

Together for Wildlife - Interior Universities Research Coalition Student Research Grant - Interim Reports

Physiological responses of the Dome Mountain Sheep Population to vehicle activity on the Jade Boulder Road

Student: Westin Creyke

Principle Investigator: Heather Bryan

School: University of Northern B.C.

Question 1. What activities have been completed on this project to date?

The first field session has been completed for this project. A total of 121 samples (7 forage samples and 114 pellet samples) were collected over three days in late winter (March 4 – 6) sheep range from the Dome Mountain Sheep population and an undisturbed control population. A safety plan was completed and submitted to the UNBC safety office. The thesis proposal for this project is underway and the fieldwork is planned for the rest of the year. I have nearly completed my 4th (out of 5) required courses for my program.

Question 2. Is the project progressing as planned? If not, why not and what are you doing to mitigate or adjust?

Field work is progressing as planned. We've made an adjustment to the timing of one sampling session. We will no longer be sampling during lambing to avoid disturbing the sheep during a sensitive time. Instead, we will be sampling in late April which will allow us to see the effects of late pregnancy on cortisol levels.

The proposal is behind the schedule outlined in the grant application. The committee for this project is being finalized and an initial proposal draft is expected to be completed in May/June.

Question 3. How have you been working with your research partners, including Indigenous communities, to ensure meaningful collaboration and participation?

The wildlife director for the Tahltan Central Government was used for check in procedures during the field work session. The wildlife guardians were welcome to join for the sampling session but were busy with their own ongoing projects. The Tahltan Central Government shared their 80% kernel winter range data with us to reduce the effort required to find sheep and samples.

The research was presented to high school students at the Dease Lake school 1.5 weeks prior to the first field session. The teachers were provided with permission forms for students to fill out and participate in sampling. One student completed the form before the sampling session began and participated in one day of sampling. More students are expected to join in upcoming fieldwork sessions. During the sampling session with the student, I talked to her in more depth about stone sheep, my project, and some Tahltan history in the study area.



Question 4. Tell us about one success, one challenge or difficulty and one thing you would do differently if you could go back?

Presenting this project to the local students in Dease Lake was a success. I brought another UNBC MSc student who is researching predator-prey dynamics in the area with me to present his research to the students as well. The students showed a lot of interest in participating in the fieldwork and hopefully saw some opportunity for pursuing a post-secondary education. This occurred a few days prior to the 12th grade students' field trip to the lower mainland to tour universities.

Finding the sheep in their winter range was difficult and took more time than expected. To save costs on flight time we landed on ridges adjacent to slopes marked in the 80% kernel winter range data and searched the slopes using binoculars and spotting scopes.

If I could restart, I would have booked my helicopter flights sooner to coincide with my presentation to the high school students. I did not book my flights soon enough this time and had to fly a week later than expected which added to travel time and costs.

