

December 13, 2016

Regular Meeting

Board of Supervisors

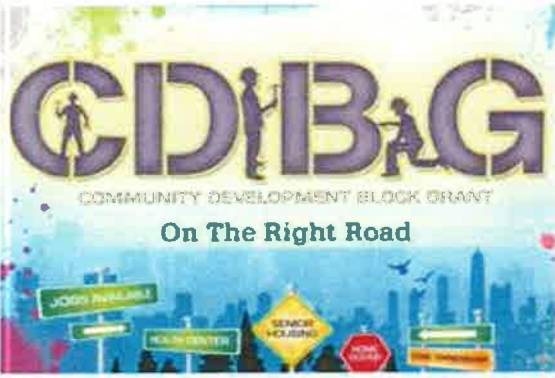
Item #9f- CDBG

Program Update -

First 5 Mono County

Child Care

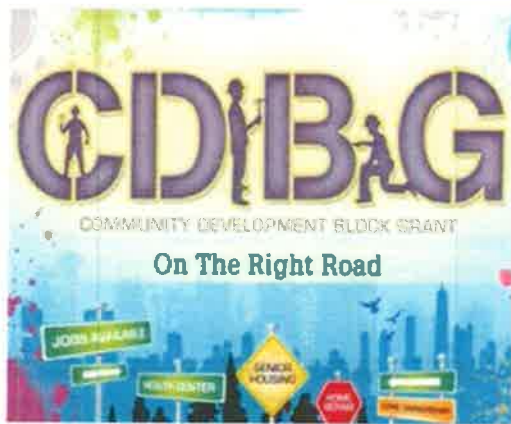
Molly Desbaillets



Eastern Sierra
Unified School District



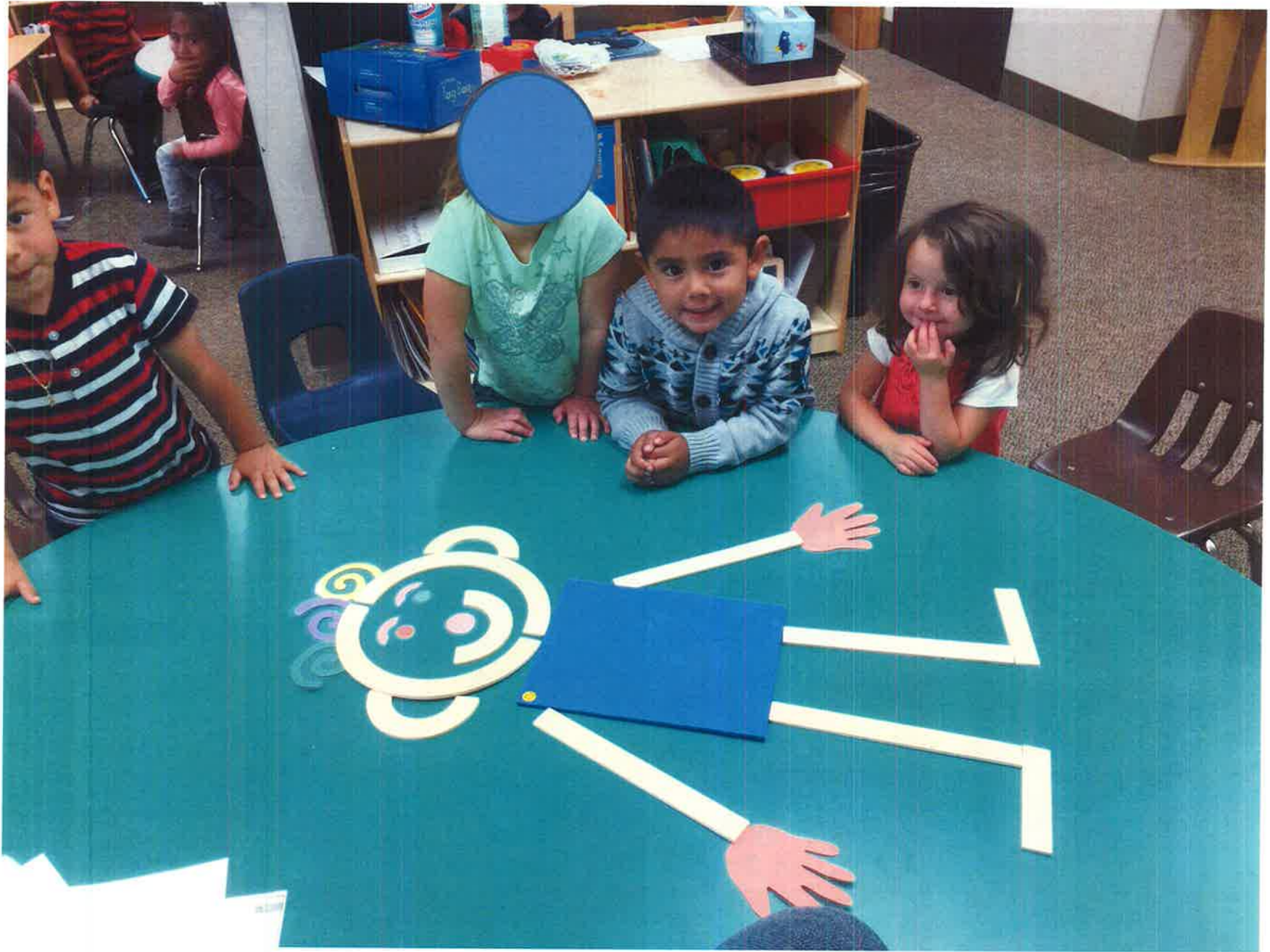
Bridgeport Elementary Preschool



Eastern Sierra
Unified School District

















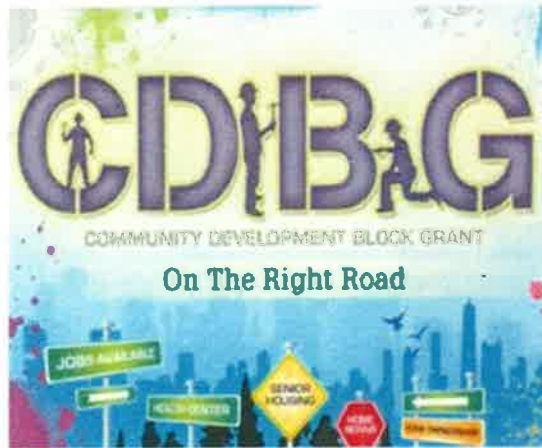
evor's
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Edna Beaman Elementary Preschool



Eastern Sierra
Unified School District







December 13, 2016

Regular Meeting

Board of Supervisors

Item #13a -

Conway/Mattly

Ranch Public

Outreach

Public Comments Received



United States Department of the Interior

Pacific Southwest Region
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Reno Fish and Wildlife Office
1340 Financial Blvd., Suite 234
Reno, Nevada 89502

Ph: (775) 861-6300 ~ Fax: (775) 861-6301



December 12, 2016
File No. 2016-CPA-0077E

Board of Supervisors
Mono County
P. O. Box 715
Bridgeport, California 93517

Subject: Conway/Mattly Ranch Item for December 13, 2016 Board of Supervisors Meeting

Dear Honorable Mono County Board of Supervisors:

Thank you for notifying our office of the Conway/Mattly Ranch agenda item for tomorrow's Board of Supervisors Meeting. The agenda item is identified as Item 13/Regular Agenda: Presentation Regarding Conway/Mattly Ranch Public Outreach and Authorization for Request for Proposals for Grazing Lease. Although our office has great interest in this topic due to the potential effects of domestic sheep grazing on Mattly and Conway Ranches to the state and federally endangered Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis sierrae*; Sierra bighorn), we are not able to attend the meeting in person.

