

*** Montana ***
WILD SHEEP
FOUNDATION
KEEPING SHEEP ON THE MOUNTAIN

WildSheep

Summer 2020 | Volume 28, Issue 2



*Call for Board of
Director Nominations*

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All contributed material will be published at the discretion of the Editorial Board of the Montana Wild Sheep Foundation (MTWSF). The Editorial Board consists of the editor of the newsletter, the executive director of the chapter, and the president of the chapter.

Cover photo credit - A Rocky Boy Indian Reservation ewe on her way to Antelope Island, Utah through the KUIU Conservation Direct program. Photo by Brian Solan.

CONNECT with Montana WSF

Visit us online at www.montanawsf.org!

While there, visit the **Photo Gallery** page. If you would like to have a picture posted, email (photos@montanawsf.org) your name, the photo (jpeg format preferred) along with a brief one to two sentence description of the hunt.



The Montana Wild Sheep Foundation will give a reward of up to \$1000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of cases involving the illegal taking of bighorn sheep in the State of Montana. If you have information of any illegal act, contact 1-800-TIP-MONT (1-800-847-6668).

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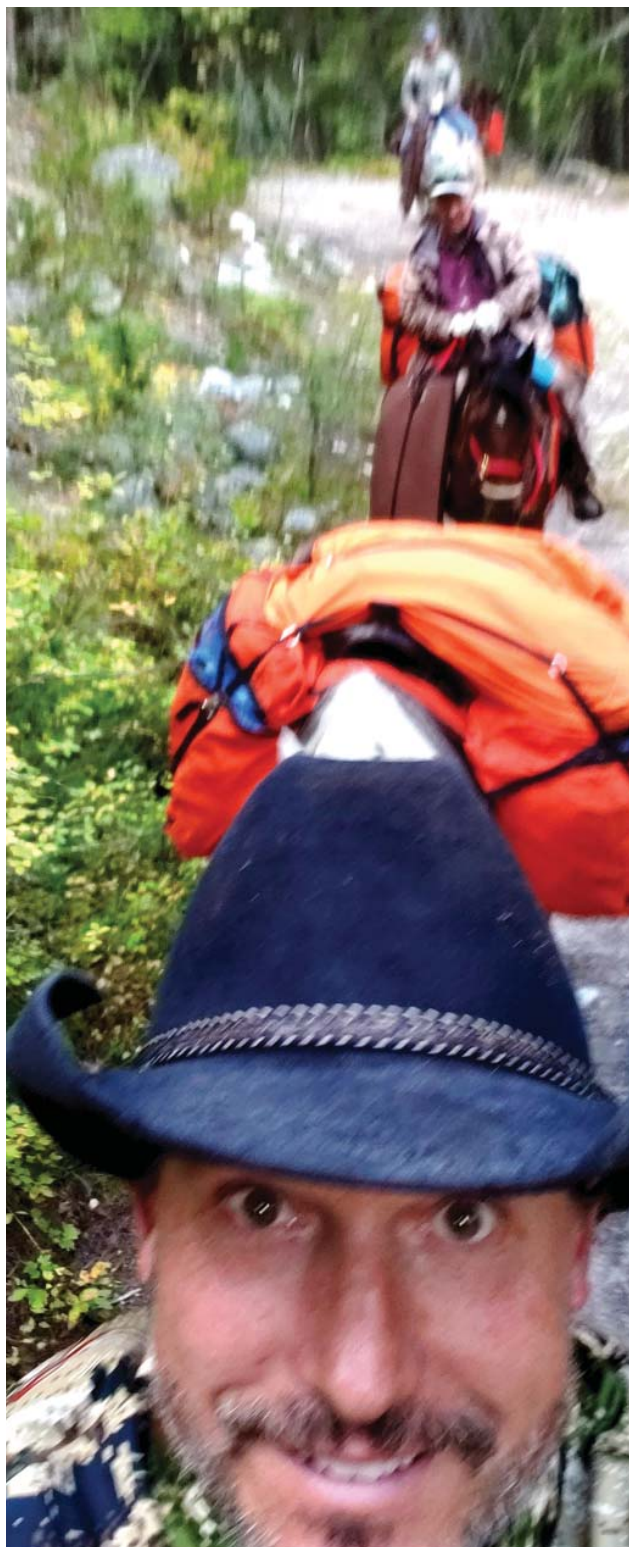
President's Message

I always mull over what I will say in my president's message as I want to make each article genuine and somewhat interesting. This time I have some exciting news to report! I will have an opportunity to get kicked out of the WSF <1 Club because I finally drew a Montana sheep tag in area 270 in the southern end of the Bitterroot valley where I live. It is an area I know quite well and I've already been able to do some scouting. Montana Wild Sheep Foundation (MTWSF) has donated funds to habitat enhancement in the area so it will be nice to put boots on the ground to check the progress while I'm looking for my chance of a lifetime ram! I am thankful and humbled for this opportunity and I look forward to writing a story about the experience.

