

THE WILD SHEEP IN THE FAMILY

CONSERVATION
POLICY COLUMN



Gray N. Thornton
B&C PROFESSIONAL MEMBER
WSF PRESIDENT & CEO

My hope for this infamous year and the turnaround ahead is in the family bonds of wildlife conservation. Our relationships will save us just as they have made us what we are. The beginnings of the Wild Sheep Foundation (WSF) and all wildlife missions are shared in the founding of the Boone and Crockett Club. I think, too, of the many relationships we have with our volunteers, donors, sponsors, exhibitors, manufacturers, and agencies who are all with us in our common cause.

The power of family drives our work to put conservation on the ground and advocate for the policies that speed our progress and hold our gains. The policy work can be more challenging to family commitments because of the difficulties—views differ, costs and benefits fall unequally—and we weigh the differences between family, friends, and frenemies.

I say this as a preamble to my update on WSF's agenda because I am struck with an appreciation for what B&C has done to establish this family from the beginning that still holds strong today.

Like many others in our family, WSF began with the vision of many of the same people, all inspired by the B&C founders to specialize in the recovery of North American big game. In the 100 years

leading up to the 1960s, big-horn sheep populations and their ranges had plummeted. In 1974, a group of wild sheep enthusiasts—B&C members among them—gathered to do something about it in Missoula, Montana, ironically, now the home of B&C. They formed the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep (FNAWS), with a mission to manage and restore wild sheep populations across the continent. In 2007, FNAWS formally changed its name to the Wild Sheep Foundation to reflect its expanded vision for wild mountain ungulates and their habitats worldwide.

Today, we deeply appreciate B&C's leadership 20 years ago in establishing a “kitchen table” for family deliberations among the 50 national organizations that coordinate through the American Wildlife Conservation Partners (AWCP). By hosting the creation of AWCP, Boone and Crockett activated our fundamental principle of family: being there for each other and pushing forward together.

Our particular need for the family is to help with our most challenging problem. Wild sheep are vulnerable to pneumonia caused by bacteria carried by domestic sheep. This has forced us into an ongoing “tough-love” discussion with other multiple-use groups and elected officials

who champion this core principle; in particular, ranchers.

We have committed to a neighbor-to-neighbor approach, respectful of the challenges to all concerned. As a result, we have secured long-running direction from Congress to collaborate with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), state agencies, ranchers, and other stakeholders to find a means of “distancing” wild and domestic sheep on public lands. We bring our own money to the problem. Over the years, we have spent millions on negotiated agreements to retire high-risk grazing allotments.

We cannot buy out the entire domestic sheep industry, so our challenge today is navigating the case-by-case renewals of permits and revisions of plans on national forests and BLM districts. As stated in the latest Wildlife for the 21st Century agenda from AWCP, our objective is to integrate new solutions with federal land grazing

programs. With the USFS, this is a matter of engaging in numerous separate policies and proposals across the regions. The BLM has taken a more focused approach by issuing agency-wide guidance in their manual and proposing this year a revision of their grazing regulations.

Over the last several years, we have faced another “tough-love” situation. The United States Air Force, which helps defend our country and trains for this mission on a military land withdrawal from a wild sheep refuge in Nevada, wants more access and control over this refuge. While we are proud that sheep conservation can also support national security, we insist that this be done in keeping with refuge purposes.

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WILD SHEEP Foundation

The Desert National Wildlife Refuge (DNWR), the largest refuge outside Alaska, was established in the 1930s for the conservation of desert bighorns and has been shared with the Air Force for their training from its beginning. Recent actions and proposals from the Air Force have threatened this shared-use arrangement. Relationships have been poor or nonexistent with us, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Nevada Department of Wildlife.

The issue has come to a head this year, and as of this writing, is headed in a better direction. Congress has rejected an Air Force proposal to transfer much of DNWR to their control. This has prompted the Air Force to engage with us. Safari Club International, Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and B&C have all lent a hand. A large coalition of environmental organizations and tribes are also working on the issue.

Our objective is for this year's National Defense Authorization Act to establish terms for a productive collaboration among all concerned. With that, we can ensure management and hunting access to DNWR and consider fairly the legitimate needs of the Air Force to improve the value of the refuge to their training.

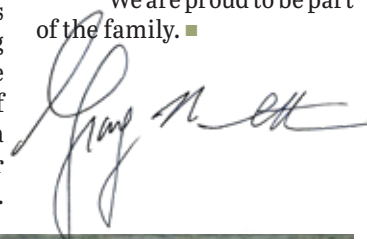
The WSF story began in tragedy and hope. Hope is taking over.

In over 40 years since its formation, WSF has raised and put on the mountain more than \$115 million, resulting in an incredible wildlife recovery success story. By translocating wild sheep, establishing an endowed research program at Washington State University, building and maintaining hundreds of water developments, teaching adults and children, and advocating sound conservation policy, we have seen the numbers of Rocky Mountain, California and desert bighorn sheep soar threefold in North America.

From around 25,000 in the 1950s to 85,000 today, some states have seen 200 percent increases in wild sheep populations. The state of Oregon alone has watched its wild sheep climb an astounding 2,000 percent.

Today over 12,000 WSF chapter and affiliate members are working to combat pneumonia in the wild herds, encourage new studies and management plans for Dall's and Stone's sheep, and advocate for the long-term health and sustainability of wild sheep herds and the wild places they roam across the globe.

We are proud to be part of the family. ■



VISION

To be the best managed, most respected and most influential conservation organization in the world, for the benefit of wild sheep worldwide.

PURPOSE

To Put and Keep Wild Sheep on the Mountain®

MISSION

We enhance wild sheep populations, promote scientific wildlife management, educate the public and youth on sustainable use and the conservation benefits of hunting while promoting the interests of the hunter.

VALUES

Honesty
Teamwork
Accountability
Integrity
Positive Attitude
Stewardship
Respect for others
Respect for wildlife
Loyalty
Hunting Ethics

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For more information about Wild Sheep Foundation, please visit wildsheepfoundation.org

