Wilderness Awareness Workshop

# Case Study Discussion Form

**1. Issue:** Mountain goats have been eliminated from the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness (FCRNRW) due to past game management practices. Mountain goats are native to the FCRNRW and a source of goats suitable for transplant is available in the Hells Canyon Wilderness (HCW).

**2. Situation:** Idaho Fish and Game (IDFG) has proposed to capture and transport Rocky Mountain Goats (goats) out of the Hells Canyon Wilderness (HCW) and transplant them into the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness (FCRNRW) using a helicopter. The purpose of the goat transplants is to augment and reestablish naturally occurring populations in wilderness that have been reduced by human influence. Efforts by IDFG to locate goats available for transplant outside wilderness and outside Idaho have been unsuccessful because of the demand for goats to be transplanted by other states.

The project would occur during May and June three times over a five-year period. The project location is near Dry Diggins Lookout in the HCW, Township 24 N., Range 2 W., Section 33, Boise Meridian. The absence of snow at Dry Diggins Lookout attracts goats to the area during this time but public use is very limited. FS Road 517 provides public access to trails in this portion of the HCW but is normally closed by unmelted snowdrifts until mid-June.

In previous years IDFG has tried to capture and transport the goats without the use of a helicopter. This effort has proven to be difficult and hazardous to both the goats and the agency personnel involved. In one case an agency biologist broke his leg and goats had to be destroyed after a mule wreck. This method also requires the use of a trap, which can cause other wildlife to be unintentionally caught and injured. In addition, the ground access to the goat habitat is blocked by snow during the spring, which is the time of the year when the goats can be captured and moved with the least amount of stress and danger of accident.

**3. Management Question(s):**

a) Is management action necessary to meet wilderness management objectives?

b) IF action is required, what is the minimum necessary method and tool that should be used?

1. Is transplant from wilderness required or is there an alternative?
2. If transplant from wilderness is required, what method should be used to transplant goats?

**4. Direction/Guidance:**

**a. What does the Wilderness Act say?**

The Wilderness Act, P.L. 88-577; 1964) states in Section 4(d)(8) "Nothing in this Act shall be construed as affecting the jurisdiction or responsibilities of the several states with respect to wildlife and fish in the national forests." In addition, the Wilderness Act, in Section 4(c) allows for the use of motorized equipment and landing of aircraft "as necessary to meet the minimum requirements for the administration of the area for the purpose of this Act." Finally, the Wilderness Act, in Section 2 (c), describes wilderness as an area "which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable.”

**b.What is your agency policy?**

Forest Service policy as stated in FSM2326 allows for the use of motorized equipment to transport wildlife in wilderness when non-motorized means are not available. In addition, the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area Comprehensive Management Plan (page 15) provides direction to support populations of goats in cooperation with IDFG and to determine specific locations for introductions and proposed range of species through supplemental environmental analyses and memoranda of understanding. The proposed project is also consistent with the Memo of Understanding between the IDFG and the USDA Forest Service of April 1983 which requires the IDFG to "consult with the Forest Service on proposed transplants ... with sufficient lead time to permit joint field investigations regarding the effects of such programs on National Forest system lands." The proposal to transplant goats was received from IDFG on February 26, 1998.

The proposal to transplant mountain goats to and from wilderness must be discussed in the context of maintaining wilderness values. According to the Policies and Guidelines for Fish and Wildlife Management in National Forest and Bureau of Land Management Wilderness (FS, BLM, IAFWA Memo of-Understanding, August 1996, p. 9:11, transplants (including removal) may only be permitted if necessary: “b. to restore the population of an indigenous species eliminated or reduced by human influence". The guidelines also state that "a. Motorized methods ... may be permitted if they are the minimum necessary to accomplish an approved transplant."

**5. What are your management options?**

*Remember to split this minimum requirements decision-making process into two parts:*

*Step 1 – Is any administrative action necessary?*

*Step 2 – If action is necessary, what is the minimum tool/method that will cause the least*

*degradation of the wilderness resource and character?*

Step 1: Is administrative action necessary? \_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO

Why?