This spring has certainly brought some interesting times to our world and we've all had to change our routines to accommodate those changes. I am thankful MTWSF was able to conduct our annual expo and fundraiser in February for there are many chapters that had to cancel or postpone their events. We are certainly fortunate to live in Montana where the impacts of the pandemic were minimized by our natural "social distancing" in our beautiful state. Our fundraiser was indeed a great success. We once again broke records for attendance, gross and net fundraising. On Saturday evening at the banquet it was particularly exciting to be able to announce the new opportunity for an experimental wild sheep transplant into the Bridger Mountains. Since the announcement at our fundraiser FWP, MTWSF, and MTWGA have been working to move the Bridger transplant opportunity forward. We hope to see the transplant come to fruition by 2021. Our board has also decided to adopt an online membership management platform called NEON. This program will help us to better serve our members and will allow us to increase efficiency. We'll be working on the program and will keep you updated as to progress. As always, thanks to all of you who support MTWSF. I wish you all health and prosperity.

Shane Clouse

Montana Wild Sheep Foundation President
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Hunter Landowner Relations

Story by and reprint courtesy of Joe Perry

I am a farmer/rancher and landowner. I am also a hunter, angler, and recreationist. Each of these terms describe me but I am the sum total of all. I have never charged anyone a dime for access to my property. I take on as many hunters as I can but sometimes have to limit the numbers so as not to be overrun. After 40 years on the land, I have retired. Over that time, I have watched the “landscape” deteriorate from “hunt where you want but be respectful” to one of tightly controlled – or no- access. I believe that there is more to be said, and said candidly from the perspectives of both landowners and hunters/recreationists.

The root of the issue seems to be from a growing disconnect between rural landowners and urban recreationists. We're all busy. We are much more mobile and don't have the same level and type of contact with close friends and neighbors as we did in the past. I remember fondly all the times our family went to stay the weekend with our country cousins. Brandings, livestock and chores, machinery and driving, real fresh eggs, milk and cream and maybe hand-cranked ice cream Great wholesome food from gardens and barnyards. We kids kept busy all weekend while our folks visited and played cards. We developed an understanding of each other's lives and real, close relationships came from that.

The level and kinds of interaction today has declined due to many factors. Livestock handling and machinery have become increasingly high tech and expensive. Kids aren't welcome to play here. Farms having combinations of geese, turkeys, chickens, milk cows, beef, sheep, pigs, and cattle are rare.

In addition, there are so many additional “extra-curricular” activities and sports that we didn't have. Parents pass each other coming and going, often dividing kid's interests and commitments between them. Social time is at these events. Golf, tennis, soccer, swimming, etc. have been added to football basketball and track. Computer games and fast-thumbing on smart phones occupies the attention of so many folks.

Yet, a major touchstone of Montana's heritage is shared resources such as wildlife. Montanans love to hunt and fish and recreate. It is family time. Wild game is a regular feature on the menus of many homes. People move here from out of state and work for less money than they

could get in big cities for those reasons. Many of us who were born here made conscious decisions to stay here even if it meant making less money. The quality- and quantity of life- was worth the trade.

The personal relationship building of the past seems to receive less emphasis. Liability issues and OSHA make free help from outside folks much riskier and far less desirable. Relationships are much harder to build at a distance. Getting Western Montana townsfolk and Eastern Montana producers together happens on fewer occasions.

Something that many people who are not rural producers don't understand is that private Property Rights are paramount to landowners. Management decisions and the responsibility for the results of those decisions made on private property largely rest with the owners. Their livelihoods survive or not, based on these decisions. There too, are those landowners who consider the public lands they lease for farming or grazing to be essentially their own personal property. Many of these folks fail to recognize that they are only paying leases for grazing and/or farming. Those leases do not allow limiting access to the public. Also, as a result, many lessees are inclined to deny public access across their private property to access these public lands.

