



Up Front

Stakeholder assault.
By C.J. Hadley

William L. Rice is a former deputy chief of the Forest Service ("The Potrillos," page 48). "For a long time," Rice says, "those of us who have been in the trenches trying to maintain some sanity of managing federal lands have known that something drastic needs to be done to reel in the blitzkrieg of stakeholder assault taking place in the West. If there is need for special management of federal lands, local input is not only needed, it is incumbent on Congress to allow that process to occur. Local customs, local history, and local economies, current and future, must first and foremost be considered."

Nevada rancher Fred Fulstone has been running sheep west of Bridgeport, Calif., for close to 75 years. He has several summer Forest Service allotments in the Sierra Nevada. The country is big, high and healthy. His livestock have helped keep brush and trees down, creeks open and running, and grasses and forbs fertilized. His sheep-herders have put out lightning fires and helped confused recreationists, and their big white dogs guard the sheep, protecting them from predators.

Back in 1986, Fulstone gave his blessing to California Fish & Game (F&G) and the Forest Service (FS) to plant Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep (SNBS) south of his range. No bighorn had ever been seen in the area; most thought the winters too harsh for their survival. Grazing greatly improves fall/winter range for SNBS due to regrowth of highly nutritious green forage. Fulstone blessed the trial on the promise that his domestic sheep operation would never be harmed. Forest Service and Fish & Game leaders put that promise in writing.

Most employees of federal land-management agencies are hardworking and honorable, but when bighorn sheep were added to the endangered species list in 2000, agency honor disappeared. For more than five years, ideologues in the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) and California Fish & Game have used everything in their power to take Fred Fulstone's legal grazing permits and his livelihood. They are using bighorn sheep as a surrogate to

take him off his range and recently contracted with a Yale graduate student to prepare computer models to show where bighorn sheep were likely to roam. The answer came, "On six grazing permits in the Sierra Nevada, including five of Fred Fulstone's."

The official letter—addressed to Edward C. Monnig, forest supervisor, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest; Jim Upchurch, Inyo National Forest; and Steve Nelson, BLM-Bishop—was signed by Robert D. Williams, FWS Nevada boss, and Diane K. Noda, field supervisor, Ventura FWS office. The letter includes: "New information has become available relative to the level of risk associated with the grazing of domestic sheep on federal allotments in close proximity to the federally listed endangered Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep."

The "new" information was written by the agencies with no scientific backup. The letter recommends that domestic sheep grazing allotments that pose "a high risk of disease transmission to bighorn sheep" be closed. It



It was obvious Bob Williams did not want another meeting with Fred Fulstone. From left: Ed Monnig, FS; Randy Sharp, FS; and Williams, FWS.

also mentions, "modeling of areas that bighorn sheep are likely to use," places where "Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep may enter," and talks about "predicted areas of potential contact." [Italics added.] It's extremely vague.

Keep in mind that bighorn have never been seen on Fulstone's allotments and that 50 bighorns planted by F&G several years ago are all presumed dead due to starvation or predation. Unfortunately, as more sheep die at taxpayer expense, the more the agencies are paid to plant more animals in places they can't survive.

At a meeting on April 7 in Reno, Nev., Ed Monnig told Fulstone and his entourage (daughter, grandson, lawyer, university supporters): "We intend to listen." Bob Williams said: "We are here to answer questions," but when asked several, he responded, "It's all in the report," which was not available to affected parties, including Fulstone's lawyer.

Ed Monnig is under a lot of pressure and FWS and F&G ammunition is weak. "I have to make a decision based on the Endangered Species Act," Monnig says. "I can't take into account economic consequences."

But he should pay attention to facts, best-

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INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER: *Tim Findley*

ASSOCIATE EDITOR: *Steve Thompson*

SCIENCE EDITOR: *Chance Gowan*

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OFFICE MANAGER: *Joyce Smith*

CUSTOMER SERVICE: *775-884-2200*

ADVERTISING/PROMOTION: *Joey Hall*

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PHOTOGRAPHERS: *Linda Dufurrena (NV/OR), Larry Turner (OR)*; ENVIRO EDITORS: *Carolyn Dufurrena (NV), Barney Nelson (TX)*; GOLDEN STATESMAN: *Tom Wahlen (CA)*; WORKING FOR THE BRAND: *J. Zane Walley (NM)*; SOUTHWEST CONNECTION: *Kathy McCraine (AZ)*; WEBLOOKER: *Carrie Depaoli (NV)*; COWBOY ADVISORS: *Don Coops (CA), Ed Depaoli (NV), Carolyn Carey (CA, HI)*.

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775-884-2200

FAX: 775-884-2213

1-800-RANGE-4-U (credit card orders)

PUBLISHER/EDITOR:

<cj@rangemagazine.com>

ADVERTISING: ads@rangemagazine.com

PROMOS: promo@rangemagazine.com

BUSINESS: admin@rangemagazine.com

AGENTS: rangeagents@yahoo.com

FREELANCERS: st@rangemagazine.com

<www.rangemagazine.com>

<cowboystwest.com>

<rangefire.us>

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UP FRONT

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available science, history, and peer-reviewed analysis—which he has yet to receive. What is perfectly clear is that the minimum risk the wildlife agencies are willing to take is “absolutely no use” by domestic livestock.

Under range conditions, transfer of respiratory disease from domestic to wild sheep has never been documented and is unlikely, according to reputable veterinarians. But Williams still insists: “We can’t allow contact. What we came out with is relative probability of bighorn sheep use in areas of analysis. We understand it’s a model and you can’t always model everything...” But, he adds, “It is the service’s recommendation that domestic sheep grazing...not be permitted for the 2009 and subsequent grazing seasons.”

The agencies are supposed to use best-available science. Their arguments and analyses have already been turned down by their own resource assessment teams. Dr. Nancy East, U.C. Davis vet, has been on the FWS/SNBS science advisory team for many years. She told the feds, “We vets know a lot about pathogens and epidemiology. There are many papers on this. You are offering a rough estimate on open country. There were many basic assumptions made that are not within accepted parameters and the bias appears to influence the model outcome. That speaks to the basic conclusions of the model. This is not reality.”

Dr. Annette Rink, veterinarian and lab director for Nevada Department of Agriculture, added: “There has never been any recorded disease in that area. There is no proof that will happen. You say you looked at all the data. No, you haven’t. Even the authors of the original publication do not agree with how the agency interpreted their original work. It was obviously misquoted. It’s in-pucky, out-pucky. You cannot defend any of the premises that this model is based on.”

Intense grazing management for domestic sheep, through recommended mitigation practices, has been successful in minimizing contact. Dr. East asks: “Why do we need to make a draconian change?”

Fulstone is frustrated. He should be angry. “We have 10 men watching this country, 24/7. They have never seen a bighorn. How can you determine risk if you have never had a mix? The agencies have circumstantial evidence and no facts. None of this stuff has been validated. I am for bighorn. I don’t want to kill them, but why use the ESA to push us off our range?”

It’s Ed Monnig’s turn to make a decision and Fulstone’s future depends on it. Will he agree with Rice or with Williams? ■