

California Wild Sheep

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Billy Silva
Newberry Mountains
Hunting with Dry Creek Outfitters
2024-25 Season
173 2/8"



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From the Editor's Desk

This is the first issue following our Annual Banquet and Fundraiser and CA Wild Sheep Summit. It includes great hunting stories from California and elsewhere, a recap of the Sheep Summit, pics from the Fundraiser, interesting history on CA DBH hunting, news from CDFW, water work in the desert, the voting ballot for 2025-2027 CAWSF Directors, AND MORE!

Good luck in the various state tag draws (including CA) and raffles for 2025. Let us know if you drew a special tag! I drew an AK Chugach tag for a Dall Ram, and am hoping to be recovered and back in sheep shape to do the hunt following open heart surgery to repair an aneurysm on May 16.

Feedback, ideas, articles and requests are always welcome. Best way to reach me is mike.borel@kearney.com (Note this new address). Due date for input to the 3Q25 issue is August 10.



Cornish Pasty from Cornish Pasty Association from Tony Gigilotti

INGREDIENTS

Pastry Dough

- 500g of bread or strong dough flour (not all purpose)
- 120g lard
- 125g Irish butter
- 1 tsp salt
- 175ml cold water

Filling and Glaze

- 14 ounces of beef
- 10 ounces of potatoes
- 6 ounces of rutabaga (can use carrots instead)
- 6 ounces of onion
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 beaten egg or milk for glazing

DIRECTIONS

- 1) Add salt to the flour
- 2) Combine the butter and lard with the flour mixing to a breadcrumb texture
- 3) Add the water and mix/knead
- 4) Once the dough is elastic cover with saran wrap and refrigerate for at least three hours
- 5) Mix the filling and season as you like
- 6) Preheat the oven to 375
- 7) Roll the dough out and cut into ~8" circles; use a dish or bowl upside down as your guide
- 8) Fill the dough in the center with a large scoop
- 9) Fold the dough over and crimp the edges
- 10) Glaze the dough and bake for 50-55 minutes

You can freeze the pasties before baking, but after glazing. No need to defrost, just cook at 325 for about an hour and 10 minutes. Any filling can be used, but you want to ensure the dough is well sealed and there is a root vegetable to provide moisture.



MAKE STEAK GREAT AGAIN



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

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

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Humorous outtakes provided by Tammy Scott
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Events

2025

June 1	Watch for your 2025 Board of Directors Election Ballot
June 4-7	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 24-26	New GALAD Installation Location TBD
November 10	Due date for articles for 4Q2025 CA WSF Newsletter
December 5	Sheep Summit XXXVII "All Virtual"
December 5-7	New GALAD Installation Location TBD

2026

January 9-10	New GALAD Installation Location TBD
January 22-24	WSF International Sheep Show Reno, NV
February 18-21 February 21-22	SCI Convention, Nashville GSCO Convention, Nashville
February 20	Due date for articles for 1Q2026 CA WSF Newsletter
February 20-22	New GALAD Installation Location TBD
April-May	CA WSF Fundraiser/Banquet 2026 TBA

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

First off, I'd like to thank everyone that turned out for annual fundraising dinner in Sacramento last month. I have a full event recap later in the issue. Thank you. You made our event a record setting one! It was our biggest turnout ever! We're still crunching the numbers, but it's looking like a great success for the chapter and will ensure our work across the Southern California Landscape to double the number of desert bighorn sheep will continue for years to come.

This year is an election year for me and marks the end of my term as President. I'll be running for reelection to the Board; however I have termed out, again, as your President. I served my maximum 4 years under our bylaws and an additional 2 years as an Interim President as outlined under bylaws changed in 2023. It has been one of the highlights of my career as a guide/outfitter and conservationist to have served the last 6 years as your chapter President. I'm also proud to have been the longest serving President in this chapter's history.

I am very blessed that we as an organization have experienced so much success in the last 6 years. It has little to do with me, but rather the combined efforts of your entire Board of Directors working hard on your behalf to meet our mutual goals. We had set many lofty goals and we are slowly and diligently achieving them through continued dedication and vigilance.

