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October 28, 2016

Alison Vergeront
Agricultural Liaison
Office of Steve Daines
30 West 14th Street, Ste. 206
Helena, MT 59601

Dear Ms. Vergeront:

I write on behalf of the Montana Wool Growers Association; the MWGA represents the Montana sheep and wool industry.

As you know from the meetings we held with you in Washington D.C. this past spring, the Association has several funding and bill report language requests which are the highest priority for the Association. The Association is very pleased that the House and Senate appropriators have included the following bill language in their respective appropriations bills:

Senate:

Vacant Grazing Allotments. – The Committee directs the Bureau to make vacant grazing allotments available to a holder of a grazing permit or lease when lands covered by the holder of the permit or lease are unusable because of drought or wildfire, or other condition beyond the control of the permittee.

Bighorn Sheep. – The Committee directs the Service to complete Risk of Contact analyses using the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' occupied bighorn habitat maps, telemetry data, and recent bighorn observations. The Service is further directed to transparently and promptly share findings with other Federal land management agencies, State and local governments, State wildlife agencies, and State and Federal animal health professionals, including the Agricultural Research Service, permittees, and stakeholders. The Committee directs the Forest Service to engage the Agricultural Research Service and the aforementioned cooperating agencies and participants to ensure the best professional scientific understanding of where and if disease transmission occurs, and the degree of that risk, before making further management decisions that impact permittees. The Forest Service is further directed, if warranted, to use this base of information to swiftly identify and implement actions to resolve high-risk of disease transmission allotments, including if agreeable to the permittee, the relocation of domestic sheep to lower-risk allotments, with minimal disruption and displacement of permittees. The Forest Service is directed to provide bi-annual briefings to the Committee on its progress and adherence to the directives contained herein. Additionally, the Forest Service is

directed to make vacant grazing lots available to a holder of a grazing permit or lease when lands covered by the holder of the permit or lease are unusable because of drought, wildfire, or agency action beyond the permittee's control.

House:

Bighorn Sheep Research. – The Service is urged to collaborate with the Bureau of Land Management and the Agricultural Research Service on research involving the risk of disease transmission between domestic and bighorn sheep.

AVAILABILITY OF VACANT GRAZING ALLOTMENTS

SEC. 432. The Secretary of the Interior, with respect to public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management, and the Secretary of Agriculture, with respect to the National Forest System lands, shall make vacant grazing allotments available to a holder of a grazing permit or lease issued by either Secretary if the lands covered by the permit or lease or other grazing lands used by the holder of the permit or lease are unusable because of drought or wildfire, as determined by the Secretary concerned. The terms and conditions contained in a permit or lease made available pursuant to this section shall be the same as the terms and conditions of the most recent permit or lease that was applicable to the vacant grazing allotment made available. Section 102 of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4332) shall not apply with respect to any Federal agency action under this section.

Proposed FY2017 Omnibus Bill Lang.—As amended from Secs. 437 and 433 of FY15/16 Interior Approps:

SEC. XXX. The Secretary of the Interior, with respect to public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management, and the Secretary of Agriculture, with respect to the National Forest System lands, shall make vacant grazing allotments available to a holder of a grazing permit or lease issued by either Secretary if the lands covered by the permit or lease or other grazing lands used by the holder of the permit or lease are deemed unusable, in full or in part, by the Secretary concerned because of drought, wildfire or any reduction or elimination of a domestic livestock permit or lease as a result of determination of a potential conflict with bighorn sheep. *Provided*, that the terms and conditions contained in a permit or lease made available pursuant to this section shall be under terms and conditions no less favorable to the permittee than those applicable to the permittee on the allotment being vacated. *Provided further*, that Section 102 of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4332) shall not apply with respect to any Federal agency action under this section. *Provided further*, that the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior shall engage the respective states' wildlife agencies, departments of agriculture, animal health professionals, and the Agricultural Research Service prior to any decision, based partially or in its entirety on the determination of a potential conflict with bighorn sheep, resulting in the reduction or elimination of a domestic livestock permit or lease.

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On behalf of the sheep industry of Montana, we strongly urge you to contact the members of the House and Senate Conference Committee urging them to include this language in the final Omnibus Appropriations Bill that is sent to the President for his signature. Should you have any questions regarding this missive, please contact Dave McEwen, President of the Montana Wool Growers Association, at (406) 937-5845.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "James E. Brown", written over a light gray grid background.

James E. Brown, Esq.
Membership Relations Director
Montana Wool Growers Association

cc: Dave McEwen