

NEBCWF – Salting Program

The Northern Rockies, its grandeur rises from the muskeg flats to lush foots hills and then to towering rock covered tops. The historical Alaska Highway winds its way through them, from Northwest of Fort Nelson, one climbs Steamboat Hill, followed by Tetsa River, Summit Lake, Macdonald River, Racing River, Toad River, Muncho Lake and Liard. I have been fortunate living in Northern BC to explore many of these mountain passages, trails and river systems in the endless journey of sheep hunting. This area boasts the highest population density of Stone Sheep in British Columbia. The highway creates relatively easy access to sheep country as one may dawn their backpack at the pickup and strike out on foot in hopes of full curls and adventure. Because of the amount of access, this area of the Northern Rockies may have the highest density of sheep hunters in all of British Columbia.



As most sheep hunters do in a quest for furthering their mountain sheep knowledge, I have read many books and memoirs of legendary outfitters, some of which pioneered these northern communities. Most stories from the early days of outfitting in the 60's speak of sightings of countless full curl rams. Although I have no scientific background and my observations are based on "in-the-field" experience, there seems to be fewer sheep than in the past. What are the reasons behind this? There are numerous

possibilities including; predation, winter forage quality, forage competition (for example: Bison, Elk, Deer), ewe reproduction rates, lamb mortality and human caused mortality both permitted and accidental. All these issues are complex and some are not as easily addressed in the short term due to funding, information, social and industrial issues.

One thing that can be done, is addressing reasons for accidental human-caused mortality. For more than 20 years, The Northeast British Columbia Wildlife Fund (NEBCWF) has been taking the lead on many wildlife initiatives in Northeast British Columbia. One project the NEBCWF has taken the lead on is trying to reduce or eliminate vehicle collisions with stone sheep along known areas of the Alaska Highway between Summit Lake in Stone Mountain Provincial Park and the Liard River. Keeping sheep off the highways is not simple and would restrict natural travel corridors.



It is a tough thing to drag a lamb off the road while the ewe stands in watch. This is a feeling that NEBCWF President Jim Fulton and Director Tom Fulton know all too well. It is through these experiences and passion for conservation of wild sheep and other ungulates in the Northern Rockies that Jim and Tom began taking action in the form of the Salting Program and Public Awareness

Salting Program

Sheep and caribou are attracted year round to the highway from salt applied during the winter months. The NEBCWF with support from FLNRO staff developed a salting program in remote sites away from the highway. NEBCWF has expanded the program to 13 licks being established and maintained in an area between Summit Lake and near the Liard River along the Alaska Highway corridor. All of the licks are within the one mile “no hunting corridor” in effect throughout the Provincial Parks. They have carefully selected sites which provide escape terrain and are screened from view from the highway. Records provided by Public Works Canada, reports from highway maintenance staff, locals, and guide outfitters, have been reviewed and locations were selected to attempt to intercept the ungulates prior to them going the highway for a salt source.



In late July 2018, NEBCWF provided 130, fifty pound blocks of salt, and utilized Qwest Helicopters to drop ten blocks at each of the 13 sites. Pickups, trailers and time were all volunteered by Tom, Jim, Ridge, and Brandon Fulton to assist the helicopter by loading sling loads and to transport the salt between staging and drop areas.

“We have seen extensive use of these salt licks by stone sheep, goats, caribou and to a lesser extent, elk and deer. We can see where providing an alternative source of salt to these ungulates besides the road salt on the Alaska Highway has reduced wildlife mortality” Says Jim Fulton President NEBCWF.

The Wild Sheep Society of British Columbia is proud to support the NEBCWF and their efforts. WSSBC has committed to cover the helicopter fees of \$7290.92 from the 2018 Salting Program and we hope to collaborate again on this project and others in the future. Partnerships on projects like this between NEBCWF and WSSBC will ensure this initiative will continue to benefit wild sheep and ungulates for years to come.



Director Josh Hamilton and Tom Foulton, NEBCWF

Guardrails, Signage, and Observations

The guardrail system that lines the canyon at Stone Mountain Provincial Park runs continuous without



breaks and acts as a trap for lambs trying to escape from oncoming traffic. NEBCWF is looking into options that would help lambs navigate the guardrail while also keeping motorists safe. Also, to further reduce wildlife collisions in this area, they are working on a proposal for installing flashing warning signage, as well as information kiosks at the brake checks. The work and planning continues for these projects as they would benefit wild sheep and other ungulates that continue to come in contact with the highway. It is worth mentioning that the Alaska Highway is federally owned.

I'd like to take this moment to encourage all BC sportsman and women that have spent time in the north to maintain membership with groups like WSSBC and NEBCWF. In general the cost of hunting tags is very low, so putting funds towards conservation groups can ensure that work such as these projects can continue to conserve and protect wild sheep in British Columbia. I would also like to add at this time that during my recent trip up and down the Alaska Highway, it was noticed that individuals had shoveled out their stock trailers in the highway pullouts. This is an unnecessary risk of introducing invasive species to the Northern Rockies. Please educate yourselves if traveling to the north in the matter of invasive species, know what is in your feed, and lead by example in helping preserve sensitive wild sheep habitat.

Josh Hamilton
WSSBC Director

