

# California Wild Sheep

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**Jessica Haddox**  
**South Bristol Mountains**  
**Hunting with Dry Creek Outfitters**  
**2024-25 Season**



# CALIFORNIA WSFLIFE MEMBER GIVEAWAY! INDIGENOUS FREE RANGE WEEMSI DESERT SHEEP

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# From the Editor's Desk

This is the first issue following the 2024-2025 Desert Bighorn Season and the last one before our Annual Banquet and Fundraiser. It includes lots of CA DBH Pictures from the season just completed, great hunting stories from California and elsewhere, more on our 2025 fundraiser, interesting history on CA DBH hunting, News from CDFW, lots of water work in the desert, AND MORE!

Good luck in the various state tag draws and raffles for 2025. I suggest you have a base plan for the year that doesn't rely on those draws. I also hope you participated in the WSF Sheep Week in Reno – it was incredibly well done and made major money for wild sheep. The GSCO collaboration with SCI also went very well – again. I so appreciate time with our Sheep Fraternity from around the world!

Feedback, ideas, articles & requests are always welcome. Best way to reach me is email: [mike.borel@kearney.com](mailto:mike.borel@kearney.com) (Note this new address). Due date for input to the 2Q25 issue is May 10.



## Corned Beef from Tony Gigilotti

### INGREDIENTS

- ~5lbs of corned beef
- 12 oz of a dark beer such as Guinness (nitrogen rather than a typical CO2 beer is preferred)
- 1 onion (diced)
- 2 stalks of green onion
- 4 garlic cloves (2 smashed and 2 minced)
- 2 bay leaves
- 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon of cloves
- 1/4 teaspoon allspice
- 5 stalks of celery
- 1 head of cauliflower or cabbage
- ~3lb of potatoes (quartered)
- 2lbs of carrots (~2" pieces in length)

### DIRECTIONS

- 1) Soak the corned beef in cold water for 1 hour, changing the water after 30 minutes to reduce the salt
- 2) Open the beer to allow some of the gas to escape
- 3) In a dutch oven or large pot caramelize the onion before adding the green onion, half the celery, and all of the minced garlic and saute
- 4) Brown the corned beef on all sides
- 5) Remove the corned beef and add the beer, remaining garlic, and spices to the pot ensuring you mix the spices in
- 6) Add the corned beef back to the pot, cover with liquid, and bring to a soft boil removing any foam that comes up
- 7) Bring to a simmer and cook for at least 3 hours or until when you get the texture you want with the brisket
- 8) Add the carrots, cauliflower/cabbage, and potatoes and cook for ~20 mins



You can reduce the liquid if you would like a gravy/sauce for the vegetables and corned beef. Bring back to a boil and slowly add corn starch to get the thickness you'd like. You should reduce it by at least half before adding the cornstarch.

In order to  
have a murder  
of crows, there  
must be  
probable caws.



## Jack O'Connor's Greatest Quotes on Sheep Hunting

The wild ram embodies the mystery and magic of the mountains, the rocky canyons, the snowy peaks, the fragrant alpine meadows, the gray slide rock, the icy, dancing rills fed by snowbank and glacier, the sweet, clean air of the high places, and the sense of being alone on the top of the world with the eagles, the marmots, and the wild sheep themselves.

— "The Bighorn," March 1960

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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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# Events

## 2025

March 1-2	San Gabriel Sheep Census
April 25	Sheep Summit XXXVI All 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	Watch for your 2025 Board of Directors Election Ballot
June 5-7	WSF Chapter & Affiliates XVII The Westin Fort Lauderdale, Florida Beach Resort
June 28	Your completed election ballots due
August 10	Due date for articles for 3Q2025 CA WSF Newsletter
October	New GALAD Installaltion Date and Location TBD
November 10	Due date for articles for 4Q2025 CA WSF Newsletter
December 5	Sheep Summit XXXVII "All Virtual"
December	New GALAD Installaltion Date and Location TBD

## 2026

January 22-24	WSF International Sheep Show Reno, NV
February 18-21	SCI Convention, Nashville
February 21-22	GSCO Convention, Nashville

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# President's Letter

I just returned from the Eastern Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation's Annual 2-day Outdoors & Hunting Expo and Fundraising dinners in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. They have been generous enough to invite me to act as their Master of Ceremonies for their event for the last few years and I am very thankful for that. Together we have developed a great collaborative relationship and they are about to reach a tremendous conservation milestone of having donated over \$4,000,000 to Grant-in-Aid Wild Sheep projects across the American West, Canada, and Mexico.

Last year, ECWSF donated \$25,000 to our California Chapter for a State Lands Drinker Project that is scheduled for construction this fall. Keep an eye on your emails and if you're able to attend a drinker project build, please do. There's tremendous satisfaction in fulfilling the goals that we've had for so long and are finally seeing come to fruition. The benefit of these drinkers across the Southern California landscape is immense. They not only benefit sheep, but all wildlife! Water is life and these projects are a means to positively impact wildlife for decades to come.

For example, recently we have had some rain events across the Southern California desert. The Kuiu Gulch Drinker project, built in collaboration with Kuiu's Conservation Direct Program in the Chuckwalla Wilderness Area last spring, had already collected water in some previous rain events. I'm proud to say we were able to capture an additional 600 gallons of water just in the last two weeks. Currently, the tanks are holding nearly 2,600 gallons of life sustaining water at a critical connectivity corridor for bighorn sheep where previously there had been none.

Each successful completion of one of these State Lands projects is a step towards "Putting and Keeping Sheep on the Mountains of California." Each successful project finish is a "Promise Kept" to all of you that have generously supported this effort for the last 20+ years. And each successful project finished benefits wildlife across the Southern California landscape for decades to come for all of us.

WSF Chairman of the Board, Glen Landrus, gave a very compelling speech in Pennsylvania this past weekend. The focus spoke largely to "Legacy." Paraphrasing, he said, "Our life begins and ends with a number with a dash in between, what will be your dash? What will be your legacy?" Well, I can promise that on your behalf, all of us here at CA Wild Sheep will ensure that we "leave it better than we found it." We will continue the work to support growth and expansion of desert bighorns across the landscape and we will collaborate with our State and Federal Agencies and partner NGO's and all of the "Wild Sheep Family" to expand opportunity, public access, and to steward the land based on sound science instead of "Ballot Box Biology." For all of us, we'll work to insure that "Legacy" we all share in as part of CA Wild Sheep Foundation and the CA Wild Sheep Family.

Please make plans to attend our annual fundraiser April 26 at the Doubletree by Hilton in Sacramento. Please read my Fundraiser update in this issue and don't miss out! Go to our website <http://cawsf.org/store.html> and buy your tickets today! And while you're there, please buy as many tickets as you can for the Stone Sheep hunt we're giving away... and then buy one more! I will see you in Sacramento and might be saying your name from the stage! Make plans to attend today!



*Donald C. Martin*

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# RAM DOWN!

By Jessica Haddox, Member

***"Ram down! He is in a really shifty spot though." That was the text that I sent my Husband after harvesting my first Desert Sheep. I can't even explain how excited I was.***

Like all hunting stories, this one starts with the draw results. My husband sat at the kitchen table checking each of our profiles on the CDFW website. When he checked mine, he stated, "there must be a glitch or something. It says that you drew a sheep tag." He logged out and then restarted the login process. I remember standing over his shoulder when he pulled up the results. South Bristol. Did you win... "Y".

We immediately went into research mode. How do you prepare for a hunt that you never thought you would draw? My husband has applied for most of his life and never drawn a tag. I quickly realized what a huge deal this would be.

A few google searches later; we found Dry Creek Outfitters. I was not going to take the chance of going into this hunt blind. After a great phone call with Cliff St. Martin, I knew that these folks were gonna take care of us. Time for us to do some prep work!

Flash forward to Christmas day. We loaded up the truck and trailer and headed south. It would take two days to arrive at the South Bristol unit. We brought along our two oldest kids Olivia and Caidyn. We said from the beginning that we wanted to make this a family trip.

Afternoon of Dec 26th, we arrived at our camp spot. I won't lie, it felt kinda nice stepping out of the truck and being met with 60-degree temps. We are accustomed to a much colder climate. The landscape was amazing. Rough hillsides and a view that stretched to the horizon. Before we even had camp setup my son Caidyn had already located some ewes feeding in a nearby drainage. I had a really good feeling about this trip.

We met up with the crew that would be guiding me on my hunt. Matt St.Martin, Johnston St.Martin, Nate Lang and Eli Lang. For the next few days these four guys would put in all kinds of work for me.

On our first day hunting we decided to divide and conquer. My husband and kids glassed from the ridge near camp. Matt and I went west hoping to locate something on the upper peaks. Nate, Eli and Johnston headed to the other side of the range. Matt and I managed to locate a couple of ewes and some rams that were clear at the top of the mountain. My husband and the kids found a group of ewes down low near camp. And the rest of the guys found some good rams on the back side of the range. But they were too far away to really get a good look at. It was a long day for all of us. By the time we got back to camp, I was pretty worn out.

The second day of the hunt was similar to the first. Everyone



Jessica Haddox and South Bristol ram

was seeing sheep and a handful of good rams were spotted on the north end of the range. Nate located a group of seven rams near the top of the hill. One of them looked really promising. The ram was obviously older and was limping from an injury. We made a game plan and headed out. But after searching for the rest of the day, we couldn't locate him again.

Day three. The older ram from the previous day was found and had moved off by himself. It was an approachable area, but it was gonna take us a while to climb the elevation to get to him. Matt and I started up this draw at a quick pace towards a saddle at the top. We knew the ram we were looking for was a ridge over but paused a couple hundred yards from the top to rehydrate and catch our breath. As we prepared to keep climbing, I looked up at our destination and saw a ewe, skylined, looking directly at us. As I get Matt's attention, I think to myself "this is it, she's going to blow over the top and scare my ram in the opposite direction and my chances for today are gone!" We decided to sneak over to a rock face and sit in the shade, resting and watching hoping she will slowly move along without spooking my ram. After about 20 minutes she's gone, back up and over the top. Slowly we kept climbing. Trying to stay calm, and keep my breathing even, we make it up to the saddle. We decided to climb the little point to the north. We took off as much gear as possible to make crawling over to our perch as easy and quiet as possible. As I peak over the edge I see him, coming towards us limping along a trail several hundred yards from the top but a couple ridges over. The ram followed the trail into a rockslide. We moved into position without worrying of him seeing us. I set up prone and tried to get as comfortable as possible (not at all, facing downhill on a rock pile). Matt and I waited and saw him emerge out of the rock cut. He crested the top of the ridge next to ours and paused to look down at the hillside broadside to us. I settled in and took the shot. Hair flies and he gets skiddish. The ram climbed higher up the ridge, coming closer to us. He had no idea where the shot came from. He climbed another hundred yards or so



closer and paused again. This time giving me a quartered away target and I squeeze off another round. He rears up and tips over backward and lies motionless, feet in the air and Matt yells “RAM DOWN!”

