

**Views from the Mountain:
What resident Yukon sheep hunters
have to say**

Jean Carey and Jim Tousignant

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Yukon Fish and Wildlife Branch
TR-98-2**

Acknowledgments

We appreciate the thoughtful,
timely responses of resident Yukon sheep hunters.


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Highlights

Of the 187 questionnaires delivered by Canada Post, 105 were returned by the six-week deadline. Most licensed sheep hunters are very supportive of the permit system as it is set up today. The majority of the complaints about the permit system were about how people think the draw is administered; more explanation is needed.

Permit hunters would like to see hunt dates staggered if more permits are made available in a subzone. When asked if all subzones should be open until there is a problem, or if only subzones which have a huntable population should be open, hunters' responses were almost equally divided. If more background information had been provided, the response may have been different.

It is more important to most respondents to know there are few other hunters in the area than it is to know they have a good chance of getting a big (or any legal) ram.

The use of ATVs for sheep hunting, and access in general, were the topics that respondents brought up the most.

Twenty-six percent of the hunters responding to the questionnaire thought that an outright ban of ATVs would be appropriate under some conditions and a further 39 percent suggested that ATVs be restricted to designated routes or limited to use below the treeline.

Thirty-five percent of the hunters responding to the questionnaire thought that banning ATVs would not be an effective management tool.

Most respondents were not aware that small, isolated sheep populations may need special protection beyond the full curl rule.

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Introduction

This survey (shown as Appendix 1) was sent to active licensed resident sheep hunters living in Haines Junction and Whitehorse - the people who are most familiar with how the permit system is working now. The survey gives wildlife managers a sense of what licensed hunters like about the permit system and what changes could be made to make it work better.

The results of this survey are also meant to alert Renewable Resource Councils to the topics that may be the most difficult to deal with when they start to build management plans for their areas.

Limited entry sheep permits have been in effect in Game Management Zone 7 for the past 18 years. From a sheep management point of view, the system is working very well, but we felt it was time to ask licensed resident hunters how they think the system is working. The questionnaire was a chance to hear what the concerns of these sheep hunters are and give them an opportunity to suggest ways to deal with their concerns.

Of the 187 questionnaires delivered by Canada Post, 105 were returned by the six-week deadline. The replies showed a lot of care and thought; many people added letters or made telephone calls. It is obvious that sheep hunters care about sheep management and have definite opinions about how things should be done. How hunters were selected to take part in the survey is explained in Appendix 2.

It is obvious that sheep hunters care about sheep management and have definite opinions about how things should be done.

We anticipate that Renewable Resource Councils will be building sheep management plans over the next few years. This survey can be used as a starting point for discussions with the Resource Councils, First Nations, interest groups and among sheep hunters themselves.

The comments presented here reflect the views of the licensed resident hunters who responded to the questionnaire. They do not represent a government position nor will they form the basis for any regulation changes. Any changes in policy or regulations will come through the planning processes. All interested parties will have their voices heard and together will build a consensus on the best ways to ensure that Yukon sheep populations will remain healthy for generations to come.

The report:

Some general themes and issues were apparent throughout the different scenarios and questions. These are presented at the beginning of the report. This is followed by the responses to each question and scenario. The responses are summarized in a chart, with the biologist's comments and a sample of hunters' comments following. Many more hunters added comments, but they were similar to the ones given here.

Issues that were raised

Access:

The use of ATVs for sheep hunting, and access in general, were the topics that were mentioned most. There are many more “easily accessible” areas today than 10 or 15 years ago: there are more roads and trails, ATVs are safer and more powerful and more people own them.

“I don’t like to see four wheelers or four wheel drives allowed in sheep country because of potential terrain disturbance and wildlife harassment. Also, to me, it detracts from my ideal of a desirable hunting experience.”

“... Use of ATVs for sheep hunting is the #1 complaint I currently hear from traditional, ethical sheep hunters. At the same time, I see ATVs as the fastest growing sheep hunter’s tool. It is time to address ATV use! They are both popular and unpopular depending on who you talk to.”

Permit hunt administration:

Most of the complaints about the permit system dealt with how people think the draw is administered. An explanation was included in this year’s hunting regulation summary; this should clear up most of the misunderstandings. A copy of the explanation is in Appendix 2.

“No, I am not happy with a permit system that allows Renewable Resource biologists and staff to enter a draw that they help to administer. If your job is to locate and study sheep in an area and then you are drawn for a tag in that area that would give you an unfair advantage over other hunters...”

The draw is administered by the departmental data administrator, not the biologist. A computer program randomly selects the applicants.

Staff members are not allowed to hunt sheep in an area they surveyed that year. This applies to all subzones, not just in the permit area.

Renewable Resource Councils:

The importance of Renewable Resource Councils bringing first nation and non-first nation communities together to deal with wildlife management was highlighted. There are many issues that must be discussed at a community level.

“Don’t open up any more permit areas, put outfitters on a quota, don’t limit the access to four wheelers and make the natives shoot legal rams.”

“There should be permits for native people too.”

“Limit the distance four wheeler or four wheel drives

can go into area. But has to apply to non-native and native or no sense doing anything”

Non-resident hunting:

While some hunters would like to see no non-resident hunting, others were suggesting that special guiding licences be available for sheep as well as moose and caribou.

“A few permits should be made available each year for Canadian citizens not residing in Yukon. This could be a lottery and special guide licences would apply.”

“No outfitters would be nice. I know it is a source of revenue but if we wish our children’s children to enjoy hunting and wilderness we should be restricting our natural resources to Canadian citizens.”

“Do not like the fact I can’t take my brother or good friend hunting sheep, only outfitters can. If there is a shortage of sheep, quota the outfitter.”

Be proactive:

There has not been a broad review of sheep management in the Yukon since the permit system was established in 1979. Many things have changed since then; it is time

to start talking about sheep management.

“Establish allowable harvest levels and registration or permit hunts only for sheep hunting in all of Yukon. It’s important now. Don’t wait until more management problems arise then try to fix them piecemeal.”

“Go permit hunt everywhere and that will solve a lot of problems.”