One thing that has struck me is that there seems to be little focus on what I call Public Property Rights. There are those who deny that the public owns all wildlife, and that each and every one of us shares in the ownership of our public lands. For some Americans and Montanans, public lands are the only ownership they will ever have. As a result, they love their public lands, and with good reason.

Why are landowners often at odds with recreationists? I see many contributing factors, attributed to both

“sides.” Some recreationists show what I perceive is an arrogance about private lands. Folks forget that the landowner owes them nothing; trespass or access is a privilege not a right. Garbage dumping, littering, thoughtless tearing up of roads, willful unethical behavior, ignoring game laws, property damage and vandalism, unauthorized driving – the list goes on and on. When these activities regularly occur, it’s hard for a landowner to want to be generous. Additionally, many recreationists are not good about turning in gal activities. They assume it’s not their problem or simply don’t want to be bothered. We need to step up and be accountable. “If you see something, say something” is the right way to help and show appreciation for the privileges you are accorded on private land.

The story of the hunter or angler encountering a landowner who treats them unfairly and poorly is as old as the hills. Upon asking permission to hunt on a rancher’s land, are lectured about how bad all recreationists are, getting a solid chewing for other’s inexcusable indiscretions. The recreationist gets an earful about how tough the landowner has it, and is personally blamed for the state’s wildlife agency’s missteps or contentious policies. Add to that the increasing lack of public access to private lands where there is so much pent up demand that landowners get inundated. Very early morning visits and calls and those late at nite to landowners who do welcome the public become overwhelming, coupled with long hunting seasons. As a result, good, reliable folks are denied access without having a chance to prove themselves.

Along with these issues, add private land outfitters to the mix. They are profit driven, and frankly, offer an alternative to landowners in the form of good payments and responsibility to handle all recreation on the place. Since outfitters usually demand exclusive access for their clients, the public is completely left out of the equation. Some outfitters claim to “manage” these places to maximize bucks and bulls but in reality is simply restricting access and as a result putting more and more wild critters on the ground. “Managing” for trophy wildlife by restricting access can be done by anyone; it is not wildlife management. Managing overall game populations and their distribution across the landscape is the charge of FWP in Montana. But there seems to be no responsibility taken by these outfitters to “manage” (i.e.- encourage and engage in the hunting of) all critters in the herd, particularly those pesky, “valueless” antlerless critters who are protected by limited access and hunting during the regular seasons, Wildlife numbers expand,

often exponentially, with the result of over-objective herds, moving onto the neighboring properties (often ones that do allow public hunting), reeking havoc on someone else’s property. Late season, antlerless-only seasons then are demanded to solve the “problem” without affecting outfitted, antlered buck or bull clientele. There seems to be no consideration to run seasons concurrently to avoid brucellosis, chronic wasting disease, and other maladies that result from unnatural concentrations of wildlife. Concurrent seasons could disperse animals on the landscape while at the same time, offer public hunters a chance to harvest on private and public lands accessible to them. Shoulder seasons (hunting season that would begin and/or end after the 5-week General Rifle Season) were recently pushed as a means to deal with these problems. But they have performance criteria that require buy-in by landowners and outfitters, which has been pretty limited except with a few notable exceptions. The problems created for the private landowners through exclusive hunting on their properties keeps going to the legislature for resolution. The Fish and Wildlife Commission is the place where such decisions need to be made. They have the time, access to resources, information and expertise to consider the best way to move. Making wildlife management policy decisions in the partisan arena only serves to slap band aids on problems and utilizes the most convenient and politically expedient solutions. We’ve seen the can kicked down the road too many times. Nonetheless, I expect to see the outfitters to continue to try to legislate their way out of their responsibility for the problem.

Farmers and ranchers were the original conservationists. Landowners are a fiercely independent lot and often that tenacity has paid off. Farmers and ranchers are coming off the best financial decade ever and they deserve it. There have been some real tough times for producers with little or no return on their investments. Often, government help was the only way we survived. Yes, government help with crop price deficiencies and disaster aid kept many farmers and ranchers on the land. Subsidized crop insurance makes risk management affordable to producers. In addition, the services of government agencies like the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resource Conservation Service and Dept. Natural Resources and Conservation provide help with land management decisions, loans, and improvements like water and grazing systems, fencing, trees, CRP, wildlife improvements, and many others. But are these entitlements? Maybe to some, but they are paid for by all the tax paying residents of our country, “The Public.”

