STATE OF NEVADA
DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE
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Deputy Director

November 12, 2003

Mr. Mike Laughlin
P.O. Box 598
Eureka, Nevada 89316

Dear Mr. Laughlin:

I am writing a belated response to your letter of January 27, 2003, wherein you relate observations made during the 2002-2003 sheep hunt while accompanying Scott Raines in Unit 282, the Desert Range of the Desert National Wildlife Refuge. As you will recall, you and I had an opportunity to visit extensively about your observations and concerns when you attended the Predator Management Committee meeting in Winnemucca on June 12, 2003. Since many of your concerns focused on policy and management issues associated with the DNWR, upon receipt of your letter we (NDOW Game Bureau employees) coordinated with refuge personnel and agreed to let them take the lead in responding, which they did on March 12, 2003.

Now, please allow me to provide you some of my own general thoughts surrounding the sequence of events that resulted in the early 90's bighorn sheep population decline on the DNWR. The late 1980's and early 1990's saw a very serious drought period in most of Nevada that persisted approximately 6 years and culminated with the harsh winter of 1992-93. The combination of drought and hard winter were particularly devastating to mule deer in central and eastern Nevada. With the deer population decline, lions were forced to shift focus to secondary prey species, in this case desert bighorn sheep populations, ádjacent to or south of those once healthy deer herds. Sheep were concentrated around water and lions took advantage of the available prey. Typical of predator/prey relationships, the balance was dynamic, and the predator pressure resulted in a dramatic sheep population decline, but the lions were forced to leave when prey, in this case sheep, became scarce. During the period of time lions were present, there was enough sheep to feed them.

Now a word about the survey methodology the Department of Wildlife uses for estimating bighorn sheep populations. We conduct most of our southern Nevada surveys in September or October. We use the helicopter to collect a representative herd composition <u>sample</u> in order to calculate a ratio of rams and lambs to 100 ewes

in the population. We use the ratio as a factor in arriving at a computer generated estimate of the herd size. We are not attempting to complete a population census when we do our aerial composition surveys. The population estimates methodology works for us, and we feel we get better each year with our herd estimates. They are never perfect or fool proof, but they are developed using the latest technology and a lot of work by our biologists. The product, the herd estimate, is very adequate upon which to base harvest recommendations, that being the main purpose of doing the surveys and developing herd estimates in the first place.

Relative to your suggestion to monitor and control predators in Nevada before we are out of big game, I believe you got a first had look at what we are doing with a predation program when you attended the Predator Management Committee meeting in Winnemucca on June 27th.

Thank you for your concern and interest in the health and welfare of Nevada's wildlife populations.

Sincerely,

Gregg Tanner

Gregg Tanner
Game Bureau Chief

GT:dc

cc: Predator Mgmt.. Committee
Director