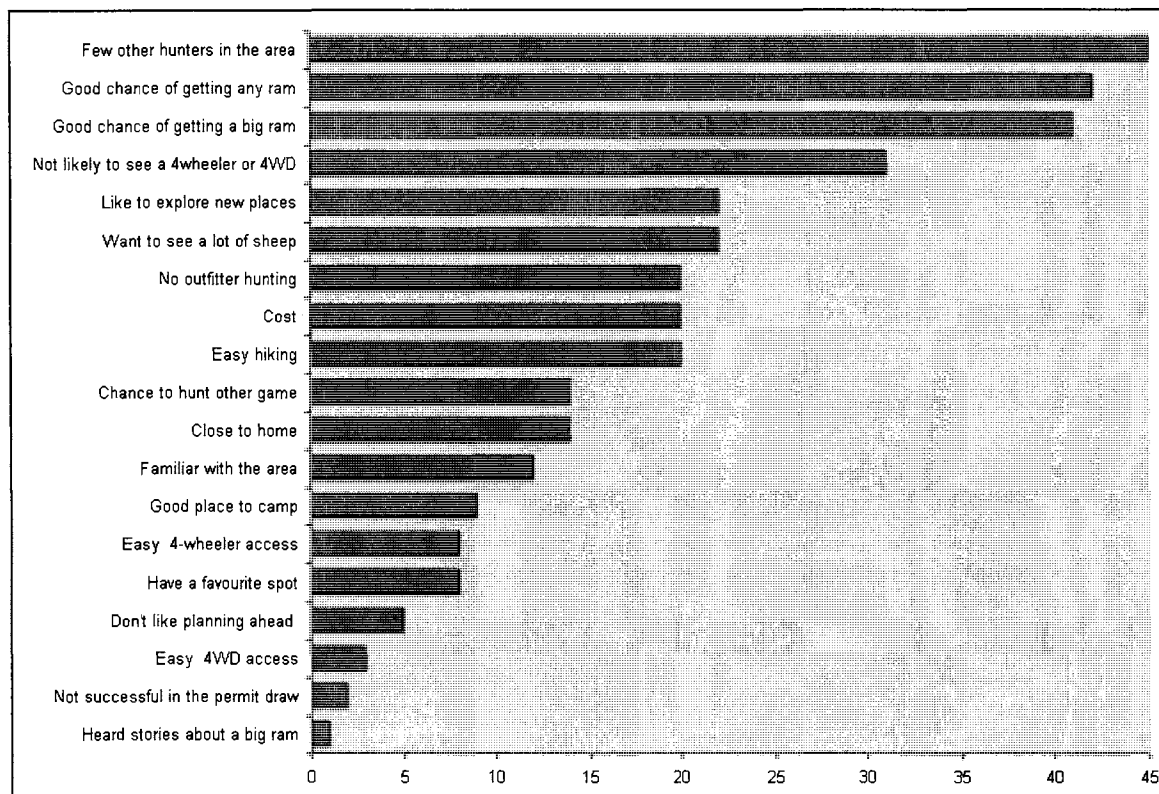
“How about “habitat protection” efforts by YTG. Lobby the Federal Government for change, please!”

Keep things simple:

“If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

To best manage the ‘people’ side of wildlife issues we have to know what is important to sheep hunters. If we can wisely manage the resource and protect the values that are important to the majority of hunters, we are more likely to have people on side and supporting the regulations. For example, there is no point in managing for maximum harvest when it is more important to most of the hunters that they don’t see anyone else while they are on their hunt.

What factors are most important to you when you decide where to go sheep hunting?



Number of times a factor was given in the top 3 reasons.

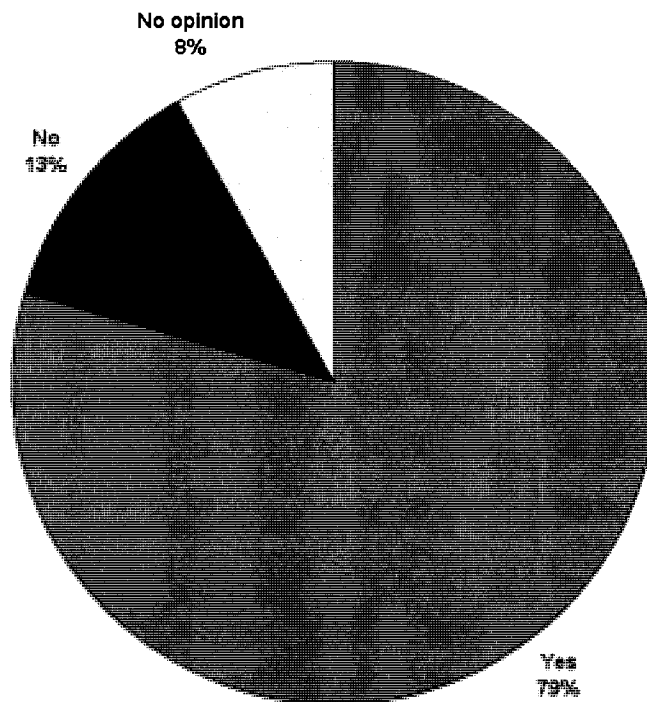
Analysis:

Sheep hunters enjoy their solitude, maybe even more than getting a sheep! There is no one factor that determines where people choose to hunt sheep and it is very difficult to rank one reason over another. More people had ‘knowing there are few other hunters in the area’ in their top 3 than any other factor, followed closely by ‘good chance of getting any ram’ and ‘good chance of getting a big ram’. Sheep hunters appreciate the hunt and their time in the mountains.

“I just like to get into the backcountry. Getting a sheep is a bonus”

The permit system has been in place since 1979, so for most hunters active today it has been operating longer than they have been hunting in the Yukon. Things seem to be working well, but some fine-tuning may make a better match between conservation goals and hunter requests.

In general, are you happy with the permit system? Do you have any ideas how we can do things better?



Analysis:

Sheep hunters are very supportive of the permit system as it is set up today. Most of the criticism is about how they believe the draw is done. An explanation of the permit draw was included in this year's Hunting Regulations Summary (see Appendix 2); this should clear up many of the misunderstandings. Despite being generally happy with the system, many hunters offered suggestions for changes. Some of the suggestions would be difficult to enforce or regulate, but they all deserve some discussion.

What hunters like about the permit system:

“The permit system for sheep is a good system and we should look at expanding it to the accessible subzones along the Alaska Hwy.”

“Yes, I am happy with the draw system. You are doing a great job ensuring there will always be great rams in and around our great city. Keep it up.”

Limits hunting pressure

“In a perfect world there would be no need to regulate hunting pressure. I think permit or registration hunting is a good way to limit hunting pressure in popular areas or where game populations are vulnerable to over-hunting.”

“Having hunted sheep in the Yukon for 25 years, I believe we have the best permit system for sheep hunting on this planet. I would be very concerned about opening the permit areas to more hunters as this would lessen the quality of the hunt.”

