Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation GIA Committee,

The Whiskey Mountain Bighorn Sheep Technical Committee (WMBSTC) is an inter-agency group comprised of representatives from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), USDA Forest Service (USDA FS), and Wyoming Game & Fish Department (WGFD). The group was chartered in 1969 with the intent of collectively managing lands owned by each of the agencies near Whiskey Mountain for the benefit of bighorn sheep. Lands near Whiskey Mountain owned by the three agencies provide extremely important bighorn sheep habitat. The vast majority of bighorn sheep summer habitat in the northern Wind River Range is populated by sheep that winter on and around Whiskey Mountain. All habitat occupied by bighorn sheep in the northern Wind River Range is classified as core native bighorn sheep habitat by the State of Wyoming. The State places the utmost importance on core native bighorn sheep habitat and is committed to minimizing any actions that will negatively impact bighorn sheep populations in these areas. In the WMBSTC charter the BLM and USDA FS also committed to manage their lands in the Whiskey Mountain area for the maximum benefit of bighorn sheep. Over the past four decades, representatives of all three agencies have been heavily involved in bighorn sheep management issues pertinent throughout the west including disease monitoring, bighorn sheep transplants, habitat enhancements, research, and harvest management. Members of the WMBSTC have seen bighorn sheep flourish in the northern Wind River Mountain range and have also witnessed catastrophic disease outbreaks as well as extended, chronic disease problems in the Whiskey Mountain Bighorn Sheep Herd.

Increasing conifer cover has negatively impacted bighorn sheep across the West through not only direct habitat loss but indirect habitat loss by creating barriers that prohibit sheep movement as they migrate from summer to winter range, excluding them from historical wintering areas. Using GPS data from collared ewes in the Whiskey Mountain Bighorn Sheep Herd managers were able to identify areas of conifer encroachment that create a barrier for bighorn sheep movements. Furthermore, these areas have been narrowed down to “pinch points” where removal of conifers will allow unrestricted movement for bighorn sheep as the migrate back and forth from summer and winter ranges and possibly open up areas of historical winter range that are no longer used by bighorn sheep. Members of this committee have reviewed these areas which occur on BLM, WGFD, and USFS lands outside of wilderness and unanimously agree that this project will benefit the Whiskey Mountain Bighorn Sheep Herd. Thank you for your continued support to improve wild sheep habitat around the state.

Respectfully,

Zach Gregory

Chair, WMBSTC