



# California Wild Sheep

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**RILEY IDEN**

**Cady Mountains**

**2023-24 Season**

**Hunting with Dry Creek Outfitters**

**See the story on page 11**





A large banner for the Ultima Thule Lodge. The background is a warm, golden sunset over a mountain range. In the upper left, there is a circular logo featuring a stylized mountain peak and a sun. The text "ULTIMA THULE LODGE" is written in a bold, serif font. Below it, the contact information "CONTACT: DONALD C. MARTIN 310-766-3921" is displayed in red text. A small airplane is visible in the sky on the right side of the banner.





# From the Editor's Desk

Happy "Transition to Winter"! Hunting season is in all stages – some in full swing, some just starting and some behind us. We've finally received sufficient rain in CA to turn our hills green again.

This issue includes some great hunting stories, drinker work, important information you want to know, humor, AND MORE! Big news is SCBS has installed the first RWWS on State Lands site and it went incredibly well. The next one will likely have happened when the print version of this Newsletter/Magazine arrives. We are planning a regular cadence of 4 new GALAD installations each year – and needed repairs of BGGs.

Your feedback, ideas, articles, pictures & requests are always welcome. Best way to reach me is email: [mike.borel@contextnet.com](mailto:mike.borel@contextnet.com). Due date for input to the 1Q25 issue is February 10.



## Lentil Meat Soup from Tony Gigilotti

A tasty fall soup recipe that's great for those chilly evenings when you don't have much time!

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup of lentils
- 3lbs bone in ham steak
- 1 onion
- 1 full stalk of celery
- 1 head of garlic
- 6 carrots
- 2 table spoon tomato paste
- 4 bay leaves
- 1.5 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon cumin powder
- Salt and pepper to taste

### DIRECTIONS

- 1) Season the pork steak and brown in a stock pot. Set aside the steak and deglaze the pot
- 2) Sauté half the onions and all of the garlic
- 3) Cut up half the carrots and celery adding them to the pot
- 4) Add the ham steak on top of the vegetables, covering with water, then add the spices and tomato paste, and bring to a simmer. Cook until the pork steak is tender and begins to fall apart (~3 hours)
- 5) Remove the bay leaves and ham steak, setting aside.
- 6) Using an immersion blender or blender, puree the vegetables and liquid
- 7) Chop up the ham steak and remaining vegetables before adding them back to the thickened broth
- 8) Add the lentils, additional water as necessary, and bring to a simmer until the lentils are cooked (30-45 min)



## I LIKE BIG BUCKS AND I CANNOT LIE



John Ware asks:  
Do you know why hunters  
only like to shoot bucks?

Answer: Because nobody  
likes Miss Steaks.



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**California Wild Sheep** is published quarterly.

Please email all articles and photos to  
mike.borel@contextnet.com

Photos should be high resolution and in color.  
It is recommended that digital photos be sent by email.  
Please include photo credits and captions.

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Humorous outtakes provided by Tammy Scott  
Published by Beverly Valdez, ORC-KF1 LLC

# Events

## 2024

December 3	Sheep Summit XXXV, "All Virtual"
December 6-8	New water installation, Location TBD

## 2025

January 10-12	New water installation, Location TBD
January 15-18	WSF International Sheep Show Reno
January 22-25	SCI International Hunters Convention Nashville, TN
January 25-26	GSCO Convention Nashville, TN
February 20	Due date for articles for 1Q2025 CA WSF Newsletter
February 21-23	New water installation, Location TBD
April 25	Sheep Summit XXXVI In person, Sacramento DoubleTree
April 26	CA WSF Fundraiser Banquet, Sacramento DoubleTree
May 20	Due date for articles for 2Q2025 CA WSF Newsletter
June 1	June 1 Watch for your 2025 Board of Directors Election Ballot



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# President's Letter

We are all deep into our Fall hunting season and I am so happy for the many of you that have reached out to me with your texts and emails showcasing your recent successes. Congratulations, it's been quite a year, so far. I've even received photos of some of our successful sheep hunters right here in California and that is always a reason to celebrate the achievement of those rare few that get to pursue those Southern California Monarchs each season. That is an opportunity that all of us dream of.

Once again, I'm glad to report my optimism for our organization going forward as your California Wild Sheep Foundation is finally achieving much of what we have been striving for over the last decade. There are still some dominoes to fall, but the progress is real and the stepping-stones to a more positive future for California's desert bighorns have not only been laid but are now being taken into a brighter future for all wildlife across the Southern California landscape.



Currently, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife has finally delivered a comprehensive management plan for bighorn sheep. It is now subject for review and public comment. Your Board of Directors has reviewed the document and we have responded. I'd like to thank the Board members for their participation in this process on your behalf. The document is far from perfect but it is step forward. More importantly, a necessary step that ultimately leads to the "Bighorn Conservation Unit plans," which will contain all of the "meat and potatoes" details in which so many of you are interested, including: expansion of hunting permits in existing units, the creation of new hunting units, and the allocation of hunting permits in those new units.

As of the publishing of this newsletter, the Give a Lamb a Drink Foundation (GALAD) has funded, and completed, the first water project construction through the state lands lease water project program in conjunction with the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep. I want to thank all of the volunteers who attended the building of this historic project. It marks a new era of wildlife project construction that can now go forward unimpeded by the problematic California Environmental Quality Act known as CEQA. Video is now available of the project on Youtube.com at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4NGF5BB2wo> or enter "Aurora SL-15" into the Youtube Search window. Special thanks again to all the volunteers, SCBS, and I would be remiss in failing to note that GALAD was the brainchild of your very own Vice President of Operations, Mike Borel. Thanks again Mike for all you do for our chapter. GALAD's goal of "putting and keeping sheep on the mountain" is finally being realized.

Please save the date, April 26, 2025, for our annual fundraiser at the Doubletree by Hilton in Sacramento! I look forward to seeing all of you there. You can also support the chapter right now! NO NEED TO WAIT! Please go to <https://cawsf.org/store.html>, click on Yukon Stone Sheep hunt right now and purchase your random drawing tickets for a chance to win a 14 day 1x1 Stone Sheep hunt with our friend and long-time supporter Aaron Florian of YUKON STONE OUTFITTERS! There is no better way to support your chapter and have a chance to win the stone sheep hunt of a lifetime. Please keep in mind, it also makes a great Christmas gift. In addition, consider a year's-end donation to GALAD! It is a tax-deductible donation, and you know where 100% of the money is going and how it is used.

With that said, I wish all of you good luck with the remainder of this hunting season and on behalf of your entire Board of Directors, have a very happy Thanksgiving, Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, and a very safe and prosperous New Year! I'll see you in Sacramento April 26!

*Donald C. Martin*



# DREAMS TO MEMORIES: THE STORY OF A DALL SHEEP HUNT

By Jed Brusseau, Distinguished Life Member

*I pretty much started this journey when meeting Beverly Valdez back about four years ago. I became a member of CA WSF, attended the dinner in Sacramento and we talked about the magnificence of wild sheep. I'm still trying my hand in the raffles but thought if I really want one of these "critters" I better book a hunt. So I did! I started talking with everyone and eventually I went with Riley Pitts from Big Game Backcountry Guides.*

In 2020 I had been in touch with Riley and decided to start preparing (financially, physically, and mentally) for the hunt that I ultimately took this year in Alaska.

In late August 2024 I flew from LAX to Prudhoe Bay to be picked up by the BGBG plane which would take me to their base camp in the Brooks Range. When I was younger, I had always dreamed of seeing ANWR. Now I would! While preparing for the trip I would read everything about the area, watch YouTube videos and listen to podcasts while driving in my truck to work.

After a fog delay in flights, I was able to get to the lodge which is their main base of operations for hunts in the Brooks Range.

On arriving I had a great welcome from Riley, Stephanie, and my guide Jake Maxie. The lodge has a couple small buildings for cooking/eating and another for skinning and meat preparation. It also has a "tent city" down in the willows where most guides and clients sleep for the one or possibly two nights, before heading out in the field or upon returning. It was very comfortable.

Once I got settled in and met everyone it was time to get out on the hunt. The next morning Jake and I headed out. First, we were flown out about 26 miles from the lodge. We then couldn't hunt that day but spent the time setting up camp and getting oriented.

In August there is still a lot of daylight hours so we started hiking about 5am the next morning, going due west a couple



Jed Brusseau with his dream Dall sheep

of hours. We started seeing some sheep quickly. Jake spotted a group of 4 rams about 3.5 miles away and said that one of them was pretty good. So, we went back down the mountain and further up the drainage to try to get a closer look. When we were about 2.5 miles from the sheep Jake took another look with his spotting scope and determined that this was a shooter ram and we should go after him.

He told me that it was up to me, but this was a good ram and I should consider that. He also said that if I didn't want this ram someone else would and that needed to be considered as well. On my part, I was thinking about the fact that this was the first morning of a ten-day hunt. Would it be wise to pass up this ram?

It's a big event you are taking on when planning a major hunt such as this, nothing is guaranteed.

That night I was so wound up I couldn't sleep! The next morning we were up early and didn't immediately see anything. Then the rams slowly started to emerge from the crags, chutes and cliff edges. We had made a game plan to make a river crossing then to start a "push" up the mountain and try and get within range of the ram.

