



## Disease Free in the North

*Alaska's Dall sheep, Rocky Mountain goats and Muskoxen are at risk from a foreign pathogen called M.ovi that causes pneumonia resulting in major die offs*

- Forty-five thousand Dall sheep live in Alaska – more than 25% of all wild sheep in North America.
- Pneumonia in wild Caprinae caused by a foreign pathogen called M.ovi is well documented including mortality in Dall sheep, Rocky Mountain goats and muskoxen.
- M.ovi is commonly carried by domestic sheep and goats including almost five percent of Alaskan domestics
- Alaska has approximately 150 to 200 owners with less than 1500 domestic sheep and goats
- Currently it is completely legal to import M.ovi-infected domestic animals into Alaska
- Alaska's Dall sheep, Rocky Mountain goats and Muskox have not been infected yet by M.ovi based on ADF&G field testing



- Unfortunately, M.ovi can be transmitted by as few as one contact between an infected domestic sheep or goat and one of their wild cousins.
- Once transmitted this bacterium could easily spread between Alaska's contiguous wild sheep ranges....causing a devastating die-off of Alaska's wild sheep and goats
- Restocking just one mountain range with sheep and goats after a major die off could take tens of millions of dollars and more than a lifetime to complete

- There are no magic bullets – no effective vaccines or treatments for M.ovi in either domestic or wild sheep
- The best solution for Alaska's unique circumstances is to go "Disease Free in the North" which really means M.ovi-free domestic herds
- The AK WSF goal is to minimize the impact on domestic producers while implementing this science-based solution to protect Alaska's wild sheep, goats and muskoxen.
- To reduce this impact, the Alaska Wild Sheep Foundation and its partners have agreed to pay for the necessary testing of all domestic sheep and goats and to compensate owners for replacement of infected animals and associated incidental costs.



*Help AK WSF prevent the needless loss of these iconic Alaska species – support regulatory changes to prevent the importation of infected domestic animals and support the testing of domestic sheep and goats with the mitigation of infected animals.*



# State of Alaska Department of Fish & Game

Division of Wildlife Conservation

**Samuel R. Cotten**  
Commissioner

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## PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: March 13, 2018

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### Respiratory Pathogen Confirmed for First Time in Alaska Dall's Sheep and Mountain Goats

(Anchorage) – A strain of bacteria known to cause pneumonia in Lower 48 bighorn sheep has been detected for the first time in Alaska Dall's sheep and mountain goats.

*Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* (*Movi*, for short), described as a respiratory bacteria that can cause disease in susceptible hosts, was recently confirmed in four Dall's sheep within a sample of 136 and in two of 39 mountain goats. The Dall's sheep testing positive for *Movi* were all in Game Management Unit 13A; all were taken by hunters and appeared healthy. The mountain goats were live captured and released in Southeast and on the Kenai Peninsula and showed no sign of illness; only samples from goats on the Kenai tested positive.

"Our initial research has confirmed *Movi* in a small number of Dall's sheep and mountain goats in relatively isolated areas of the state," said Division of Wildlife Conservation Director Bruce Dale, adding that Alaska's Dall's sheep and mountain goat populations overall are healthy.

"We are not aware of any pneumonia outbreaks or die-offs in Dall's sheep or mountain goats related to this bacterium."

The department has collected surveillance samples from Dall's sheep and mountain goats throughout most of mainland Alaska for several years, sending them over the last eight months to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal Disease Research Unit. That collaborative effort is credited for the *Movi* detection.

"Monitoring the health of Alaska's wildlife populations is part of what wildlife managers do," Dale said. "Detecting *Movi* in Dall's sheep and mountain goats increases our knowledge about the health of Alaska's populations."

*Movi* is sometimes found in domestic sheep, goats, and wild sheep and goats in the Lower 48, among other hooved animals. It has been identified as a pathogen in Lower 48 bighorn sheep pneumonia outbreaks that have resulted in significant die-offs. Pneumonia from *Movi* can develop as the result of multiple stressors including poor nutritional condition and/or environmental factors such as extreme weather, or high population density.

Both domestic and wild sheep and goats can carry the bacteria while showing no signs of illness.

*Movi* is considered a pathogen because it impairs the hosts' respiratory cilia from clearing bacteria that enter the lungs normally at each breath. This can allow other more virulent bacteria to remain in the lungs to proliferate and cause pneumonia.

