



Sulphur / 8 Mile Stone's Sheep Project Northern British Columbia
A multi-stakeholder research and planning initiative



Stephanie Killam, Chair
Muskwa-Kechika Advisory Board , and
Dale Morgan, Regional Executive Director, Northeast, Ministry of Forests Lands and Natural Resource Operations.

Re: North Peace Stone's Sheep Sustainability Steering Committee Recommendation.

This letter refers to the completion of the final phase of the Sulphur / 8 Mile Stone's Sheep Project *The Application of the Sulphur/ 8 Mile Stone's Sheep Project to Oil and Gas Pre-Tenure Plan for the Muskwa-Kechika Management Area.*, and our recommendations to the Muskwa-Kechika Advisory Board. The following reports are now available at <http://www.scek.ca/>:

- 1. The Application of the Sulphur/ 8 Mile Stone's Sheep Project to Oil and Gas Pre-Tenure Plan for the Muskwa-Kechika Management Area.***
- 2. Research Summary & Management Considerations, January 2012***
- 3. Stone's sheep population dynamics and habitat use in the Sulphur / 8 Mile oil and gas pre-tenure plan area, northern British Columbia, 2005 – 2010***

Pre-tenure planning for Oil and Gas tenures is mandated by the *Muskwa-Kechika Management Area Act*. Concerns about the status of Stone's sheep population in the Sulphur / 8 Mile pre-tenure plan area resulted in the following provisions:

- The pre-tenure plan, approved in 2004, only applied to the Lower Elevation Zone;
- A study of Stone's sheep habitat and population was initiated in 2004 in order to inform the development of management direction for oil and gas activities in the Higher Elevation Zone;
- The study was to be undertaken in a five year period ending in 2009. (Note: the study is just now complete due to initial funding challenges and extended field work on male sheep to accommodate strong concerns over impacts on resident hunting and the guide outfitting industry); and
- Oil and gas tenures were not to be sold in the Higher Elevation Zone until the management direction was completed and the pre-tenure plan was amended to incorporate this direction.

NP Stone's Sheep Sustainability Committee and the Sulphur / 8 Mile Stone's Sheep project have made significant progress with substantive support from Industry, the Science and Community Environmental Knowledge Fund (SCEK Fund), EMPR's Environmental Sustainability Fund and the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund Foundation and others.

This project is essential to offering a scientific-basis for finalizing the Sulphur / 8 Mile Pre-tenure plan. The plan is required by the Muskwa-Kechika Management Area Act prior to the posting of Oil and Gas tenure opportunities in this area.

With the completion of the project and reports our recommendations are as follows:



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The Sulphur/8Mile Stone's Sheep Research Project has comprehensively documented sheep distribution in the Sulphur/8Mile Pre-Tenure Plan area. The project identifies that a significant portion of the High Elevation Zone, north of the Toad River, is virtually unused by Stone's Sheep, currently and historically. Similarly a portion of the high elevation zone south of the Dunedin River has very limited utilization by sheep. These areas, which comprise 60% of the Sulphur/8 Mile Pre-Tenure Plan area, and the adjacent Muskwa West Zone, should be managed by the general measures for Stone's Sheep in the Muskwa-Kechika Pre-Tenure Plan and reference for special sheep consideration in these areas should be removed.

The Steering Committee recognises that a portion of the High Elevation Zone of the Sulphur/8Mile Pre-Tenure planning area is critical to the maintenance of the "Stone" subpopulation of Stone's Sheep; substantially verifying the strong concerns expressed by the Public Advisory Group in 2003. The research indicates that this population is at capacity and is fully utilizing the area. It appears that industrial activity in this area will certainly lead to a decline in this population. Loss of habitat through surface disturbance and loss of use of additional habitat through perceptual disruption, fragmentation and disturbance would all be contributing factors.

The Steering Committee recommends that the remaining area of the High Elevation Zone south of the Toad River and north of the Dunedin River, the "Stone's Sheep Zone", be designated for the protection of Stone's Sheep by either:

- 1) Changing the approved boundaries of the Muskwa-Kechika Pre-Tenure plan area; or*
- 2) A No Disposition Notation order under the Petroleum and Natural Gas Act;*

The Steering Committee would like to bring to the attention of the Muskwa-Kechika Advisory Board and the Ministry of Natural Resource Operations that the restrictions to oil and gas development to sustain Stone's Sheep, if accepted, should also apply to all other forms of surface development that may result in similar impacts. Stone's Sheep warrant this level of protection, and require exclusion for other conflicting activities. Options would include a full suite of regulatory actions or Legislative Action as identified in the discussion in option 3 section 8 a) iii.

We request that you consider our recommendation. If you have any questions or would like the issue report presented to you please contact me. The full report will be sent to you by Brian Churchill, Chair Science Committee.

On behalf of the North Peace Stone's Sheep Sustainability Committee

Bill Oppen, Chair.