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Comments: I am writing as your constituent who strongly supports full protection for our Wilderness Areas throughout our country from invasion and destruction due to animal herds or human destructive practices .

The 455,000-acre High Uintas Wilderness forms the core of the Uinta Mountains in northeastern Utah. This massive mountain range, which is the highest in Utah, was named for the Uintah Indians, who are 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 subalpine fir.

The High Uintas, with its massive alpine terrain separated by 13,000-foot peaks, should be a haven for native Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep except for one simple reason, which is that this location, 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 solitude and an authentic Wilderness experience.

Over the past couple of decades, bighorns from a nearby reintroduction effort have found their way into the High Uintas Wilderness and a nascent herd is becoming reestablished on its eastern end where domestic sheep grazing ended years ago. However, 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, including one which has not been grazed in more than 40 years, covering about 144,000 acres in the High Uintas Wilderness. Unfortunately, the agency's proposed action is to continue destruction of this wilderness area by 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, including 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.

The SDEIS considers two alternatives which include to maintain the status quo and no grazing. At this time, the choice is simple because the decision should end grazing 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 decide to 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.

I strongly urge the Forest Service to understand that the High Uintas Wilderness should be dedicated to its native endangered wildlife. To the extent livestock grazing is allowed, it should be limited so as to not compete with wildlife for food or space or to spread disease to native species.

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. Grazing should be curtailed to meet the public's interest in protecting the High Uintas for wildlife and an authentic Wilderness experience for visitors.

It is vital to remember that any grazing of domestic sheep is incompatible with recovering native bighorn sheep population. I am very concerned because if domestic sheep grazing remains in the High Uintas, the ability for the native, endangered bighorn sheep to survive is very much doomed.

Killing native predators to protect sheep or cows should be prohibited if domestic livestock grazing is allowed

to continue. 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. The SDEIS also fails to disclose the effects continued sheep grazing has on the potential for recovering native wildlife including wolves and grizzly bears.

I strongly urge the Forest Service to please mandate and support the no grazing option because this option is the best choice to ensure the ability for native wildlife, watersheds, recreation, and the Wilderness at Uintas to survive. At the very least, the Forest Service should close any sheep grazing allotment if the permit is waived back to the Forest Service.?

At this time, I thank you for your consideration of my letter and my recommendations. To ensure that there is full protection of this Wilderness Area, I strongly urge the Forest Service to please mandate in all federal directives for the Uintas Wilderness and all the endangered native wildlife who depend upon the ability to access the Uintas Wilderness for their ability to survive that it is crucial to fully guard and protect this fragile, high elevation alpine basins of the High Uintas Wilderness from all domestic sheep grazing!

Sincerely,

Jean Marie Naples, MD-Ph.D