After crossing the glacial fed river without any complications, we removed any unnecessary items from our packs we didn't need and hung them in the tallest stand of willows we could find.

We used a creek shrouded in willows as a starting point up the mountain. In doing so, we pushed out a huge white wolf that we watched for some time before disappearing up the canyon. About halfway up we saw the wolf a second time. We took out the spotter and filmed it as it got within forty yards of three rams. They all just stared at each other for about 10 secs till the wolf turned and trotted off in the opposite direction. We continued working our way up the mountain, we were within 750 feet of the top and starting to side hill to where we





last saw the shooter ram.

Knowing the other sheep would be close by and not trying to blow them out as we started to cross the first of two chutes. We unbuckled our packs, I grabbed my rifle as we started, Jake looked below and pointed very slowly and whispered, "there are two sheep below us at 30 yards"! Then he said, "lets wait here till they're out of sight". When they were gone, we moved through then got to the edge of the last chute, Jake looked up and noticed a "white patch" in a rock outcropping 175yds above us. "That has to be the ram", he said! As soon as I found the "white patch" in my binoculars it stood up, readjusted then laid back down facing my direction. "This is the ram we've been looking for"!

Scrambling to find a good rest, I was able to get situated very quickly! We just watched and waited. Jake mentioned not to shoot while he's lying down, he said, "wait till he stands". As I'm taking it all in, watching through my rifle scope, I'm overwhelmed with emotions admiring this incredibly regal and majestic animal, he sits high on a stone bench and while looking out he would slowly doze off, wake, then doze off again. He's magnificent!

As Jake decides to go back for the spotter to film the ram, the ram looks down and notices movement from below, when he stands up, I take the shot.

As the ram falls from the shelf he was on, he lands about 10 feet on to a steep incline of loose scree. A couple secs later I hear rocks and boulders flying down to my right. The ram ended up traveling about 200 yards below us, hung-up in among "coffee table" size boulders. Luckily, he didn't go off the cliff which we had feared. He was twisted up but in great shape. Upon approaching the ram it's hard not to get emotional. My first wild sheep -- and the first animal I had shot with my new 6.5 PRC. He had broken ribs on both sides and his face had a lip cut but he was beautiful. Absolutely beautiful!

Jake said "Gimme a hug!" Which I did. He reached into his pocket and gave me an engraved coin with the phrase "Die with memories not dreams". I would never have gotten that ram without Jake. He is the ultimate guide.

Now, normally this is the end of the hunt but wait ... remember that white wolf? As we were packing out the sheep, both of us loaded heavy (Jake's pack probably double the weight of mine) and watching all the time where to step for the right path. Jake



reaches for his binos and says there's a wolf 800 yards below us. Let's go down a little farther, side-hill it over and get above that wolf. When we do get above him, Jake ranges him at 455 yards and says, there's a lil' cross wind where he's at. Hold to the left side of the animal and your bullet should "drift" right in. I put the crosshairs on his left side, squeeze the trigger and that was it! Jake was overjoyed at getting me a wolf.

We ended up moving our camp down to the drainage on the gravel bar where the planes could land. We hiked back to our camp and had a perfect dinner of Dall sheep shish kebabs over the open fire. We got into our tents about 1:00am that morning. It was a perfect end to the day, and I marveled at how it all came together.

The next morning, we were up early again and we saw another wolf right above where I had shot the one the previous evening. All we needed to do was cover 500 yards, get within range and I was able to shoot another wolf! Talk about luck!

We had to wait another 3 days due to bad weather before we were picked up and taken back to base camp. Considering the change in weather I was extremely fortunate that I was able to get my ram early.

When we got back to camp there was a federal biologist who came in to age the ram. I had guessed 10 years, and he agreed. The ram had a small nub on one side which the biologist said confirmed he was a bruiser. He had a lot of mass very young and he beat up on everything -- trees, rocks and even other rams.

At the lodge everyone was extremely complimentary about my ram. They processed and vacuum-sealed all the meat, so I was able to bring it home. I ended up staying a couple of extra days in camp. I would get up early and go to bed late and just marvel at what an incredible place the arctic is. I enjoyed listening to everyone share how they got there or how they ended up working with Riley & Stephanie! They are an extremely hard working, honest, "do anything for you" outfit! Riley, Stephanie, and all of the team at Big Game Backcountry Guides were family -- a highly professional and caring family that I felt honored to be part of.

About three weeks after I returned home, one morning while having a cup of coffee with my wife she looked over at me and said, "I think you had a life-changing experience." I said, "Yes, I believe I did."





# ALASKA HUNTING — MOOSE, GOAT, AND DEER!

by Craig Van Arsdale, Member

*Editor's Note: Craig Van Arsdale, a long time member that has relocated to Alaska, has been able to take advantage of that state's wonderful opportunities. Here are just a few of his experiences from the most recent season!*



The Moose has been an Archery nemesis animal for me. I did my first moose hunt 10 years ago and since then have done 5 hunts total. This September it finally came together on a hunt with @hardworkinghunter and on my 47th day of archery moose hunting on our way back to camp I stepped on a stick and this bull grunted and raked a tree in response just 200 yards below us. After a short contemplation by the bull he committed and closed the distance rocking his head back and fourth and grunting the whole way in where he came through my shooting lane at 33 yards and Zach stopped him for a perfect broadside shot! Zach and I both killed bulls on this hunt and honestly this was just one of those hunts where everything just fell into place!

After returning from my Moose hunt I was carefully watching the weather in my goat area for at least a 3 day weather window. It appeared it wouldn't materialize and I'd just have to go anyways but at the last minute a window appeared and I was already packed and ready! After a full day of bushwhacking and climbing from sea level to the alpine I was ready to hunt the following morning. As luck would have it in the morning I spotted a good Billy in a very "benchy" area of rock below a hanging glacier I had scouted prior and hoped to find a goat there for my hunt! The route to get to that rock was way more challenging than I anticipated and I didn't get above the goat until 3pm. After relocating him and verifying he was the goat I wanted I was able to slowly creep into position for a 42 yard shot when he stood from his bed. Thankfully the weather held as it took me 3 days to get the goat and camp packed out!



Opening day of the deer season I found myself in the alpine within bow range of the biggest Sitka Blacktail buck I've ever laid eyes on! After a 30 min wait for the right shot angle I put a perfect arrow through the buck and watched him expire in sight!

On day two of my early alpine Sitka Blacktail hunt I was just leaving the tent and looked below me in a boulder field and this deer was looking up in my direction! I thought he had me but immediately hit the deck and slowly crawled out of view of the buck. Once out of view it didn't take long to position myself 32 yards from the bedded buck in the rocks. After a 3 hour wait the buck finally stood from his bed and the arrow flew true!





## LIVE ON

By Steve Cooper, Member

*When I received an email from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, that draw results were available for 2023, I opened my page and scanned my picks. Deer, X9A, not successful. Elk, La Panza, not successful. Big Horn Sheep, Newberry, Rodman and Ord, successful! I did a double take, I couldn't believe it, but there it was. I had max points and a lot of years of "well, maybe next year," moments. A hunt of a lifetime was finally going to come true.*

I knew I wanted to hire a guide, so I did a search and found Dry Creek Outfitters. I called and made arrangements with Cliff and Matt St. Martin. I booked a fully guided five day hunt, for December second thru sixth.

Now came the waiting and planning. Everyone knows the drill. Gun, ammo, sighting in, boots, clothes and the all important getting in shape. At seventy-one years old, I felt like I was in pretty good shape. I'd been a cyclist and an outdoorsman all my life, as well as a farmer. This would pay off for the hunt.

The orientation came and went in August, and finally December came. My hunting buddy Stewart and I arrived in camp on December first. We met Matt and his crew, had a



Steve Cooper with 2023 ram

great dinner and discussed what the plan for the next day would be. Matt asked if I was up for about a four mile hike, to where he and his crew had spotted some good rams, and YES, was my answer.

The hike was easy, except for the last eighth of a mile up a talus slope, to the top where we would glass and look for the big ram we would take. He was around a group of lesser rams, and about 10 ewes, one of which was in season. The two biggest rams were chasing her around. There was a lot of movement, and commotion. Matt asked if I wanted to take the big ram, and I did, but we had to wait for things to calm down.

The moment of truth came, Matt cleared me to shoot. I totally missed and my heart sank. I knew it was over for that stalk, because most of the rams and ewes took off, but, to my surprise the two rams that were chasing the ewe in season, were so preoccupied they didn't leave. Matt said that we were going to get another chance.

While we were waiting for him to present me with a shot, I got to see the ram I would take breed the ewe twice. His genes would live on.

I would like to give special thanks to Matt St. Martin and his crew for a hunt of a lifetime!



Steve Cooper with friend Steve and the Dry Creek Outfitters team

## 6 POINTS

By Riley Iden, Member

*I was at work when I received the notification that the California big game draw results were out. I immediately stopped the tractor I was driving and logged into my California Portal. As I scrolled through the list, I noted several "N"s, indicating I hadn't drawn anything, until I reached the sheep section. There it was: a "Y". I couldn't believe my eyes. I stared at the screen for what felt like an eternity, trying to make sense of what I was seeing. But it was real, I had drawn a desert sheep tag for Cady Mountain with only 6 points. After calling and texting my family and friends to share the news, I knew exactly who to contact, Cliff St. Martin from Dry Creek Outfitters.*

Cliff and I spoke on the phone about the unit, and I decided to book a 7-day hunt. We planned to hunt around the end of December unless Cliff and his crew spotted something before then. My brother and nephew would join me on the hunt, all that was left to do was get my rifle dialed in and wait the long 6 months until the hunt began.

