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September 10, 2007

Dr. Roger Mahr, President and
Members, AVMA Executive Board
American Veterinary Medical Association
1931 North Meacham Road, Suite 100
Schaumburg, IL 60173-4360

Dear Dr. Mahr and Members of the Executive Board:

This letter is in response to the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* (JAVMA) May 15, 2007, news article regarding adoption of the policy "Wildlife-Livestock Interactions" as recommended by the American Veterinary Medical Association's (AVMA) Animal Agriculture Liaison Committee. The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) is deeply concerned that the subject policy and associated news article were based on the false premise that state wildlife agencies do not rely on science-based evidence and peer-reviewed research when making management decisions related to wildlife-livestock interactions.

In fact, WAFWA has a standing Wildlife Health Committee composed of agency veterinarians, scientists, wildlife health specialists and other professional staff involved in the day-to-day monitoring, diagnosis, research, and management of wildlife diseases in cooperation with the recognized public health and agricultural animal health authorities in their respective states. Many of the committee members are nationally recognized wildlife veterinarians, a number of whom are also AVMA members. Some of these committee members regularly publish the results of their research in the peer-reviewed literature with the support of their wildlife agency employers. At its July 12, 2007, annual business meeting, WAFWA directors received a report from the Wildlife Health Committee, which prompted this letter.

To provide you with background about WAFWA, and to put our concerns in perspective, our organization is composed of the commissioners, directors, and fisheries and wildlife chiefs from 23 western states and Canadian provinces. WAFWA has been a key organization in the promotion of sound resource management principles and the strengthening of federal, state and private cooperation in protecting and managing fish and wildlife and their habitats in the public interest for the past 85 years. Through its committee structure, and involvement with the Washington, D.C.-based Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, WAFWA brings its expertise and prestige to bear on behalf of needed advances and reforms in fish and wildlife management at the state, national and international levels in order to enhance wildlife conservation efforts and the protection of associated habitats in the public interest. Our mission is "*Delivering conservation through information exchange and working partnerships*". You may be interested to know that the primary missions of WAFWA member agencies are similar and focus on conserving and enhancing wildlife populations which they hold in the public trust on behalf of all the citizens of their respective states. As such, state wildlife agencies are vested with the jurisdiction and legal authority for managing resident wildlife, including bighorn sheep. In other words, WAFWA is composed of the state government agencies which, according to the JAVMA news article, would be encouraged to use the new AVMA "Wildlife-Livestock Interactions" policy.

Western state wildlife agencies have worked for decades with university scientists and land managers to develop sound policy from available scientific information designed to mitigate wildlife and livestock producer issues, including those involving pasteurellosis in bighorn and domestic sheep, brucellosis in elk, bison, and cattle, and bovine tuberculosis in deer and livestock, among others.


With respect to state wildlife agencies providing input to the federal land management agencies – including the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management, regarding livestock grazing decisions – there is a long history of interactions at the national, regional and state levels. WAFWA recognizes the multiple land use mandates for these federal agencies and promotes the use of the best scientific information in making decisions involving potential conflicts between wildlife and livestock.

Addressing disease issues in free-ranging wildlife populations is a major responsibility of every wildlife management agency, more so than any non-government entity can claim. Therefore, we are concerned that the misleading statements printed in your organization's article can only serve to provide a platform of misinformation to your readership and the public, and negatively affect the foundations our agencies have built with the agricultural animal community and land management agencies.

In conclusion, WAFWA requests that the AVMA Executive Board review the statements contained in the May 15, 2007, JAVMA news article and consider an update of its position which appears to have been based on unsubstantiated statements related to state wildlife agency public policy being developed on the basis of speculation rather than science. We would suggest that in the future, when publishing views concerning wildlife/livestock disease interface issues, that AVMA consult any number of professional wildlife health associations including our Wildlife Health Committee, the USAHA Wildlife Disease Committee, members of the Wildlife Disease Association, and the American Association of Wildlife Veterinarians. By copy of this letter, I will inform the Chief of the U.S. Forest Service and the Director of the Bureau of Land Management of WAFWA's concerns regarding this important matter.

We hope to see these issues resolved in the near future and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,


Jeffrey R. Vonk
WAFWA President

cc: Chief, U.S. Forest Service
Director, Bureau of Land Management