Step 2: If the answer to Step 1 is YES, administrative action is necessary, then discuss the following

alternatives and others that your group develops:

Alternative A - No Action

The goat transplant project would not be implemented. The goat population in HCW would likely continue to grow unless there are changes in hunting rules or the number of predators increases dramatically. Due to natural processes, some stress will occur within the population as more goats are forced off the preferred habitat. The additional stress could lead to increased susceptibility to disease. The forage would likely be over utilized in some areas of preferred habitat.

The goat population in the FCRNRW would not be increased through the addition of goats from the HCW. It may eventually be possible to transplant goats from other locations into the FCRNRW to help the herd become a viable population.

Alternative B - Proposed Action - Capture and Fly Out the Goats

Capture and transport the goats using a net gun fired from a helicopter. The helicopter would be used to fly within the wilderness to net the goats and then land to transport the goats out of the wilderness. This alternative could be implemented much earlier in the season because no camps or trail access routes are necessary. Approximately 10 landings over a four-day period would be required. No camps would be established within the wilderness.

Alternative C - Capture and Fly Out the Goats using Clover Traps

Capture the goats in clover traps using traps and staff flown into the wilderness. The helicopter would be used to fly out staff and the captured goats. This method would require 4-5 people camped in the wilderness at the Dry Diggins Lookout for 5-10 days and would occur between June 1 and July 3. The transportation of staff and equipment into the wilderness would require 8 flights. Three flights would be required to remove captured goats. The helicopter would remain out of the wilderness when not in use.

Alternative D - Capture and Pack Out the Goats

Use clover traps to capture goats and use mules and other livestock to transport the goats during June when the area is accessible. The operation will last about two weeks, require a base camp with livestock and a holding pen in the wilderness, and cause the trail to be closed to other users during the time the mules loaded with goats are actually on the trail. This method also requires the use of a trap instead of nets and dart guns.

What other alternatives are feasible?

**6. What is your decision?**

**7. What is the rationale for your decision?**

The rationale should link the decision made to wilderness management objectives, law, policy, forest plan standards and guidelines, etc. and explain how this decision best protects the wilderness character while addressing the problem in a feasible manner.

**8. What additional constraints are necessary to minimize disturbance to the wilderness resource and character?**

What mitigation measures are necessary?

Timing, location, or frequency of activity?

Maintenance requirements?

Standards or design requirements?

Monitoring?

**Actual Decision** (if made):

Use a helicopter to capture and fly out the goats (the proposed action).

The first decision that must be made for this project is whether this action is necessary and will benefit wilderness. In other words, is this the minimum requirement for management of the wilderness values? The mandate for management of wildlife populations in wilderness is to allow natural processes to dominate. However, with the complex relationship between state fish and wildlife agencies, federal land management agencies, and the political realities of issues such as predator control and hunting, this is not always possible in all wilderness at all times. In fact, IDFG has made some effort to reestablish the goat population in the FCRNRW without having to transplant goats from the HCW but alternate populations cannot be found. Therefore, given the choices available to the wilderness manager, the reestablishment of missing natural processes and the stewardship of existing natural processes in the context of protection of all wilderness values must be the driving factors. To take no action would likely cause the population in the FCRNRW to continue to decline, in part do to the past over harvest of goats caused by human intervention. This lack of a viable population affects the natural processes in the FCRNRW, especially the predator prey relationship. In addition, removal of the number of goats proposed over the period of time suggested will not have an effect on the goat population in the HCW. Indeed, a small reduction in the population may have a positive effect on both the health of the goat herd and over utilization of the habitat, which in turn effects other populations and natural processes. Therefore, the management objective in this case is to manage the goat populations in wilderness by allowing natural process dominate. Before that can occur, the population must be reestablished in the FCRNRW. The HCW goat herd can contribute to meeting that objective without an effect on the natural processes in the HCW, except for the proposed short-term effects of the helicopter use.

