
USING NUCLEAR MAGNETIC RESONANCE SPECTROSCOPY TO DEVELOP PHYSIOLOGICAL PROFILES FOR BIGHORN SHEEP (POSTER)

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This study employs new techniques using nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) to assess the relative health, physiological condition, and reproductive function of wild bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*) in Montana and Wyoming. Ongoing bighorn studies in Montana and the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem are focused on herd attributes and the population dynamics which are affected by disease, climate, habitat and physiology. Indices of herd health and physiological status are typically obtained through expensive and time consuming lab assays and field measurements. Recently, NMR spectroscopy has been used to revolutionize the assessment of human metabolic health, and we expect that there is similar potential for studies of wildlife populations. Using NMR spectroscopy to assess metabolites associated with disease, nutrition and stress may eliminate the need for many traditional assays and techniques used today. NMR can be used to evaluate a large suite of metabolites associated with a variety of physiological functions from as little as 500 uL of serum or plasma. Blood samples from 242 sheep from 13 different herds were collected during the winters of 2013-14 and 2014-15 to develop a comprehensive metabolite panel for bighorn sheep. We have used a recently developed statistical program known as MetaboAnalyst™ to begin to analyze and evaluate differences in NMR metabolic profiles among herds and across the fall-winter season when nutritional and physiological stress is expected to be acute. We will be presenting the results of this preliminary study and discussing the potential for application in wildlife management.