Wednesday, December 28, was the first day of the hunt. I arrived in camp shortly after sunset on the 27th and was greeted by Cliff, Caden St. Martin, and Casey Nick. My brother and nephew arrived a couple of hours later, and we settled into camp and had dinner. The next morning was the big day.

We woke up early, and Cliff and the crew gave us the game plan. We would split up, my brother Bryce and nephew Bradford would go with Casey and Caden, while I would go with Cliff. We would work our way around the mountain range, glassing into the nooks and crannies, looking for sheep to stalk. We loaded into the side-by-sides and headed out. It didn't take long before we spotted sheep. About a mile out of camp, we pulled over to glass and spotted a group of ewes.

This was the first time I had ever seen desert sheep in person. Cliff assured me that the rams wouldn't be far off, so we continued working our way around the mountain range. Later in the afternoon, we spotted another group of ewes and a smaller ram. As the sun set, we headed back to camp



Riley Iden with "6 Point"

and met up with the rest of the crew for an awesome dinner and some much-needed rest. All in all, it was a great first day.

The next day, we were up early and ready to go. After breakfast, we packed our lunches. Today, Cliff and I would hike into the mountain range where we had seen the ewes and young ram, while the other crew would head to the opposite end of the range to glass for us. We parked the side-by-side and started hiking. Within 30 minutes, Cliff spotted two rams that looked promising. They were over a thousand yards out, so we decided to slip in for a closer look. We worked our way closer to the two rams, and Cliff confirmed they were shooters. As we watched, they disappeared behind a mountain along a trail. We waited for what seemed like forever until one of the rams popped out on the other side of the mountain. We kept waiting for the second ram to follow, but he never did. We watched as the first ram went into a small basin and never emerged, indicating that he had bedded down. We decided to stalk into the basin and see if we could relocate the ram.

Once in the basin, we set up in a good location to glass from. It wasn't long before Cliff spotted another ram on a different mountain range about a mile away. We marked him down and continued searching for the ram we had spotted earlier. About an hour into glassing, nature called, and I decided to take a leak. As I stood up, we heard a crash of rocks off to our left. We turned to see the ram, only 150 yards away, making his way up a ridge. I grabbed my rifle, ranged him, and asked Cliff if he was a shooter. The ram stopped broadside and looked at us. After a moment, Cliff said, "I think we can do better." I unloaded my gun, and we both started laughing;





Riley Iden with family and the Dry Creek Outfitters team

that ram had been right next to us for an hour without moving until I got up. It never fails, we thought.

We quickly devised a plan to work our way down the ridge toward the ram that had split from the one we had just jumped. Cliff believed he was a better ram and a shooter. We crept along the ridge, moving slowly and checking everything ahead of us. We knew the ram had to be within a few hundred yards from where they had split earlier that morning. About an hour into the hike, I looked to my left and spotted the ram standing 300 yards down the ridge. I motioned to Cliff, and we stopped. Cliff looked the ram over with his binoculars and immediately said, "That's a shooter, get ready."

I layed down, set up my bipod, and got a range. He was a little over 300 yards away, quartering away. I had a shot, but we decided to wait and see if he would take a few more steps to the right to get more broadside. The ram was looking off to his left at something, completely frozen. We waited and

waited; the ram didn't even wiggle an ear. I looked at Cliff and asked, "What is he looking at?" Cliff replied, "I have no idea." We started laughing around the 15-minute mark, wondering if it was a robotic ram. What was going on? Neither of us had ever seen anything like it; the ram was frozen in time, with no movement whatsoever. At about the 20-minute mark, I was so restless that I told Cliff I was ready to take the shot. I settled in on the ram's shoulder, it was a steep, quartering-away angle. I squeezed the trigger and saw dust fly right over the ram's back. Cliff said I had missed. I quickly racked another round, and the ram ran about 25 yards to his right, stopping broadside. I settled in behind his shoulder again, squeezed the trigger, and heard the unmistakable thud. "Hit! Rack another one!" Cliff exclaimed. We watched as the ram took a few steps back and then collapsed to the ground. He was done.

The celebration erupted. I couldn't believe I had actually taken a desert ram. He was everything I had ever wanted in a sheep—a 9- to 10-year-old ram in the 160s with over 15-inch bases. The scar on his nose from fighting was an awesome bonus, too.

The hunt only took a day and a half, which speaks volumes about the dedication and expertise of Cliff and his crew. I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to Cliff St. Martin, Caden St. Martin, and Casey Nick for an unforgettable hunt and all their hard work in helping me harvest this ram. Without them, I would have been wandering the desert for weeks, likely never even catching a glimpse of a single ram. I also want to thank my brother Bryce Iden and my nephew Bradford Iden for joining me on this adventure, and my wife Kim Iden for holding down the fort while I was away.

If you ever draw a sheep tag, I highly recommend contacting Cliff at Dry Creek Outfitters, he and his crew are truly second to none.



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# PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD



The hunt for this ram was very different from my last two rams. Having hunted over 30 days for each of my previous rams I killed this ram on my first hunting day and first stalk. I spotted him and his 3 yr old companion the night before right before dark as I was setting up camp after a long days hike. I was able to get the spotter on him to verify he was a legal ram before dark that night and thankfully the next morning the rams were still in the same band of cliffs. After a couple hours of climbing I was in position in my whites above the sheep but on the edge of the band of cliffs and the waiting game began. To make a long story short after an all day wait the rams finally made a mistake and I was able to strike when the iron was hot and put an arrow through the big ram at 25 yards right before dark!

-- Craig



John Ware  
Nevada Mule Deer  
October 2024



Beverly Valdez  
Nevada Mule Deer  
November 2024





# Are YOU a CA Wild Sheep Foundation Distinguished Life Member? NOW is the time to join or upgrade!

**SHOW YOUR TRUE COMMITMENT TO THE WILD SHEEP OF CALIFORNIA AND THE WORLD! JOIN OR UPGRADE YOUR MEMBERSHIP TODAY.**

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KYLE MEINTZER  
NICK METTA  
ANDY MOECKEL  
PATRICK OILAR  
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JEREMY PECHTEL  
JEFF PERACCHI  
DON PERRIEN  
JOHN PESTORICH  
DON PRIEST  
CAROLINE PYNE, DVM,  
**DISTINGUISHED LIFE #1**  
CONNOR PYNE, DVM,

**DISTINGUISHED LIFE #2**  
GLEN PYNE, DVM,  
**DISTINGUISHED LIFE #5**  
MADISON PYNE,  
**DISTINGUISHED LIFE #4**  
TRAVIS PYNE,  
**DISTINGUISHED LIFE #3**  
TOM REA  
MASON ROGERS  
DAVE ROWAN  
PAUL SCHULTHEIS  
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ALAN SHULTZ  
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DANIEL SMITH, IV  
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Orders must be received by April 12, 2025. Drawing held April 26, 2025. Do not need to be present to win.



# RIVER BEAR AND BULL

By Mike Torres, Distinguished Life Member

***My wife Lee and I had booked a river moose hunt with Deuling Stone Outfitters in the Yukon for September 2024. This would be my seventh hunt with Deuling Stone and Lee's first trip to the Yukon. I asked Jarrett Deuling to put us in a river camp with big bulls, and Jarrett certainly came through.***

On September 17 we flew by float plane to a remote alpine lake, off loaded our gear and met our Guides. Our Guides were Graeme Peters and his Dad Vern Peters. Graeme has been guiding in the Yukon for years and his Dad Vern in addition to guiding and hunting the Yukon for over 50 years, Vern was the recipient of the 2024 Wild Sheep Foundation Jack O'Conner Writer's Award for his article titled "Lofty Goals". In his article Vern described how he got into sheep hunting and starting his son Graeme sheep hunting at 10 years of age.

It was obvious that we were in the hands of two experienced professionals.

We hiked down to our camp on the MacMillian River. Camp was a traditional log cabin right on the bank of the free flowing river. The area was absolutely beautiful, with bright green spruce trees growing to the water's edge and backed up with thousands of glowing yellow and orange aspen, birch and poplar trees.

It had rained consistently for the previous 25 days, but our first day was clear and gorgeous.

After flying in we had to wait 6 hours before we could start hunting. We checked the zero on our rifles. Lee was shooting her 30/06 with 168 grain Barnes TTSX, and I was shooting my old .338 Win. Mag with 225 grain Accubonds.

Graeme thought we should head down river for the last few hours of daylight and do a little glassing and calling. It turned out to be a very good decision. We passed a huge log jam, tied up the 20 foot jet boat, and climbed a glassing hill. I immediately spotted a big bull moose across the river on a ridge about 1500 yards away. The Bull was interested in our calling and started down through the timber. We lost sight of him and Graeme wanted to start back before it got dark. As we were headed up stream, Lee called out "Bear, Big Bear!" She had spotted a huge Grizzly climbing over the log jam. The Grizzly hit the river bank and started running along it as the bank was under cut and he couldn't climb up it.

