



“Rags Over the Arkansas River”

**ROAR**  
www.roarcolorado.org

To preserve and protect the headwaters of the Arkansas River, the Bighorn Sheep Canyon, its inhabitants and the communities that depend upon them.

## **ROAR News Release**

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### **ROAR Disputes OTR's Fairytale Outcome For Bighorn Sheep**

There they go again, churning out their corporate slick PR campaign messages trying hard to convince everyone that the sheep herds of the Bighorn Sheep Canyon will do just fine despite the massive disruption to their habitat soon to be imposed by the OTR Corporation if the project is allowed to proceed.

ROAR would like to inject science and facts into this discussion as we have previously done at every step of the process from the first scoping meetings, then with BLM's Draft EIS, the Final EIS and in reaction to BLM's shocking Record of Decision.

Our concerns relate to the high stress that the OTR project will cause to the sheep and the subsequent effects of that stress including probable mortality. Previously the Colorado Wildlife Commission passed a resolution, which in part stated that, “the OTR project, as proposed, will have significant known and unknown negative impacts on wildlife and wildlife habitat, and on the public's use and enjoyment of both. We believe that these negative impacts cannot be satisfactorily mitigated (most notably those on bighorn sheep, Thompson's big eared bat and recreational fishing), thus the project should not be approved”.

Based on input from former CDOW biologists ROAR believes constant disturbances to the sheep over the course of OTR installation through construction, tear down and mitigation, a period of approximately three years, will likely result in significant impacts to herd sustainability. Stress caused by displacement from preferred habitats for feeding, watering, breeding and rearing of young will result in a decline of the sub groups that make up this herd.

This herd has struggled to survive, marginally, throughout the last century. DOW has tried to rebuild the herd with transplants, but this herd continues to struggle to be self-sustaining. Any significant disturbances to the sheep involving their key habitats should be avoided. Therefore, the OTR project, just in regard to sheep alone, should not be allowed.

#### **Sheep Monitoring:**

If the OTR project is allowed to proceed and after the project begins, ROAR recommends that sheep behavior be used as a reliable, non-intrusive indicator of adverse impacts of the OTR project.

(more)

If sheep avoid areas traditionally frequented, change eating and drinking patterns or use different movement routes, these behaviors should trigger requirements for OTR's work to cease in the affected areas of the OTR project. If over a period of days, the animals fail to return to normal behavior, the affected area should be permanently removed from further use for the OTR project.

ROAR finds sheep losses as a result of the OTR project to be unacceptable. The small herd west of Parkdale (approximately 50 animals) has struggled for decades. Substantial State and Federal resources have been used to help maintain and stabilize this herd. A loss of even 10% would be 5-7 animals, and a loss of 50 percent (the mitigation plan trigger for sheep replacement) could result in the death of 25 or more animals. Such losses could destabilize the population and jeopardize its very existence.

**Make Cessation of Work In Deep Snow Mandatory:**

It is well known that sheep are not well adapted to deep snow. The Mitigation Plan recommends that operations above a certain snow level, 25 cm, should cease (Mitigation Plan at page 1). However, ROAR believes cessation of work on OTR should be mandatory when the snow reaches this depth or a depth where sheep will expend too much energy attempting to get through snow.

**Noise Impacts:**

Chronic noise can also be a problem for bighorn sheep. The noise that will ensue once the construction phase of the OTR project begins will be huge and will include reverberating drilling for long hours and movement of heavy equipment and supply trains in the project area which is bighorn sheep habitat.

**Conclusion:**

Stress results in immune system problems which then predispose bighorn sheep to disease, most commonly, a pneumonia complex. This pneumonia has been a serious cause of mortality for Colorado bighorn sheep. ROAR maintains the projected impacts of the OTR project will be too great for the bighorn sheep and the OTR project should not be allowed to proceed.