

Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

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In Reply Refer To:
OSM.B25029

APRIL 04 2025

Tim Hammond, Manager
Bureau of Land Management
Eastern Interior Field Office
222 University Avenue
Fairbanks, Alaska 99709-3816

Dear Mr. Hammond,

I write to you on behalf of the Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (Council) to thank you for your letter dated February 12, 2025, in response to the Council's letter to various Eastern Interior agencies requesting the formation of an Eastern Interior Dall Sheep Management Coalition (Coalition). The Council was greatly appreciative of your effort to discuss the Coalition formation with your colleagues involved in sheep management regionally.

For your information, the Council held a working group meeting February 18, 2025, and a public meeting February 19-20, during which we discussed your letter and your request for more specific information about our vision for the Coalition. In our discussions, the Council reiterated our desire to see a coalition of managers and stakeholders convened to review and refine strategies for long-term sustainable sheep management in the Eastern Interior region. We feel this is necessary due to the declines in sheep populations across the region and the concerns expressed by various user groups who wish to ensure the continued sustainability and use of sheep. We suggest that the Coalition review sheep population and harvest trends throughout the region, identify data and research needs, seek out potential research and funding collaborations to address identified needs, and discuss harvest management strategies.

Through experiences with other wildlife working groups and coalitions, Council members have found working in smaller groups to be the most effective for ensuring productivity. With that in mind, we hope to keep the size of this Coalition manageable to maximize efficiency. However, we also feel that the Coalition should be well-balanced with representation from the various stakeholder groups who utilize and manage sheep (Federal and State subsistence users, guides and transporters, Tribal representatives, Federal and State managers, etc.). At the time of this letter, the Council has received support from the Delta, Eagle, and Upper Tanana-Fortymile Fish and Game Advisory Committees (ACs) for the formation of a Coalition. Additionally, the Fairbanks AC voted to participate if a Coalition is formed. We proposed that this Council and each interested AC could select 1-2 representatives knowledgeable about sheep to participate.

The Council considers the Fortymile Caribou Harvest Management Coalition to be a great example of another local, effective working group that utilizes tactics this sheep coalition could replicate, such as roundtable discussions and input from agency staff. The Council recognizes that discrete sheep populations across the region have unique characteristics, managing agencies, and users. Because of this diversity, the Council suggests the Coalition use small break-out groups as a strategy for targeted discussions about sheep populations in different portions of the Interior (e.g., White Mountains, Alaska Range, etc.). Such breakout groups could discuss the status and management of sheep unique to those areas and identify specific data gaps, research priorities, opportunities for collaboration, and harvest management strategies for sheep in specific Game Management Units. Breakout groups could then present an overview of their findings and recommendations back to the broader Coalition to promote information sharing across the larger group.

During the Council's February meeting, we reviewed several Statewide Alaska Board of Game (BOG) proposals about sheep. The Council felt that some of those statewide proposals would be better suited as regional proposals and could be discussed by Coalition members. If the Coalition identifies any management recommendations that warrant regulatory proposals, those could be submitted to the BOG or Federal Subsistence Board (Board) in upcoming regulatory cycles (Interior Region BOG in 2026/2027; Board call for wildlife proposals in 2027). The Council suggests that Coalition meetings and sub-regional breakout group meetings could be done virtually or in conjunction with other scheduled meetings, such as this Council's meetings, as a cost saving measure. The timing of meetings should keep in mind the upcoming regulatory cycles and any associated deadlines. Additionally, we do not feel that a special facilitator needs to be hired for effective meetings and discussion to occur.

Finally, the Council would like to respond to criticism we heard from some regional stakeholders regarding the intent of this Coalition, in which accusations were made that the Council wants to restrict sheep hunting opportunity for non-federally qualified users. That is most certainly not the intent. We remain adamant that the best management decisions come from working together across agencies and user groups to address issues and build relationships. We reiterate that our main intent for this proposed Coalition is to ensure the long-term sustainability and utilization of sheep in our region by all users.

The Council thanks you for once again considering our concerns for Dall sheep and our request to form an Eastern Interior Dall Sheep Management Coalition. We look forward to the opportunity to have further discussion. If you have any questions or would like to follow up, please contact me through our Subsistence Council Coordinator, Brooke McDavid, at (907) 891-9181 or brooke_mcdavid@ios.doi.gov.

Sincerely,



Robert "Charlie" Wright, Sr.
Chair

cc: Federal Subsistence Board

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Office of Subsistence Management

Interagency Staff Committee

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