Graeme was following the bear with the jet boat at about 40 yards. I couldn't hear what Graeme was saying over the jet motor and river rapids. I could tell that this was a big bear by the small ears, heavy thick legs, and rear end that looked



Mike Torres with the "Volkswagen" grizzly

like a hairy Volkswagen. We were staying alongside the bear when things got very Western, shooting offhand in a moving boat, wearing a life vest, on a running bear quartering away. I hit him and he rolled, coming up roaring and biting his side. When he saw us he looked extremely angry and started for us through the shallow water. I gave him another shot on the shoulder and he went down.

He was a very big dark boar Grizzly. The four of us could not drag him out of the river and up the bank. We tied him to a nearby tree and opted to come back for him the next morning.

When we returned to the bear the next morning we took shovels and dug the river bank down to the level of the river. By doing so we were able to drag him out of the river and onto the shore for photos and processing.

While we were working on the bear I looked down river and saw a big bull moose standing on a gravel bar about 600 yards away. Graeme said he was a shooter and the three of us scrambled up the steep bank to gain elevation. Vern stayed with the boat and bear.

The bull was walking through 6 foot tall willows and was interested in our calling. Graeme set Lee up on a fallen log with her rifle on a tripod. I took a rest on a root wad off to the side. When the bull stepped out of the trees and turned broadside at 400 yards, Graeme counted to 3 and had us both fire on 3. We both missed cleanly. When Lee reloaded and shot again I saw her bullet hit just behind the shoulder. She had double lunged him. I gave him an insurance shot just as he was going down. It turned out that my shot was unnecessary. She had smoked him.

After high-fiving and celebrating, we returned to Vern and the boat. We were able to get the boat to within 100 yards



Lee Torres and her moose with Mike

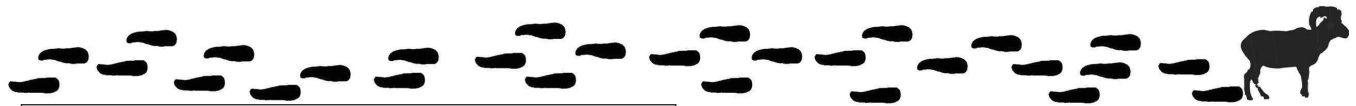
of the bull. Graeme used a chainsaw to cut a path to the bull and clear around him. We found him to be a mature 60.5" bull with good pans and lots of points.

We had only been in camp for 16 hours and had a Grizzly and Bull Moose down. It rained most of the night and we returned the next day to work on the Bear and Bull. It took two trips with the boat to transport the heavy loads. We worked on the two trophies for the next 2 days.

The priority on this hunt was to get Lee a good bull. The Grizzly I got was an unexpected bonus. We were both successful and very pleased. We continued to hunt for another big bull locating 8 more bulls, 3 in one afternoon, but no shooters showed up.

On the last morning of the hunt we were running the MacMillian river in a howling snow storm and I told Lee, Vern and Graeme that I feel sorry for Golfer's, because they never have cool stories like this.

This was an exceptional hunt in stunning, pure wilderness. The Outfitter, Guides, camp, equipment, food and accommodations were wonderful. In fact I could spend a month on the MacMillian river just watching it flow by..



## Mac and Cheese from Tony Gigilotti

Yum! Who doesn't love a good Mac 'n Cheese! With so many great cheeses you can't go wrong!

### INGREDIENTS

- Cheese Mix (see below)
- 1 stick of butter
- 2 1/2 cup of milk
- 2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne
- pepper
- 1lb pasta
- 1/2 cup flour
- 2 1/4 cup panko bread crumbs\*\*
- 1lb thick cut bacon \*\*\*

#### CHEESE MIX

- 8 1/2 oz pepper jack
- 8 1/2 oz sharp cheddar
- 1 oz asiago
- 1/2 oz parmesan
- 1/2 oz romano
- 3 oz gruyere
- 1/2 oz emmie
- 1/2 oz paradiso
- 3 oz Jalapeño cheddar (white)

### DIRECTIONS

- Melt 1 tbsp of butter and sauté the panko bread crumbs; set these aside
- Cook the bacon slowly rendering all the fat; cut/dice and set aside
- Boil the pasta; pasta should be less than al dente with some hardness to it. If the pasta is cooked before the cheese is ready, run under cold water and add olive oil to keep it from sticking
- Heat the milk in a sauce pan, ensuring it does not boil
- In a large pot (should fit the pasta and cheese mix), begin melting the remaining butter.

- Once the butter begins to bubble slowly add in the flour, whisk to create the roux; I do this on medium low heat
- Once the roux is created, very slowly add the milk while continuing to whisk until it bubbles and thickens
- Add salt, pepper, and nutmeg
- Add the cheese in hand fulls and do not add more cheese until what you've added is melted/mixed in; I turn the burner to medium high at this point as you're stirring/mixing fast enough it won't burn. Save ~1/4 of the cheese for the top if desired

- Mix in the bacon
- Add the pasta and mix
- Put all the pasta in a casserole dish (ensure you've buttered the dish), top with panko bread crumbs and remaining cheese

- Cook in the oven for 30-35 min at 375

#### NOTES:

- \*You can mix any cheeses to get the total weight; however you need to keep the jack and cheddar roughly at this ratio to ensure the cheese mixture melts. I have never done the same recipe twice; whatever cheeses look good go in .
- \*\* Panko bread crumbs are optional, but add a good texture.
- \*\*\* If not using thick cut bacon use 1.5lbs and remove all non rendered fat.





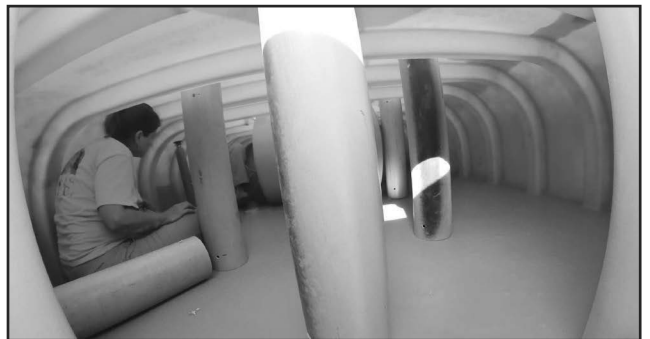
# SUCCESS AT LAST – STATE LANDS GUZZLER LAUNCHES NEW ERA

by Debbie Miller Marschke, SCBS

*It's been a long and tedious journey, but on October 27, 2024 the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep completed it's first new guzzler installation upon a leased parcel of California's State Lands in the Cady Mountains.*

This monumental achievement is the first type of project of it's kind in the California desert, which has been the result of over ten years of planning and development by members of SCBS. The California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation has been partners in this endeavor in the audacious fundraising campaign through the "Give A Lamb A Drink" (GALAD) program. The SCBS organization has over 50 years of expertise constructing and maintaining man-made water catchment systems colloquially known as "guzzlers"; these volunteer soldiers for wildlife perform countless acts of valor without fanfare doing what's best for the sheep. However, SCBS is not particularly skilled or sophisticated when it comes to fundraising. CA WSF successfully bridges that deficiency. By and through this partnership between SCBS and CA WSF, we can achieve far more together than either group can achieve alone. Sharing the common goal to strategically place wildlife water catchments in the most impactful habitats, we now enter a new era of habitat enhancement which should be a catalyst, realized by and through an increase in the populations of desert bighorn sheep in our State in the future. The lack of reliable water sources in the arid regions has been a primary and obvious concern; California deserts continually suffer from drought with no material changes predicted.

SCBS is proud to announce the completion of the first State Lands Wildlife Water System which has been nicknamed "Aurora". The project had the participation of thirty individuals: mostly SCBS member/volunteers, some members of WSF and several crew members from CDFW. SCBS had the benefit of an excavator, which was provided by Chuck Thomas of Diversified Excavating at a greatly reduced rate. Chuck has an equal passion for this wildlife enhancement work, which was clearly demonstrated by his determination to get his rig to the work site, his meticulous focus on the project, and his professional integrity. While Chuck excavated the holes for the Raincatcher tanks, the crew diligently prepared the pad for the water collection mat. Once all the rocks



Working the tanks outside and inside! (David Hawxhurst Photos)

were removed and the surface was raked fine, there was an all-hands-on-deck exercise to manipulate the heavy Hypalon rain mats. As it turned out, once the mats were unfurled, it was discovered that they were facing the wrong direction. Each mat weighs about 800 pounds! All the volunteers lined up along all four edges, and in one team effort the mats were rotated counter clockwise in one effective maneuver. "Piece of Cake"! Then the entire team spread out over the landscape, harvesting sizable rocks and carrying them over to be placed upon the rain mat. Sounds rudimentary – but this proven method using native materials keeps those rain mats in place for decades in the harsh Mojave environment. Immediately following the completion of the rain collection mat, another crew of SCBS volunteers arrived at the scene with water totes. Water was transported from sources at Newberry Springs and Ludlow by a determined water-haul team; by Sunday afternoon the two Raincatcher tanks were almost full. I am proud to say that we left the area clean, raked out our tire tracks, and "Aurora" is ready for discovery by the Cady Bighorn. It's just a matter of time that this dry side of the mountains can host the existing populations and expand their available habitat.