If the decision is made that this activity must take place in wilderness, then the second decision is to determine what the minimum tool or technique is to accomplish the task. In considering this decision, all impacts and resources must be evaluated. In this case, Alternative A, No Action might have the least impact on the HCW but will have the most impact on the FCRNRW because the goat population in the FCRNRW will not be augmented and restored. Alternative D, Capture and Pack Out the Goats is the most consistent with the use of primitive tools and skills, but is not necessarily the minimum tool. This is true because Alternative D would require a camp and holding pen to be setup in the wilderness and it would require the use of pack and riding stock for a longer period of time in the wilderness during the wet early season, when visitors are beginning to visit the area. It also has been proven to be the most hazardous to the wildlife and staff involved.

The preferred action alternative is B, Capture and Fly Out the Goats. This alternative causes short-term effects to the wilderness and necessitates the use or motorized equipment and mechanical transport. However, of the two alternatives proposing the use of a helicopter in wilderness, it accomplishes the management objectives in a more feasible manner with less visitor disturbance and effects caused by the operations in wilderness, because the operation is conducted early in the season before visitors are in the area and because no camp is necessary inside the wilderness. There is also less risk to other wildlife because a trap is not used and the animals are not being transported by mule. However, safety is still an issue for the agency staff because while the packing and transporting of goats by mule may cause injuries, a helicopter accident can cause serious injury or fatalities. This alternative accomplishes the long term wilderness management objectives by reestablishing the goat population in the FCRNRW and helping to reverse an impact on that population caused by past over harvest of goats by humans in that wilderness. It also meets the long-term wilderness management objectives for the HCW by not effecting the existing viable population of goats.

**Rationale for decision:**

Alternative A - No Action

This alternative would not accomplish the wilderness management objective of transplanting goats to the FCRNRW from the HCW. There would be no short-term effects but there would be long-term effects on wilderness habitat and potentially the goat population due to likely over crowding in the HCW and a less than viable population in the FCRNRW.

Alternative B - Proposed Action - Capture and Fly Out the Goats

This alternative would accomplish the wilderness management objectives for both this wilderness and the wilderness receiving the transplanted goats. The long-term effect is that the goat herd in the HCW would be slightly reduced to better fit the preferred range thereby increasing the long-term health of the herd. The short-term effect is that a helicopter would be used for four days in wilderness during a time when ground access to the area is not possible and no wilderness visitors would be in the area. Use of the helicopter is a safety risk for staff and wildlife. Disturbance to other wildlife would occur due to use of the helicopter and net gun. However, the net gun capture method is the most efficient and reliable approach.

Alternative C - Capture and Fly Out the Goats using Clover Traps

This alternative could accomplish the wilderness management objectives for both this wilderness and the wilderness receiving the transplanted goats. The long-term effect is that the goat herd in the HCW would be slightly reduced to better fit the preferred range thereby increasing the long-term health of the herd. The short-term effect is that a helicopter would be used for 5-10 days in wilderness during a time when ground access to the area is possible and some wilderness visitors may be in the area. Use of the traps can also be more hazardous to other wildlife than use of a net gun as proposed in Alternative B. Use of the helicopter is a safety risk to staff and wildlife. Disturbance to other wildlife would occur due to the use of a helicopter in the wilderness. Past attempts at using this method resulted in the capture of a single goat in two trapping attempts.

Alternative D - Capture and Pack Out the Goats

Successful implementation of this alternative would accomplish the management objectives for both wilderness areas but would put the agency staff, goats, and other wildlife at risk from injury due to a longer confinement of the goats and the packing operations. It would also close a popular trail for a short period of time and necessitate a base camp in the wilderness for up to 14 days. In addition, the transfer point, Dry Diggins Lookout, is not usually accessible by pack stock during May and June when clover traps are most effective

**What additional constraints are necessary to minimize disturbance to the wilderness resource and character?**

Timing, location, or frequency of activity?

A total of 4 days of disturbance during early season when visitor use is minimal.

Transplant operations are spread over five years.

Maintenance requirements?

None

Standards or design requirements?

Safety requirements for helicopter operations, livestock use, backcountry work.

Monitoring?

IDFG is to monitor health and survival of populations in FCRNRW and HCW.

Operations will be suspended if population trends are negative.