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***Wild & Wool*; New Film Exposes Die-offs of Bighorn Sheep**

Bozeman, Montana. April 17, 2020. The Wild Sheep Foundation (WSF), in partnership with Sitka Gear, has produced a new film that, for the first time, takes an in-depth look at what has been killing wild bighorn sheep since the 1930s, and has been slowing efforts to enhance populations of this iconic species.

The culprit is called *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae*, or *M.ovi* for short. It is a bacterium carried by some domestic sheep and goats that can lead to respiratory complications and death in wild sheep. *M.ovi* is not a problem everywhere, or everywhere domestic and wild populations come in contact with each other, but *M.ovi* has been identified as a pathogen in bighorn sheep pneumonia outbreaks. These outbreaks have resulted in sporadic and, in some places, large-scale all-age die-off events in bighorn sheep, in some cases with mortalities of 70% or more of a given population. What's exacerbating the problem is these disease episodes also result in low lamb recruitment often for decades.

“Where domestic sheep and goats and wild sheep share the same rangelands, we either have a problem or the threat of problem,” said Kevin Hurley, Vice President of Conservation & Operations for the Wild Sheep Foundation. “Domestic animals can live with *M.ovi* if they have it, but wild sheep have no immunity to it if they get it.”

Wild & Wool follows researchers and biologists as they monitor the health of bighorn sheep in Idaho's Hells Canyon and the mountain ranges near Wendover, Nevada, two past and present *M.ovi* hot spots. The film also brings forward the story of the domestic sheep and wool production industry and the multi-generational family ranches that partially rely on U.S. Forest Service 10-year, term grazing permits.

“As viewers will learn, this is a complex issue,” explained Hurley. “One thing we do know is, with adult mortality rates and poor lamb survival year after year, in wild populations, these infected herds will not last. We can have both on the landscape, wild and domestic sheep, but just not together.”

The film was produced in cooperation with Implement Productions and Foss Media. It has been accepted by the prestigious International Wildlife Film Festival (IWFF), and debuts as a virtual online experience on Saturday, April 18, 2020.

“A whole lot of people are committed to putting more wild sheep on the mountain,” Hurley concluded. “We have the know-how to do that. It’s keeping them on the mountain where *M.ovi* is making us come up short.”

Wild & Wool will be available for free viewing at this IWFF [link](#) on April 18-25.

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The Wild Sheep Foundation (WSF), based in Bozeman, Mont., was founded in 1977 by wild sheep conservationists and enthusiasts. With a membership of more than 8,500 worldwide, WSF is the premier advocate for wild sheep and other mountain wildlife and their habitats. WSF has raised and expended more than \$135 million on wild sheep habitat and population enhancements, education, and conservation advocacy programs in North America, Europe, and Asia to “Put and Keep Wild Sheep On the Mountain”®. These and other efforts have increased bighorn sheep populations in North America from historic lows in the 1950-60s of 25,000 to more than 85,000 today. www.wildsheepfoundation.org.