Thank you, California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation, for the faith demonstrated in SCBS's quest to bring this project to fruition. It will be the first of many new water systems installed in the East Mojave, strategically placed and based upon scientific data. SCBS also appreciates the boots-on-the-ground support by the CDFW, it is a great honor to feel the validation by that agency's presence. We all want the same thing: What's best for the Bighorn.

Please consider volunteering for one of our next upcoming State Lands guzzler installations. We currently have three additional project dates calendared: December 6-8, 2024, January 10-12 2025, and February 21-23, 2025.

SEE THE VIDEO ON YOUTUBE!

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4NGF5BB2wo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4NGF5BB2wo)



Managing the mat placement (David Hawxhurst Photos)



### From "Life Starts at 60"

AS I GET OLDER, I REALIZE THAT:

1. I talk to myself, because sometimes I need expert advice.
2. Sometimes I roll my eyes out loud. Well, actually, I do it a lot!
3. I don't need anger management. I need people to stop pissing me off.
4. My people skills are just fine. It's my tolerance of idiots that needs work.
5. The biggest lie I tell myself is, "I don't need to write that down. I'll remember it."

6. When I was a child I thought nap time was punishment. Now it's like a mini vacation.
7. The day the world runs out of wine is just too terrible to think about.
8. Even duct tape can't fix stupid, but it can muffle the sound!
9. Wouldn't it be great if we could put ourselves in the dryer for 10 minutes; come out wrinkle-free and three sizes smaller?
10. If God wanted me to touch my toes, he would've put them on my knees.
11. When the kids text me "plz" which is shorter than please. I text back "no" which is shorter than "yes".
12. At my age "getting lucky" means walking into a room and remembering what I came in there for.



# KUIU HELPS WILD SHEEP IN CALIFORNIA AS PART OF THEIR “CONSERVATION DIRECT” PROJECTS

*As part of the Give a Lamb a Drink (GALAD) program, KUIU partnered with CA WSF to fund and build a Raincatcher Wildlife Water System (RWWS) in the Chuckawalla Mountains.*

In April 2024, KUIU Conservation Direct, along with California Wild Sheep, completed its first water guzzler project in California. Located in the Chuckawalla Mountains, this 10,000-gallon artificial water catchment system expands desert bighorn sheep habitat, connects neighboring herds, and benefits all wildlife in the area.

To collect rainwater, the large sheet metal apron serves as the water catch. As rain hits the apron, it flows down into a large gutter, funneling into the subterranean containers that can hold up to 10,000 gallons of water. All the containers are connected and fill to the same level, keeping the open drinker full of water.

Aimed at providing a reliable water source for southern California’s desert bighorn sheep, along with the broader ecosystem in the area, the entire initiative—from land acquisition to procurement of water guzzler materials—was funded entirely by KUIU’s Conservation Direct (KCD), a first-of-its-kind



KUIU partnered with California Wild Sheep to provide reliable water sources for desert bighorn sheep. (Photo courtesy of KUIU)



KUIU’s Conservation Direct (KCD) is entirely funded by the company and its customers. (Photo courtesy of KUIU)

conservation initiative that is entirely funded by the camo company and its customers with each dollar being invested towards a tangible conservation project that everyone can see.

“Hunting and hands-on conservation are inseparable,” said Brendan Burns, KUIU’s director of conservation. “We have focused our conservation goals as a company on tangible projects that have a direct impact on creating future hunting opportunities.”

Conservation projects like the California sheep water guzzler are done one-at-a-time by KUIU to ensure transparency from start to finish. In addition to this scientific approach to wild game and habitat management, KCD also seeks to create hunting opportunities right now and into the future.

*Editor’s Note: We have held back publishing information about this GALAD project so that KUIU could provide source materials. Thank you to Kuiu for partnering with us on this important build in the desert and showing that collaborative efforts between non-profits and businesses can lead to impactful, lasting change in the desert.*



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# GOVERNMENT ISSUES UPDATE

*by Don Priest, Distinguished Life Member, Board Member*

## CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE RELEASE THE SHEEP PLAN FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

As many of our CA WSF members know, we have been waiting with anticipation for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to complete the Desert Bighorn Sheep Plan. And after many, I hate to say, years the wait is over. In September CDFW released for public comment the 'Draft Conservation and Management Plan for Bighorn Sheep in California' (Sheep Plan). This Sheep Plan contains the general overarching plan for Desert Bighorn Sheep (DBS), excluding the Peninsular Ranges Desert Bighorn Sheep and Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep. These sub-species of sheep are currently being managed by their own separate Endangered Species recovery program plans.

This general Sheep Plan lays out the history of DBS, the ecological requirements and challenges in our modern world, conservation concerns, management needs, along with recreational opportunities including hunting. With this extensive and detailed foundation of historical knowledge and future challenges to the management of DBS, the Sheep Plan laid out four Goals:

**Goal 1:** Manage desert bighorn populations for their long-term persistence in the face of changing environmental conditions.

**Goal 2:** Conserve, restore, and manage habitat and water availability to support sustainable desert bighorn populations.

**Goal 3:** Provide opportunities for recreational, traditional-cultural, aesthetic, educational, and ecological benefit of desert bighorn.

**Goal 4:** Develop, enhance, and maintain communication and collaboration with Tribes, stakeholders, agencies, and researchers regarding desert bighorn conservation and management.

Each Goal was further defined by a number additional Objectives.

The Sheep Plan will be followed by six detailed Bighorn Conservation Unit (BCU) Plans, each covering a range of sheep herds and mountain ranges that have been separated into metapopulations by human activities and barriers, including highway systems. In 2025 we anticipate that at least one, if not two, of these BCU Plans will be released. The first BCU Plan shall be the region bordered by I-15 to the North, I-40 to the south and east to the Nevada border, which encapsulates the Mojave National Preserve.

Within each of these Plans, the Goals and Objectives will be detailed toward the unique issues and conditions for the DBS herds and mountain ranges that lie within each particular



BCU. These BCU Plans will be the crux of the Sheep Plan, with specific details as to the management of DBS. Our understanding is that these BCU Plans are, in a sense, living documents that can be adjusted in the future given the fluid dynamics and conditions that may affect DBS populations.

CA WSF has provided CDFW our comments on the Sheep Plan. As the details for specific DBS herds will come with the BCU Plans, our comments were general, centering on the Goals and Objectives listed within the Sheep Plan. We provided several recommendations for expanding wording within or the addition of Objectives that we find would enhance conservation efforts by CDFW and stakeholders such as CA WSF.

Though the comment period has passed, if you would like to read the Sheep Plan, you may find it still posted on the CDFW website at: <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Mammals/Bighorn-Sheep>. CA WSF will provide our members within this newsletter and on our website further details and comments to the BCU Plans as they come available over the next few years.

### The Case for Term Limits

Congress has a 94% re-election rate over the past 60 years. Once you win the primary, you have a strong chance of representing your district until you decide to retire or the Grim Reaper decides for you.

In the Senate, the level is closer to 90%. Given the six-year Senate terms, that's not so bad.

# DESERT BIGHORN SHEEP PROGRAM UPDATE

*By Samantha Stelter, CDFW Desert Bighorn Sheep Scientific Aide*

Fall has been a very busy time for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Desert Bighorn Program. We retrieved ~60 cameras from various sections of the desert to preform camera surveys and estimate desert sheep populations in 14 different desert ranges. We even got our first-ever population estimate for the Deep Springs Mountains. Exploring the remote and rugged parts of the desert which the sheep call home is always a treat. Processing this data is underway and quite the rigorous process as we perform Poisson Mark-Resight Analyses to estimate these populations based on hundreds of thousands of photos from these cameras.

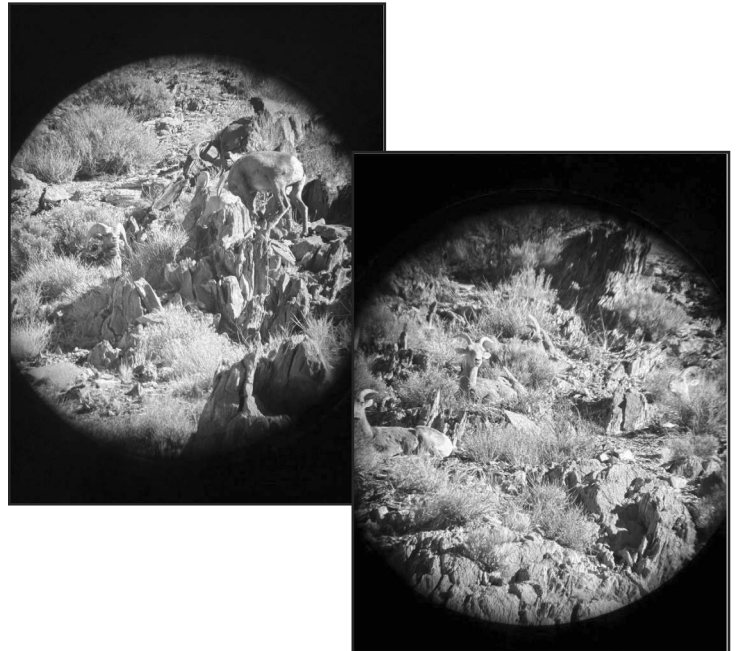
September to October saw the implementation of a power pole replacement in Silver Canyon in the White Mountains, a location with a well-known ewe deme. We were very concerned about the impact of the construction on our ewes and their lamb survival. We worked with the bio-monitors on the project to teach them how to spot sheep and kept a close eye on the sheep behavior. In addition to other constraints, the construction crew was not allowed to fly their helicopter up the canyon to transport materials and was not allowed to work within 1 km of sheep groups. These rules appeared to keep the sheep undisturbed, and we even saw quite a few rams move in for the rut.

