



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks
47050 Generals Highway
Three Rivers, California 93271-9651
(559) 565-3341



IN REPLY REFER TO:
L3031 (SEKI)

June 16, 2010

Dear Interested Party:

The National Park Service (NPS), in cooperation with the California Department of Fish and Game, is proposing to conduct a study on Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep within and adjacent to Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks.

The preliminary study objectives are to:

- 1) identify the extent to which bighorn sheep use meadows within Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks and specifically meadows and other habitats that are used by pack stock and backpackers,
- 2) determine whether the use of meadows and other habitats by pack stock or backpackers limits use by bighorn sheep either through competition for forage or simply by the presence of pack stock, and
- 3) develop a model to predict the relative probability of use of various habitats by bighorn sheep.

The Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep was listed as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act on April 20, 1999. An endangered species is an animal or plant species in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. In the late 1990s the population of bighorn had declined to about 100 animals and very few remained within the parks. Today, the Sierra Nevada bighorn population currently numbers about 370 animals and an increasing number of animals are using the parks.

Meadows are focal vegetation communities for both wildlife and human activities. Meadow systems are important habitats to Sierra Nevada bighorn and provide a high density of nutritional forage, yet meadows occupy only 1-2% of the landscape at higher elevations in the Sierra Nevada. The persistence of high elevation meadows are threatened by a number of factors including climate change. Their sensitivity to disturbance and their slow recovery following disturbance necessitates that the NPS understand the extent to which human activities affect the value of meadows as wildlife habitat.

The draft study details are in development, but it is likely that up to 40 Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep would be captured and collared using helicopter/net-guns. About 75% of the work would occur in the sheep's winter range, which is located outside the parks' boundaries to the east of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. Some of the captures could occur within the eastern portion of the parks. The California Department of Fish and Game would be the principal

investigator on this project and would be conducting the operation under their existing permit with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The NPS is interested in the public's concerns and potential issues related to the proposed study. We are currently accepting public comments in the "scoping" phase of project planning. After analyzing scoping comments, we will determine the level of analysis needed for this project. More information on the proposed project is available online by selecting Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks at the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment website, <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/seki>, or you may contact Wildlife Ecologist Harold Werner at (559) 565-3123.

Public comment may be submitted at this website, or you may direct comments regarding this project to the park in writing by sending an e-mail to seki_planning@nps.gov, or by mail or hand delivery to:

Superintendent
Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks
Attn: Bighorn Sheep Study
47050 Generals Highway
Three Rivers, CA 93271

All comments must be received by July 19, 2010.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. We will always make submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives of or officials of organizations or businesses, available for public inspection in their entirety. Anonymous comments will not be accepted.

Thank you for your interest in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks.


for Karen F. Taylor-Goodrich