Permits are for residents only

“The permit system is excellent as it is right now. The fact that an area is for residents only, that is managed in a manner to provide quality hunting, is a good idea. Please do not

change it unless demand would suggest more permit areas are needed.”

Limited area

“Leave the permit system as an option in the limited area it is in now.”

What hunters don't like about the permit system:

Cost

“No, I've more or less given up on being drawn. What's the sense of spending \$20, not getting picked and losing your money?”

“Permit system is too expensive. In British Columbia it only costs \$3 for a permit.”

Restricting hunters

“I am not that happy with the permit system. I believe if any species are too low to hunt or harvest, hunting should be closed completely. When the species are back to harvestable hunting, everybody has a chance.”

“I think the permit system should only be used to protect sheep populations. If the hunter wants to have a pristine hunt by himself for a record ram, he should get an outfitter.”

Who is eligible?

“No, I am not happy with a permit system that allows Renewable Resource Biologist and staff to enter a draw that they help in administering. Also if your job is to locate and study sheep in an area and then you are drawn for a tag in that area that would give you an unfair advantage over other hunters...”

“Conservation officers are privy to inside information and should not be allowed to draw a permit; or information on large or available rams should be made public.”

Suggestions for making things better:

Bowhunting

“I believe all permit areas could be open for bowhunting from July 15 to July 31. This would encourage more time in the field without depleting the resource.”

“I think there should be more bowhunting only zones or a slightly early season for bowhunters.”

Increase trophy size

“Perhaps there would be a way to keep trophy quality very high - full curl plus? Ten years or better?”

“Alternate subzones should be closed one or two seasons at a

time to allow full curl rams to be more abundant and older, larger trophies.”

Relax trophy requirements

“I think if you see a deformed sheep (positively deformed) it should be harvestable without being full curl.”

“Why not relax full curl requirement in the permit area?”

Expand permit area

“I would like to see all zones close to Whitehorse on permits.”

“The permit system is good and should be expanded to a degree that all applicants can be accommodated.”

“No suggestions for improvement other than buying out outfitter concessions as they become available.”

“I would prefer if more high-use and easier access were open to residents (and Canadians guided by residents) by permit draw only.”

“The permit system should be expanded to include small populations; particularly small isolated populations constrained to isolated mountain blocks, especially those that are easily accessible i.e. the Miner’s Range and the Sifton Range.”

Control the number of hunters

“Most permit holders hunt the first part of the season August 1-7 and this can sometimes cause congestion. It might be

worth making smaller subzones i.e. 7-22 could have several subunits to apply for. I don't think this is a large problem though. A hunt mid-August and on will result in few hunters in the unit anyway. Staggered hunt dates can accomplish the same thing as subunits."

"To avoid crowding during the first week of August stagger hunter periods i.e. 50% August 1-15, 50% after August 15."

"The most important aspect of the permit system is that it limits hunters during the peak August period and allows for a quality hunt. Should provide opportunities for non-successful permit applicants to hunt during non-peak season e.g. September and October provided allowable harvests are not exceeded."

Control access

"...no off-road or four wheel drives in permit area."

"If the use of ATVs is not covered in the hunter safety and training program it should be."

Change the application deadline

"I would like to see the application deadline much earlier and knowing if I drew or didn't draw earlier. Gives more time for scouting the area and making plans and arrangements well in advance."

"Dates should be advertised better. Possibly people could put their names in a year ahead and offered the

opportunity each year when completing questionnaire or purchasing licences."

Change the cost

"If more zones become permit area the draw system is too expensive."

"The permit system needs some revamping. A better way would be to receive applications for permit zones and upon awarding the applicant, payment to Renewable would be awarded. The other way is a money grab."

Special permits

"Increase number of permits slightly and offer new permits to women only or youth."

"Looking into the future it would be nice for a special permit for people that are older e.g. 65."

Change the number of permits

"Increase the number of permits drawn in areas that can sustain a higher harvest."

"Would like to reduce permits in some areas to increase quality of hunting experience."

"If permit holder has been unsuccessful on year permit is issued, allow to try from August 15 next year."

Open the permit area to non-residents

"A few permits should be made available each year for Canadian citizens not residing in Yukon. This could be a

**lottery and special guide
licences would apply.”**

How the draw is done

**“The draw should be open to
the public. You could also
have a community meeting to
discuss hunting changes and
draw the permit hunt at the
end.”**

**“Publish a list of successful
applicants yearly.”**

**“I’d like to see how many
successful hunts there were in
each zone.”**

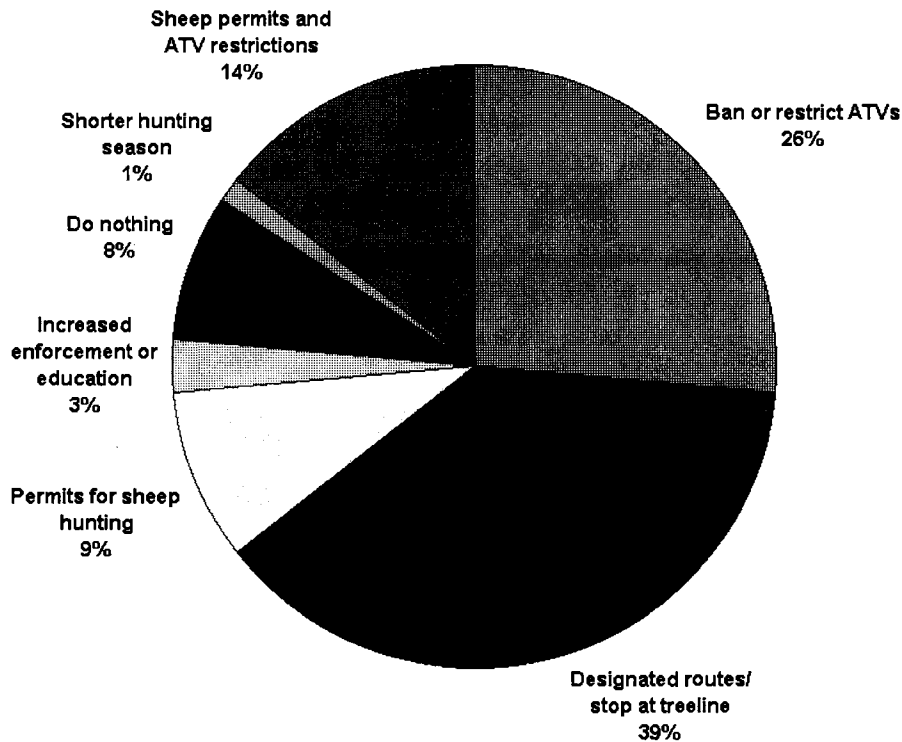
**“I feel a hunter should be able
to enter the draw every year
and have a fair and equal
chance of receiving a draw
whether he was successful the
year before or not.”**

Four scenarios were presented to draw out hunters' views on particular issues. The first scenario dealt with the question of whether we should manage the resource or the resource user; the second looked at attitudes towards permit hunting, the third looked at special considerations for low density sheep populations and the last scenario posed a philosophical question: should all areas be open until there is a problem, or should only areas that have populations large enough to hunt be open.