We waited for the others to make their way over to us. The adrenaline slowed and excitement set in. He could have been in a worse spot but that didn’t make the spot he was in any easier to get to. We debated whether to bring him uphill about 300 yards to the saddle across 3 treacherous rockslides. Or take him downhill, which would be much farther and just as dangerous. Thankfully we had plenty of packs to share the weight. As we made our way over to him, he still hadn’t moved. His weathered and well used horns caught on a pile of rocks. Which I was thankful for because the terrain to the bottom was steep and clear of any obstacles that would have stopped him from rolling to the bottom.

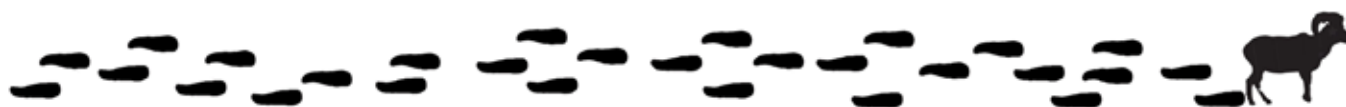
When the rest of the crew arrived, Nate nicknamed me “Ram Killer” and the others congratulated me on a great ram! We took pictures and the boys made quick work of caping him out and breaking him down. We took it slowly climbing back to the top of the mountain. One wrong step and the rocks would fall out from under you, and you’d slide all the way to the bottom. The trek down the other side was much quicker and you could tell by our pace we were all ready to get back to camp for dinner and more celebrating. We had already decided oysters were the appetizer for dinner, and we were all in agreement that we would call it tenderloin until it was gone otherwise our



Jessica Haddox with Dry Creek Outfitters team

daughter would refuse to try them. We cooked and toasted with moonshine and sat around the fire like we’d known each other for decades.

I cannot say enough good things about the folks that helped me get my first sheep. We definitely made the best choice in choosing an outfitter. They made us feel welcome and we all enjoyed our time together in camp, as much as the time spent up on the hill.



## Potato Pave from Tony Gigilotti

### INGREDIENTS

- 3lbs of russet potatoes that are roughly uniform in size
- 1 cup of heavy cream
- 1 leek (diced)
- 1 clove of garlic (smashed)
- 1 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp of pepper
- 1/3 cup of butter or duck fat (melted)

### DIRECTIONS

- 1) In a large bowl put the heavy cream, salt, and pepper
- 2) Peel the potatoes, cutting off the edges to make them square
- 3) Using a mandoline (or carefully with a sharp knife) slice as thinly as possible. If using a mandoline does this over the bowl of heavy cream. If using a knife put the slices into the bowl to keep the potato from turning brown
- 4) Line a baking loaf pan with parchment paper (do not remove the excess from the sides) or foil ensuring you use the butter or duck fat to coat the parchment paper
- 5) Begin layering the potatoes, adding butter or duck fat every few layers. Do your best to have a consistent layer, though it will eventually level out
- 6) Once completed fold over the excess parchment paper, covering the potatoes with foil and cook at 350 degrees for ~1.5 hours. Use a knife to confirm the potatoes are cooked by pushing it through the top. You should feel very little resistance



- 7) Remove the pan from the oven, letting cool slightly before adding weight on top. You want to keep the potatoes compressed by using a second loaf pan and cans. If you do not have a second loaf pan you can use cardboard in foil cut to size and then add the cans on top
- 8) Once the pan is cool enough put it in the fridge for at least 6 hours
- 9) When you are ready to fry the potatoes begin with sauteing the leeks and garlic
- 10) You can remove the potatoes from the pan by flipping upside down and tapping or pulling up from the parchment paper. Cut the potatoes into individual sizes to fry
- 11) Fry all sides of the potatoes allowing them to get crispy

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# CALIFORNIA WILD SHEEP SUMMIT XXXV

*December 9, 2024 "All Virtual"*

*By Mike J. Borel, VP Operations*

CA WSF hosted Sheep Summit XXXV on December 9, 2024 "All Virtual". The purpose of these summits is "to accomplish more collectively for Desert Bighorn in CA through sharing and collaboration, than the sum of what each organization can accomplish individually". And they have proven to be a valuable interactive event.

Summit XXXVI is scheduled for April 25, 2025 in Sacramento "All In Person". Following is a summary of Session XXXV.

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS: CDFW, USFS, USBLM, NPS-MNP, NPS-JT, Twentynine Palms Marine Base, China Lake Naval Station, Mine reclamations, CAWSE, and SCBS. 47 persons in all.

Information reviewed:

1.	Welcome, Review Meeting Purpose & Agenda, Introduction of new persons	Mike Borel
2.	CDFW Big Picture Update	Scott Gardner and Mario Klip
3.	CDFW Statewide Bighorn Update: Statewide Management Plan status and review of adjustments, BCU Plan Status, Regulations	Paige Prentice
4.	CDFW Desert Bighorn Sheep Update from Region 6, including surveys and captures	Danielle Glass
5.	OSU Update on Research and Activities, including NSF Results	Clint Epps, Christina Aiello
6.	CDFW Peninsular Bighorn Update from Region 5/6 - including Fence on La Quinta, Planned new Drinker, Update on Peninsular herd following domestic sheep sighting in early 2024	Jeff Villepique
7.	US BLM - Update on the Big Picture, Multiple EA's and the Programmatic EA	Brian Novosak
8.	Survey and Collar Data Update at Joshua Tree NP	Michael Vamstead
9.	Conversion of small game drinkers to DBH Value	Scott Gibson
10.	Additional Information and Planned Research on Bighorn Sheep and Minerals	Carlos Gallinger
11.	Update on Brightline and Overpasses for Mitigation with Cal Trans and other State Issues Impacting DBH	Don Priest
12.	SCBS Guzzler (BGG) Repairs and New Drinkers (RWWS) Installations Update, State Lands Installations - experience, plan for 2025	Steve Marschke
13.	GALAD (Give a Lamb a Drink) progress, funding	Mike Borel
14.	"Report on Recent Activities that are of value and interest for CA wild sheep -- e.g. WAFWA, Wild Sheep & Goat Council, Desert Bighorn Council, Boone & Crockett Club, WHBAB, etc.	Vern Bleich
15.	Suggestions for Next Summit April 25, 2025 "All In Person"	All

Our previously committed COLLECTIVE VISION FOR WILD SHEEP IN CALIFORNIA:

- Ensure the persistence and restoration of healthy and sustainable metapopulations of bighorn sheep throughout their historical distribution in California.
- Develop and use science as the basis for conservation and management.
- Provide for recreational uses of bighorn sheep wherever appropriate.



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# DESERT BIGHORN SHEEP DECEMBER 30TH 2024!

by David Coleman, Member

***Throughout the last 44 years I have applied for as many hunts that I could afford but when it came to the California Draw to my disappointment for years, I never drew a tag. When California went to a modified preference point system in 2002 and with max points this increased my chances of obtaining a coveted Desert Bighorn Sheep tag. And with the Lords blessing in June 2024, I discovered that I had beaten the California lottery system and drew out a Desert bighorn Sheep tag for the Newberry/ Rodman/ Ord mountains.***

I attended the mandatory fish and wildlife sheep hunter orientation in Davis California. While I was there, I knew that there were Outfitters and Guides that were offering their services. My thinking was, how hard can this be. So, I made the decision to hunt on my own. I went home and started to make plans for my hunt. Already having commitments in Colorado and Wyoming I could not pre-scout my hunt unit. October and November came and went. Opening day started on December 7th but I could not make the opening day because my binoculars would not focus, and I had to send them for repairs to Swarovski Optik in Cranston, Road Island. Thanks to Swarovski I quickly received them back on December 13th. And on December 17th I drove to my hunt area. I spent the next four days driving and glassing looking for sheep. With no luck. I did not see a single sheep. But in the early morning hours at first light on December 21st I located my first Desert Bighorn Sheep. They were far in the distance on a high mountain side. Two were not legal and the third may have been a legal ram. They did not give me much time to look at them because they were in a hurry getting into the rocks to bed down. Believe me, after they bed down, they are almost impossible to find.

Soon after that I started to do some serious thinking. With my hunt area being very desolate and remote and not seeing sheep or a human being for 3 days hunting alone, I came to a conclusion. If I were to be successful and for my safety, I decided to get some help. Later that morning I drove the next four hours back home. While driving, I started thinking of Outfitters that I knew who would give me the best chance at filling my tag. But I already knew who would be the one. I did not have to look for an Outfitter, do the research ask questions or wonder about their every answer. I knew right where to go, I knew who to call. The first one on my mind was Matt St



David Coleman and Newberry ram

Martin with Dry Creek Outfitters in Three Rivers, California. I arrived home late that afternoon and the next morning Sunday December 22nd I called Matt and arranged to meet the next day. I believe in my Lord and savior Jesus Christ and that God Almighty brings good people into my life to bless me and to make great opportunities happen. And everything immediately started in motion after contacting Matt. I met him, along with his son Jonston, the very next day at the Three Rivers Mercantile. We discussed sheep hunting and all the details. I knew right then I had come to the right Outfitter. Matt said that he had a BHS Hunt scheduled for the next week in the South Bristols, because my hunt unit was close by Matt said he would call me when he was finished with that hunt and for me to meet him at my hunt unit to begin my guided hunt. Matt said to me to be ready and so I did. The next week was Christmas and Christmas came and went. But on December 29th Matt called me and said to meet him the next day, December 30th. Matt said that he and his guide Nate would be scouting and working for me to locate a Ram. Matt said I would not have to show up early, maybe around 3pm would be ok.

The next morning, I left my home at 10:30 a.m. and arrived in Barstow California that afternoon and while pumping gas into my truck I received a phone call from Matt. Matt said that his guide Nate had located two good rams. Matt said he would send me a new pin location to meet him where they are located. I then drove to the pin location where I contacted Matt by phone and then he directed me to where he and Nate were set up on a high ridge. As I got closer Matt said to drive past Nate's truck and up to his buggy. As I got out of my truck I walked up to where Matt and Nate were set up with spotting scopes. I then looked through the scope and saw a real good ram about 2 miles away.

Matt then said that we need to go on this ram. I mentioned to



David Coleman and Dry Creek Outfitter team

Matt about it getting dark soon, Matt said yes and we will be coming back in the dark, whether we get that ram or not. I also said, "Is it really steep going down over there?" Matt said yes, so with a leap of faith, I paused for just a moment and then I said, "let's go". And immediately God's strength came into me and at the age of 69 I felt like I was 25 again back when I had climbed Mt. Shasta. Being dressed in scrubs T shirt and tennis shoes I ran down to my truck and changed out.

