

Syilx Okanagan Nation Call for an Emergency Order to Halt Big Horn Sheep Hunting as Populations are Decimated

nk'mcinm (Grand Forks), Syilx Territory: Over the last weeks the California Big Horn Sheep herd near nk'mcinm (Grand Forks) has been decimated by bluetongue disease epidemic. This disease has created a widespread die off in most of the herd in a short period of time. The number of dead is expected to continue to climb.

Bluetongue disease is uncommon in British Columbia, though it has affected herds south of the border. It is spread by the *Culicoides* biting fly, which is thought to have arrived due to changes in environmental conditions and wind.

"This disease, as it currently stands, is exacerbated by this drought period, and it will most likely be more common due to human caused climate change," stated Addison Fosberry, ONA Wildlife Biologist.

Currently, there are still several hunting tags that the Province of BC has issued for this population – having been issued before the epidemic was identified.

Chief Clarence Louie, ONA Tribal Chair, states: "The ability of these big horn sheep to survive is gravely threatened by the recent outbreak of bluetongue disease. We are demanding the Province of BC place an emergency order to immediately suspend the bighorn sheep hunting season, which opened this week, to allow those animals still alive an opportunity to begin to recover. We are also calling on those that currently do hold hunting tags to abstain from hunting these animals."

At this time there is no evidence that bluetongue disease can transmit to humans, though there are concerns that it may also infect white tail and mule deer. If you harvest a sick animal, we ask that you report them to Addison Fosberry, ONA Wildlife Biologist: 1-250-300-8226. We advise that meat is not consumed until there is better evidence of how the disease interacts with humans.

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