Currently, we are excited to be capturing ~70 sheep in 16 different desert ranges, some of which have never had sheep collared in them! We are especially excited to collar sheep in ranges around the Colorado River (Chocolates, Palen-McCoy, Big Marias, Little Marias, Riverside) and explore sheep movements from there. This will help us get a better understanding of where sheep are traveling in sections of the desert that CDFW hasn't collared sheep within and allow us to get population estimates for these ranges.

In December, we are hoping to do helicopter work to perform much needed repairs on a wildlife water development. We are also performing a helicopter survey on the South Soda Mountains to get a better population estimate. This survey will include Cave Mountain area. We are also sad to see two of our Scientific Aids, Riley and Shelton, leave the program to further their careers. We wish them the best.



Samantha Stelter



Silver Canyon sheep undisturbed

# CALIFORNIA FISH AND WILDLIFE UPDATE

## WILDLIFE BRANCH UPDATE

*by Paige Prentice, Statewide Bighorn Sheep Coordinator*

*It's been a very busy few months for the bighorn sheep programs throughout the State—both in the office and the field. The Department released a draft of the Conservation and Management Plan for Bighorn Sheep for a 45-day public review, which closed on October 21st. We received a total of eight comment letters. Final edits are being made and the goal is to have the Plan submitted to the Director before Thanksgiving. A huge thank you to those of you that took the time to review the Plan and provide feedback.*

As mentioned in my previous update, the Department is also working on a new Regulations package for desert bighorn sheep hunting (25/26 season). These proposed changes include adjusting language for the fundraising tags; splitting the Newberry/Rodman/Ord hunt season into two 1-month seasons; adding a winter season to the White Mountains; modifying the hunt zone boundary for the Sheep Hole Mountains (Zone 6); and adjusting tag quota ranges. Overall, these proposed changes have the potential to increase the number of desert bighorn hunt tags in California by 12—that's a 32% increase in potential hunting opportunities! These changes will be proposed during the December FGC Notice Hearing, then discussed during the February FGC Public Discussion, and then voted on during the April FGC Adoption meeting. If the proposed changes are adopted, they will be active starting the 2025/2026 hunt season.

Outside of the office, we've been equally busy. The Sierra Nevada (SNBS) and Desert Bighorn (DBS) Programs finished up their summer surveys just in time for capture season to start mid-October. The SNBS program captured a total of 35 individuals (20 ewes and 15 rams). The Peninsular Bighorn Program (PBS) conducted an extensive capture effort across all nine Recovery Regions for a total of 86 individuals (53 ewes, 33 rams). This marked the first time in almost a decade that we were able to bring animals into base camp for



Paige Prentice

processing, allowing us to gain important physiological and body condition information. And at the time of writing this, the DBS program is still in the desert finishing their capture efforts. Stay tuned for more details in the next issue.

In addition to captures, there have been multiple drinker repair and installation projects, as well as water hauls—I'm hoping these are covered in more detail in other articles. A huge thank you to all the volunteers that helped make these happen!

Last but not least, we are planning to return to the Sonoran Desert in December for an 11-day helicopter survey of the PBS recovery regions.

We'll also be attending the Sheep Show in Reno in January—please come by and say hello!

**DON'T MISS CA WSF AT THE SHEEP SHOW**

**Booth 264**



# THE OROCOPIA MOUNTAINS: A BRIEF HISTORY OF CALIFORNIA'S FIFTH BIGHORN SHEEP HUNT ZONE

*by Vernon C. Bleich*

During the Spring of 1996, the California Department of Fish and Game's (CDFG) fifth bighorn sheep hunt zone, referred to here as the Orocopia Mountains Bighorn Sheep Hunt Zone (OMBSHZ), was proposed to be opened to the harvest of bighorn sheep (Torres 1996). Shortly thereafter, CDFG's proposal to allocate two tags was approved by the California Fish and Game Commission. Data to support this were generated during a series of aerial and ground-based surveys that revealed positive population-level responses to ongoing conservation actions outlined in the management plan prepared earlier (Thompson and Bleich 1991), as well as with enhanced forage availability that had resulted from increased precipitation (Thompson and Bleich 1991). Described below is a brief historical accounting of what had been known about bighorn sheep in the Orocopia Mountains, and some of the survey and habitat work that was completed prior to the opening of California's fifth bighorn sheep hunt zone.

The CDFG's information about desert bighorn sheep in extreme southeastern California historically was quite limited. For example, Weaver's 1957 assessment of the status of bighorn sheep in this area, which included much of the Sonoran Desert in California, noted simply that, "... all the [mountain] ranges have some sheep in them at some time". Weaver (1957) provided no additional details, although Weaver and Vernoy (1956) had placed the number of bighorn sheep occupying the range at 50, an estimate that was concurred with by other CDFG personnel in 1957 according to Berger (1990), Thompson and Bleich (1991), and Wehausen (1999).

Prior to 1956 there are no estimates specific to the number of bighorn sheep inhabiting the Orocopia Mountains. That year, Department of Fish and Game personnel observed two adult males and 11 females, lambs, or yearling males at Hidden Spring

during a survey of several water sources (Weaver and Vernoy 1956). In the same study, Weaver and Vernoy reported that 13 bighorn sheep were seen by the CDFG water development crew in the Mecca Hills, and those authors estimated the population to be 50 animals in the Mecca Hills and the Orocopia Mountains, combined. During late 1969 and early 1970, Dick Weaver and Jerry Mensch conducted surveys of several mountain ranges in southern Riverside County to update the status of desert bighorn sheep in that general area. This 'boots on the ground' effort, while brief, confirmed that a native population of sheep occupied the Orocopia Mountains and the Chuckwalla Mountains immediately to the east. Following that effort, Weaver and Mensch (1970) placed the number of bighorn sheep occupying the Orocopia Mountains at 15 animals.

A series of ground and aerial observations during 1978 yielded observations that prompted Weaver (1982) to revise the population estimate upward. Among these was the observation of 12 mature males, 14 females, and 14 lambs seen by Lt. Jay Harris, Vern Bleich, and helicopter pilot Don Landells during a brief flyover in April of that year. This information, when combined with the results of several additional surveys (Thompson and Bleich 1991), prompted Weaver (1982) to estimate that 80 animals occupied the Orocopia Mountains, and that number remained unchanged from 1982 to 1994. Additional ground and aerial survey work during that period and, particularly during the early 1990s, yielded information that the population likely was between 100 and 150



individuals (Torres et al. 1994, Torres et al. 1996, Abella et al. 2011). Currently, the population is ‘estimated’ to be somewhere between 50 and 100 individuals (Vu et al. 2021).

Man-made water sources likely have been beneficial to the bighorn sheep population, as well as to desert mule deer inhabiting the area (Schaefer 1996). CDFG was a prominent force in the development of these projects, which began as early as 1955 (Weaver and Mensch 1970), and that later were implemented in cooperation with the Bureau of Land Management, the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep (SCBS), Desert Wildlife Unlimited (DWU) and, recently, the California Wild Sheep Foundation. These water developments historically were cooperative efforts, and have occurred on private, state, and federal lands in the OMBSHZ.

At least three artificial water developments have been constructed by CDFG in cooperation with SCBS (Thompson and Bleich 1991), and others have been developed by personnel affiliated with DWU—a wildlife conservation organization based in Imperial County, California (Hunter 2014). At least four natural springs also have been enhanced to increase water flow, storage capacity, or access, and the storage capacity of one of the four tinajas (natural rock tanks) known to exist in the mountain range and used by bighorn sheep has been enhanced (Thompson and Bleich 1991).

Bighorn sheep occupying the Orocopia Mountains also have been the beneficiaries of water available in the Coachella Canal, which runs along the southwestern boundary of the management unit and provides a year-round source of water where the canal is proximate to escape terrain (Thompson and Bleich 1991). The canal generated an immense public outcry and a great deal of controversy when bighorn sheep and mule deer became entrapped and drowned when portions were lined with concrete in the late 1970s (Hunter 2014); it continued, however, to provide water to bighorn sheep in those stretches where it was not lined (Thompson and Bleich 1991). The losses of mule deer and bighorn sheep led to the installation of several additional water sources

located some distance from the canal and that were of benefit to both species (Thompson and Bleich 1991, Hunter 2014).

