacent to where populations of wild sheep (bighorn sheep) currently or can potentially reside.

WHEREAS: when domestic sheep and goats come into contact with wild populations of sheep and mountain goats, the wild populations can suffer illness and/or death associated with transferable diseases spread from domestic sheep and goats;

WHEREAS: wild sheep herds across British Columbia, Alberta, and the western United States have been documented to have suffered catastrophic all-age-class die-offs and long-term chronic effects from respiratory infections that domestic sheep and goats carry, including recent die-off within Syilx Territory;

WHEREAS: the introduction of *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* bacterium, *Mannheimia* species bacteria, or any other bacteria, viruses, parasites, and/or microorganisms that may or potentially be transferred between domestic livestock/pets in Syilx Territory poses a significant threat to Syilx Rights and Responsibilities;

WHEREAS: research is ongoing, but it is widely recognized that there are no current effective treatments or preventative measures other than physical separation from domestic sheep and goats;

WHEREAS: overarching provincial legislation that limits or excludes domestic sheep and goat farms from specific high-risk areas while still supporting a viable domestic sheep/goat industry in British Columbia must be enacted and is consistent with actions taken by other jurisdictions.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT: The Okanagan Nation Alliance Chiefs Executive Council asks that the British Columbia government develop, in partnership with the ONA and Member communities, overarching legislation (e.g. Animal Health Act – Control Order) that will provide for effective means of separation between wild and domestic sheep and goats to ensure healthy wild sheep populations and the sustainability of sustenance, societal and ceremonial opportunities wild sheep provide, for generations to come.



SYLX DOMESTIC SHEEP & GOAT HEALTH PROTOCOL FOR THE PROTECTION OF WILD SHEEP



Sil-teekin yilmix^{wm} Greg Gabriel
Penticton Indian Band



kal'Nupaqn yilmix^{wm} Keith Crow
Lower Similkameen Indian Band



ki law na yilmix^{wm} Clarence Louie
Osoyoos Indian Band

yilmix^{wm} Robert Louie
Westbank First Nation

yilmix^{wm} Byron Louis
Okanagan Indian Band

Quorum 3



**RENEWABLE RESOURCES COUNCIL - ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
KWANLIN DUN CULTRE CENTRE - 2015**

Resolution #2015-03

Title: Wild/Domestic Sheep and Goats: Legislated Separation

WHEREAS;

- A. Wild sheep in North America and domestic sheep are closely related genetically but they have vastly different reactions to respiratory diseases.
- B. Wild sheep herds across BC, Alberta, and the western United States have suffered catastrophic die-offs and long-term chronic effects from respiratory infections that domestic sheep and goats carry.
- C. Research is ongoing but it is widely recognized that there are no current effective treatments or preventative measures other than physical separation from domestic sheep and goats.
- D. Farm-by-farm mitigation efforts (e.g., fencing projects on private land) without overarching legislation is expensive and prone to abuse by landowners.
- E. Options are available through the Yukon Animal Health Act to enable overarching Territorial legislation that limits or excludes domestic sheep and goat farms from specific high risk areas while still supporting a viable domestic sheep/goat industry in the Yukon.

Sheep Control Order

What is a control order?

Governments may use control orders to respond to issues of health and safety. The Government of Yukon is issuing this Control Order pursuant to the Animal Health Act to balance the responsible development of a domestic sheep and goat industry with protecting the health of wild thinhorn sheep and mountain goats.

Why is a Control Order necessary to protect wild sheep and goat health?

Wild thinhorn sheep and mountain goats are at risk of developing respiratory disease if they come into contact with domestic sheep and domestic goats. The disease can spread rapidly within wild sheep and goat populations, causing high numbers of deaths and significantly reducing the size and health of populations.

When is this happening?

The Control Order comes into effect January 1, 2020. Owners are encouraged to contact the Animal Health Unit and Agriculture Branch for more information and to access government support to comply with the order.

What does this mean for you, if you keep sheep or goats?

If you want to raise sheep and goats in Yukon, you must be in compliance with the Control Order by January 1, 2020.

How to comply with the order:

Before the Control Order comes into effect, sheep and goat owners must ensure their animals are being kept below 1,000 meters in elevation. In addition, all owners of sheep or goats, whether they own a single animal or operate a farm with many animals, must comply with the following conditions:

- all sheep and goats are maintained in an enclosure approved by an inspector before January 1, 2020 and annually thereafter;
- all sheep and goats have some form of permanent identification, e.g., ear tags;
- records are maintained for each individual sheep and goat;
- all sheep and goats are tested annually for pathogens of concern;
- any sheep or goats that escape from an enclosure, or while being transported, must be reported immediately to the chief veterinary officer; and



Contact

For general questions about the Control Order and testing for respiratory pathogens:

Animal Health Unit
Government of Yukon
867-667-5600 or
1-800-661-0408, ext. 5600

P.O. Box 2703 (V-7)
Whitehorse, YT
Y1A 2C6

animalhealth@gov.yk.ca

For questions about fencing specifications and support available:

Agriculture Branch
Government of Yukon
867-667-5838 or
1-800-661-0408, ext. 5838

agriculture@gov.yk.ca

MWAC Recommendation #26: Wild Sheep in B.C.

The spread of disease from domestic to wild sheep continues to be a crucial conservation issue facing wild sheep populations in B.C. Council strongly supports strengthening the commitments and policy and regulation reforms that address disease risks and achieve effective physical separation of domestic and wild sheep.

- 1. We recognize the use of existing regulatory protections under the Forest and Range Protection Act, and in particular the Government Actions Regulation. However, these protections have not resulted in enough action to ensure the sustainability of wild sheep in B.C., due to ongoing disease transmission. We understand a policy team has been re-energized but Council recommends that you to seek a stronger level of involvement and commitment from your colleague, Minister Pam Alexis, Minister of Agriculture and Food. This cross-ministry effort could improve outcomes for wild sheep and bring greater certainty to those who husband domestic animals.*