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First name: William

Last name: Hendrix

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Domestic Sheep and Goats Grazing DEIS-NOA Comments, Okanogan -Wenatchee National Forest.

July 26, 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to express my support for the continued practice of domestic sheep grazing within our nation's forests, even in areas where bighorn sheep populations are present. Managed responsibly, this traditional use can coexist with wildlife conservation, uphold rural livelihoods, and contribute to the health of our public lands. I have known and worked with S. Martinez Livestock for many years (1970's). They are leaders in environmental stewardship, environmental education, sustainable silvicultural grazing, range management and fire fuel load mitigation. I've seen nothing but positive effects and management with positive environmental impacts originating from the three generations of the Martinez family I've been blessed to know.

In the environmental arena it's hard to defend against fiction if the fiction is being constantly repeated with a high level of volume. This is what is happening in the case of theory domestic sheep are getting bighorn sheep sick. I was a graduate student, studying immunology at WSU in the 1970's. Because of my experience of being raised in the sheep industry and my "grunt" status as a graduate student I was involved in veterinary school/wildlife/animal science studies pertaining to diseases passing from domestic sheep to bighorn sheep. After grad school as a professor with WSU, I kept track of these continued studies. To my knowledge, immunological crossovers can't be attributed to domestic sheep in the last 100 years. In recent cases, culturing of the sick bighorn sheep showed the domestic sheep had absolutely nothing to do with the problem.

Domestic sheep were on the same range as bighorn sheep, without incident, for more than 6 decades prior to the introduction of Rocky Mountain Elk into eastern Washington starting at Naches, Washington in March of 1913. As the RM elk herd has expanded health issues with the bighorn sheep have also increased. Pointing the finger at domestic sheep for bighorn illnesses is factually one of those environmental arena fictions. The pneumonia that can cause damage in bighorn populations is of greater prevalence in other wildlife species than in domestic sheep populations while out on range.

The Martinez's are willing partners in conservation and have demonstrated a commitment to protecting wildlife values while maintaining their operation. Continued dialogue between land managers, wildlife agencies, researchers, and grazing permittees is essential. We need a cooperative approach to ensure management decisions are grounded in current factual science and practical realities.

I support the continued occurrence of domestic sheep grazing in national forests with bighorn sheep. I recommend sheep grazing be continued in the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. Sheep grazing has many positive effects in the National Forest arena. This has been frequently documented over many decades. With thoughtful oversight and collaborative effort, we can protect both our wildlife heritage and the livelihoods of those who depend on the land.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

W. F. Hendrix

Callipyge Genetics, LLC

433 Ames Road

Selah, Washington 98942