Following the transfer of then Unit Manager Rocky Thompson, Nancy Andrew assumed the position of Lower Colorado River Unit Manager, and continued to build on the efforts of Thompson, previous Unit Managers Fred Botti and Jesse Garcia, Wardens Alan Matthews and Joe Brana, and Lt. Jay Harris. Nancy Andrew (1994) had investigated bighorn sheep ecology in eastern Imperial County, where her investigations paved the way to the opening of the East Chocolate Mountains Bighorn Sheep Hunt Zone (Andrew and Bleich 2024; Andrew et al. 2024a, 2024b). During the early 1990s Nancy, Vern Bleich, and Steve Torres—the CDFG Bighorn Sheep Coordinator—worked collaboratively with Peter August, Jeff Barettte, and others affiliated with the Environmental Data Center at the University of Rhode Island to further the knowledge of bighorn sheep and bighorn sheep habitat in the Orocopia Mountains. This collaborative effort involved a number of the survey and monitoring techniques developed previously in the East Chocolate Mountains (Andrew et al. 2024b). As results accumulated, Steve, Nancy, and Vern began work on a detailed proposal to open that area to the harvest of bighorn sheep consistent with the increasing population in the range (Torres et al. 1994, Torres 1996). The proposed regulatory change was staunchly supported by local conservation groups, and in particular by DWU and SCBS.

Whereas a management plan for the bighorn sheep population occupying the Orocopia Mountains already existed (Thompson and Bleich 1991) and called for the opening of the range to the harvest of bighorn sheep when certain criteria had been met, the process of establishing the new hunt zone was simplified. As a result, CDFG submitted a proposal to the California Fish and Game Commission early in 1996 (Torres 1996). That proposal was approved by the Commission, and the first bighorn sheep season in the Orocopia Mountains was held that year with two ‘regular

season' tags available, and the zone also was open to the holder of the CDFG special fund-raising tag (CDFG 1996).

Fewer than 1,200 individuals applied for the first season (CDFG 1996), and only one hunter was successful that year (CDFG 1997). During the most recent (2023-2024) season, there were about 1,300 applicants for the single tag available (CDFw 2024). A single tag is also available for the upcoming (2024-2025) season (CDFw 2024). The Orocopa Mountains are known for producing high-scoring bighorn sheep; in part, that is a function of the extremely conservative harvest recommendations that have been in place since the zone opened to hunting. The current California state record (190 4/8) was taken in this zone in 2017, and the OMBSHZ has been a favorite among those that have purchased a special fund-raising tag; a number of the bighorn sheep harvested there appear in the most recent edition of the Boone and Crockett Records Book (Lehr and Schwab 2023).

As an aside but, perhaps of some interest to readers, it was during the survey flight in April of 1978—described earlier in this essay—that the author observed what remains the largest male desert bighorn sheep he has, as yet, seen in California. That tremendous ram was one of a group of 12 very large males running southward across the east-facing slope of Orocopa Peak (~33.57° N, ~115.78° W). That individual's genotype is no longer in the population, but his genes are. Conservative harvests, good management, quality forage, and good luck will ensure this population remains healthy and productive, and that hunting opportunities continue in California's fifth bighorn sheep hunt zone.

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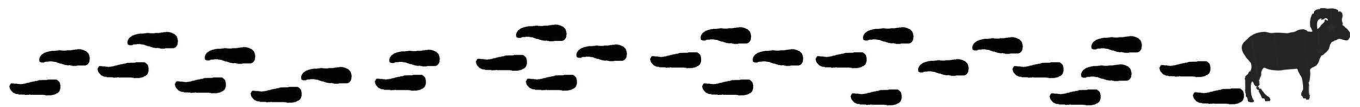
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—This article is part of a series by Dr. Vern Bleich, who increasingly is concerned that much of the long and complex history and management of bighorn sheep in California are being forgotten as ‘corporate memory’ declines and ‘generational amnesia’ begins to prevail. The author was fortunate to have joined the California Department of Fish and Game in 1973, shortly after

completion of a thorough inventory of bighorn sheep in California by Richard Weaver, and was employed by that agency for more than three decades during which he worked closely with three CDFG Bighorn Sheep Coordinators (Richard Weaver, Steve Torres, and Regina Vu) and served as interim coordinator for several years. Since retiring from CDFG in 2008 Vern has remained active in the conservation and management of bighorn sheep and currently is Research Professor at the University of Nevada Reno. He also serves on the Advisory Board of the Texas Bighorn Society, is Science Advisor for the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep, serves on two committees for the California Wild Sheep Foundation, and is a member and former chair of the Wild Sheep Foundation’s Professional Resource Advisory Board. From 2019 to 2022, he represented wildlife conservation and management issues on the National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board. Interested parties can contact Vern directly ([vcbleich@gmail.com](mailto:vcbleich@gmail.com)).



## MORE PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD



### WOMEN HUNT!

Makenzie (L) and Brynae (Vern Bleich's oldest grand-daughter) and both of whom are 14, bagged this nice buck near Wilton, North Dakota, on their 4th outing together this season. The ladies shared the same tree stand, hunted long and hard, and worked together to make this hunt successful. When the deer, which was first seen by Brynae and was in her sights, walked into some trees and then reappeared moments later, Makenzie had a clear shot and Brynae urged her to take it. There are several very proud Grandpas sharing this photo around town!



# THE POLITICS OF CONSERVATION

*KEEPING SHEEP ON THE MOUNTAIN AND YOU IN THE FIELD*

*By Bill Gaines, Gaines and Associates*

## 2023/2024 LEGISLATIVE SESSION WRAPS NOVEMBER 2024 ELECTION SETS THE STAGE FOR 2025

Late the evening of Saturday, August 31, 2024, the final gavel dropped on the 2023/2024 Legislative Session of the California State Legislature – leaving the Governor with 30 days to act on bills placed upon his desk. Then, following far too short of a break, the November 2024 statewide election took place – setting the stage for the challenges we may face in the halls of our State Capitol in the upcoming 2024/2025 Session.

Before we dive into the November 2024 election results and what to expect at our State Capitol in 2025, let's wrap the 2024 Session with a review of the fate of those bills of concern to the California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation (CA WSF) still in play as of our last report in mid-August.

### 2024 STATE LEGISLATIVE SESSION – FINAL WRAP

#### **AB 1889 (Friedman) – Conservation Element: Wildlife and Habitat Connectivity.**

Existing law requires cities or counties to adopt a comprehensive general plan that includes various elements, including land use, housing, and conservation elements. Existing law requires the conservation element to consider the effect of development within the jurisdiction on natural resources located on public lands.

Signed into law on September 27th, AB 1889 by Assembly Member Laura Friedman (D/44-Burbank) will require the conservation element to consider the effect of development on the movement of wildlife and habitat connectivity upon the next update of one or more elements on or after January 1, 2028. Among other things, the bill will require the conservation element to identify and analyze connectivity areas, permeability, and natural landscape areas within the jurisdiction, identify and analyze existing or planned wildlife passage features, and consider the impacts of development and the barriers caused by development to wildlife and habitat connectivity.

#### **AB 2320 (Irwin) – Wildlife Connectivity and Climate Adaptation Act of 2024: Wildlife Corridors: Fish Passage**

Existing law requires the Secretary of the Natural Resources Agency to prepare and submit an annual report to the Legislature on progress made towards achieving the state's goal to conserve at least 30% of the state's lands and coastal waters by 2030.

AB 2320 by Assembly Member Jacqui Irwin (D-Thousand Oaks) would have made it the policy of the state to preserve, protect, and restore wildlife habitats and biodiversity through the acquisition and restoration of blocks of habitat and



natural lands that are connected by wildlife corridors and the infrastructure that supports wildlife corridors. The bill would have required the state to identify priority projects for the acquisition, protection, and expansion of wildlife corridors, and authorized the Wildlife Conservation Board to give priority to projects that protect wildlife corridors. Further, AB 2320 would have required the agency to include an update on the state's progress towards addressing priority wildlife corridors, and goals for wildlife corridor protection in the next five years.

In late August, AB 2320 was held in Senate fiscal committee and died.

#### **SB 1163 (Dahle) – Wildlife-Vehicle Collisions: Wildlife Salvage Permits**

SB 1163 by Senator Brian Dahle (R-Redding) would have improved public safety and promoted the health of California's deer, wild sheep, and other wildlife by reducing the frequency of vehicle-wildlife collisions on our roadways. Upon appropriation by the Legislature, SB 1163 would have authorized the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to develop a pilot program to collect and compile information and data on vehicle-wildlife collisions via the creation of a smartphone app that would have allowed motorists to report the location of vehicle-wildlife collisions easily and in real-time.

Further, SB 1163 would have authorized the California Fish and Game Commission to establish a pilot program for the issuance of wildlife salvage permits that would have allowed motorists to salvage edible portions of deer, elk, antelope, and/or wild pig killed on our roadways.

In late August, SB 1163 was held in Assembly fiscal committee and died.

#### **SB 53 (Gonzalez) – Firearms Safety Certificates**

Existing law already imposes storage requirements to prevent children from gaining access to firearms.

Signed into law on September 24th, SB 53 by Senator

Anthony Portantino (D-Glendale) will now additionally require firearms to be stored in a locked box or safe that is listed on the Department of Justice (DOJ) roster of approved firearm safety devices. Further, SB 53 will require that firearms sold or transferred be accompanied by a lock box or safe on the DOJ roster.

SB 53 exempts the sale or transfer of a firearm from the above requirements if both of the following apply: 1) a purchaser or transferee already owns a lock box or safe that is listed on the DOJ roster; and 2) they present the dealer with an original receipt for purchase of that lock box or safe, or other accepted proof of purchase or ownership.

The requirements of SB 53 will take effect beginning January 1, 2026.