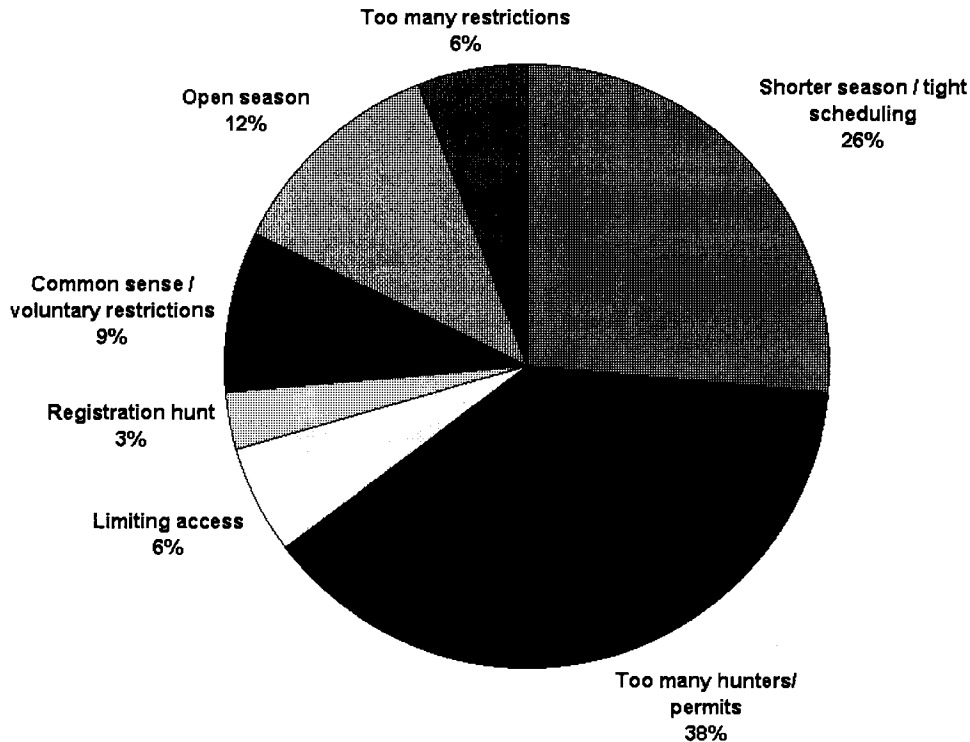
Scenario 1.

Some easily accessible areas have many people making one day sheep hunting trips (although not many are successful). Most use a 4 wheeler or four wheel drive vehicle to reach the alpine. As well as concerns about the number of hunters, there is also a concern that the traffic may be driving sheep from their range or that the range may be damaged by these vehicles.

In your opinion, what management tools would work in this situation?



What management tools wouldn't work?



Analysis:

Almost all of the hunters saw this situation as a problem that needs to be dealt with. While many people saw an outright ban on ATVs as a solution, more people thought that this would not work. Others sought a compromise by having ATVs restricted to trails or to below treeline. No matter what the solution, the warning to keep things simple was heard.

There are two approaches to dealing with this situation: limit the number of hunters (by permit) and let them choose how to get to the hunting area, or restrict how they can access the area, which will limit the number of people willing to make the effort to hunt there.

What hunters said would work:

Ban/restrict ATVs

“Definitely restrictions on four wheelers are important. If you can’t work for the meat with respect and a challenge buy your meat in the store.”

“No use of ATVs in high impact areas during the first month or two weeks.”

“I favor restricting four wheelers but this should not be done to only hunters - amend the highways act.”

Designated routes/stop at treeline

“It’s okay for people to use four wheelers in some areas. At least they’re out enjoying the outdoors. Some will get lucky. If habitat destruction becomes a problem, then designate access routes.”

“A more extensive list of areas not open to four wheel drive vehicles should be developed. four wheelers, ATVs and four wheel drives should be restricted to the valleys and not be allowed in the alpine areas.”

Permits

“Limited entry would significantly reduce traffic and be much easier and more realistic to enforce than vehicle bans.”

“Limit the number of permits issued to close, accessible areas. Vehicles should be controlled in very specific

locations based on habitat damage potential only!”

“Limit the number of people and leave access to individuals; make area permit hunt area.”

Do nothing

“I don’t think this is a problem: why should number of hunters be a concern? If I don’t like crowds next time I’ll go somewhere else less crowded. I don’t believe sheep are being chased from their range. One day-hunters are only out for the first three weekends or so of August (8 or 10 days of hunting). The rest of the whole year the sheep are left to themselves virtually. They will return to their range. Also, four-wheelers don’t damage terrain.”

Permit and access restrictions

“I think that the way to deal with this issue may be some form of the registration hunt. Limit the number of hunters and the number of kills rather than the way people get to their hunting area.”

“Make the easily accessible areas permit areas (if they already aren’t) and restrict vehicle use. Limit hunting season in some areas.”

“Limit the number of permits to close accessible areas. Vehicles should be controlled in very specific locations based on habitat damage potential only!”

“Limit the number of people and leave access to the

individual; make area permit hunt area.”

“I feel you should be allowed to reach your hunting area by a four wheeler or vehicle, park it and hunt. I don’t feel this traffic to and from an area impacts on the sheep - if so make it by permit only.”

Increased enforcement/education

“Limit four wheeler access by legislation and by blocking off known backroads that are abused.”

What hunters said wouldn’t work:

ATV bans

“Access restrictions reduce “equal opportunity” for hunters. As access becomes more restricted, cost of hunt increases to point where some can’t go.”

“In fairness to all hunters, regardless of fitness level, there needs to be some easy access to sheep habitat.”

“I use my ATV just to get into the ranges then hike. I hunt mainly in the same area yearly. I’m not scaring the sheep away. My ATV is a lot easier on the terrain than horses which tear it up.”

“Four wheelers are okay with me. Otherwise only people that can afford a plane or a horse will be able to go hunting.”

“Four-wheeler bans penalizes people whose schedules does not permit them to take five-

day hunt trips. Does not address other recreational users of ATVs e.g. campers, etc.”

