



Office of the Minister
Box 2703, Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2C6

April 6, 2018

Frank Thomas, Chair
Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board
P.O. Box 31104
Whitehorse, YT Y1A 5P7

Dear Mr. Thomas:

RE: *M. OVI* BACTERIA IN WILD SHEEP

As you may be aware, the Alaskan government has made recent announcements regarding tests that are positive for the *M. ovi* bacteria in some isolated populations of Dall's sheep and mountain goats in the state. I am contacting you to provide more information about this detection and what we are doing about it.

As the *M. ovi* bacteria has been linked to pneumonia outbreaks in bighorn sheep in southern parts of North America, we are staying in touch with our Alaskan counterparts to keep abreast of their surveillance findings. We will continue to take action to ensure our intrinsically and commercially valuable wild thinhorn sheep populations remain healthy by supporting the testing of domestic sheep and goats for *M. ovi*. We are also expanding the testing of wild sheep here in Yukon.

These recent results from Alaska are preliminary, but all animals that tested positive were healthy. The risk of spread from potentially positive animals in Alaska to Yukon is considered to be low. While some positive animals were detected in zones adjacent to Yukon, the populations are separated geographically and there has been no evidence of pneumonia in the Alaskan populations where *M. ovi* was detected. Surveillance testing of wild thinhorn sheep in Yukon and northern British Columbia over the past two years has not detected *M. ovi*.

The *M. ovi* bacteria can be carried by healthy domestic sheep or goats, but there are different strains in different host species. We are aware of the potential for disease to spread if domestic sheep or goats come into contact with isolated wild thinhorn sheep. At the same time, we recognize that domestic sheep and goats are of high potential value for the territory's growing livestock industry because of their meat, milk and fleece. This is why we are working with the Yukon's agriculture industry to promote and support fencing to keep domestic sheep and goats separate from wild populations. We are also exploring options for policy or regulatory solutions to mitigate the risk of disease transfer to Yukon wild sheep and goat populations.



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We will continue our work with our partners in Alaska and British Columbia, the agriculture industry, the outfitting industry, and others to monitor and protect the health of our iconic wild sheep populations. The departmental contact is Chief Veterinarian Officer, Mary Vanderkop at Mary.Vanderkop@gov.yk.ca or 867-456-4482.

Mahsi,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pauline Frost', written in a cursive style.

Pauline Frost
Minister of Environment

Cc. Renewable Resource Councils
Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope)