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Conservation groups file objection to helicopter-assisted game-farming project in Wasatch Wildernesses

For more info:

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Conservation and Wilderness groups recently filed an objection against the U.S. Forest Service's proposal to allow the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) to use helicopters to capture and collar mountain goats and bighorn sheep in the Mt. Timpanogos, Lone Peak and Twin Peak Wildernesses in the Wasatch Mountains in Utah.

The objection was filed by Wilderness Watch, Western Wildlife Conservancy, Save Our Canyons, Yellowstone to Uintas Connection and Utah Chapter of the Sierra Club. It can be viewed here: <http://bit.ly/2BH8MK8>

“Wildernesses are protected areas where the earth and its community of life are ‘untrammled’ by man, where natural processes prevail and wildlife is afforded a rare reprieve from our aggressive meddling,” explained Dana Johnson, staff attorney for Wilderness Watch. “Yet, UDWR wants to pursue, capture, and radio-collar wildlife from helicopters in three wilderness areas to intensively manage an introduced species for recreational hunting opportunities. This plan undermines everything that wilderness is about.”

The groups contend the proposal is antithetical to Wilderness in numerous ways. For starters, mountain goats are a non-native, exotic species in Utah. UDWR placed them in the Wasatch Mountains some years ago for hunting. Attempting to perpetuate a non-native species in Wilderness violates a fundamental tenet of Wilderness — “where the earth and its community of life are untrammled by man...retaining its primeval character and influence...which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions.”

Helicopters, too, are antithetical to Wilderness. The Wilderness Act prohibits the use of aircraft except in cases of emergencies or when an essential wilderness stewardship action cannot be met without them. Yet this proposal would allow up to 60 helicopter landings — 40 for mountain goats and 20 for bighorn sheep —all in Wilderness. The Wilderness Act also prohibits installations, such as GPS tracking collars, except in very narrow circumstances, but the proposal would allow them as a matter of course.

“It’s important for citizens to be both vigilant and diligent in protecting our public lands and wildlife. Among other things, this means protecting the sanctity of the Wilderness Act by protecting wilderness itself,” stated Kirk Robinson, Ph.D., Executive Director of the Western Wildlife Conservancy. “The UDWR proposal is all about providing more animals for hunters to shoot and has nothing at all to do with managing the Wasatch wilderness areas for their wilderness character. It is our duty to oppose it.”

Last year, UDWR asked permission to capture mountain goats, but because they aren’t native it was virtually impossible to show the project was necessary to benefit the Wildernesses. It now appears that UDWR is simply piggybacking bighorn sheep onto the project to make it appear it might help a native species. Even if one could justify capturing bighorns, roughly two-thirds of their range lies outside the Wilderness and they could be captured there. – END –