The department plans to continue surveillance for *Mycoplasma* bacteria, including *Movi* research in Dall's sheep, mountain goats, and other Alaska wildlife in collaboration with the USDA Animal Disease Research Unit and the Washington Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory in Pullman, Washington. For more information about *Movi* findings in Alaska, see the frequently asked questions at <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=hottopics.movi>

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March 21, 2018

The Hon. Andy Josephson  
Alaska House of Representatives  
Room 102 Capitol Bldg.  
Juneau, AK, 99801

Dear Representative Josephson:

Our sportsmen-conservation and professional organizations, representing a large portion of all American sportsmen and women, strongly support House Concurrent Resolution No. 23. This measure supports enhanced efforts to protect wildlife and domestic animals in the state from infectious diseases, foreign pathogens, and non-endemic parasites. This is a vital and basic duty in wildlife conservation.

Action against foreign pathogens and infectious diseases is particularly important in Alaska where wildlife is a celebrated treasure of worldwide renown. The value of wildlife conservation reaches throughout the way of life and economy of Alaska, intertwined with such basic needs as food security and such economic strengths as tourism.

HCR No. 23 is consistent with a federal proposal from Sen. Lisa Murkowski directing federal agencies to use the best data and information to identify risks of disease transmission and solutions by working directly with state agencies, other professionals, and stakeholders.

With 40,000-50,000 Dall's sheep, Alaska is home to 25% of all wild sheep in North America. Recent proof of pathogen spillover from domestic stock to wild Dall's sheep in the Talkeetna range is alarming and should be a call to swift action to prevent additional disease transmission which threatens this incredibly valuable resource to Alaskans, Americans and people worldwide.

Please rely on our full support of House Concurrent Resolution No. 23 as you continue to push for its adoption.

Thank you for your efforts.

# New Findings Suggest *Movi* is More Widespread in Alaska's Wild Sheep and Goats

- ADF&G Press Release

**Sam Cotten, Commissioner**

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**Press Release: March 20, 2018**

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## **New Findings Suggest *Movi* is More Widespread in Alaska's Wild Sheep and Goats**

(Fairbanks) — New laboratory results received by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game late last Friday have reported detection of *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* ("*Movi*") in nine more Dall's sheep and three more mountain goats — that's in addition to the initial discovery of the bacteria in four Dall's sheep and two mountain goats announced March 13. The findings confirm the detection of *Movi* in Dall's sheep in Game Management Units 12, 13A, 20A, 25C, 26B, and 26C, and in mountain goats in 15B.

"We're sharing these findings with Alaskans as we receive them," said Bruce Dale, Division of Wildlife Conservation director. Numerous samples are currently queued to be analyzed.

Based on preliminary analysis, three strains of *Movi* have been identified in Dall's sheep. All animals sampled appeared disease-free and the department has no evidence that *Movi* has caused sickness or death in Alaska's wild sheep or goat populations.

Sometimes found in domestic and wild sheep and goats in the Lower 48, *Movi* is considered a pathogen because it impairs hosts' respiratory cilia from clearing bacteria that enter the lungs normally at each breath. *Movi* has been associated with pneumonia outbreaks in Lower 48 bighorn sheep, often resulting in significant die-offs.

The presence of *Movi* in an animal does not mean it is or will become sick. More than 100 known *Mycoplasma* species exist, including *Movi*, and evidence suggests that virulence — the ability to infect and cause disease — varies between *Movi* strains. The ability of *Movi* to cause pneumonia is impacted by multiple stressors including poor nutritional condition and/or environmental factors such as extreme weather. Both domestic and wild sheep and goats can carry the bacteria while showing no signs of illness.

The department has collected surveillance samples from Dall's sheep and mountain goats throughout most of mainland Alaska for years. In response to the recent findings, the department plans to intensify *Movi* surveillance efforts in Dall's sheep, mountain goats, and other Alaska wildlife in collaboration with the USDA Animal Disease Research Unit and the Washington Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory in Pullman, Washington. Department staff will also monitor the affected wildlife populations.

"We obviously have more to learn about *Movi* in Alaska," said Dale. "The recent laboratory results provide a starting point for seeking more information about this pathogen."

For more information about *Movi* findings in Alaska, see the frequently asked questions at <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=hottopics.movi>

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