March 2023

To the Offices of: Alberta Minister of Environment and Protected Areas, Minister of Forestry,
Tourism and Parks
aep.minister@gov.ab.ca, fpt.minister@gov.ab.ca

Re: Corrupt Bighorn sheep management

Dear Minister Savage,

I am disgusted and horrified that Alberta Environment and Protected Areas (AEP) managers decided to euthanize several bighorn sheep rams from the Sheep River Population without first consulting experts or considering how this action would impact the long-term health and social well-being of the population.

Between early February and early March of 2023, five bighorn sheep died. The cause of death was assumed to be bacterial pneumonia, although three showed evidence of cougar activity. These five rams were part of a larger male group numbering 16 individuals. On March 13th, parks officials made the hasty and uninformed decision to shoot the remaining rams. Managers claimed this was a necessary measure to prevent the disease from spreading to a nearby (~18km away) female herd.

Had these managers consulted bighorn sheep experts, they would have been informed of a few points. 1) Male and female sheep remain segregated outside of the mating season (November and December) and therefore transmission between the two herds is highly unlikely this time of year; 2) although this disease has a high mortality rate amongst wild sheep, it is not a death sentence – the sheep who survive bring immunity into the population; 3) there are alternative ways of preventing transmission, including but not limited to testing, quarantining and treating sick individuals; and 4) removal of several rams would have dire genetic and social consequences.

Alberta sheep managers thrive on secrecy, ignorance and an unwillingness to collaborate. My trust in provincial wildlife biologists is broken. These rams were treated like expendable resources, they deserved better from those charged with protecting them.

I urge you to re-evaluate this province's approach to wildlife management. First, expert consultation needs to be mandated, as should consultation with First Nations who are guardians of these lands. Second, instead of protecting the careers of mediocre, complacent, uninformed managers, restructure these departments to prioritize safeguarding Alberta's bighorn sheep. I hope to one day be able to trust provincial wildlife managers to act in the interest of wildlife. Put aside political one-upmanship and concern for industry. Ministers, do your jobs; act to protect Alberta's environment as is your responsibility.

Sincerely,
[Insert name, title(s)
Affiliations

The views expressed in this letter do not necessarily represent those of my employer.

March 2023

Contact Information]

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