“I don’t see how anyone can backpack into a sheep area and bring any amount of meat out with cape and horns.

“If the law was laid that there were no ATVs or four wheel drives allowed there would be more people breaking the law, especially if they know the game is in that range.”

Not banning ATVs/doing nothing

“Voluntary compliance. Allowing use of ATVs will only increase in years to come = increased harassment.”

“Leaving situation as it is would not be good in the long term.”

“Doing nothing or encouraging people not to doesn’t work. It must be illegal for all hunters.”

Permits/limiting numbers

“No motorized access and different dates on permits would be costly to enforce.”

“Limiting the number of hunters in a subzone at any one time [would not work] as most disturbance and damage would be caused by motorized vehicles and not people on foot.”

Shortened season/permits with different time periods

“Don’t shorten the season; I personally like late season sheep hunting. Both my sheep

**were taken last week of
October.”**

Voluntary compliance/warnings

**“Relying on common sense
and ethical methods [wouldn’t
work].”**

**“No management tools will
work here. Natives are
shooting anything that moves
in these areas. I have written
two letters of complaint in the
last two years on this issue.”**

**“Anything voluntary [wouldn’t
work]. My concern is also**

**native pressure disregarding
restrictions.**

More restrictions/anything too complicated

**“A regulation that would be
difficult for the public to
understand and difficult to
enforce e.g. restrict ATV use to
a certain elevation and not
beyond [wouldn’t work].”**

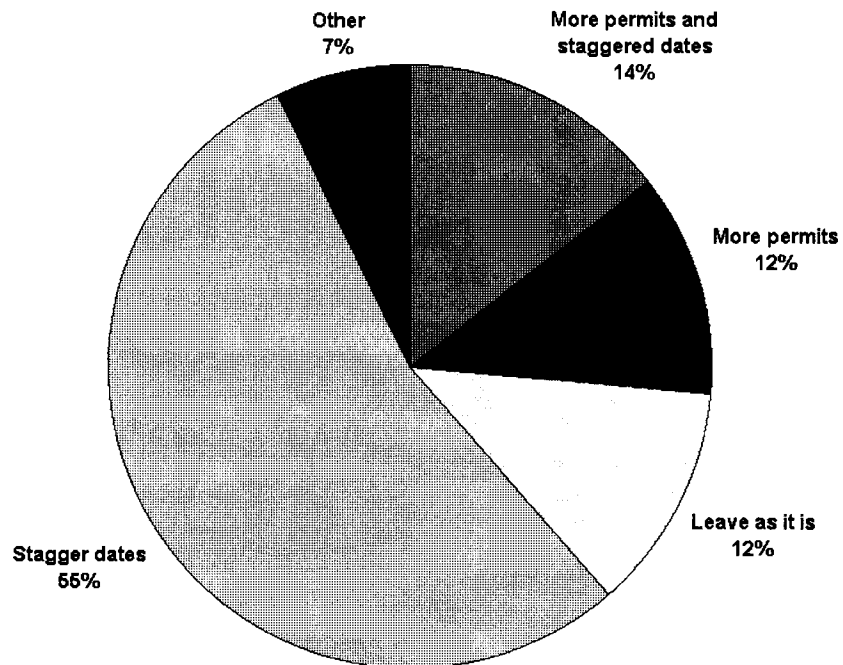
Closing to sheep hunting

**“The subzone shouldn’t be
removed from sheep hunting,
it should just be made more
challenging.”**

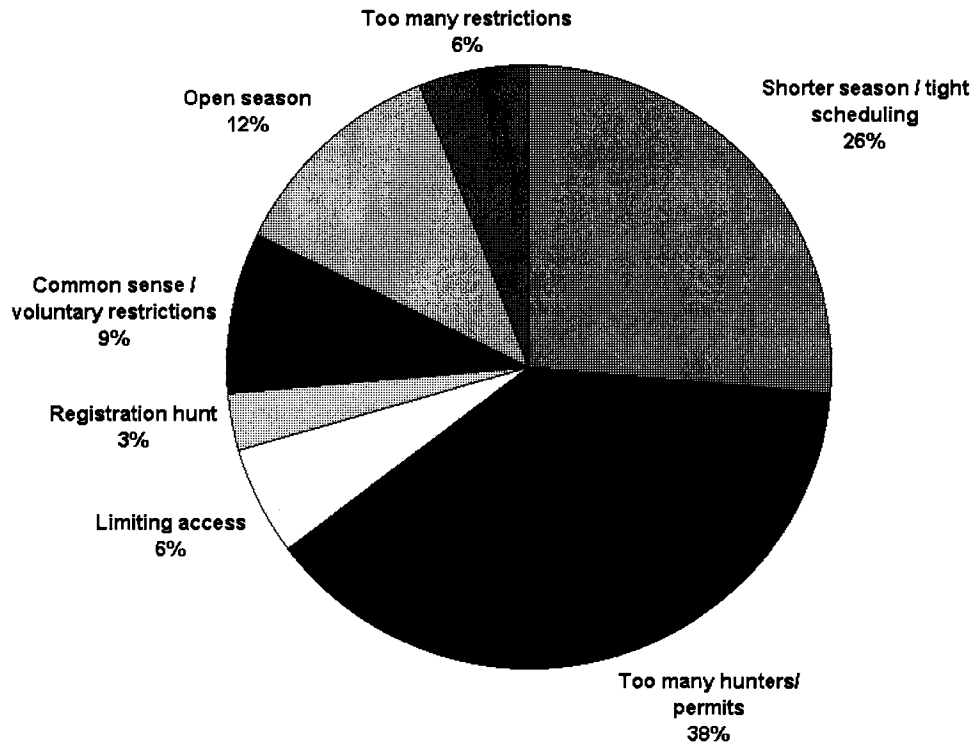
Scenario 2.

In a permit only area, populations have increased since permits were established and some subzones within the area could sustain a higher harvest. But a higher harvest would mean more hunters in the area, especially on August 1.

In your opinion, what management tools would work in this situation?



What management tools wouldn't work?



Analysis:

It was not clear from the responses whether those suggesting some form of staggered dates for the permits were also suggesting more permits be made available, or whether they thought there was an overcrowding problem with the number of permits issued today.

Since hunters rated 'Knowing there are few other hunters in the area' as one of the most important factors in choosing where to hunt, it is not surprising that they suggested spreading out the hunting times if there were to be more hunters allowed in an area.

Sheep permits were designed to protect vulnerable sheep populations, either easily accessible or small ones. In the easily accessible areas of the permit area, all populations would be vulnerable to overhunting without permits, no matter how many sheep are there.