We started going down a steep, deep ravine and then ascended to another steep ridge side. Keeping up with Matt we traverse across the ridge, staying below the skyline. Then down again being steep rocky and loose. We finally got to the bottom in a rocky drainage with lots of cactus. We climbed that rocky drainage and kept going up for a while when Matt stopped and said, there is a ram just ahead of us. Matt said he is a good ram, and you need to shoot that ram. From where I was standing and behind Matt, I could not see him. Matt said just stay low and move ahead a bit. I literally crawled a few feet. I could not see the ram and had to lean to my left. I found myself looking at the ram.

I was astonished with my heart in my throat seeing a dark phantom silhouette standing on the skyline looking directly at me. I was staying as low as I could get. Matt then said he is 165 yards and then handed me my rifle. I quickly and carefully checked my dial and made sure to turn down the power in the scope. With three rounds in the magazine, I then jacked a shell into the chamber with the safety on. I said to Matt that I would shoot from a small, elevated rock that was just ahead of me. Matt said "no, if you move forward you will blow him out of here". Matt said use my pack to shoot from. Matt set up his pack frame in front of me and so I rested my rifle and took the safety off.

As I was looking through the scope at the ram, I said to Matt that I can't shoot because he is looking straight at me. Matt reassured me to be patient and that he would turn, and sure enough just in moments the ram soon turned and started slowly walking to my left. My first shot was a hit. With Matt staying on him looking through his binoculars he said you hit him. You

could see the ram stop and then struggle for a few moments. I put another round into the chamber. I shot once again and the ram took about 4 steps, then went down.

When we got to the downed ram I was in stun mode. Matt got excited and said that it is a good ram. It was late and darkness was closing fast so I punched my tag, and we took a few pictures. Then Matt quickly prepared the ram for our return the next morning. In the desert, walking back to our vehicles in pitch darkness you can easily get lost, turned around and walk down the wrong drainage if you aren't familiar with the area. With a two hour walk out of this place in the dark there was reason to be concerned. But with Matt and his GPS guiding me I was relieved with no worries. Early the next morning Matt, Nate and I returned to the kill site. We took several pictures and then Matt and Nate began preparing the ram for the pack out. Matt and Nate know what they are doing. They know just what to do; they both tag teamed, skinned quarters, wrapped and loaded the ram into our packs for the pack out. January 31st, New Years eve. What a great day, having God's blessing and walking out with a beautiful Ram. It doesn't get any better than that.

I want to say thank you First and foremost to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for his blessings to make this all possible. That he brought good people into my life. Matt and Nate and Dry Creek Outfitters not only for their professional services and helping me but for their kind and caring demeanor, for their good energy, for who they are and for what they do. Also, I would like to thank the California Wild Sheep Foundation for their efforts in supporting the Desert Big Horn Sheep management program. I want to thank them for providing healthy herds, and a good population so future generations will have and to enjoy and to be blessed as I have. Every day is a blessing. Every day I feel blessed to live in a Great Beautiful country as we do. It's a great time for Hunting; it's a Great time for our country and it's a great time to be free.





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# SNAIL

By Jason Bruce

***It all began at the 2022 WSF (Sheep Show) convention during the Saturday night auction. I wasn't paying much attention—maybe the cocktails played a part—but when I thought the California Governor's sheep tag was going for way too cheap, I jumped in on the bidding. The next thing I knew, I had the winning bid. I spent the rest of the night feeling like I had scored an unbelievable deal.***

As the evening wore on and after a few more drinks, Jake Franklin approached me and asked, "Why did you buy the Cady Mountain unit tag?" I looked at him, confused, and said, "No, I got the California Governor's tag." He smiled and said, "No, sir, you got the Cady's tag, and it's going to be a tough hunt." He then explained the unit and what to expect. I mentioned that a few years ago I'd bought the Nebraska tag, hunted alone, and managed to shoot the state record for both archery and any weapon. Living in California, I figured I'd likely hunt solo, but we exchanged numbers, and he said he'd be happy to help if needed.

A few weeks later, after doing some research and reflecting on how outfitters need to stay in business, especially in a state with such limited sheep permits, I decided to go with Kika Worldwide. When I reached out to Jake, he told me there were only about two mature rams in the unit that he knew of. His first question was, "You're not planning on archery hunting, are you?" When I told him no, I could practically hear the sigh of relief on the other end of the line. I then mentioned that I was chasing a muzzleloader slam, which didn't seem to excite him much, but he assured me, "We can get it done."

Jake mentioned there was a big ram in the unit, always at the guzzler, but just before season, he would vanish. Over the years, they'd named him "Snail." Jake warned me that finding this ram would be difficult, as no one had seen him during the season. He believed the ram was around 11 or 12 years old. Despite the challenge, the plan was set, and November 5 couldn't come soon enough.

I met Chris, Landon, and Cody the day before opening day. We drove down from the Sacramento area and arrived at camp just before dark. After shaking hands and exchanging pleasantries, Chris mentioned they had been glassing all day in an area where sheep typically gather that time of year but had only spotted small rams, ewes, and lambs. Then, with a smirk, he said, "On the way back to camp, something told me to stop and glass the front face of that mountain range." It



Jason Bruce and Cady ram

was a spot no one usually bothered to check. Chris said he'd only been glassing for 10 minutes when he found Snail.

While Cody started dinner, Chris told me Landon would stay the night on one of the higher peaks to glass the backside of the mountain at first light, just in case the ram was on the move. After a couple of beers and dinner, the night felt like it lasted forever.

The next morning, we set up in the same spot where Chris had found Snail the night before. No luck. We moved about a mile away and set up again. Less than an hour later, Cody was the first to spot the ram. With excitement building, we resisted the urge to rush up the mountain. We knew we had to sit, observe, and plan carefully. After the longest hour, we finally came up with a strategy to stay out of the wind and use a drainage to get us to the base of the mountain.

From there, we used the mountain's shadows to conceal ourselves as we made our way up, closing the distance to about 140 yards. The ram and two ewes were feeding broadside when Snail stood up on a rock outcrop. I filled the valley between us with black powder smoke. When the smoke cleared, we could see that Snail had been hit. He followed the ewes up the mountain but collapsed about 150 yards from where I shot.

It took some effort to navigate around a small valley to reach him, but as we made our way, we noticed another valley—a hidden one that would have been impossible to see from below. If Snail had been just one ridge over, we might have never seen him, and we thought that was likely his hiding spot, maybe even his rutting grounds, where he could disappear for the season.

By the time Cody and Estelle made their way up, and Landon—I'm still not sure how—crossed the mountain range to join Chris and me, the ram was down. Before taking pictures or skinning him, we were all amazed at how heavy the old ram was. We had him off the mountain and back to camp before dark on day one.

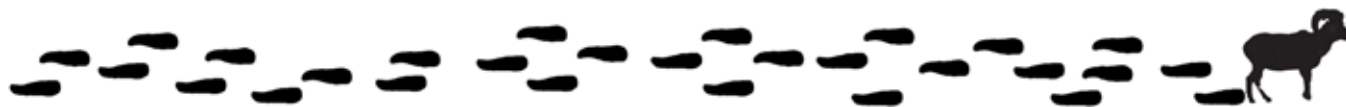
Jake was in another unit with the California Governor's tag and had a giant ram down on opening day as well. Looking back, I wish the hunt had lasted a few more days in those rugged desert mountains. But then, I remember a 23-day archery Stone sheep hunt where I only saw one ram at 300 yards. I'll take a first-day ram any day.

Thanks to Kika Worldwide and their guides for this unforgettable hunt. Also, a huge thank you to all outfitters and guides around the world who make these wild adventures possible. When I had the ram checked in with California Fish and Wildlife, they aged him at 11 years old and estimated him at around 175 inches.

It's reassuring to see the future of wild sheep and North American game thriving—not just due to hunters' conservation efforts, but also through conservation tags issued by government agencies.



Jason Bruce and the Kika Worldwide team



## CANADA MOOSE

*By Claude Howard, Life Member*

We arrived at airport and got picked up by Richard of Jennings River Outfitters BC. Off we went on a four hour drive to camp which Nic owns and became friends. We ate supper, woke up and got on float plane me and BMack, my friend that hunts with me. We arrived at a cabin on a lake, very nice and drank water out of a creek. We went hunting next day and stalked caribou but they were not big enough. We came back and BMack showed us this monster moose that came out of the buck bush. The next day we saw nothing but I shot a wolf at 664 yards. The next day went to new ground and it was beautiful area.

Richard spotted the monster moose about one mile away. BMack stayed back since he's fighting cancer because we had to walk a long ways on stalk through buckbush; it was tough. When we got around 500 yards we stopped and looked no moose. Two hours; no moose we were wet and cold and thinking we lost the moose but Richard spotted his horn so we stalked closer and we hid in buckbush at 420 yards. He was in thick trees and brush. Richard scraped the tree and called. Finally he stood up I had a shot about 6 inch gap at 420 yards; boom he fell. Took us one hour or so to walk to him, buck brush was tough and grizzly signs everywhere. I prayed over the moose thanking God for Richard and my safety and the moose.

The work started next cleaning and hauling meat back - thank goodness for 6 wheel drive canam. When we got back



to main camp two days later and flew back to Georgia.

That trip took a lots out of me I canceled the rest of my trips except one for 2024 to rest and hunt with family and take my grandson.

Tip of the Day 6 wheel drive canam is bad boy!



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# THE SECRET TO MY SUCCESSFUL SHEEP HUNT

By David Comer

***Like many would-be sheep hunters, I have been applying for a sheep tag as long as they have available, even before there was a points system. But it was still a great surprise when I was finally drawn last year for the Clark/Kingston area. After going to the mandatory Desert Sheep Hunter Orientation in the summer it was time to get serious about being a successful sheep hunter! It is imperative once you get a tag that you make that tag good!***

Immediately I knew I would need a guide. I do a lot shooting and I'm in pretty fair shape for sheep hunting but I'm of an age when I can use some help in the mountains. And I'm not out in the Clark/Kingston area all the time. Even before I was able to get to the Orientation I contacted Johnny Kellogg. I had hunted elk with Johnny a few years before and knew him to be an outstanding guide. When I called him about my sheep tag he was probably more excited than I was -- he loves sheep hunting!

You might ask, why are guides so necessary, especially if you are young and in good shape. My reasons are not just physical. There is also the time involved. It's a big country -- especially in the area I was hunting. It hit me as I drove up to the camp area that I would not have much of a chance without the help. If you can spend a year of weekend and holidays in a mountain range you might get to know the terrain well enough to follow the wanderings of the scattered and nomadic bighorn sheep but for most hunters that is not likely.