As stated in our June 17, 2016 comment letter on the April 2016 draft Conway Ranch Strategic Facility Plan, we request the County simply identify livestock grazing as the master vision for Conway/Mattly Ranches as opposed to limiting consideration to only domestic sheep operations.

Since the current grazing lease expires on November 15, 2017, we appreciate the interest and need for the County to pursue this matter expeditiously; however, we respectfully request the County reschedule this discussion in order for us and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to identify other options of consideration by the Board and to be able to attend the meeting in person. Please note, we would also like to work together in helping craft language for any future Request for Proposals for livestock grazing on Mattly and/or Conway Ranches.

Our main concern is the potential for disease transmission, specifically pneumonia, between domestic sheep and Sierra bighorn due to the proximity of Mattly and Conway Ranches to the Mt. Warren herd unit. The Mt. Warren herd unit was identified in the 2007 Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep Recovery Plan (Service 2007) as a herd unit essential for the recovery of the subspecies and it is also designated critical habitat. Our partner in recovering the Sierra bighorn, CDFW, has been successful in increasing the abundance and distribution of Sierra bighorn

through augmentations and translocations. These efforts have been necessary in order to ensure the persistence of the subspecies throughout its historic range. A disease outbreak in the Mt. Warren herd unit would not only affect animals occupying this area but it could also spread to animals in the surrounding area known as the Northern Recovery Unit. Currently, there are two other herds located in the Northern Recovery Unit, one of which is a newly introduced herd located in Yosemite National Park.