There is no worry anywhere in the Yukon today that certain sheep ranges are becoming overpopulated. An increased harvest would be to satisfy the demand for more high quality hunting opportunities, not to reduce sheep numbers in a subzone.

Far fewer people volunteered what they thought would not work and those that did tended to give two- or three-word answers without a lot of explanation. The message was that it would be a mistake to allow too many hunters into an area at any one time, but many people would not like to see the hunt schedule too regimented.

What hunters said would work:

“Let permit holders work this out among themselves, if they want. Otherwise, not Renewable’s concern.”

Stagger dates

“More hunters may not be a big problem, depending on the subzone; if problem develops, vary the valid periods.”

More permits and stagger dates

“Let hunter apply for either August-September or October to limit number of hunters in area. But the number of permits should be increased if populations can sustain.”

“Allow additional hunters after peak season and monitor effort and harvest. Limit effort and harvest during September and October by permit only if necessary.”

“Double the number of permits - six weeks each”

“If the subzone could support higher harvest - first draw the

existing number of hunters. After August 15 allow a predetermined number of hunters further on the draw”

“So far there has been no problem. If more hunters are allowed to hunt let people put in when they wish to hunt.”

“Increase the number of serious hunters by allowing a few non-resident permits with a September 1 opening.”

Leave it as it is

“Leave the current permit levels as is. Increased number of sheep shouldn’t automatically result in increased pressure from increased hunting.”

“Do not increase harvest unless the area will not sustain populations.”

“Keep the number of permits the same, but utilize other subzones as permit only as well. This would pre-distribute the hunting population evenly before opening day. Perhaps tying the permit to time frames.”

“Leave it crowded, purists will go later just to be left alone, or have the mountains to themselves.”

“Permit areas offer a high quality trophy hunt for old rams. A higher harvest is not desirable.”

“Most hunters wouldn’t be bothered by knowing a higher harvest could be allowed, but isn’t. Maximizing sheep harvest will minimize hunt quality.”

“It is okay to have a lot of sheep! Do not put more hunters into an area at one time!”

More permits

“I suspect the increase of permits in a given subzone would be minimal and only to give more hunters opportunities. The harvest rate would probably not increase that much.”

“Increase the number of permits drawn - ten more permits issued, for example, means only ten more hunters; that’s not an overcrowding problem. And it also relieves the pressure from Scenario 1.”

“Why not consider allowing a valid permit holder to purchase a second permit so he can hunt with someone of his own choosing and/or permits valid for different lengths of time. Also you could allow a party to purchase two or three permits for designated days. Kills to be reported at end of hunt and Renewable Resources closes the area

when allotted kill has finished.”

“Increase permit numbers in areas that would sustain more harvest. Hunters can make arrangements themselves to avoid overcrowding during peak times.”

Reduce subzone size

“Reduce the size of subzones so that hunters are restricted to specific areas.”

Open season

“Remove permit hunting in these subzones and open up for regular hunting.”

“Continued permit hunt is not acceptable if herd is growing, healthy.”

Restrict access

“Restrict vehicle access - it’s too easy to hunt sheep from four wheelers. Not many hunters will walk.”

Fewer permits

More permits for target groups

“Increase number of permits slightly and offer new permits to women only or youth.”

What hunters said wouldn’t work:

Shorter season/tight scheduling

“Staggering the start/end times for a hunt is not a good alternative. Sheep hunting is

basically restricted to August for most areas anyway, since weather becomes a factor after August 30.”

“Knowing you would only have a shortened allotted time to hunt the area defeats the permit system as a hunter not biologically though. I like to look an area over good. With weather, work schedules, unexpected events, this would limit a hunter’s chance of utilizing that permit to its fullest advantage.”

“Short season - too many hunters at one time”

Too many hunters/permits

“I would hate to go to the cost and planning of a plane charter to a high alpine lake and find ten other hunters there.”

“Adding permits with no provisions for spreading out

the opening day congestion [would not work].”

Limiting access

Registration hunt

Common sense/voluntary restrictions

“Voluntary adjustments of the hunting periods by the hunters; everybody wants to be there August 1.”

Open season

Too many restrictions

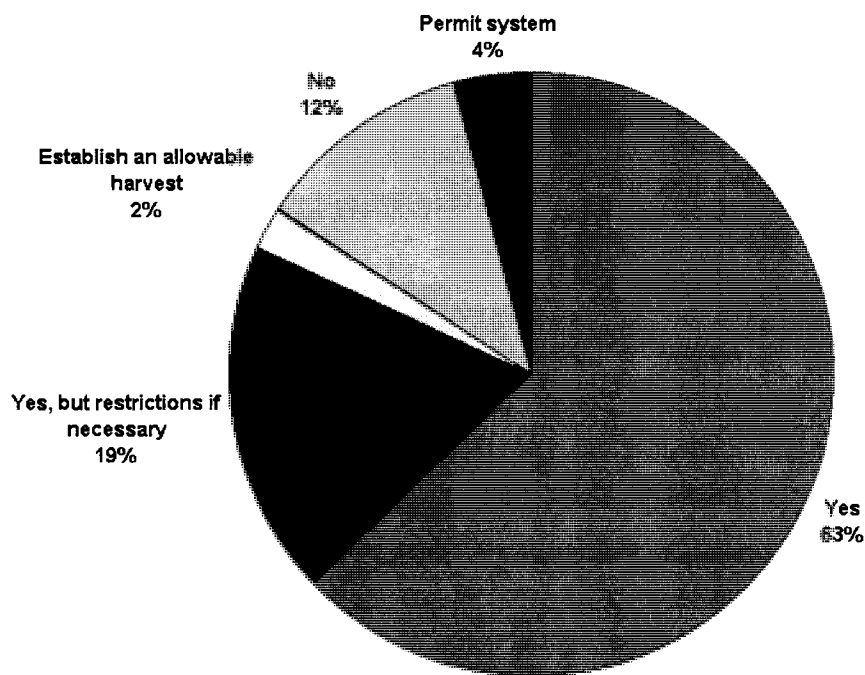
“Don’t make too many new rules (seems to have worked fine so far).”

“Continued permit hunt is not acceptable if herd is growing, healthy.”

Scenario 3.

Low density populations cannot sustain more than a minimal harvest. These populations generally do not receive much hunting pressure, but there is always the chance that they could.

In your opinion, is the full curl rule good enough protection?