We spent a couple of days looking, sometimes 3000 yards away, sometime 3 miles away. When you spot the sheep they can suddenly slip down into the canyons and be gone before you can get to them. You don't want to get on them until you are ready to commit a shot so Johnny and his team were using Swarovski "double eye" scopes and I used my Sig Sauer stabilized 15 power binoculars.

In addition to Johnny and his crew there were friends along so we had a total of nine people on the mountain. They did a lot of the leg work finding the sheep in various locations. There is so much ground to cover that at any one point in time there were people looking, some near and some farther away.

Day one we saw three rams, one was worthy of a shot but we decided to continue looking. There were so many things



David Comer with his ram

to look at while searching for the ram. I saw one smaller ram push over a barrel cactus and eat out the middle for moisture. When he was done another one came in to have his fill. I had never seen that before and didn't know that sheep would do that. Another thing I noticed, there were stickers everywhere! On the ground, in the bushes, you must have leather gloves or you will have bleeding hands for days!

After three days of further looking and not finding, we went back to the area where we had seen the three, expecting to reevaluate the one that looked good. We had people all around on the ridge tops looking for these sheep. But then we saw "the one". It was bigger and we honed in on him.

I was using my special "300 DJC express", which I developed, with a Bushnell Elite Tactical, 3.25-16 x 42 MM, with exposed tactical turrets scope. Once Johnny and I came up from behind and over the ridge to where we thought the ram was, I got ready. My first shot hit the horn! I was aiming at behind the shoulder so I was more than surprised! As I mentioned, I do a lot of shooting so this shouldn't be happening. The ram had moved up and around the mountain but, because we had so many people around watching, we knew where it went. We moved up and I took another shot, missed. What is going on I wondered. My third shot at about 500 yards dropped him -- it sliced through his jugular vein. THAT was not where I was aiming! Lucky, lucky, lucky!

I was very upset about that. When I returned home I sighted in and at 80 yards I was 4 inches off. The turret was up against my leg as we were driving and that is the only thing that could have caused this. Once you are in the field and on the ram there is no choice but in my case it was on a wing and a



David Comer with Johnny Kellogg

prayer that I made this tag good.

After shooting, by the time I would get down and back up to the sheep it would be too late to take photos but Johnny and his team, after gutting the ram, carried it whole back to the vehicle so that I wouldn't have to manage walking

into that back country again. We were able to get some very good pictures. Johnny is a consummate professional – a lot of people can say they are a guide, but Johnny is a guide. In addition, he is just easy to be around. And his entire team reflects his attitudes.

The biologist estimated the age to be 12-15 years old. It's a couple of points into the Boone and Crockett scoring. But the important thing is the story. That will be told by my full life size taxidermy and the shards of the horn which I blew off. What a story!

I'll leave you with two tips for success:

Get a guide. Immediately. Don't hesitate. We hunters have a one time opportunity, we are not that good at judging sheep. If you already know a good sheep guide, then they will be just as excited as you are! If you don't know one, contact people who might – CA Wild Sheep has a lot of experienced hunters that can help. I first learned of Johnny from Huntin' Fool when I drew my elk tag. Johnny strives to be the best he can be and I would certainly recommend him to anyone!

Take care of your equipment. My rifle and scope were perfect when leaving home and I know that set up as well as the back of my hand. But misfortunes happen. When you realize something is going wrong don't let it throw you off. Continue to get to a position where you can be successful.



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# PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD



*Hank Raats, Nevada  
Kellogg Trophy Hunts 2024*



*Vince Grimaldi, Clarks  
Dry Creek Outfitters 2024*



*David Coleman, Newberries  
Dry Creek Outfitters 2024*



*David Null, Clarks  
Dry Creek Outfitters 2024*



*Sheep enjoying a drink guzzler  
Summer, 2024*



*Billy Silva, Newberries  
Dry Creek Outfitters 2024*





*Brad Lucich, Cady  
Dry Creek Outfitters 2024*



*Todd Roberts, Newberries  
Dry Creek Outfitters 2024*



*Randy Fortune, Newberries  
Dry Creek Outfitters 2024*



*Steve Hornady, Orocopias  
Dry Creek Outfitters 2024*



*Beverly Valdez, Balkan Chamois  
Serbia, 2024*



*John Ware, Carpathian Chamois  
Serbia, 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.**

You will be joining a hard working, and hard hunting, group of CA WSF Distinguished Life members when you join or upgrade.  
**Meet our Distinguished Life Members:**

JUSTIN AKINS	ANTHONY GIGLIOTTI	PEGGY BARNETT LEE	JOHN PESTORICH	DAN SMITH, III
PEGGY MAY BLOOM	STEVE GINGRAS	CHASEN MARLER	DON PRIEST	DANIEL SMITH, IV
VINCE BLOOM	BEN GORDON	MAKENA MARLER	CAROLINE PYNE, DVM,	RENEE SNIDER
MIKE BOREL	TINA GORDON	DONALD C MARTIN	<b>DISTINGUISHED LIFE #1</b>	ADAM STARR
JIM BRICKER	JUSTIN HALLOCK	JEFF F. MARTIN	CONNOR PYNE, DVM,	BROOKS STILTZ
JED BRUSSEAU	DAVID HARTWIG,	JOSEPH MASSOLO	<b>DISTINGUISHED LIFE #2</b>	BILL TITTLE
ADAM CASAGRANDE	<b>DISTINGUISHED LIFE #6</b>	ROGER MCCOSKER	GLEN PYNE, DVM,	MICHAEL TORRES
KEVIN CHENG	STEEN HENRIKSEN	RICHARD M. MCDREW	<b>DISTINGUISHED LIFE #5</b>	NATHAN TREADWELL
DAVID COMBS	CORY HIGGINS	KYLE MEINTZER	MADISON PYNE,	REUBEN VALLES
WILLIAM CULLINS	TYLER W. HIGGINS	NICK METTA	<b>DISTINGUISHED LIFE #4</b>	ZACK WALTON
JOSHUA DARNELL	GARY HILL	ANDY MOECKEL	TRAVIS PYNE,	JOHN WARE
BRET DISMUKES	ERNEST HOLLOWAY	PATRICK OILAR	<b>DISTINGUISHED LIFE #3</b>	JIM WARNER
JIM DISMUKES	PATTY HOLLOWAY	JOHN OLDENKAMP	TOM REA	SHAINA WARNER
NOAH DISMUKES	SHAD HULSE	NATHAN OLDENKAMP	MASON ROGERS	SIMON WHETZEL
DAN EVENSON	BRETT JEFFERSON	CHRISTOPHER	DAVE ROWAN	DARRYL WILLIAMS
SCOTT FINLEY	BOB KEAGY	PEATRESS	PAUL SCHULTHEIS	SHAWN WOOD
JIM FITZGERALD	BRYN KERN	JEREMY PECHTEL	RICH SELLERS	
RICK GARZOLI JR	MAK KERN	JEFF PERACCHI	ALAN SHULTZ	
SCOTT GIBSON	RANDY LASKOWSKY	DON PERRIEN	DAN SMITH, JR.	

## **Join as a Life Member (\$500)**

**Make a commitment now to continue PUTTING AND KEEPING WILD SHEEP ON THE MOUNTAINS of California! Join CA WSF as a Life Member or a Junior Life Member and receive ONE chance to WIN the special Life Members item/hunt.**

## **Upgrade your CA WSF Life Membership (\$1,000)**

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**You may also join at the Distinguished Life Member level for \$1,500.**

**All Distinguished Life Members receive a PELOTON 240 VEST from Kuju emblazoned with the CA WSF logo.**

# 2025 STONE SHEEP HUNT

## Special Drawing



ONLY 1500 TICKETS AVAILABLE

\$100 PER TICKET



## Yukon Stone Outfitters

14 day 1x1 hunt with Yukon Stone Outfitters

Dates: As agreed with outfitter

Location: Pelly Mountains, Yukon, Canada

Does not include: commercial airfare, charter flight, Tag and Preservation Find fees, Government Harvest Fee, 5% GST, or gratuities.

Read full giveaway rules at [CAWSF.org](http://CAWSF.org)

Get Tickets by Mail, Fax, or ON LINE

Mail order form to:

CA WSF

1630 Williams Hwy 151  
Grants Pass, OR 97527

FAX order form to:

650-409-6005

ONLINE ORDERS:

[www.cawsf.org/store](http://www.cawsf.org/store)

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Signature

Orders must be received by April 12, 2025. Drawing held April 26, 2025. Do not need to be present to win.



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# ANNUAL FUNDRAISING DINNER UPDATE

*By Don Martin and Ken Crother  
Fundraising Committee Co-Chairs*

***Our Annual Fundraising Dinner will be here before you know it and I want all of you to save the date and make it a priority to attend. You do not want to miss this one. Our event will be Saturday April 26 at the Doubletree by Hilton in Sacramento. We'll continue to send you emails to provide additional information and the event schedule. There are exciting announcements to follow so please read this thoroughly.***

This year our **keynote speaker will be Matt Ward of the highly acclaimed "A Hunter's Quest" video series.** Matt is an exceptionally experienced International big game hunter and is pleased to join us and share his unique story and his hunting adventures. More information can be found at Matt's Facebook, [ahuntersquest](#), his Instagram, [@ahuntersquest](#), and visit YouTube and search "A Hunter's Quest" to find his YouTube content.

Our spotlight item in our live auction this year will be the California Governor's Desert Bighorn Sheep Permit for Unit 10, the Newberry-Rodman-Ords. This is a tremendous unit, an incredibly fun hunt with high sheep density and the opportunity to look over a lot of rams. For the bowhunter, this unit offers the opportunity to stalk rams nearly every day. Extended season dates give the winning bidder incredible flexibility and opportunity. **Don't miss out on your chance to bid on this first Governor's Permit ever issued exclusively for Unit 10.**

We're still assembling our list of items for the general random drawing at this time, but I can make one announcement. Our Gold Progressive random drawing prize will be a **\$5,000 credit towards the custom rifle of your choice with Alterra Firearms** of Boise Idaho. Alterra Firearms has been a supporter of the CA WSF for years and we have given away their beautiful rifles before. However, this time, we truly wanted to offer something to our winning member that they could custom tailor to their specific wants and needs. Todd Harney, General Manager of Alterra Firearms, will be in attendance and have some samples for our members to look at and discuss options.

**Here's the biggest announcement!** Your CA WSF has teamed up with Bo Mogan of GowithBo Booking & Guide Service to offer a hunt in Baja California Sur for an

indigenous free-range Weemsi Desert Bighorn to one of our lucky life members in attendance. You must be a life member of any level and you must be in the room to win it! Same rules as in the past apply. Life members and Youth Life members receive ONE free chance to win, Distinguished Life Members receive THREE free chances to win. **Pay attention, new for this year, due to the current cost of sheep hunts.** We will be offering "Life Member Drawing Sponsor" tickets to life members in attendance. You must be a life member of any level to purchase. "Life Member Drawing Sponsor" tickets will be \$250 and a maximum of 4 per life member may be purchased in person at the event. Bo Morgan has a 100% success rate on this hunt. This hunt cannot be delayed and is not transferable.