Since, I started my journey with this organization, some near 20 years ago, one of our primary goals has been the state's "Comprehensive Sheep Management Plan." This Plan would lay a foundation for "Bighorn Conservation Unit Plans" that ultimately would provide increased opportunity and help our chapter reach our former goal that some of you may remember as the "Drive to 35" campaign. A goal we set long ago to simply get to 35 bighorn sheep permits available to the public, we're at 30 now. A benchmark that would demonstrate that hunting opportunity was the byproduct of successful conservation efforts and science-based management. That goal is closer than ever, thanks in large part to recently appointed Statewide Sheep Coordinator, Paige Prentice, who was responsible for a lot of the "heavy-lifting" to get the Sheep Management Plan finally passed and signed by the Director of CA Fish and Wildlife. As a result, the pending new Bighorn Conservation Unit Plans are currently in the works and we could see new hunt units and expanded hunting opportunities within the next 2-3 years.

As part of our "Give a Lamb a Drink (GALAD)" efforts, our goal of "doubling the number of desert bighorns" has always revolved around water. And in the last 6 years, more specifically the last two, CA WSF in coordination with the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep and our State and Federal Partners, most notably the United States Marine Corps, Cal-Fire, CDFW, and the United States Army, we have installed or repaired many new and existing water projects across the Southern California landscape. We have found new sources of funding for these projects and have collaborated with private donors, industry partners like Kuiu, and other WSF chapters including both the Iowa Foundation for North American Wild Sheep and the Eastern Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation. We thank all of our conservation partners that are helping us make a difference for desert bighorns.

But the difference that has made the greatest impact in the last 6 years is the continued faith and support of all of you, our members. Your continued dedication to this organization is finally being rewarded! We are finally moving forward in a direction that will benefit all of us and most especially the sheep regardless of whether they be Californias, Sierra Nevadas, Peninsulars, or Nelsoni. The progress of the last two years has been a monumental achievement for all of us and all of you and your entire Board of Directors, past and present, deserve thanks. I thank you.

It has been my highest honor to serve as your President. I want to thank Kyle Meintzer, Mike Borel, Bob Keagy, Darryl Williams, Ben Gordon, Ken Crother, and Beverly Valdez for mentoring me along the way. I would also like to thank all the Board members I have had the pleasure to serve with my entire time on the Board. I look forward to the continued good work of this organization and to working with the new President that your Board will elect this Summer.

Thanks again.

Donald C. Martin



PATIENCE, PERSEVERANCE, AND THE PERFECT SHOT!

By Billy Silva, Member

My once-in-a-lifetime sheep hunt started like most; I had to draw a tag! I had never allowed myself to dream about hunting sheep. I never thought it was a possibility.

My only chance was a tag here in my home state of California. I started applying for desert sheep hunts more than 23 years ago, and every year, when the draw came out, I saw the same thing, a big “no.” But not this year! To say I was shocked was an understatement.

After the shock and excitement settled in, I realized I needed to make a major decision: Should I do the hunt myself or hire a guide for this special experience?

After researching and talking to several outfitters and past tag holders, the outfitter that stood out the most and who I felt would be able to make my dream a reality, were Dry Creek Outfitters.

Now, with a tag in hand and a guide hired, it was time to go sheep hunting!

The Hunt Begins

My hunt started on the opening week of the season. My longtime hunting partner and cousin, Tony, decided to join me on this incredible adventure. He brought along his 11-year-old son, Little Tony, to experience the excitement of such a high-caliber hunt. The day before the opener, we headed to the unit to set up camp and met with Matt St. Martin from Dry Creek Outfitters at the main camp. There, we met the other guides, Nate and Jake.

Next, Matt gave us the rundown on how the hunt would begin. The plan was to set up on the desert floor and glass for sheep on the face of the mountain in the morning. I asked if they had seen any good rams while scouting. To my excitement, Matt said yes, they had spotted several rams, with one standing out from the others, which they referred to as “the target ram.”

