ASI Call to Action – Federal Agencies Removing Sheep Grazing

We have been working with ASI and our congressional delegation to craft letters now circulating in the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives for signatures regarding efforts by the Forest Service (FS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to remove domestic sheep from federal grazing allotments. The letters are addressed to Department of Agriculture Secretary Thomas Vilsack and Interior Secretary Sally Jewell.

According to ASI, half of all domestic sheep in the United States graze on federal lands at least part of the time. The FS and BLM effort to systematically remove domestic sheep from grazing allotments in the name of bighorn sheep management is accelerating despite the fact there are reasonable solutions to accommodate sheep ranches. In Idaho, the FS has removed 70 percent of domestic sheep from the Payette National Forest, putting one ranch now entirely out of business and causing two others to reduce their sheep numbers drastically. Even though only 10 percent of FS allotments and 3 percent of BLM allotments are actually within occupied bighorn habitat recent documents indicate the agencies are expanding the Payette model to areas outside occupied territory to vast additional areas through the West. An expansion of removing sheep grazing of this kind would impact fully 23 percent of the nation’s sheep production and jeopardize the viability of lamb and wool companies that provide services such as transportation, shearing and processing to all sheep producers.

ASI put out the following statement today:

“Congressional direction on this issue is critical and timely. It has been announced that forests in Nevada, Utah, Wyoming and Idaho will make determinations on grazing and bighorn viability by February 2015. The letters provide you a key opportunity to directly involve Representative and Senators to address this threat.

“ASI requests that you ask your congressional delegation to support the sheep industry by signing these letters. Senate offices can contact Travis with Sen. John Barrasso (WY) at Travis_McNiven@Barrasso.senate.gov and Representative offices should reach out to Rob MacGregor with Rep. Rob Bishop (Utah) at Robert.MacGregor@mail.house.gov to cosign.“

Draft copies of the Senate and House letters are available here. A one-page brief explaining the serious threat this bighorn issue poses to the entire sheep industry can be accessed at here. For additional information, contact me or Peter Orwick at porwick@sheepusa.org/303-771-3500, ext. 33.