Hunter Landowner Relations *continued from page 5*

Leases on state and federal public lands for farming and grazing are a huge, necessary part of many producers' operations. Generally, these leases are made far below "market"- what would be charged by a private landowner. In the case of federal leases, they are so low as to be ridiculous. Yet, these allowances have kept many an outfit in Montana in operation. Once again, who pays for the costs of these agencies who often manage at a big loss? "The Public."

My intention is not to single out anyone. Keeping agricultural operations viable not only contributes to the economy but more often than not, has been of great benefit to wildlife, fisheries and public recreation in general. But I think it's important to point to the fact there is legitimate and crucial financial interaction and relationship between producers and the public. Yes, those same town folks who you go to church with, basketball games, funerals, weddings, and benefits.

The same folks who own the hotels, restaurants, gas stations, stores, bars, etc. The families your kids go to school with. Property taxes paid by landowners are a major component of the sustenance of our towns and counties. We need to recognize that it is a two-way street.

I believe it's high time to realize we are all in this together and no one is getting out alive. Landowners, producers, and their city cousins all contribute to something called community, this thing we call "The Last Best Place". FWP manages wildlife in trust for all of us. We all have legitimate and equal stakes in how it is managed and maintained into the future. Landowners as well as recreationists must realize we all rely upon one another, and, in fact, need each other. Tolerance and cooperation are the main components of our collective successful future. We all need to take responsibility for our actions! 🍷

Photo Op

**After 46 years applying the Lord blessed me with a Montana sheep tag in 2019!
181 2/8 B&C 38 2/8" curl X 16 3/8" bases
Stephanie Altimus and Larry L. Altimus Montana Life Members**





Call for Board of Director Nominations

This is the official call for nominations to the Montana Wild Sheep Foundation Board of Directors for 2020. Nominations for the Board of Directors are due by **July 15, 2020**. Current Directors - Levi Bowler, Justin Spring and Ray Vinkey terms are up. Each Director position is a (3) year term. The bylaws require that Board of Director nominees must be members of the chapter in good standing for a minimum of (1) year. If any member has the desire to serve on the Board and be part of this growing organization, please submit a letter/ email of interest to our Executive Director – Brian Solan, bsolan.bs@gmail.com



MONTANA
WILD SHEEP
FOUNDATION

Membership Management Summer 2020

Growth causes discomfort. The Montana Wild Sheep Foundation is living that statement currently. With all of the growth and expansion of the chapter of the past few years, we have come to realize that we need to manage our membership services differently moving forward. Many of you have signed up for membership in the past couple years and did not receive welcome letters, updates etc. We acknowledge that deficiency and we are working to correct it. We have partnered with NEON, a non-profit membership management service that is web based to help us organize and streamline the effort.

Over the summer of 2020 we will be transitioning our membership services to the NEON system which should allow us to respond quicker, send out renewals in a timely manner and provide a better overall service and experience for our membership. I want you all to know that we are adapting and scaling our chapter services to meet the growth we have seen and this is a step in the right direction.

Expect to see more updates electronically through this new system, as that is the basis for modern communications. If you have an email update, address or phone number change – please reach out to me at bsolan.bs@gmail.com and I can get it updated so you don't miss any communications.

Onward and upward! Thanks for your patience.

Brian Solan



Science Corner

In 2015, Matt Rippentrop of South Dakota contacted MTWSF regarding funding assistance for a (3) year study with South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks in Custer State Park. The project was entitled “Determining the role of chronic shedders in respiratory disease persistence, annual lamb recruitment, and transmission in bighorn sheep.”



Matt Rippentrop with his Missouri River Breaks Ram

For those of you who don't know Matt, he drew a Missouri River Breaks tag in 2010 and killed a 203-6/8" giant (see attached photo). Matt is a Life Member of Montana WSF and has been instrumental in working on bighorn sheep conservation in South Dakota and Montana.