And to close out our evening, **our grand prize giveaway is the hunt with our friend Aaron Florian of Yukon Stone Outfitters for Stone Sheep!** This is an incredible opportunity with one of the best outfitters in the Yukon. We've given this one away before and we're so glad to be able to provide this opportunity once again. This 15 day hunt is for available dates of the 2025 season. Don't miss out! **YOU DO NOT NEED TO BE PRESENT TO WIN!** Go to <http://cawsf.org.store.html> to buy your tickets today. This is a very expensive hunt, I would appreciate it if everyone would support this effort to provide this rare opportunity to one of our members/supporters and to also support one of our greatest conservation partners in the guide/outfitting business Aaron Florian and Yukon Stone Outfitters.

As always, we look forward to seeing you in Sacramento! So please purchase tour tickets to attend now! **Register online by March 23 and qualify for the early bird drawing.** Our event is more family friendly every year, so please bring the kids and introduce them to the Wild Sheep Family. As we round out our auctions and giveaways, we'll email you updates leading up to the event. I'm looking forward to seeing you April 26 at the Doubletree by Hilton in Sacramento.

In the case where you will be unable to make it to our event, please purchase tickets for the stone sheep hunt. You do not need to be present to win. Also, please register to bid online for our live auction with [onlinehuntingauctions.com](http://onlinehuntingauctions.com). In addition, please consider visiting <https://cawsf.org/store.html> and make a donation to "Give a Lamb a Drink" to help fund our effort to double the number of desert bighorns in California through water projects and together, we'll "Put and Keep Sheep on the Mountain Forever!"

Thank you.

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# ALASKA CHUGACH 14C MOUNTAIN GOAT

By Vince Bloom, Distinguished Life Member

*This adventure started at the California Wild Sheep Foundation banquet in Sacramento, California. My good friend Nick Albonico and I ran a half marathon that morning and were discussing the upcoming fundraiser and what was on auction. Always dreaming, I love thinking about hunts of a lifetime. We determined that the Chugach Mountain Goat Governor's tag would be the one to get!*

Well, all that training was going to pay off. It was a fun and exciting night. So much so, I found myself with that very special tag in my hands at the end of the night!

Nick had hunted the Eagle River for his 40 inch Dall sheep in 21 and saw the biggest mountain goat ever, he said.

Brutal, challenging, and beautiful is what he said about the hunt.

My training intensified when I was told it was a 2-day backpack hike just to start hunting. The Chugach State Park is a no-fly to hunt or motorized vehicle zone. The way it should be. The hike itself up the Eagle River was challenging and eye-opening! Ladders, ropes, and sketchy footing made the trail challenging.

Fresh brown bear scat lay right on the trail!

We did have good weather those two days hiking in. Only small fits of rain. We packed hip waders for several creek crossings. The current was swift, but we navigated them without too much difficulty.



Vince with 14C mountain goat

Finally, we made it to our destination and set up a spike camp.

We were at the mouth of a glacier-fed giant creek, and we set up our tents.

The view was amazing; the rushing creek was very loud but fitting. I had brought my nephew, Collyn Server, on this hunt. I invited him to share in the experience and bring his 29-year-old muscle.

Hank Frank and Archer Brown were my guides. Experience, energy, and enthusiasm is what these young men brought.

I felt confident as we went to sleep early that night. We would need it.

Dan Montgomery told us Billy's love that bench up top and should be the first place we looked.

When I asked how long the hike through the alders and up the creek to get to the bench would be? His response was it was going to be a long day. Little did I know.

Going up the creek and around the waterfalls was deafening. My training had paid off on the climb. The alders were a whole different kind of challenge. They fought forward progress like a possessed Wing Chun fighting dummy. Crawling, climbing, and cursing our way through, all the while time stood still. Camaraderie and a positive attitude led our climb through the toughest parts.

The weather had held throughout our climb when we finally got above the bench on the mountain.

We got our spotters out and were looking at five good Billys! Two of them held mass worthy of the tag!

We had to sneak across an opening to get in range. The three smaller ones would see us. We decided it was worth the gamble as it was only seconds of being in view. We would wait until their heads were down feeding.



We got into position without spooking them.

543 yards away, we waited for the right moment.

It was like Shangri-La on that bench. A bright green grassy meadow with a glacier-fed pond atop what was a near impenetrable fortress of solitude.

I ranged again, and with Hank as my spotter, he made the wind call. I dialed my Nightforce scope on my seasoned 300 PRC and waited for him to turn broadside.

The big Billy fed into a perfect position. “Fire in the hole,” I whispered and sent it. Mountain goats are tough and soak up bullets.

I made a perfect heart shot, and he dropped after several steps. I was elated! A great shot on a trophy Billy, with no recovery issues. We laughed, took pictures, and congratulated ourselves.



Then we caped him out, all the while the three Billys were feeding in the background. They acted like they hadn't seen humans! The barrier of entry kept hunting pressure near zero. Amazing and beautiful. We finished just before dark. We set out on our long journey down the mountain. The long day was unfolding. We were navigating our way through the alders to the creek when we were suddenly cliffed out. An 80-foot straight drop forced us to backtrack two hours. We got to the creek in the dark and made our way down with heavy packs. I was doing a

life mount, and the weight was significant. We slipped and fell so many times we forgot. The treacherous descent on slippery rocks was broken up by mind-numbing detours around waterfalls through the alders. 60 yards taking an hour? WTF? The roar of the water kept the march going.

Hank coldly stated, “Put on your gear, it's going to rain.” 10 minutes later, it started pouring rain and didn't stop for 24 hours!

When we got cliffed out the second time and delayed us another 2 hours, it was a mental gut check for sure. Misery loves company has never been truer. Teamwork, camaraderie, and bonding accelerate under duress.

At 59 years old, I felt blessed to be hanging with my younger hunting brothers. No time for fear or a negative attitude, I was just trying to keep up. I was being challenged to the ultimate level and pushing through it! I smiled thinking about the difficult journey it had been to this point. I didn't have the time or money for this hunt. I had just started my own business, and multiple times I didn't think I was going to be able to go on this hunt. All the while, I kept training like my life depended on it and let the universe work out the details. A positive mindset was in place and tested long before the hunt.

I made it here to this point already. I certainly could tough it out no matter what lay ahead. More waterfalls, more alders, and more heaping tons of mountain misery. The pouring rain kept us moving. We were soaking wet from sweat and torn gear. We had to keep moving to keep that grueling but warming pace.

26 hours later, the sun was up, and our tents were in sight!

Hank had predicted a long day, and the Chugach mountains didn't disappoint.

We slept for four hours and prepared for the next day's travels. They had packed in a float raft to get the goat and some gear most of the way down the river. We turned the 2-day hike into a 1-day power hike out! With lighter packs and a trophy goat in my mind, it was actually fun struggling down the trail.

Hank floated the mountain goat 3/4 the way out, then we repacked everything on our backs for our last push. The pain never felt more rewarding. The sun had come out, and we were on a good trail. We started seeing hikers and signs of civilization.

Trip of a lifetime with family and friends for life!

I highly recommend the California Wild Sheep Foundation banquet.

Be careful though, you may end up on an adventure of a lifetime!

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# “AUORA” — FIRST STATE LANDS WILDLIFE WATER SYSTEM COMPLETED

*by Debbie Miller Marschke, Board of Directors, 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 through the audacious fundraising campaign known as 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.



Prepping for and placing the tanks



Excavation and 'turning the mat'



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 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 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





Prepping for and placing the tanks



Final touches



A tired but happy team of wildlife warriors

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. Watch your email from [forthesheep@gmail.com](mailto:forthesheep@gmail.com) for announcements. We are often not able to provide a long lead time but we will get the information to you as soon as possible!



The end result -- very natural and beneficial, barely noticeable in the landscape



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# GOVERNMENT ISSUES UPDATE

by Don Priest, Distinguished Life Member, Board Member

## OPPOSITION TO THE SOLAR MOUNTAIN SOLAR PROJECT

Unfortunately the Solar Mountain Solar Project (Project) has resurrected itself. The California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation (CA WSF) had worked with Desert Bighorn Sheep (DBS) biologists, CDFW, and other NGO partners to halt the Project nearly ten years ago. CA WSF and a coalition of nineteen other sportsman conservation organizations has recently sent the California Energy Commission a Letter of Opposition to this latest attempt at implementing this Project.

The Letter thoroughly states that this Project ‘...will have significant effects on our desert’s delicate ecosystem, and will undermine current conservation efforts to restore and enhance our desert lands by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Department of Transportation, other State and Federal Agencies, Indian Tribes and the NGO stakeholders.’

The Project’s location will be adjacent to Desert Bighorn Sheep (DBS) habitat and one of the I-15 wildlife overcrossings that CA WSF, along with over forty NGOs, fought to have built congruent with the Brightline High Speed Rail Project development. The Project has the strong potential to induce DBS to avoid the crossing, reducing or eliminating access to critical food and water sources, as well as disallow the connectivity for the continuing genetic diversity necessary for the survival of DBS.

## CHUCKWALLA NATIONAL MONUMENT PROCLAMATION

Prior to his departure, former President Joe Biden signed ‘Proclamation 10881 – Establishment of the Chuckwalla National Monument’ on January 14, 2025. As indicated in previous ‘Up-dates’, both Senator Alex Padilla (CA) and Rep. Raul Ruiz (CA-25) had introduced nearly identical bills in their respective congressional chambers to establish the Chuckwalla National Monument (Chuckwalla NM). As time ran out on the 118th Congress, the former President took it upon himself, via his Presidential Proclamation authority granted him by the Antiquities Act of 1906, to proclaim the Chuckwalla NM.

Regards sportsman’s rights and access, the wording is essentially that of Senate bill S. 4132 introduced by Senator Alex Padilla (CA). CA WSF, with other sportsman conservation organizations, worked with our partners in Washington DC to be certain that ‘...sportsman’s rights and access...’ were protected by the establishment of the Chuckwalla NM, whether by bill or Proclamation, and that the authority over such would still lie with the California Department of Fish and



Wildlife (CDFW),

Unfortunately, the wording regards ‘Wildlife Water Development Projects’ that had been included within Senate bill S. 4132 was not incorporated into the Proclamation. Instead, the more general wording about ‘...collaboration...’ between the Secretary of the Interior and CDFW was utilized. CA WSF and our partners will work with CDFW so that the establishment of this Proclamation does not preclude nor interfere with the continuing work of CDFW and their NGO partners in the maintenance, replacement, and establishment of water guzzlers within the Chuckwalla NM. These guzzlers are imperative to the conservation and survival of DBS, as well as benefiting other wildlife within the NM.