I believe that recovery of Sierra bighorn is a shared goal among the County, CDFW and the Service. The Service believes that recovery of this species is within reach. However, presently the current management of Mattly and Conway Ranches does not provide for the effective separation of domestic sheep and Sierra bighorn. This lack of effective separation limits our ability to recover Sierra bighorn and puts the recovery effort within the Northern Recovery Unit at risk.

Although Lee Ann Carranza, Assistant Field Supervisor, reached out to the County and F.I.M. Corporation to offer a meeting in which to facilitate information sharing on the subject, we have not scheduled any meetings. However, we remain interested and our offer to meet remains. Ideally such a meeting would include CDFW. If you have any questions regarding our comments or would like to arrange a meeting, please contact me or Lee Ann Carranza at (775) 861-6300.

Sincerely,



Carolyn Swed,
Acting Field Supervisor

ccs:

Tony Dublino, Mono County, South County Office, Mammoth Lakes, California
F.I.M. Corporation, Smith, Nevada

Dr. Tom Stephenson, Senior Environmental Scientist, California Department of Fish and
Wildlife, Inland Deserts Region, Bishop, California

Literature Cited

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2007. Recovery Plan for the Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep. Sacramento, California. xiv + 199 pages.



Counties of Inyo & Mono

Nathan D. Reade
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Director of Weights and Measures
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Email – Inyomonoag@gmail.com Web - www.inyomonoagriculture.com



TO: Mono County Board of Supervisors
FROM: Nathan Reade, Agricultural Commissioner
CC: Leslie Chapman, CAO
Tony Dublino, Environmental Services Manager
DATE: December 8 2016
SUBJECT: Conway Ranch Grazing Lease

As you are aware, the grazing lease that F.I.M. Corporation operates under for their Conway Ranch grazing operations is scheduled to expire in November of 2017. It is my understanding that your board will be considering a range of options on how to move forward with grazing on the Conway Ranch during your December 13 meeting. I respectfully ask your board to please consider the following information when making decisions related to grazing on Conway Ranch:

- The value of livestock grazing operations in Mono County was nearly \$14,000,000 in 2015. ~~Sheep-sheep~~ grazing accounted for roughly 20% of this value.
- ~~which~~ Sheep grazing has been the predominant agricultural use on the Conway Ranch for at least the last 50 years. ~~accounted for roughly 20% of this value.~~
- Ranching operations in Mono County have limited options for grazing due to the small amount of private land available for this use and limited federal allotments. Typically, a combination of private and public leases is required for a viable grazing operation. Any in our county are limited as well. Any viable grazing reduction of acreage available for grazing land that is removed from the small pool that currently supports our local agriculture industry has significant and compounding consequences to Mono County ranching operations.
- Managed grazing can provide many environmental benefits. These include:
 - Increased biodiversity through the creation of wildlife forage, habitat, and associated edge effects created through water spreading,
 - Reduction in the need to introduce supplemental feed from out of the area and into Mono County, which reduces the potential for non-native invasive plant introduction,
 - Essentially free control of fuel loads, reducing fire threats and environmental consequences that follow fire events such as erosion, dust, and flooding,
 - Increased range vigor leading to increased capacity for water retention and groundwater contribution.

Grazing on Conway Ranch is a historic and beneficial use of this land. It provides the viewscape that we all enjoy when driving through or visiting this area, economic activity that supports local businesses, and environmental benefits. Please consider these many reasons to continue managed and responsible grazing on the Conway Ranch.

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Helen Nunn

From: John Boynton <jboynton66@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, December 10, 2016 8:45 AM
To: Tony Dublino
Subject: Re: Board of Supervisors item for December 13th, 2016

Tony,

Many thanks for emailing me the Agenda for Tuesday's BOS meeting where grazing on Conway and Mattly ranches will be discussed and your Recommendations to the BOS describing options will be considered. Since returning to my home in New Mexico in late September, I have been watching each new BOS Agenda for a discussion of the County's Strategic Plan for these properties. I feel your Recommendation regarding what action to take on the long postponed discussion to finalize the Strategic Plan to be quite reasonable given that Mono County would likely have to do a CEQA analysis of each project mentioned in the plan. I agree that continuation of historic sheep grazing on Conway and Mattly ranches is the most pressing among the several issues discussed in the draft Strategic Plan. I was especially gratified by the BOS decision to discuss issuing an RFP for continuation of sheep grazing on Conway and Mattly ranches in light of the recent threading letter they received from the Center for Biological Diversity's attorney.

