

My name is Robert Fithian, I live in Lower Tonsina Alaska, I am a conservationist, hunter and professional guide.

As always, it is an honor to testify here before you within the most democratic process of wildlife conservation that exists in the world today.

My comments today will be directed towards the Dall's sheep concerns you have before you.

Regardless of the continuous atmosphere surrounding this agenda topic, it is pleasing to see that the issues you have before you are leading to the higher level of respect that our wild sheep deserve.

New and developing data science and public interest in our wild sheep is long overdue and a welcome phenomena for those of us who care so much about these animals.

I have never found any level of respect for the best interest of whole with the sheep allocation proposals which have continued to impact this venue that primarily

endeavor to benefit the proposer themselves, prey on the ways of life of others and have little consideration for prudent stewardship of the resource they want unencumbered access to.

They are not. and have not. been healthy proposals for the whole and have been very selfish in nature.

It is not hard to understand your concern of taking no action on them for so many years each of which

we were believing that the DNR GCP would be created which would effectively address them.

To take affirmative action on them even now, from my perspective would not be in the best interest of the whole.

3. My recommendation regarding those types of proposals at this point in time is that you

A. continue to encourage and seek science and inventory information.

B. work to encourage sound habitat and climatic analysis, carrying capacities, and healthy wild sheep populations in keeping with our sustained yield, abundance and maximum benefit mandates.

C. Utilize fairness and respect for all hunters within your allocation, means and methods, season dates and bag limits decisions.

D. If at all possible within a conservation basis

stay implementation of actions eliminating opportunity with as strong as leverage possible to

encourage the few legislatures in this state who have not supported the Guide Concession Program to do so.

Implementation of this program as many of us well know, will relieve much of the strain you're experiencing with this topic and will continue to experience with additional species.

E. And finally, put a five year moratorium on any any new proposals that seek to divide sheep hunters in this state.

My testimonies and encouragement for this Board have always been for what I have felt were in the best interest of the whole for Alaska's wildlife populations and all people who enjoy or depend upon the benefit of prudent stewardship of them,

whether they be people who just enjoy seeing healthy wildlife populations and knowing they are being taken care of respectfully or those of us conservationist/hunters who know that hunting goes hand in hand with the great North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.

You have the responsibility and the ability to steer Alaska's wildlife conservation and hunting heritage into the future and I believe that

for this heritage to be viable and sustainable,

the foundation has to be built within the state founding fathers constitutional mandates

with the additional side boards of

Resource First and Fair Chase

Resource First is simple,

we do not hunt or book hunters unless we have harvestable surpluses of healthy wildlife populations.

Dr. Brinkmans work showed the dissatisfaction sheep hunters have with aircraft impacting their sheep hunting experience.

Taking this vein a little further, the truth of it is that only six percent of America's human population hunts and about the same percentage of Americans oppose hunting

with the remaining 88 percent who hinge the balance of steering the pro or anti percentage

With the rate of Ecotourism and wildlands being visited by non-hunting public throughout many of our sheep ranges growing,

we have to be fully respectful and cognizant of the delicate balance we have.

In today's world here in Alaska, any person who uses an airplane to search over habitats which may or probably have other hunters or non-hunting public within them to find an animal to kill is working against the best interest of the whole and against the principles of fair chase.

There is a long history of airplane use by hunters in Alaska and it is an important manner with which to continue to support hunting with.

It was not surprising to see Dr. Brinkmans survey results and then see your proposal addressing airplane use, and then see that the majority of the ACs did not support it. ???

Do we think this concern is just going to go away? Are we naive enough to believe that it will not grow?

There are numbers of resident hunters and guides who have historically explained to me that it takes between 40 and 200 hours of flying to produce a 40 inch ram or a 70 inch moose.

This type of impact on the country, the wildlife, other hunters, especially those who cannot afford to own or operate an airplane is just not right.

Any professional guide should know the habitats and the wildlife populations within them well enough to know how many hunters they can book to have good harvest success

without having to jump into an airplane or multiples of airplanes to go and search over habitats other hunters or tourists are enjoying to find an animal to kill.

As well, any resident hunter should be able to recognize that an every year harvest of a once in a lifetime ram is not respectful of the whole.

resident hunters, guides or transporters all have the ability to fly habitats before the sheep season to discern population densities that support a quality hunt.

My vote is to support your proposal to limit the use of aircraft,

encourage hunters to respect the wildlife and others in the field and to take it even a bit further and

incorporate the same standard that the BGCSB adopted some years ago that prohibits the use of an aircraft to spot an specific animal with the intent to harvest that animal.

O yes, you will hear the cry and theory of how unenforceable it is and how a flight may be misconstrued to be seen as a flight to search for a specific animal etc. etc.

Or that if you are going to restrict airplane use to kill an animal with you need to also limit horses, boats, atvs, etc.

This is not sound reasoning.

But truly, anyone who steps into a plane and uses it to locate an animal to kill regardless of the impact it is causing to the wildlife, the wilderness experience of others or to other hunters in General,

knows what those impacts are and if they don't. They should.

They also know what the more respectful use of aircraft is to the whole when they are used to support the logistical aspect of a hunt rather than used as a tool of harvest.

I believe that it goes along ways towards preserving Alaska's wildlife conservation and hunting heritage to take the high road here and to show the average Alaskan hunter and hunters from around the world that we do respect them and the resources and the quality of the experience they are dependent upon or hoping to enjoy.

Regarding fluctuating populations of wild sheep, we have been in a warming trend from 6 - 10 thousand years.

Yes we are experiencing loss of remnant ice pack in many of our sheep ranges but this trend has been occurring for a long long time and there were many hundreds of thousands of acres of what is now prime sheep habitat that has previously been covered with ice.

Severe winters, related forage and predator stress impact our wild sheep, especially those which carry diseases.

Do not forget what our wild sheep populations were before the ballot initiatives of 80s and 90s stripped ADF&G of their effective ability to control our wolf populations and have wreaked a continuing conservation tragedy upon the heartbeats of healthy wildlife populations.

Compare those overall healthy wildlife populations with where we are at today.

My experience with fluctuating populations of wild sheep

of which I am certain of within three significant regions,

is that the numbers of wolf tracks in the sheep habitats have more to do with high or low density sheep equilibriums than any other factor in this state.

It is important that we respect our wolves but as we know and respect, they have to be incorporated into our sustained yield mandate.

I bring this forward to you and the staff who are here with us with the hope that it will help you understand, that our wild sheep science has to be garnered over a long period of time to help us clearly understand the long term approach to maintaining sustainable and healthy populations.

It is also with some considerable hope Mr. Chairman and Board members, that these comments will help you in your decision making.

A respectful thank you to each of you for what you do for Alaska.

WHHCC

ten year conservation plan with 58 action items 38 of which require significant work on state/federal/tribal cooperation.

which is the elephant in that room as well as this one.

NPS Regulation letter

BLM new planning process

USF&W Visions

Next Meeting June 8 and 9

ANILCA Failings review Cooperation Constitutional Mandates

What the failure has cost healthy wildlife, cooperation, respects between hunters, fighting over what is left of diminishing populations, federal subsistence board

End of Fithian 2-15-15 comments.