## **NOVEMBER 2024 ELECTION RECAP – CALIFORNIA STATE LEGISLATURE**

When it comes to issues of importance to California's hunting, shooting, and wildlife conservation community at California's State Capitol, does it really matter which political party is in control? It really does. Although there certainly are many exceptions, the Democratic Party has historically been the party least supportive of hunting and our Second Amendment rights. Why? Because, in many cases, it is the Democratic Party that represents California's urban legislative districts – constituencies that largely do not hunt or shoot, and which have little understanding of hunters, hunting, our critical role in wildlife conservation, or the important positive impact we have on our state's economy. Residents of these urban areas elect representatives that reflect their values and often share their misunderstandings of our outdoor traditions.

First, to lay some foundation for those who may be confused by California's complicated political process, let us begin with a brief overview of how our State Legislature is built and how it works.

### **CALIFORNIA STATE LEGISLATURE – HOW IT IS BUILT**

The California State Legislature is a bicameral body consisting of the California State Assembly with eighty members, and the California State Senate with forty members. Members of the State Assembly serve two-year terms, while members of the State Senate serve four-year terms. In short, all eighty State Assembly seats are up for election every two years, while twenty State Senate seats are up for election at each two-year election cycle. To make things even more confusing, our State Legislature has "term limits" – which limit Legislators to serving a maximum of twelve years. With term limits eliminating long-serving incumbents from the ballot, each California State election proves to be interesting, with many seats up for grabs and much at stake. The November 2024 State election was no different.

Over decade ago, in the November 2012 election, Democrats captured two-thirds of the seats of our State Senate and State Assembly – giving them a legislative "supermajority" and the power to easily pass legislation, raise taxes, override legislative rules and even pass emergency legislation without a single Republican vote. Twelve years later, the Democratic Party has not released their grip on our State House.

Would the Republicans finally bust up the Democratic

stranglehold on our State Capitol by riding the red wave which swept much of our nation on November 5th? Let us take look....

### **STATE ASSEMBLY**

In our State Assembly, fifty-four seats are needed to hold a two-thirds supermajority, and all eighty seats were up for grab. During the 2023/2024 State Legislative Session, Democrats enjoyed a supermajority with sixty-two Assembly seats, while Republicans held only seventeen, with one being vacant. Although votes are still being counted, Democrats will certainly retain their supermajority, but Republicans did manage to flip at least one seat. As of mid-November, Democrats have secured at least 60 Assembly seats for the 2025/2026 Session, Republicans eighteen, with two seats still too close to call.

### **STATE SENATE**

On the Senate side, twenty of the forty seats were up for grabs, with twenty-seven seats needed to hold a supermajority. During the 2023/2024 Session, the Democratic Party handily held a supermajority by holding thirty-one Senate seats, with the Republican Party holding only nine. Again, with votes still being counted, Republicans have flipped one Senate seat, but Democrats will easily maintain their supermajority. As of mid-November, the balance in our State Senate has only been marginally adjusted with Democrats holding thirty seats, to the Republicans ten during the 2025/2026 Session.

### **SO, WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN?**

By maintaining their supermajority grip on both chambers of our State House, and still holding all statewide elected offices, the Democratic Party will remain in complete control of defining California policy for the next two years. But will it make a notable difference on policy associated with wildlife conservation, hunting and/or sporting arms?

Although the partisan balance of control of California has only marginally changed with the recent election, that does not mean that we will not see any notable change at the State Capitol – for better or for worse. A total of thirty-five Senators and Assembly Members did not seek re-election due to term limits, seeking other political opportunities, and/or other reasons. Said differently, we will have a lot of fresh faces at our State Capitol for the next two years.

It is up to us. Collaborating closely with our partners in conservation, CA WSF will work hard to educate first-year Legislators and their staff of the importance of science-based wildlife management, the critical role of hunting in wildlife conservation. We will also reach out to experienced Legislators and their staff to reaffirm our working relationship and their support of wildlife conservation and our outdoor traditions.

Regardless of the challenges we may face in the coming year, CA WSF will do all possible to ensure policy decisions which promote healthy sheep populations on the mountain, and which keep you on the hunt.

The 2025/2026 version of the California State Legislature will be convened at our State Capitol on Monday, January 6th,

# REGISTERING HARVESTED AND “PICK UP” WILD SHEEP & PLUGGING, STATE BY STATE

by Tammy Scott, Life Member

Agency	Register Harvested Rams	Register Harvested Ewes/Lambs	Plug “Pick-up” Rams	Plug Harvested Rams	Primary Reason(s) For Plugging
Alberta Environment & Protected Areas	Y	N	Y**	Y	Enforcement & Proof of Regulatory Compliance. Biological data including disease. ** NOT MANDATORY **
Arizona Game & Fish Dept.	Y	N/A	N	Y	Mandatory reporting/check-in for BHS harvest, which is used to gather additional information on sheep (age, DNA, hunter effort, etc.).
British Columbia Ministry of Forests, Fish & Wildlife Branch	Y	Y	Y	Y	Enforcement & Proof of Regulatory Compliance/Proof of Ownership. Indigenous harvests are only “registered” and pinned if the harvest meets the Rule of General Application (i.e. sex, species, age/horn curl, harvest season, bag limit). BC does not allow pick-ups, however when turned in, they are pinned and included in the ministry inventory.
California Dept. of Fish & Wildlife	Y	N/A	N	Y	Law enforcement. Pick-up heads are not allowed.
Colorado Parks & Wildlife	Y	Y	N	Y	Law enforcement. Permanent marker. Don't plug pick-ups so they are not legal for sale.
Idaho Dept. of Fish & Game	Y	N/A	Y	Y	Law enforcement. Gather additional information on the sheep. There are rules about selling BHS horns, etc. Silver pins for harvested and gold pins for pick-ups.
Montana Dept. of Fish, Wildlife & Parks	Y	N	Y	Y	Enforcement & regulatory compliance. MT state legislature changed allowance of pick-ups beginning in 2019.
Nebraska Game & Parks Commission	Y	Y	Y	Y	Law enforcement.
Nevada Dept. of Wildlife	Y	N/A	N	Y	Law enforcement.
New Mexico Dept. of Game & Fish	Y	N	Y	Y	Law enforcement re: possession permit.
North Dakota Game & Fish Dept.	Y	N/A	Y	Y	Enforcement/deter poaching. All rams from wild sheep must be plugged in ND regardless of where they were harvested/found.
Northwest Territories Environment & Natural Resources	Y	N		Y	No hunts for ewes/lambs. Register & plug for exporting and biological sample of horns. Law enforcement.
Oregon Dept. of Fish & Wildlife	Y	Y	N	Y	Law enforcement. Horns can not be possessed unless from a legally harvested animal.
South Dakota Dept. Game, Fish, & Parks	Y	N	Y	Y	No ewe/lamb hunts. Public is not allowed to keep pick-ups as they belong to the state, and are plugged.
Texas Parks & Wildlife Dept.	Y	N	Y	Y	Law enforcement. Proof of ownership.
Utah Division of Wildlife Resources	Y	N	N	Y	Enforcement and Proof of Regulatory Compliance, however LE is questioning importance of plugging and proposing to move away from it. Already moved away from plugging deadheads in the past year.
Washington Dept. of Fish & Wildlife	Y	Y	N	Y	Law enforcement and Biological data.
Wyoming Game & Fish Dept.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Law enforcement, regulatory compliance. Started plugging rams in 1977. Have pre-77 plugs, pick-up plugs and harvested plugs.
Government of Yukon Dept. of Environment	Y	Y	Y	Y	Enforcement & Proof of Regulatory Compliance.

\*\*\* Please check current regulations for the most up to date information. \*\*\*

# WINECUP GAMBLE RANCH NEVADA

## ROCKY MOUNTAIN BULL ELK HUNT DRAWING

### 500 TICKETS AVAILABLE/\$100 PER TICKET



**HUNT INFO:** Trophy Rocky Mountain 6 Day Elk Hunt on the **Winecup Gamble Ranch**, NE Nevada. Private ranch in Nevada Units 076, 077, 079, and 081 on 30,000 acres of private (locked off); and access to areas inaccessible by the public. Total ranch is 1.25 million acres. Hunt takes place in 2025.

- 6 day hunt with two guides from Western Wildlife Adventures
- Food and transportation included
- Lodging accommodations in 6,500 sq ft luxury lodge
- Animal field dressed & ready for butcher upon departure.
- Archery hunter has the option of adding 4 additional hunting days for an additional fee (subject to availability).
- Hunt includes Landowner Elk Voucher (\$18,500) to exchange for an elk tag (winner is responsible for the \$1,200 tag and license).
- Winner may choose archery, muzzleloader, or rifle and will be hunting for 340-370+ BC bulls.

**This is an exceptional hunting opportunity for a Trophy Bull Elk.**

Drawing takes place **February 1, 2025** at the Redding CDA Banquet.

Do not need to be present to win.

For tickets or information please contact:

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or go to [www.caldeer.org/events](http://www.caldeer.org/events)







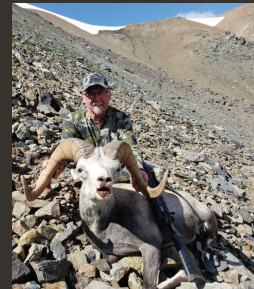
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