I will be unable to attend Tuesday's BOS meeting where continuation of the historic sheep grazing on Conway and Mattly ranches will be considered, but intend to email my detailed comments to the individual Supervisors this weekend and will send you a copy. As you well know, I strongly support continued sheep grazing on these two properties. I also feel that FIM has done good job handling their sheep grazing and irrigation responsibilities during their present contract.

John

On Dec 9, 2016, at 10:41 AM, Tony Dublino <tdublino@mono.ca.gov> wrote:.

All Conway Ranch interested parties and stakeholders:

On Tuesday, December 13, the Board of Supervisors will be considering input and providing direction to staff relating to the Conway Ranch Strategic Facility Plan and future grazing activities on the Ranch.

See attached Board Agenda and Staff Report for additional information.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me.

Best,

Tony Dublino
Environmental Services Manager
Mono County
o. (760) 932-5453
c. (760) 616-0613

<12 Dec 13 2016 agenda only.pdf><BOS 12.13.16 Conway SFP and Grazing STAFF.PDF>

Helen Nunn

From: John Boynton <jboynton66@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, December 11, 2016 2:03 PM
To: Tim Alpers; Stacy Corless; Tim Fesko; Larry Johnston; Fred Stump
Cc: Tony Dublino; Shannon Kendall
Subject: Tuesdays BOS Meeting - Conway Ranch Sheep Grazing
Attachments: Sierra Big Horn Sheep Recovery Plan.pdf

Follow Up Flag: Flag for follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Mono County Supervisors Alpers, Corless, Fesko, Johnston and Sump,

I am writing to request your support to continue historic sheep grazing on the Conway and Mattly Ranches owned and managed by Mono County. Please vote to approve Item 13 (A), 2 (A) on the Agenda for Tuesdays BOS meeting that would "Prepare, publish and post a Request for Proposals for sheep grazing on Conway and Mattly Ranches for a period of 10 years" and initiate a CEQA environmental review if necessary to support this endeavor. My reasons for this course of action are presented below.

1. Continued sheep grazing is important for the environment of the Conway & Mattly Ranches. To maintain the diversity of plant species in the wet meadows, these meadows need to be grazed responsibly and irrigated frequently with water from Virginia and Wilson creeks. If the irrigated meadows are not grazed, a few dominant invasive plant species will take over, obliterating the existing diverse meadow vegetation. Over time a thatch of dead plants will accumulate that destroys both the meadows' ability to support grazing and reduces the number of wild animal and bird species that live there. Grazed irrigated meadows are known to be the preferred habitat for many birds, mammals and other wildlife. When grazing is halted and irrigation is discontinued, the abundance of wildlife drops markedly. I believe that maintaining the existing wet meadow habitat is likely a requirement of Mono County's Conservation Easement with the Eastern Sierra Land Trust.

2. The wet meadows on Conway & Mattly Ranches, and possibly on the Dechambau Ranch are the only wet meadow habitats remaining in the Mono Basin. Irrigated meadows on Thompson, Cain and other historic ranches have been dried up years ago. From a visitor's perspective, the view of the Mono Basin from Conway Summit is greatly enhanced by the green meadows of the Conway and Mattly Ranches.

3. The environmental consequences of continuing sheep grazing on the wet meadows of Conway & Mattly Ranches are far better than replacing the sheep with cattle because the sheep do little or no damage to springs, creeks and irrigation ditches. Sheep will not enter the water when they come to drink unless forced to and then they move away without destroying the wet soil on the banks of these watering areas. In contrast, cattle will hang around the wet areas, badly trampling the vegetation and eroding the wet soil. Often cattle urinate and defecate while standing in the water, something that sheep never do. Sheep are monitored and herded 24/7 by shepherds and not allowed to roam throughout the area on their own. They are herded to a specific area of the wet meadow to graze, moved to water to drink and moved to a dry area to bed down for the night. In contrast cattle would simply be turned loose in fenced pastures with no 24/7 supervision and only visited occasionally by a rancher. Hence cattle grazing Conway and Mattly Ranches' wet meadows will cause far more environmental damage than sheep grazing. FIM, who holds the current sheep grazing contract on Conway & Mattly Ranches also assumes the responsibility for irrigating the wet meadows. Whether a rancher grazing cattle on Conway and Mattly Ranches will have the necessary skill or willingness to assume this irrigation responsibility remains to be determined.