The Proclamation Section regards hunting, fishing, conservation and water development activities stated:

*Nothing in this proclamation shall be deemed to enlarge or diminish the jurisdiction or authority of the State of California with respect to fish and wildlife management, including hunting and fishing, on the lands reserved by this proclamation. The Secretary shall seek to develop and implement science-based habitat and ecological restoration projects within the monument and shall seek to collaborate with the State of California on wildlife management within the monument, including through the development of new, or the continuation of existing, agreements with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.*

Focus on the **step**  
in front of you, not  
the whole staircase.



# DESERT BIGHORN SHEEP PROGRAM UPDATE

*By Danielle Glass, CDFW Environmental Scientist*

The past few months have been a flurry of activity for CDFW's desert bighorn crew. Captures, a helicopter survey, guzzler work, hunter checkouts, photo processing, and the Sheep Show have kept us very busy.

In November, we captured bighorn in the Orocopia, Chuckwalla, Palen, Little Maria, Big Maria, Chocolate, Clipper, Wood-Hackberry, Castle Piute, Kingston, Old Dad, Providence, and Cady Mountains. The captures in the hunt zones were to supplement the number of GPS collars and allow for continued mark-resight population estimates. The captures in the southern ranges near the Colorado River represent the most substantive effort to gather data about these populations in 20+ years. The data collected will provide us with important information about each herd's size, habitat use, and condition, as well as the connectivity and disease structure of this southern section of the metapopulation. In total, we captured 78 bighorn across 13 mountain ranges in 10 days.

Immediately after Thanksgiving, we regrouped and conducted a helicopter survey in the Soda Mountains. We saw 48 bighorn total, and estimated 24 adult ewes and 17 adult rams using a simultaneous double-count. The similarity in estimate between the minimum count and simultaneous double-count suggests we saw nearly all the bighorn in the range from the helicopter. We then traveled with the helicopter down to the Orocopia Mountains, where we installed a third tank and also filled the tanks with water at the Fay Dee Wildlife Water Development (WWD). We will conduct a second day of repair at Fay Dee WWD in March.

Across ten bighorn populations, we are generating population estimates from photos taken from trail cameras set at water sources. These population estimates will help us provide recommendations for next year's hunt tag numbers to the Fish & Game Commission. The vast majority of this season's hunters were successful in their sheep hunt, and this year's Sheep Show demonstrated that interest remains high for California's bighorn hunt tags. The open-zone auction tag raised \$270,000, with the vast majority going to CDFW's big-game management fund.



The Fay Dee  
water fill



Danielle Glass

This spring, we look forward to installing trail cameras in the northernmost section of the bighorn range in California, completing more WWD maintenance, filling out our crew by hiring two more Scientific Aides, and attending the Desert Bighorn Council meeting. Onwards!

## Number of Desert Bighorn Captured by CDFW in November 2024 CDFW

MOUNTAIN RANGE	# EWES	# RAMS	
Orocopia	6	3	
Chuckwalla	5	1	
Palen	1	1	
Little Maria	4	1	
Big Maria	1	0	
Chocolate	3	5	
Clippers	6	4	
Wood-Hackberry	6	3	
Castle Piute	2	5	
Kingston	2	4	
ODKM	2	5	
Providence	2	1	
Cady	2	3	
Total	42	36	= 78 bighorn

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# R10 FAY DEE WATER HAUL AND (3RD) TANK INSTALLATION

*by Scott Gibson, Distinguished Life Member and SCBS Member*

On December 4th, 2024, a group of volunteers and California Department of Fish & Wildlife (CDFW) employees met up in the Orocopia Mountains pre-sunrise. The volunteers were from the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep (SCBS), Desert Wildlife Unlimited (DWU) and the California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation (CAWSF). Our goal this crisp morning is to install a 3rd water tank and to replenish the system with water by helicopter at the famed R10 Fay Dee Big Game Wildlife Water Development.

After a brief safety sunrise safety and tortoise awareness meeting, we took a quick group photo. We then split into three (3) teams; landing zone team, tank rigging team and the guzzler team.

The third tank, located in “wilderness”, was left over from a previous 2021 project in the desert wash below Fay Dee. Our two hiking teams met at the tank and made short work of rigging the tank to be picked up and “long lined” by the helicopter. The 3-man tank rigging team remained with the tank, waiting on the helicopter, while the rest of us hiked up to Fay Dee.

At Fay Dee, the third team prepared the pad to accept the tank. We didn’t have much time before we heard the helicopter rotors and saw the tank coming our way. We quickly set the tank and the helicopter returned with the stock tank, pumps and hose to receiver the water delivery.

We set up the stock tank, pump and hoses to ready for the helicopter to start delivering water via Bambi Bucket. We had some pretty strong winds at ground level so it was necessary to help guide the bucket over the stock tank. Even though this is the desert, the water and wind made this job chilly. Once the helicopter discharges in the stock tank, we pumped the water to Fay Dee’s tanks.

Once the tanks were full, we packed all the pumps, hose and other gear for the helicopter to haul out. We will have a future project scheduled this upcoming spring to re-stretch the rain collection mat. At least we know there is enough water in Fay Dee to supply the bighorn population of the Orocopias for the season. I want to thank the membership from the California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation — the stock tank, helicopter rigging and water pump for this project were purchased from funds provided by CAWSF on earlier projects.



*Pictured (L-R): Rick Ianello (CDFW), Danielle Glass (CDFW), Marty Ambrose (SCBS), Samantha Stelter (CDFW), Rudy Mena (CDFW), Scott Gibson (CAWSF/SCBS), Andres Reutman (SCBS) and Dr. Jeff Villepique (CDFW)*



*Rigged for “lift-off” - Pictured (L-R): Mike Meyer (DWU), Marty Ambrose (SCBS) & Rick Ianello (CDFW)*





# THE SAN GORGONIO WILDERNESS HUNT ZONE: BRIEF HISTORY AND ADDITIONAL NOTES ON CALIFORNIA'S SIXTH BIGHORN SHEEP HUNT UNIT

*by Vernon C. Bleich*

There is increasing concern among some—the author included—that the complex history of bighorn sheep management in California is being forgotten. Indeed, as ‘corporate memory’ declines, it is replaced by ‘generational amnesia’. To help ensure that readers are familiar with some of the events that led to the legalization of hunting bighorn sheep in California and that those events are not relegated to the dungeons of history, this is the sixth in a series of articles describing that successful endeavor.

Legislative action resulted in substantial progress on bighorn sheep management unit plans (BSMUPs) during 1990 and 1991, a 2-year period during which a total of 20 such plans were completed (Bleich et al. 1992). Those were banner years for bighorn sheep, for California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) personnel, and ultimately for hunters. Three of the plans completed in 1991 resulted in new hunt zones that year alone. Completion of those management plans also facilitated the opening of several additional zones shortly thereafter, and a total of 10 hunt zones were approved from 1987 to 2010.

Among the management plans completed in 1991 was that for the area, which at the time was designated as the Whitewater Bighorn Sheep Management Unit, in southwestern San Bernardino County (Yparraguirre and Bleich 1991). As has been the case with all such documents, this plan was completed in compliance with legislative policy established in Sections 1801 and 4900–4905 of the California Fish and Game Code. Readers will recognize that the plan itself encompassed an area much larger than the area opened to hunting bighorn sheep; that was not an oversight, but was intentional. The authors of these plans were aware that a hunting opportunity may or may not be approved in the future; they also realized that if a harvest were to be approved, the boundary of the management unit and that of a hunt zone within the management unit need not be congruent.

Although the hunt zone would be contained within the management unit, the open area was to be delineated by the Department and then approved by the California Fish and Game Commission. In short, the management unit plans were written to provide the best guidance for the conservation of bighorn sheep on a geographic basis, but not to establish precise hunt zone boundaries. Most of the information presented in this article provides background information specific to the San Gorgonio Wilderness Bighorn Sheep Hunt Zone (SGWBSHZ), and a number of issues associated with the Whitewater Bighorn Sheep Management Unit, as delineated in the original management plan, also will be addressed.

At the time, CDFG was well aware of the distribution of bighorn sheep in the management zone designated by

Yparraguirre and Bleich (1991), but information available had not been adequate to justify a hunt. It was well known that bighorn sheep occurred primarily in the southeastern portion of the management unit, primarily along the south and middle forks of the Whitewater

River, near Mission Creek, and northward or westward to Mt. San Gorgonio (Weaver et al. 1972). Additionally, a small population of bighorn sheep occupied—and continues to occupy—the north-facing slope of the San Bernardino Mountains in the vicinity of Cushenbury Canyon and occasionally were observed at Ord Mountain and other proximate ranges to the north, and that they previously occupied the Bighorn Mountains (Weaver 1972); all of these areas are outside the SGWBSHZ.

The majority of occupied bighorn sheep habitat in the area identified as the Whitewater Bighorn Sheep Management Unit is on public land within the San Bernardino National Forest, and habitat management therein is the responsibility of that agency (Light et al. 1966, Light 1970). The area also included a substantial proportion of land for which BLM was the responsible agency (Yparraguirre and Bleich 1991). Major differences within the SGWBSHZ when compared with habitat occupied by the majority of desert bighorn sheep elsewhere in California are the widespread availability of natural water sources within the hunt zone, the density of vegetation in some areas, and the migratory nature of the animals, which occur at elevations ranging from ~700 to 3,500 m (11,500 ft) on a seasonal basis. Thus, no water development projects were undertaken as habitat enhancement projects. Moreover, much of the SGWBSHZ supports chaparral vegetation and, in some areas stands of timber predominate. Many methods to enhance habitat for bighorn sheep occupying forested landscapes are available, but the only efficacious management in such areas would necessarily involve the use of prescribed fire—or timber harvests—to enhance forage availability and overall quality of bighorn sheep habitat (Bleich and Holl 1982). Wilderness designation has precluded such activities.

Historical ‘estimates’ of population size have been available since 1940, and have ranged from a low of 15 during 1946–1948, and up to 115 during 1972–74 and 1979–1985 (Wehausen 1999). It had been acknowledged earlier,



however, that most such estimates were cursory efforts (Weaver 1957, Wehausen et al. 1987, Bleich and Weaver 2007) and were not especially reliable. In addition to the estimates used by Wehausen (1999) in his critique of Berger's (1990) work on population persistence, evidence points to the continuous presence of bighorn sheep in the management unit. For example, Light et al. (1966) reported that local ranchers considered there to have been at least 200 bighorn sheep in the vicinity of the Whitewater River during the 1930s. Further, 75 bighorn sheep were thought to occur in the SGWBSHZ in 1965; this was a conservative 'estimate' and based on observations of bighorn sheep in that area, and the extant, albeit small, population occupying the north slope of the range (Light et al. 1966).

