

BC's Wild/Domestic Sheep Separation Program

The British Columbia Sheep Separation Program (BCSSP) is an important program for BC's wild sheep, promoting healthy wild sheep throughout the province by reducing contact between wild and domestic sheep. The BCSSP formed in 2008 through the collaboration and support of multiple stakeholders including the Ministry of Forest Lands and Natural Resources Operations, the Wild Sheep Society of BC and private stakeholders. Jeremy Ayotte was recently hired as the Provincial Coordinator of the BCSSP to enable the group to more actively pursue its' goals. The primary funding has and continues to be provided by the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund (HCTF). The WSSBC has also contributed funding and support over the years. The BCSSP works with wildlife managers and stakeholders to reduce the risk of contact and range overlap between the two species, while still supporting an expanding domestic sheep industry in areas where the risk of contact is low. The program goal of managing for healthy wild sheep and healthy domestic sheep farms is achieved through public education, farm-by-farm mitigation, and lobbying for policy and legislation.

Farm mitigation efforts include installing fencing (typically 8' wildlife fencing), and working with landowners to modify practices on the farm such as timing of pasture rotation (avoiding perimeter pastures during the fall rut), and the use of livestock protection dogs to keep wild sheep from co-mingling with domestics. Although mitigation on high risk farms can be effective on a small scale, it is costly to fund and mitigation money is hard to come by. Since this is a provincial issue, the BCSSP, along with its collaborators, is seeking overarching policy and regulations to limit or exclude domestic sheep in high risk areas.