



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wild sheep in British Columbia battling pandemic

M.Ovi found in the Okanagan

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As we roll into the sixth month of a pandemic sweeping the globe, we are continually reminded to 'wear masks' and 'keep social distance' as a measure to prevent becoming infected with this disease. For over a decade, the Wild Sheep Society has brought the attention of government to a similar disease called *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* (M.Ovi). M.Ovi is the infection that typically triggers bighorn sheep pneumonia outbreaks, a nightmarish parallel to COVID-19.

In mid- July, we received reports of sheep exhibiting symptoms of M.Ovi in our South Okanagan herds. We are incredibly saddened to announce that Ministry staff sampled and confirmed the presence of (M.Ovi) in 2 lambs in our Vaseaux bighorn sheep herd, just outside of Penticton.

"Wild sheep do not know the meaning of social distancing. Until strict and drastic measures are put in place to ensure separation, we are going to continue to lose wild sheep to their own pandemic at an alarming rate" said Chris Barker, Project Chair for WSSBC.

Multiple peer-reviewed studies have shown that keeping domestic sheep and goats separated from wild sheep is the most effective way to prevent this horrible disease from spreading. M. Ovi has torn through the Chasm bighorn herd. In just two short years, this herd has been devastated, losing up to 80% of its population. As preventative measures are put in place to prevent Chronic Wasting Disease from infecting ungulates, nothing is being done for bighorn sheep in BC.

The bighorn sheep populations are following the fall of the caribou due to ongoing mismanagement. The science on this disease is clear; Only drastic and immediate action taken by government and other involved stakeholders can avert not only the decline, but the unfortunate and eventual extinction of a species that has roamed the hillsides of BC for years.

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About the Wild Sheep Society of BC

The Wild Sheep Society of BC is a non-profit registered Society dedicated to the protection and enhancement of wild sheep and wild sheep habitat throughout "Beautiful British Columbia". Putting tens of thousands of volunteer hours and dollars into conservation projects in BC since 1998, the WSSBC is committed to its vision statement of 'Putting more sheep on the mountains'.

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