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Comments: The 455,000-acre High Uintas Wilderness is a massive mountain range-the highest in Utah- and was named for the Uintah Indians, early relatives of the modern Ute Tribe. The High Uintas contain the largest contiguous alpine tundra in the central Rockies, with lower slopes blanketed by forests of lodgepole pine, spruce, and sub-alpine fir.

The High Uintas should be a haven for native Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep. Instead, the High Uintas has more livestock grazing than any other Wilderness in the country.

Years of extensive grazing by domestic sheep has displaced native wildlife, led to persecution of predators like bears, coyotes, and mountain lions, marred the landscape, compromised water quality, and negatively impacted visitors seeking an authentic Wilderness experience.

Over the past few decades, bighorn from a nearby reintroduction effort have found their way into the High Uintas Wilderness and a nascent herd has reestablished on its eastern end where domestic sheep grazing ended years ago. But the future of the bighorn herd and its ability to recolonize its native range across the High Uintas is in doubt because much of the rest of the bighorn range is filled with domestic sheep that carry disease fatal to the bighorns.

The U.S. Forest Service has released a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) evaluating the future of 10 domestic sheep allotments. The SDEIS considers two alternatives: maintain the status quo and no grazing. The choice is simple. Grazing should end in the High Uintas Wilderness in order to protect native wildlife, restore the degraded watershed, and enhance opportunities for an increasingly rare Wilderness experience.

To mitigate impacts to the few affected ranchers, the Forest Service should retire grazing permits that are voluntarily waived back to the agency, giving the ranchers the opportunity to seek compensation from conservation interests before the allotments are permanently closed.??

The High Uintas Wilderness should be dedicated to its native wildlife. Grazing by domestic sheep and cows compromises the High Uintas watersheds, fouls the lakes and streams, and severely degrades the experience of visitors seeking a Wilderness experience.

Domestic sheep grazing is incompatible with recovering native bighorn sheep population. If domestic sheep grazing remains in the High Uintas, the native bighorn sheep are likely doomed.

If domestic livestock grazing is allowed (even though it shouldn't be), killing native predators to protect sheep & cows should be prohibited. The SDEIS should also track and disclose how many native predators-such as black bears, mountain lions, or coyotes-are killed in the High Uintas Wilderness to protect domestic sheep. The SDEIS should also study and report the effects that continued sheep grazing has on the potential for recovering native wildlife such as wolves and grizzly bears.

Transitioning to the the no grazing option is best for the wildlife, watersheds, recreation, and the Wilderness.

Thank you for defending the High Uintas Wilderness from domestic sheep!

Unfortunately, the agency's proposed action is to continue the status quo, filling the High Uintas with more than 10,000 domestic sheep and their lambs for two months every summer to the exclusion of native wildlife.

The SDEIS fails to disclose how many native predators-such as black bears, mountain lions, or coyotes-are killed in the High Uintas Wilderness to protect domestic sheep, nor the effects continued sheep grazing has on the potential for recovering native wildlife such as wolves and grizzly bears.

Rather than remove the threat of domestic sheep and allowing the bighorn population and other wildlife populations to expand, the Forest Service proposal essentially endorses the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources' (UDWR) approach to maintain bighorn numbers by killing native predators, especially mountain lions, and augmenting the bighorn population with translocations and by constantly modifying the habitat.

Please raise your voice to protect native wildlife and the fragile, high elevation alpine basins of the High Uintas Wilderness from domestic sheep grazing! Comments are being accepted through Monday, August 28. ??

Speak in your own words and share any personal knowledge you have about the High Uintas Wilderness, but please consider making the following points in your comments: