



File Code: 1920
Route To:

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Subject: Species of Conservation Concern List Update for the Ashley National Forest

To: Sue Eickhoff, Forest Supervisor, Ashley National Forest

In coordination with the Ashley National Forest, and pursuant to my responsibilities and authority under the 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219.7(c)(3)), I concur with your determination that the Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep (BHS) does not meet the criteria as a Species of Conservation Concern (SCC) for the Ashley National Forest's revised Land Management Plan (LMP) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). I update the existing Regional Forester's SCC list for the Ashley National Forest to remove the BHS, please see the enclosure. The definition of SCC is found at 36 CFR 219.9(c), and criteria for identifying them are outlined in the Forest Service Handbook FSH1909.12 Chapter 10, Section 12.52c.

The U.S. Forest Service initiated the 60-day opportunity to object to the revised Land Management Plan and the Regional Forester's SCC list for the Ashley National Forest in April 2023. The objection filing period ended June 20, 2023. Two objections were filed for SCC with the objectors contending that BHS are not at risk in the planning area and that the rationale for inclusion of BHS is inconsistent with regulations and policies. Jacqueline Emanuel, Associate Deputy Chief for National Forest System, was the reviewing officer for SCC objections. The reviewing officer determined that the persistence analysis for BHS needed to be updated to include the latest best available scientific information, to provide greater clarity in what data and information was relied upon for the analysis, and to make it easier to understand the connections between what data and information was used and the conclusions that were drawn. The responsible official, Forest Supervisor Susan Eickhoff, was instructed to use this information to determine whether to recommend a change to the SCC list by removing BHS. I was instructed to determine whether to change the SCC list based on this recommendation and to notify the public and responsible official of this determination.

The six BHS herds currently in the Ashley plan area are from reintroduction efforts that began in 1983. Since reintroduction efforts these BHS herds have substantially expanded their range beyond the original release sites. Nearly 40 years of empirical evidence suggests that while disease has affected the BHS herds on the Ashley plan area, current management by the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources and habitat management by the Ashley NF have resulted in BHS persistence on the Ashley plan area.

I, along with Regional Office Wildlife and Planning staff, have reviewed the data and updated the rationale for not including BHS as a SCC. I determined that because the concern for the species persistence in the plan area is not of substantial concern, the BHS should not be identified as a SCC (Forest Service Handbook [FSH] 1909.12, chapter 10, section 12.52c).



I acknowledge that some stakeholders may be concerned about the removal of BHS as a SCC. The BHS status has now been updated from a SCC to a species of interest on the Ashley. Plan direction will include guidelines, a goal, and monitoring of the BHS, as well as management approaches to work with the State of Utah and utilize memorandums of understanding to apply reasonable and relevant management strategies that strive to minimize the risk of contact between BHS and domestic sheep or domestic goats. I commend that effort and encourage continuation of collaborative efforts as part of implementing the revised Land Management Plan.

As Regional Forester, I am responsible for determining the best way to achieve the objectives for the conservation of at-risk species (Forest Service Manual (FSM) 2670.44). As your revised plan provides direction to maintain and restore the ecological conditions necessary to support long term persistence of species using the coarse filter/fine filter approach of the 2012 Planning Rule, I find the plan is sufficient to meet the sensitive species objectives of FSM 2670. Once the revised plan is in effect, the Regional Forester's Sensitive Species list no longer applies to the Ashley National Forest.

I have determined that the species in the most recent update to the Ashley National Forest Regional Forester's SCC list meet the criteria for SCC as defined by the 2012 Planning Rule and its implementing directives. Please note that the identification of SCC is a dynamic process. New scientific information may prompt future changes in the list. We will continue to work with you and your staff to evaluate new information and determine if a change to the SCC list is warranted, following the process described in FSH 1902.12, section 21.22b.

I appreciate the expertise and assistance of your staff during this process. I look forward to continuing to work together to ensure the diversity of species on the Ashley National Forest. If you have any questions regarding the amended list of SCC, the process for identifying SCC, or the requirement for addressing SCC under the 2012 Planning Rule, please contact Lee Jacobson, Regional Threatened and Endangered Species Program Manager at lee.jacobson@usda.gov, or Tova Spector, Regional Botanist at tova.spector@usda.gov.

MARY FARNSWORTH
Regional Forester

Enclosure: Updated Species of Conservation Concern List for the Ashley National Forest

cc: Shanda Dekome, Chris Moyer, Lee Jacobson, Tova Spector, Melissa Steward, Sarah Browne, Autumn Ela