Matt brought this study project to MTWSF for funding in 2015 and the chapter approved funding through our Grant in Aid program. The project has reached its conclusion and the full study is posted on our website un-

der PROJECTS (https://montanawsf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/SD-Disease-Study-Garwood-et-al.-Final_2020.pdf). The project hypothesis was that by removing chronic carriers of MOvi, they could reduce the persistence of disease in the herd. This was a beneficial project for the overall understanding of bighorn sheep diseases as well as potential management of herds that have struggled with mortality and lamb recruitment after a disease related die off. Included are some of the tables from the study and an abstract (conclusion):

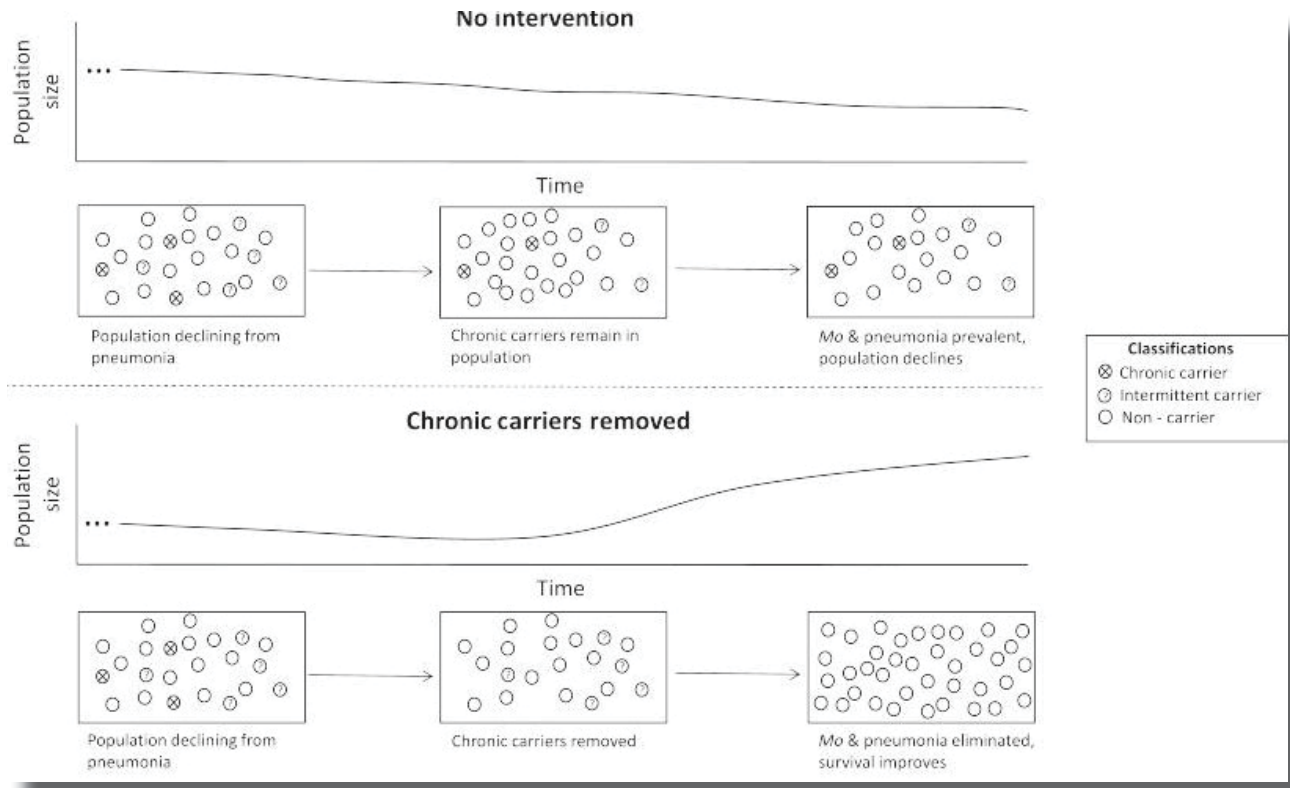


FIGURE 1: A conceptual depiction of our experiment, where chronic carriers of *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* are identified in two populations, but only removed in one. Bighorn sheep can be classified as chronic carriers, intermittent carriers, and noncarriers; only chronic carriers need to be removed under our operating hypothesis. If chronic carriers are removed, the population should rebound as lamb recruitment improves. Without intervention, the population will continue to decline indefinitely due to low lamb recruitment.

