Raymon Hedges

I am writing in support of the Proposed Revisions to Animal Importation, Animal Testing, and Disease Reporting (18 AAC 36). However, I would like the regulation to state that ALL domestic sheep and goats must be tested by an accredited diagnostic laboratory prior to import. Many domestic sheep and goats are imported before two months to save on shipping. It is practically like not requiring testing at all. Some estimates show that the impact to Alaska's economy from Dall sheep hunting is in the millions of dollars annually, if not tens of millions. The sheep and goat "industry", such as it is (nominally it is more of a hobby industry), contributes far less with fewer than 3,000 animals state-wide. Conversely, should an outbreak of Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae (M. ovi.) occur in our wild sheep herds, the loss of animals in any given mountain range could be catastrophic. Management actions to address such an outbreak, such as herd elimination and restocking, would cost far more than could be afforded. Even now, parts of ranges where sheep have been extirpated, often due to overhunting in areas around old mining districts, have yet to be restocked due to technical and financial challenges. Even regular population surveys seem hard to accomplish. With stagnant or declining populations of Dall sheep across the state, it seems that these new import measures and testing for M. ovi. (for ALL imports) would be the least that could be done to protect an iconic, sentinel species such as Alaska's great white sheep.