During April of 1987, CDFG personnel V. Bleich, B. Blong, T. Paulek, and helicopter pilot S. deJesus, conducted a survey of bighorn sheep habitat in what eventually would become California's sixth bighorn sheep hunt zone; a total of 87 individuals was observed, consisting of 46 females, 38 males, and 3 lambs (Yparraguirre and Bleich 1991). When these observations were combined with the prevailing notion that aerial surveys seldom result in detection rates of more than 50% of the animals present, the Department's estimate of bighorn sheep in the San Bernardino Mountains was increased to 150 (Weaver 1988). A similar, albeit substantially less intensive, survey in January 1990 yielded observations of 43 bighorn sheep, comprised of 17 females and 26 unclassified individuals (Yparraguirre and Bleich 1991).

In 1993, following a series of additional aerial and ground investigations, Torres et al. (1994) placed the population of bighorn sheep occurring on the north-facing slope of the San Bernardino Mountains as <25 individuals, and the number occupying the SGWBSHZ was placed in the category of  $\geq 100$  but  $\leq 150$  individuals. Torres et al. (1994) was the earliest effort to define metapopulations of bighorn sheep on a geographic basis, and the population categories did not change over the next ten years. The north slope population was upgraded one level to (25–50) and the number of sheep occupying the SGWBSHZ was downgraded one level (51–100) by Epps et al. (2003). Based on additional survey work, the size category for the north-slope population later was reduced to <25 individuals, and the population category for the SGWBSHZ was elevated to between 151 and 200 (Abella et al. 2011). In 2019, and again in 2021, published population categories for the north-slope population and for the hunt zone itself remained at <25, but was reduced to 51–100 (Prentice et al. 2019, Vu et al. 2021). A mortality event that appears to have resulted in the loss of 30% of the bighorn sheep occupying the SGWBSHZ was detected in December 2018.

It was during the Spring of 1995, and again in 1996 that the California Department of Fish and Game's (CDFG) fifth and sixth bighorn sheep hunt zones first were considered to be opened to the harvest of bighorn sheep (Torres 1996, Torres et al. 1996). The Fish and Game Commission approved both proposals, and the sixth zone (SGWBSHZ) offered one lottery tag (i.e., draw) tag and the Open Zone Fund-Raising Tag also was to be valid therein (CDFG 1996). Thus, the SGWBSHZ opened to the harvest of bighorn sheep for the 1996 hunting

season, and in 1999 a new state record ram was harvested there (Bleich and Weaver 2007).

Hunting regulations for the SGWBSHZ remained unchanged from 1996 through the 2018 hunting season (California Department of Fish and Wildlife [CDFW] 2018) with the exception that the number of lottery tags available was adjusted as appropriate. In 2019, following the aforementioned mortality event, the number of lottery tags was reduced to zero, and remained unchanged through the 2024 hunting season (CDFW 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024). Thus, SGWBSHZ remained an 'open zone' but with no lottery tags available. An increase in the allocation of lottery tags will be greatly simplified when demographic information supports such a recommendation, and could occur as soon as the upcoming hunting season.

Also of conservation interest are several additional points not addressed in the original management plan (Yparraguirre and Bleich 1991), or elsewhere; if not memorialized here, this information likely will not surface in the future. Most readers are aware that the past and continuing presence of domestic or feral goats or domestic sheep in habitat occupied by North American wild sheep remains a concern (Brewer et al. 2014, Jex et al. 2016), but the following information regarding the proximity of these domestic species to bighorn sheep in the San Bernardino Mountains warrants mention. It is known that (1) feral domestic goats (*Capra aegagrus hircus*) at one time inhabited the Sidewinder Mountains (immediately north of the Whitewater Bighorn Sheep Management Unit), with observations recorded there during the 1930s; (2) feral goats have been present—albeit perhaps not continuously—in or near Cushenbury Canyon on the north slope of the San Bernardino Mountains since the 1950s; (3) a feral ungulate resembling an aoudad (*Ammotragus lervia*) was observed in the Whitewater River drainage during a deer herd composition count in January 1985; and (4) feral goats have been seen in the vicinity of Cushenbury Canyon as recently as 2007 (Bleich 2015).

During October 1985, V. C. Bleich and S. A. Holl attempted to locate and remove the aoudad-like ungulate seen earlier that year (Elsbury 2013); the animal could not be located, however, resulting in the possibility that feral or exotic ungulates observed at Ord Mountain and other proximate ranges remained in the range for a period of time (Bleich and Jessup 1991). I long have wondered if the aoudad-like ungulate encountered in 1985 had escaped from a private hunting reserve located on the south-facing slope of the San Bernardino Mountains immediately west of the Whitewater River drainage; I suspect, however, that we will never know.

Questions remain about the history of the small population of bighorn sheep residing on the north-facing slope of the San Bernardino Mountains. Epps et al. (2010) cited a personal communication that the apparent colonization of Cushenbury Canyon by bighorn sheep occurred in the 1980s. There is other evidence, however, indicating that a population of bighorn sheep had resided on the north slope of the range much earlier, specifically in the Bighorn Mountains (Light et al. 1969, Weaver 1972). Further, Weaver (1972) described a personal communication from a "reliable



conservationist” stating he had observed male bighorn sheep in Cushenbury Canyon in the mid-1960s; I knew that individual—who was a very active member of the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep—and concur with Weaver’s assessment. Moreover, in 1976 I was the CDFG Unit Manager for the area that included the San Bernardino Mountains, and I personally investigated reports of bighorn sheep seen by employees of the Mitsubishi Cement Plant, which is located in Cushenbury Canyon. I was not successful in locating those animals, but based on my interviews with the personnel that had seen them and when combined with Weaver’s (1972) earlier reports, it is probable that bighorn sheep were present there well before the 1980s. Once again, it is likely that we will never be certain.

Mining activity on the north slope of the San Bernardino Mountains has been ongoing for many decades (Fife 2025), and bighorn sheep continue to occupy the limestone mines there (Bleich et al. 2009; Anderson et al. 2017, 2022). Additionally, the Bighorn Mountains are located approximately midway between the Cushenbury Canyon population and the Mount San Gorgonio population, and were identified early on as a potential reintroduction site (Weaver 1972). Results of an initial evaluation of that area (Crossley (1984) supported Weaver’s (1972) suggestion and in a letter issued shortly after Crossley’s report, CDFG management stated that a translocation, “... should not be ruled out entirely if the described land use conflicts ... can be resolved” (letter from Fred Worthley [Regional Manager, CDFG Region 5] to Loren Lutz [President, Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep] dated 6 July 1984). Thus, the Bighorn Mountains remain a potential reintroduction site, and might serve as a ‘stepping-stone’ between the population in the SGWBSHZ and the population in Cushenbury Canyon (Bleich et al. 1996).

An application of network theory (Creech et al. 2014) identified the Cushenbury Canyon and San Gorgonio populations genetically as “effectively connected pairs” (ECP) and as having “mean weighted closeness” (MWC), measures of short and longer-term genetic network connectivity, respectively, between each other and bighorn sheep populations to the north and east. Both ECP and MWC evidenced demographic network connectivity between populations at Cushenbury Canyon and San Gorgonio, but only between those areas. It might be argued that establishing a population in the Bighorn Mountains would have positive implications for metapopulation function and the long-term persistence of both the Cushenbury Canyon and San Gorgonio populations, but population subdivision can have an important influence on the potential for pathogen transfer (Dobson and May 1986). Enhanced genetic or demographic connectivity between these populations carries with it the consequence of enhanced opportunities for pathogen transfer between them (Simberloff and Cox 1987, Bleich 2010, Altizer et al. 2011, Teitelbaum et al. 2018). Whether among or between natural populations, or those established via translocation, this has become a primary concern among bighorn sheep managers (Whiting et al. 2023). Although translocations historically have played an important role in the restoration of bighorn

sheep across the landscape, some populations proximate to those reestablished or augmented by translocations likely have suffered because that management approach was implemented prior to a more complete understanding of some important issues (Bleich et al. 2021). Consequently, future translocations likely will be scrutinized more closely and may occur less frequently than in the past (Whiting et al. 2023).

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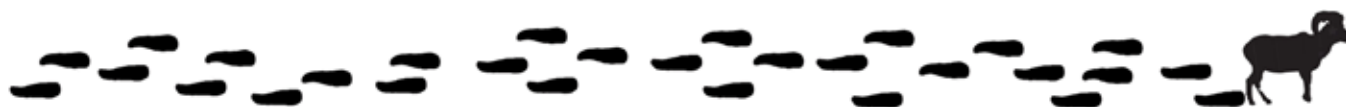
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*This article is part of a series by Dr. Vern Bleich, who increasingly is concerned that many aspects of the history and management of bighorn sheep in California are being lost. That history is long and complex, and at times has been misinterpreted, or even wrongly conveyed to others, by those not having a direct connection to the past. Vern was employed by the California Department of Fish and Game for 34 years, during which he worked extensively with large mammals occupying the Great Basin, Mojave, and Sonoran deserts of California and,*

*in particular, desert bighorn sheep. He was fortunate to have joined the Department shortly after completion of a thorough inventory of bighorn sheep in California, and has remained active in the conservation and management of that species since 1973. He currently is Research Professor at the University of Nevada Reno, 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 of the California Wild Sheep Foundation, is a member of the Wild Sheep Foundation's Professional Resource Advisory Board, and he represented wildlife conservation and management interests on the National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board from 2019 to 2022. Parties interested in material presented in this article can contact Vern directly (vcbleich@gmail.com).*



## BIGHORN SHEEP SPOTTED IN PALM SPRINGS

*Palm Springs Desert Sun*

Things you may spot in downtown Palm Springs: Tourists and local residents strolling along Palm Canyon Drive, a towering Marilyn Monroe striking a pose and ... bighorn sheep engaging in some retail therapy? Yes, you read that right.

A video that has been making rounds on social media all week shows two bewildered-looking bighorn sheep crossing Palm Canyon Drive, between East Andreas Road and Museum Way, and taking in the shops and slowed cars around them.

A voice in the video is heard saying, "They're just like, 'Umm, trying to go to brunch,'" providing cheeky commentary as to why the two animals may have galloped their way down the mountain and into the downtown area (Psst, Lulu's is just a few blocks south). Bighorn sheep typically eat grasses, shrubs and forbs, not pancakes, eggs Benedict and mimosas.

Another voice says the person capturing the video can get closer to the sheep because they are tame, but the Bighorn Institute advises against that.

The video was captured and shared on Facebook by Jeff Witthuhn of the boutique Peepas, according to a post, who did not immediately respond to The Desert Sun's request for comment.

