

Dear Board of Game Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in person on an intensely personal topic (opposing Prop 64) for this second go-round. As in March of 2016, I again came away with a real appreciation for the work that you do, and the magnitude of the task before you as you sort out the proposals with merit from those which would not benefit the state's resources and residents. Your efforts to understand and give fair consideration to everyone's viewpoints came across clearly and impressively.

As you heard in Dr. Gerlach's presentation, livestock owners have taken a very large step forward over the past year by testing 376 sheep and goats for M. ovi in a 3-part series. We foresee this segment of testing as preliminary, with greater numbers and more details to follow, as an essential component of a science-based risk assessment. We as a community recognize that there is a sense of urgency in taking continued precautionary measures against the threat of M. ovi -- however, **urgency** should not be mistaken for "**emergency**," and responses and actions should be planned, purposeful, and deliberate as opposed to hasty, rash, and potentially regrettable.

Removal of sheep and goats from the Clean List will only serve to foster animosity -- it will certainly not provide any protection to wild sheep, nor any incentive to owners for taking cooperative action. Furthermore it would punish the 27 farm owners who have already tested their herds, and leave the statewide livestock community in a turmoil-filled limbo for years to come. Last year the mere threat of removal from the Clean List cost us sales personally -- instead of selling a pair of registered kids for the \$500 to a 4-H family who canceled on us due to Clean List concerns, we ended up selling them for \$75 apiece to someone who butchered them the same day. The effects of **actually** taking domestic sheep and goats off of the Clean List, would cause us and the rest of Alaska's livestock industry to suffer irreparable harm.

Taking care of our natural resources is of paramount importance, but Prop 64 is a wrong-headed approach. The most detrimental and counter-productive effect of such an action would be to divert the attention and energy of livestock owners away from the urgent issue at hand, and instead toward fighting for survival in legal arenas. Sunday's town hall meeting opened the door to real communication between opposing sides, and cast a ray of hope that we might be able to move forward in a productive way. Prop 64 would only create a road block.

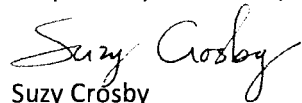
All of the efforts, money, time and energy that have gone into the M. ovi testing project thus far have come from local producers and veterinarians, the State Vet's office, and the ADRU lab through a USDA grant. Although the WSF has repeatedly publicized their commitment to pay for testing and replacement of positive animals, they have yet to contribute a penny to cover costs of the study so far. Their oft-repeated excuse is that they need to take "something" back to their organization before allocating funds. But their definition of "something" is the unattainable goal of finding, mapping, and testing every single sheep and goat in the state of Alaska. Even if last night's group of producers had agreed unanimously to the concept of 100% statewide mandatory testing with all of its requisite details, how could it possibly be enforced? Who would enforce it, and who would pay for the cost of enforcement? Would a team of "enforcers" drive every side street and back road throughout the state of Alaska in search of sheep and goats and demand compliance? Our resistance is based not on an unwillingness to cooperate, but on a realistic view of what is achievable and not pledging support to what is not. Voluntary testing has yielded excellent preliminary results despite the odds and limited resources. Imagine what could be done with a united effort and adequate finances, if WSF would step up and truly "put their money where their mouth is".

We have a current example of what voluntary testing with peer-driven policing has already accomplished in Alaska's livestock community. Ten years ago there were four or five large herds in south central AK whose owners did not believe in testing or managing their herds to address or eradicate a goat disease known as CAE (Caprine

Arthritis & Encephalitis). All of these herds were predominantly CAE-positive, and their goats were sold with impunity and without disclosure throughout the state. The community was gradually becoming aware of the disease, but if someone posted a goat for sale on a public forum and mentioned that they had a “tested herd” the next comment was usually “tested for what?” A few years later, that situation has now been exactly reversed as awareness has grown—these days if someone posts a goat for sale and fails to specify whether their herd is tested, the first comment is “is your herd tested”? Even newbies considering getting into goats are aware of the disease issue now, and even if not conversant with all of the details, the typical first newbie request is for advice in finding a breeder who has quality goats and a tested herd. The last CAE-positive goat I’ve seen mentioned on Facebook (about two years ago) was being sold as meat, the disease appears to have died out through attrition. The interesting point here is that there has never been any requirement or enforcement for this testing, it has been entirely market-driven and grown from the bottom up. Awareness of *M. ovi* is in its infancy, with the first test results coming back only three months ago. With the rapid dispersal of information through social media I absolutely foresee *M. ovi* taking its place on the list of things that buyers and breeders will expect to see test results for, and that near-universal community awareness and action will be a much faster process than in the CAE example.

I thank you for your dedication, time and energy, and I wish you wisdom and guidance in the days ahead, and ask you to not pass Proposal 64 due to the severe impact it would have on individual domestic goat and sheep enthusiasts and small farm operations. Please heed the counsel of other state agencies (ADF&G, DOL, Division of Ag, and the AK Farm Bureau) and TAKE NO ACTION on Proposal 64.

Respectfully submitted,



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