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THE STATE OF ARIZONA
GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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October 20, 2008

Tom Edgerton
Arizona Strip Field Office
Manager Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument
345 E Riverside Drive
St. George, UT 84790

RE: Management of Bighorn Sheep and Grazing Administration on the Pakoon Springs Allotment

Dear Tom,

On September 30 – October 1, 2008, we conducted our aerial bighorn sheep surveys in the Grand Wash Cliffs, Lake Mead, and the two Cockscomb areas of the Parashant National Monument. This survey produced an exciting documentation of bighorn utilizing the Cockscombs that run north and south to the west of Pakoon Springs. We flew this area after a 2006 summer sighting of bighorn utilizing a trough on the Middle Spring Pipeline that feeds the recently authorized southern portion of the Pakoon Springs allotment. Our survey was an effort to determine if my sighting in 2006 was a fluke, or if bighorn are indeed utilizing the Cockscombs.

In addition the documented presence, there was significant sign of bighorn utilizing this area. This included namely large bedding areas and trailing. Often times this type of observed sign is consistent with winter use of the area, but the documented presence of bighorn during these surveys, and the sighting in summer 2006, indicates that bighorn are utilizing this habitat year round, with perhaps more bighorn use during the winter months.

As you are aware bighorn sheep are a highly valued animal to the people of the State of Arizona, and to your agency. We actively manage this animal as a game species, but also actively manage to improve the distribution of this species in its habitat across the state and the Arizona Strip. These local actions are fundamental to the implementation of the Arizona Strip Desert Bighorn Sheep Plan.

This presence of bighorn and the documentation of them utilizing the pipeline troughs obviously bring some discussion points to grazing administration on the Pakoon Springs Allotment. Namely, wildlife access and water availability at these pipeline troughs is extremely important, perhaps more so now that bighorn have been documented in the area. The fences around these troughs are not wildlife friendly, namely high wood post structures, with the only access being through a gate or similar structure. This particular issue is important for all wildlife.



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The availability of surface water at Pakoon Springs will continue to be extremely important during and after the restoration process. We have appreciated the ability to be actively involved in this restoration process and are encouraged with the progress to date.

We would oppose these waters being turned off for extended times of the year such as when cattle are not present. In addition, any increase in stocking numbers and the evaluation of current years use needs to be carefully considered with these new findings.

We would also like to discuss the addition of a wildlife only water to the Cockscombs. The location could be determined to certainly minimize the visibility and maximize benefit to bighorn sheep. It could alleviate some of the concerns with water availability along the pipeline.

We also recognize that the administration of this area for Desert Tortoise is extremely important, and support the recovery of this species on the Arizona Strip. We believe that the management of tortoise and bighorn sheep is compatible, and that we can implement strategies that will benefit all resources involved in this important area. It also appears that actions such as installing a bighorn water are consistent with the new RMP if we implement design features for Desert Tortoise.

Finally, in light of the recent Standards and Guidelines evaluation for the Pakoon Springs and Pakoon Allotments, we would like these topics discussed and recognized as part of the future management of these allotments. We regret not being able to attend the field trip, but we had previous commitments scheduled.

Please call me if you would like to visit more on these findings. This is an exciting discovery for the future management of bighorn on the Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument.

Sincerely,

Luke Thompson
Wildlife Manager III – Arizona Strip GMU 13B
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