Peninsular bighorn sheep call the Coachella Valley home. They live in dry, rocky, low-elevation desert slopes, canyons and washes from the San Jacinto and Santa Rosa mountains near Palm Springs south into Baja California, Mexico.

The sheep have previously been spotted grazing on the grass at the O'Donnell Golf Club, located in downtown Palm Springs, which is located right next to rocky, mountainous terrain and the Cactus to Clouds trailhead.



*Photo Credit: Vickie Conor/The Desert Sun*

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# THE POLITICS OF CONSERVATION

## *A SNAPSHOT IN TIME — POLITICAL POTPOURRI*

*By Bill Gaines, Gaines and Associates*

Those who support the California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation (CA WSF) know we are dedicated to keeping sheep on the mountain and to those who choose to hunt them in the field. But chances are they are not aware of the various political theaters we must be continually active within to effectively do so. This column often touches on the challenges we face in California's State Legislature where uneducated lawmakers frequently push emotionally driven proposals which challenge science-based wildlife management or threaten our traditions. But our State Legislature is only one of the arenas where CA WSF must continually be vigilant and engaged to achieve our mission.

Although the State Legislature does occasionally go on recess, CA WSF's quest to achieve our objectives literally never takes a break. As a testimony, this article serves as a snapshot in time of the political potpourri CA WSF must continuously wade in to secure our goals.

At the time of this writing, it is the second week of February of an odd-numbered year – from a political perspective, one of the “quietest” periods of time. Yet, CA WSF is currently active in all three primary arenas – legislative, regulatory, and administrative – where policy is determined. Let us take a look at what's stirring at this “quiet time”.

### **THE LEGISLATIVE ARENA – THE CALIFORNIA STATE LEGISLATURE**

On Monday, January 6, 2025, the California State Legislature convened for the 2025 Legislative Session – the first year of the two-year 2025/2026 Session. As is typical, the first five weeks of the new Session have been filled with lawmakers getting settled in, piecing together their staff, and working to fill their “bill packages”.

With the formal bill introduction deadline of Friday, February 21st, still nearly two weeks away, only a few bills have shown up in print. Fortunately, no harmful bills dealing with wildlife related policy, hunting opportunity, or our Second Amendment have yet surfaced. But CA WSF continues to listen for any “hallway rumors” and track all bill introductions daily – all the while bracing ourselves for the massive bill dump we will receive later this month.

We have all heard the saying “the best defense is good offense”. Not willing to simply play defense at our State Capitol, CA WSF and our partners in conservation also play offense – with the 2025 Session being no exception. While we patiently wait to see what legislative challenges we will face this year, we also have been collaborating with our allies on positive policy proposals.

During the 2025 Session, our conservation community will bring forward bills which propose positive changes in wildlife management and which promote hunting opportunities. These bills, which also have not yet shown up in print, include legislation which will increase hunting opportunity via improvements to the Shared Habitat Alliance for Recreation



Enhancement (SHARE) “public access to private lands” program, a bill which would authorize the non-lethal use of dogs to proactively haze problem mountain lions, and similar legislation which would reauthorize the use of dogs to pursue bears. Coined “tree and free”, the primary intent of these two bills is to mitigate escalating public safety concerns resulting from the significant increase in human/bear and lion encounters by re-instilling a fear of humans and dogs in each of them. However, the “dogs on bears” bill will take it one step further.

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) will soon release an updated Bear Management Plan (Plan) which documents that current bear populations in California are double existing estimates, and which notes the significant increase in human/bear conflict. Although the Plan stops just short of saying that hunters need to harvest more bears, it provides several arguments pointing in that direction. For example, the Plan states that the maximum sustainable annual hunter harvest of black bears is near 16%, yet California hunters have been harvesting less than 3%. Among other things, the Plan also remarks that another consequence of black bear populations being out of balance with the ecosystem is the impact it has on other predator species – including mountain lions – and their prey. The Plan states that research has demonstrated that black bears “frequently displace mountain lions from their kills, a behavior called kleptoparasitism”, noting that studies have “found black bears at 77% of mountain lion kills, and black bears displaced mountain lions from them 72% of the time. Black bear kleptoparasitism caused mountain lions to increase their kill rates substantially to recoup energetic losses to black bears...and mountain lion kill rates in this system were the highest reported for the species across their range”. The Plan also comments that “high rates of predation on deer fawns and kleptoparasitism of mountain lion kills by black bears have likely contributed to a declining deer population...”.



It is well known that the most effective “method of take” for hunting bears is to pursue them with dogs. However, the use of dogs to pursue bears in California was prohibited in statute by the Legislature via the passage of SB 1221 in 2012. Knowing of the impending release of the Bear Management Plan, and the arguments it provides calling for an increase annual bear harvest, the “dogs on bears” bill includes a critical second section. In addition to the non-lethal pursuit of bears by dogs, this bill would reauthorize the Commission to allow the use of dogs to hunt bears, should they choose to. Although the hunting community has long wanted to restore the ability to run dogs on bears, we understand that passing legislation that does so – given the makeup of our Legislature – will be extremely difficult. However, given the pending release of the revised Bear Management Plan, if we are ever to be successful, we believe that the best time may be now.

But our efforts at the Capitol at this “quiet time” do not stop there. While we watch and wait for new bills to drop, CA WSF is also proactively working to enhance our ability to succeed on the Capitol stage in 2025. With a large freshman class of thirty-five new Legislators taking their seats, CA WSF is busy meeting new lawmakers and beginning to educate them on our organization, what we do on behalf of wild sheep, the importance of science-based wildlife management, and the critical role of hunting in wildlife conservation. We are also reaching out to experienced Legislators and their staff to reaffirm our working relationships and their support of our ideals.

In our State Legislature, this may be the quietest of times, but for CA WSF even the “quietest of times” are noisy.

### **THE REGULATORY ARENA – THE CALIFORNIA FISH AND GAME COMMISSION**

Although the California State Legislature writes the laws, it has delegated a variety of powers to the Fish and Game Commission in the Fish and Game Code, some general in nature and some very specific. These responsibilities include, but are not limited to, listing and delisting of threatened/ endangered species under the California Endangered Species Act; establishing protected lands/waters – including marine protected areas, wildlife areas, and ecological reserves; and prescribing terms and conditions for issuance, suspension, revocation of hunting and fishing licenses and permits issued by DFW. Perhaps most importantly for many hunters and anglers, the Commission has also been given the authority to approve seasons, bag limits and methods of take for game animals and sport fishing. In other words, although DFW may recommend what they believe the allocation of tags for wild sheep and other big game species may be for any given year – it is the Commission that has the final say. It is for that reason and so very much more that CA WSF must constantly keep our fingers on the pulse of the California Fish and Game Commission.

Like the Legislature, the gears of the California Fish and Game Commission grind slowly when determining wildlife management policy. Unlike the Legislature, however, the Commission does not go on recess, and neither does the annual process for setting big game hunting regulations. It follows that, if the Commission process for setting big game regulations does not take a break, neither can we.

The annual process for setting big game hunting regulations is truly non-stop. The procedure for the “following year” begins with the initial public vetting of the topic at the Commission’s Wildlife Resources Committee (WRC) meeting held each May and concludes eleven months later at their April full Commission meeting. It is just days after the Commission adopts big game regulations for the coming season each April that DFW releases their Big Game Hunting Digest in early May. Then, literally a few days after the Big Game Digest hits the street for that year, the big game regulation setting process starts all over again for the following year at the May WRC.

The Commission’s annual May WRC meeting is followed by a discussion of the topic at a second WRC meeting each September. It is after the second public vetting that DFW begins to formally prepare the preliminary proposal for the following year they will present to the full Commission for consideration at their annual December meeting. Although the initial package presented to the full Commission each December may include general regulation change proposals, it does not include any specificity on the number of big game tags they may recommend for any unit or zone. Rather, because DFW is still gathering data on the population health of our wild sheep and other big game, the initial package only includes “ranges” of possible tag allocations.

Two months later, at the annual February Commission meeting, proposed changes to big game regulations for the upcoming seasons are again placed on Commission agenda, but for “discussion” only. At that time, with DFW still gathering and analyzing data, big game tag allocations remain only as ranges. It typically is not until late March that DFW will finalize the recommended big game tag allocations they plan to bring to the full Commission for their consideration of adoption at their annual April meeting.

With the Commission having final say on all hunting related regulations, it is critical that CA WSF is present and prepared to provide comment on pending wild sheep regulations and other matters of concern at each of the Commission’s annual WRC meetings, as well as all six of their yearly full Commission meetings. But to truly be effective, CA WSF must work between meetings to build credibility and maintain relationships with Commission members and their staff. By doing so, CA WSF will not only be more effective when speaking from the podium but also have greater access to quickly meet privately with Commission members or staff to discuss our concerns when difficult issues arise.

Working with the California Fish and Game Commission is a non-stop, year-round effort. But with the Commission’s February 2025 meeting later this week, the “quietest of times” are not so quiet on the regulatory front.

### **THE ADMINISTRATIVE ARENA – THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT FISH AND WILDLIFE**

Although the Commission may have the final say, it is DFW that serves as their “scientific arm”. When considering a possible regulatory change, the Commission looks to DFW for their recommendation based on the latest and best available science. Although public input at Commission meetings can make a difference – and no voice is louder than

that of CA WSF – the Commission rarely sways far from DFW recommendations. Said differently, if you want to achieve a certain outcome on a regulation change, you better have done your best ahead of time to reach agreement with DFW on their recommendation to the Commission.

Knowing that, CA WSF has spent years, decades even, working to build credibility and a strong working relationship with DFW. With a mutual respect of each other's knowledge of our wild sheep, CA WSF meets regularly with DFW's leadership in their Sheep Program and maintains an on-going dialogue with their experts. With the health of California's wild sheep being our number one priority, CA WSF partners with DFW in the field every year on projects and critical wild sheep research. Further, when DFW is considering administrative policy on wild sheep management, the respect we have earned often places us at the table.

CA WSF also collaborates closely with DFW throughout the year as the latest data on herd health is gathered, analyzed, and ground into DFW's recommendation to the Commission each April on the number of sheep tags to be allocated. Having mutual respect, and shared knowledge of the latest

status of our wild sheep, DFW and CA WSF work extremely hard to reach agreement on the recommendation they will present to the Commission. When CA WSF and DFW are in agreement, the Commission unequivocally adopts the recommendation. In the rare case when CA WSF and DFW agree to disagree, the credibility and relationships we have built with the Commission allows our arguments to be heard and strongly considered.

As with the Commission, working with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife is a non-stop, year-round effort. As of this writing, CA WSF remains fully at the table with DFW leadership collaborating on wild sheep management, as well as pending regulatory recommendations which assure the health of California's wild sheep, while providing maximum acceptable wild sheep hunting opportunity.

Sometimes the quietest of times are the busiest of times.

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