Analysis:

Low density sheep populations may need special protection. They are probably at a low density because the habitat is marginal. They are likely less able to withstand disturbance. How accessible these populations are is a factor that must be considered. Increasing the horn curl requirements would be difficult to enforce, but limiting the number of hunters may be worth discussing.

Permits are valuable tools for a number of reasons. They help protect large but very accessible populations but they can also help protect small, vulnerable populations..

What hunters had to say:

“Full curl is a good rule if you have enough information on the population to be sure that all the full curl rams are not being taken.”

“If harvest target rates are greatly, then close subzone for a few years. Generally hunters will not overhunt (over-use) a low density population because too much effort expended for success.”

“It’s simple -- full curl rule okay as long as population is not overhunted. If it is, then obviously permit hunts.”

“No. Harvest restrictions should apply. There should always be some mature rams left behind.”

“The full curl rule is adequate unless disturbance becomes a problem.”

“Yes. If the population is low enough to be endangered by

removal of 7 year plus rams there should be no open season.”

“Small populations need special consideration. Important factors are size of herd, isolation, trend in numbers and level of disturbance. Herds of less than 100 need to be looked at; those of less than 50 should not be hunted under any circumstances.”

“Yes. Low density areas are unpopular as the chances of seeing sheep are poor. If there isn’t a problem, don’t fix it.”

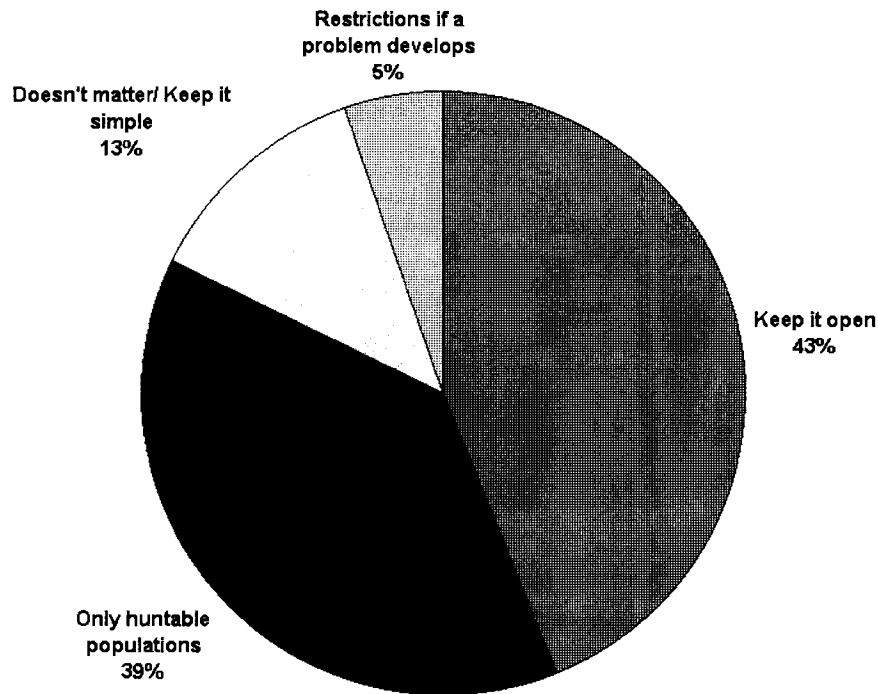
“Yes, if the area is not easily accessible. No, if the area is accessible - the population will be continuously cropped which in my view is poor (excessive harvest, excessive disturbance from hunting).”

“No. These populations are still vulnerable to a few knowledgeable good hunters. Limit gear efficiency e.g. bow zone.”

Scenario 4.

Some subzones have no known sheep populations, and in fact are not really sheep habitat (like wetlands). Yet these subzones are open to sheep hunting.

In your opinion, should everything be open until there is a problem, or should only subzones which have a huntable population be open?



Analysis:

Just because sheep are accessible and can be shot, doesn't necessarily mean they should be 'huntable' - the population has to be large enough to withstand a harvest. Genetic mixing between populations, especially small ones is also important.

There may be mountains near sheep range that could support a population, but do not. Caribou Mountain near Carcross is a good example. For many years there were no sheep, but in the last 10 years sheep have returned. If this mountain had been open to hunting because it had no

sheep, there probably would not be a population on Caribou Mountain today.

Locations of sheep populations and where people hunt sheep are important for input into land claims negotiations and land use applications, as well as for setting hunting regulations. If there are 'secret' or little known populations, then managers have no way of knowing that there would be a problem should a road or mine be proposed. The expert opinion biologists take to meetings is only as good as the information gathered during helicopter surveys, and from local knowledge (which includes the hunter questionnaire). If we don't know about it, we can't try to protect your special sheep hunting area from development.

What hunters had to say:

"Establish allowable harvest levels and registration or permit hunts only for sheep hunting in all of Yukon. It's important now. Don't wait until more management problems arise then try to fix them piecemeal."

"The less complicated the rules and regulations, the better for all."

"No; if you only open the populated areas, you are telling the hunter where to look; the word hunt means the hunter has to research what he is about to do. Why not let them hunt?"

"Subzones that have no known sheep populations should not be open to hunting. There is a chance a novice hunter could hunt such a zone and be discouraged."

"What's the point of closing them if there is no known

sheep population and it's not sheep habitat. But there is a chance of seeing a sheep crossing to another range. If it is full curl or over we should be able hunt it."

"Only subzones that have huntable populations should be open. I believe there are some subzones that sheep would colonize or recolonize if closed to hunting. Allowing harvest of a sheep in non-sheep habitat i.e. a disperser reduces genetic flow between populations."

"If the subzones in question are not considered sheep habitat we have no problem. In addition many populations of coloured sheep are not known to the general hunting public or the Department of Renewable Resources and should not be closed to selective hunters."

"Go permit hunt everywhere and that will solve a lot of problems."

“If there are no sheep in a subzone, there will be no concerns. On the other hand, if a subzone has potential to be gradually colonized by sheep, hunting should be prohibited.”

“Everything should be open within reason (permit areas, etc.) because there are areas that have huntable populations that are not known to Fish and Game.”

“Close it unless there is a huntable population. It encourages the thinking they can shoot anything anytime. We need people that care and are knowledgeable about local areas and will really appreciate wildlife opportunities to hunt.”

“Areas like Keno used to have sheep. The season is still open. If sheep return there, they can be hunted before they can re-establish themselves. This is wrong.”

“This could help protect little known or very small populations from being the popular destination one season.”

“As I understand it, areas that are sheep habitat but have populations below sustainable harvest are already closed. If a population drops below harvestable levels, close it.”