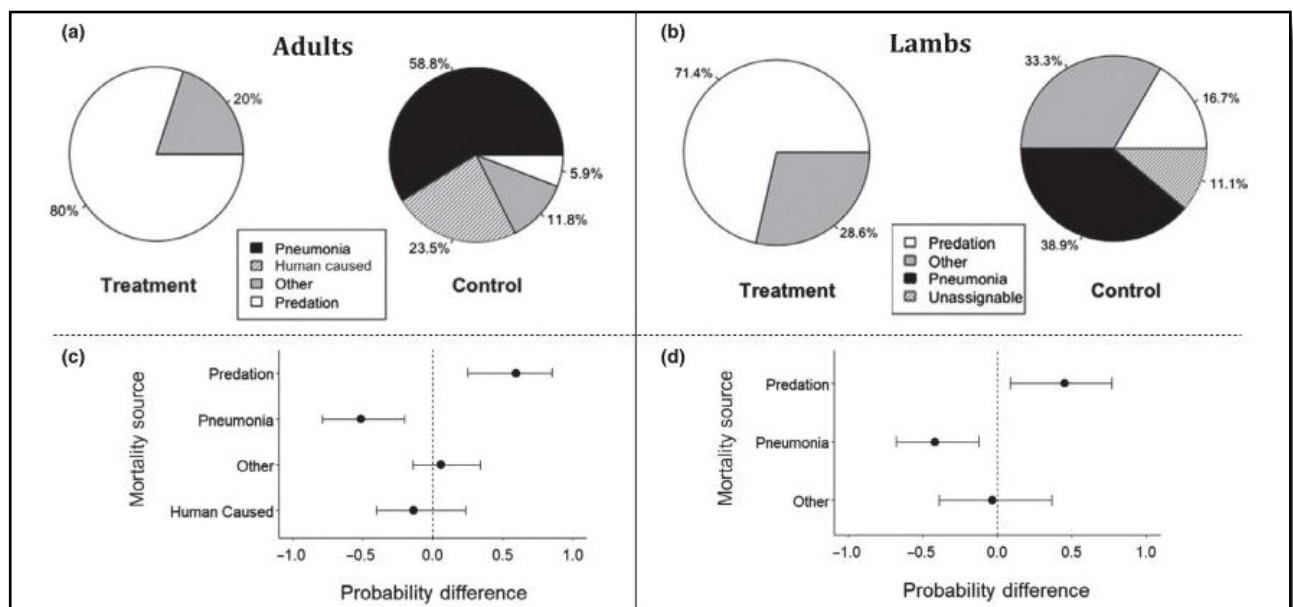


FIGURE 2: A comparison of mortality sources for bighorn sheep between herds after chronic carrier removal in the treatment population on 13 March 2016. Panels [a] and [b] show cause-specific mortality sources based on the most likely cause of death assigned in the field for adult and lambs, respectively. Panels [c] and [d] show the estimated differences in cause-specific probabilities between the populations based on the survival analysis for adults and lambs, respectively. Estimates for the treatment population are given relative to the control population, which is signified by the dotted line at 0. Credible intervals are 95%

1. Chronic pathogen carriage is one mechanism that allows diseases to persist in populations. We hypothesized that persistent or recurrent pneumonia in bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*) populations may be caused by chronic carriers of *Mycoplasma ovi-pneumoniae* (Mo). Our experimental approach allowed us to address a conservation need while investigating the role of chronic carriage in disease persistence.
2. We tested our hypothesis in two bighorn sheep populations in South Dakota, USA. We identified and removed Mo chronic carriers from the Custer State Park (treatment) population. Simultaneously, we identified carriers but did not remove them from the Rapid City population (control). We predicted removal would result in decreased pneumonia, mortality, and Mo prevalence. Both population ranges had similar habitat and predator communities but were sufficiently isolated to preclude intermixing.
3. We classified chronic carriers as adults that consistently tested positive for Mo carriage over a 20-month sampling period ($n = 2$ in the treatment population; $n = 2$ in control population).
4. We failed to detect Mo or pneumonia in the treatment population after chronic carrier removal, while both remained in the control. Mortality hazard for lambs was reduced by 72% in the treatment population relative to the control (CI = 36%, 91%). There was also a 41% reduction in adult mortality hazard attributable to the treatment, although this was not statistically significant (CI = 82% reduction, 34% increase).
5. Synthesis and Applications: These results support the hypothesis that Mo is a primary causative agent of persistent or recurrent respiratory disease in bighorn sheep populations and can be maintained by a few chronic carriers. Our findings provide direction for future research and management actions aimed at controlling pneumonia in wild sheep and may apply to other diseases. 🍷

Memories 2020 MTWSF Annual Banquet





Annual Banquet & Life Member Raffle Winner Josh Burden



Stories with STEALTHY HUNTER – Ryan Lampers



Montana WSF Board of Directors



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