4. The fees that the County receives from sheep grazing on Conway & Mattly ranches help offset most or all of the costs that the County incurs in managing these properties. In tight economic times this income is important. If grazing were discontinued on these properties, the County would still have to pay the cost of managing them in accordance with the terms of the Conservation Agreement with the Eastern Sierra Land Trust.

5. Domestic sheep have been reported to serve as symptomless carriers of pneumonia causing microbes that they transfer to Bighorn sheep when the two species come in contact. Bighorn sheep supposedly have no resistance to these microbes and subsequently die of pneumonia. While the symptoms of pneumonia are identical in domestic and Bighorn sheep, Veterinarians have determined that the causal pathogens in domestic sheep and Bighorn sheep have different DNA profiles. Thus what appears to be a single disease in domestic and Bighorn sheep is caused by a variety of very different microbes in the two species that can be determined with proper laboratory diagnosis. Recent data indicate that domestic sheep and Bighorn sheep can both be symptomless carriers of their respective pneumonia causing microbes.

6. When Bighorn sheep are introduced into the high altitude environments on Mt Warren and Tioga Pass with no winter access to low altitude pastures with available feed, these sheep can slowly starve to death in the deep snow. In their emaciated condition, these Bighorn sheep may be unable to escape mountain lion predation or resist dying from pneumonia. Mortality of Bighorn sheep introduced into the Mt. Warren and Tioga bands in Mono County that lack access to snow-free winter pasture has been unacceptably high. In contrast Big Horn sheep introduced into the southern Sierra with access to snow-free winter pasture has been much lower. This leads to the conclusion that starvation may be the root cause of Bighorn sheep deaths in the northern Mt. Warren and Tioga bands that have no or very limited access to adequate winter feed.

7. Domestic sheep grazing on Conway & Mattly Ranches are only present in mid to late summer when the Big Horn sheep are grazing at high altitudes on Mt. Warren. When the Bighorn sheep migrate to lower elevations to feed during the winter months there are no domestic sheep present on the Conway & Mattly Ranches. Thus there is little if any chance for the domestic sheep and Bighorn sheep to come into physical contact. Furthermore domestic sheep grazing on Conway & Mattly Ranches are being tended 24/7 by experienced herders who are trained to spot any intruding animals including any Bighorn sheep.

All of the above arguments strongly support the contention that the historic domestic sheep grazing on Conway & Mattly Ranches should be continued. It is beneficial to the environments of these Ranches and to the Mono County budget, while posing no tangible threat to the band of Bighorn sheep introduced on Mt. Warren.

The controversy regarding continuation of domestic sheep grazing on Conway & Mattly Ranches arises from the 2007 Recovery Plan for the Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep (see attached .pdf). In my opinion, this plan authored by the US Fish and Wildlife Service has some serious flaws. First, poor environmental choices were made regarding specific sites for reintroduction of the Bighorn sheep herds. Bighorn sheep introduced at the southern most locations of the Eastern Sierra have survived and established stable herds. In contrast, Bighorn sheep introduced at the northern most locations (Tioga Pass and Mt. Warren) have suffered high mortality for the reasons described above. Second, ranchers' USFS grazing leases proximal to the seven reintroduction sites have been cancelled on the false premise of preventing grazing domestic sheep from transmitting pneumonia causing microbes to the reintroduced Bighorn Sheep. The Strategic Plan also specifies that domestic sheep grazing on private land or County/State Land must cease for the same reason. Third, there is now DNA evidence that both domestic sheep and Bighorn sheep harbor distinct pneumonia causing microbes. This strongly argues against the transmission of pneumonia causing microbes between the two species. Forth, little consideration was given on the need to locating Bighorn sheep reintroduction sites on BLM or USFS lands distant from ranchers' existing grazing leases and selecting sites with proximity to suitable winter grazing. Continuing to introduce replacement Bighorn sheep at the Tioga Pass and Mt. Warren sites has

repeatedly resulted in high levels of mortality that would seem to violate the basic tenants of the Endangered Species Act.

John Boynton
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