“If there are no sheep to worry about why complicate the hunting regulations any more than they already are? It seems ridiculous to even worry about such a scenario.”

“All habitat should be looked at closely and some areas which are closed now could be open (by permit) and others should be closed. It would make more paperwork, subzones and boundaries but it would more accurately reflect sheep populations.”

“The less complicated the rules and regulations the better for all.”

“What is the cost associated with this regulatory process? And should we not concentrate on spending our limited funds on identifying problems (overhunting, access) and addressing them?”

“All open until population is under pressure. Some people travel long distances to reach areas no one else has been recently.”

“Yes, leave it open until a problem develops and address each individually.”

“Leave it the way it is but publish a report so sheep hunters know where there are huntable populations of sheep.”

Appendix 1.

Dear Hunter:

I am asking for your help. Your experience as a sheep hunter gives you a perspective that is valuable in shaping the future of sheep management. This is not a ballot where you get to vote on what will happen, but a way for you to give me feedback directly.

Over the next few years, the Fish and Wildlife Management Board and Renewable Resource Councils will be dealing with sheep management issues. I can explain what the biological consequences of each management option are, but I would like to better explain what effect the regulations may have on the people directly affected - sheep hunters like you.

Please feel free to add any other comments you may have about sheep hunting in the Yukon. Your responses will be kept confidential and anonymous.

If you would like to receive a copy of the report, please fill in the enclosed mailing label. If you would like to get in touch with me, or have any questions, I can be reached at 667-5849 (1-800-661-0408 Local 5849). So that your comments can be included in the report, please return this to me before Friday, April 11. Thank you for your help.

Jean Carey
Sheep/Goat Biologist



? What factors are most important to you when you decide where to go sheep hunting? Please choose as many as are important to you, and rank them, with 1 being the most important, 2 being the next most important and so on.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> cost | <input type="checkbox"/> good place to camp |
| <input type="checkbox"/> chance to hunt other game | <input type="checkbox"/> have a favorite spot I always go to |
| <input type="checkbox"/> close to home | <input type="checkbox"/> heard stories about a big ram |
| <input type="checkbox"/> don't like planning ahead for the permit draw | <input type="checkbox"/> knowing there are few other hunters in the area |
| <input type="checkbox"/> don't want to hunt where an outfitter hunts | <input type="checkbox"/> like to explore new places |
| <input type="checkbox"/> easy access for hiking | <input type="checkbox"/> not likely to see a 4 wheeler or 4 wheel drive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> easy access for my 4 wheeler | <input type="checkbox"/> not likely to see another hunter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> easy access for my 4 wheel drive | <input type="checkbox"/> want to be able to see a lot of sheep |
| <input type="checkbox"/> familiar with the area | <input type="checkbox"/> wasn't successful in the permit draw |
| <input type="checkbox"/> good chance of getting a big ram | <input type="checkbox"/> other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> good chance of getting any ram | <input type="checkbox"/> other _____ |

? In general, are you happy with the permit system? Do you have any ideas how we can do things better?

Wildlife managers should perhaps be called people managers. In the past, we have used a few standard “tools” to manage how people hunt sheep. Currently, we have (the general season) subzones closed to hunting, restricted 4-wheeler access to designated routes or limited entry permits valid for the whole season. Other options are shorter seasons, permits valid for different lengths of time, limit the number of hunters in a subzone at any one time, or you may have other ideas that we haven’t yet considered.

The following situations reflect important issues that will have to be dealt with in the near future:

Scenario 1. Some easily accessible areas have many people making one day sheep hunting trips (although not many are successful). Most use a 4 wheeler or a 4 wheel drive vehicle to reach the alpine. As well as concerns about the number of hunters there is also a concern that the traffic may be driving sheep from their range or that the range may be damaged by these vehicles.

? In your opinion, what management tools would work in this situation?

? What management tools wouldn't work?

Scenario 2. In a permit only area, populations have increased since permits were established and some subzones within the area could sustain a higher harvest. But a higher harvest would mean more hunters in the area, especially on August 1.

? In your opinion, what management tools would work in this situation?

? What management tools wouldn't work?

Scenario 3. Low density populations cannot sustain more than a minimal harvest. These populations generally do not receive much hunting pressure, but there is always the chance that they could.

? In your opinion, is the full curl rule good enough protection? Please explain.

Scenario 4. Some subzones have no known sheep populations, and in fact are not really sheep habitat (like wetlands). Yet, these subzones are open to sheep hunting.

? In your opinion, should everything be open until there is a problem, or should only subzones which have a huntable population be open?

Appendix 2.

How does the permit draw work?

Step 1. A computer program picks random names from the group of applicants and ranks them on a list from first-chosen to last. It's like picking names out of a hat with one important difference. The computer draw is weighted in favour of applicants who were not drawn in the past. Here's how the weighting system works.

- If this is the first year you have applied for a permit your name goes in the hat once.
- If this is the second year you have applied for a permit, and you were unsuccessful last year, your name goes in the hat twice.
- If you have applied for a permit unsuccessfully for five years or more, your name goes in the hat five times, which is the maximum number.
- If you won a permit last year, your name does not go in the hat this year. Next year you will be treated like a first-time applicant.

Step 2. Permits for specific subzones are issued to those on the list according to their rank and the alternate choices, if any, they indicated on their applications. For example, the first person on the list for sheep will get a permit for the subzone they marked as their first choice. Each subsequent person on the list will get a permit for their subzone of first choice, *or*, if all those permits are gone, their subzone of second choice, *or*, if all those permits are gone, on the remaining subzones.

A list of all names selected in the permit draw is posted at all Renewable Resource offices.

Appendix 3.

How were hunters selected to receive a survey?

Hunters from Haines Junction and Whitehorse were chosen because they live closest to the permit area and other high density sheep areas. The two areas were also chosen to see if there was any difference in the responses of 'urban' Whitehorse hunters and 'rural' Haines Junction hunters. Any management plan would likely have the greatest impact on these hunters. Many people buy seals but don't actually go hunting; 'active' sheep hunters were chosen to receive the questionnaire.

The survey
was sent to:

1. All Haines Junction hunters who bought sheep seals in 1996 and 1994 or 1995 and who said on the hunter questionnaire that they hunted sheep in 1994 or 1995 but did not hunt in the permit area (22 hunters).
2. All Haines Junction permit holders in 1995 and 1996 (4 hunters).
3. Whitehorse hunters who bought sheep seals in 1994, 1995 and 1996 and who said they hunted sheep in 1994 or 1995 but did not hunt in the permit area (96 hunters).
4. All Whitehorse permit holders in 1995 and 1996 (79 hunters).