Opening Day

Like all opening mornings, it came early, but this one carried even more excitement, this was my first, and probably only, sheep hunt. We met Matt at the main camp and headed out to our glassing position. At first light, we started spotting sheep. Little Tony was the first to pick up a group of five rams feeding on the mountain face.

Meanwhile, Matt spotted another group consisting of several ewes and two rams, one of them was our target ram. However, before he could get a good look, they went over the ridge. Matt contacted Nate and Jake, who had taken a different route from us, to see if they could spot the ram from their position. They reported that the rams had moved onto a ledge off one of the ridges near the mountain peak. With the wind conditions as they were, there was no opportunity for a stalk, so we decided



Billy Silva and Newberry ram

to return to camp for breakfast and try again in the evening.

The Chase Continues

That evening, we glassed from a different position, hoping the rams might feed down the other side of the ridge. We spotted the ewes, but the rams never appeared.

The next morning, we stuck to the same plan, hoping the ram would feed down the mountain into a better stalking position. While we spotted sheep, our target ram wasn't among them; however, Nate and Jake had eyes on him. The rams were heading toward the same bedding area as the day before.

With the wind coming down the mountain, Matt decided we should set up below the sheep, hoping they would feed toward us. He took me to a spot just below their bedding shelf. Though we saw some ewes and a young ram, our target ram never appeared.

Making the Move

The next morning, we glassed again from the desert floor. Just as before, we saw sheep. Matt received a call from the boys saying the rams were heading to their usual bedding area. This time, he devised a different plan: We would hike up the backside of the mountain and come down on them.

With a strong wind pushing up the mountain, we believed they would not hear or smell us. Our main concern was bumping into other sheep that could alert our target ram. After climbing about 2,000 feet, we settled into a spot just less than 300 yards from the sheep's bedding shelf. Matt had me prepare for a shot, hoping the ram would step out.

The Moment of Truth

The ewes came up on the shelf first, behind a big rock, then turned and walked directly away from us. They didn't stop until they were 500 yards away. Matt turned to me and said, “Let's hope the rams don't do that.” Of course, the rams did exactly that, but I did get to see the magnificent ram.

The ram bedded down at the far end of the plateau. With the wind whipping through us, Matt suggested we move to the other side of the ridge for shelter while the boy's kept eyes on the ram.

After some time, Matt hatched a bold plan, one that would either make him a hero or a zero. He proposed we drop down the left side of the ridge and go after the ram aggressively. As an aggressive hunter, I was all for it. Matt believed we could get within 100 yards, which would help with the high wind but also risk blowing the ram out.

We carefully moved down the mountain and spotted the smaller ram but only its back and head. I told Matt I could not take a shot from that angle. The boys confirmed our target ram was still bedded behind a big rock. With favorable wind, we decided to get even closer.

Matt tossed up his pack on a rock face in front of us and told me to jump up and get set. When I got up on the bag, I had a ram looking directly at me!

"Don't shoot! That's the small ram," Matt whispered.

I held my position, my knees and elbows burning from holding still.

Finally, the smaller ram moved away, but my knees were killing me. Matt told me to rest but be ready when the target ram stood. Minutes felt like hours. The window for this shot was very small. I only had 10 yards to make the shot before the ram would go off the ridge.

"Get up. Take the shot," Matt whispered suddenly.

I jumped up on the bag, but when I tried to settle in for the shot the ram was on the move and I kept sliding off the rock. Matt was trying to stop the ram while I moved my gun off the bag and onto the tip of the rock. With no time to breathe, I put the cross hair behind his shoulder, and pulled the trigger.

"You got him!" Matt exclaimed just before the ram did a complete somersault into the rocks.

A Dream Realized

We waited a few minutes to ensure the ram was down before hiking to him. The 70-yard walk felt like a mile. When I finally laid hands on him, the shock of drawing the tag was replaced with the shock of harvesting the most incredible ram I had ever seen.

After moving the ram off the rock pile, Matt, Nate, and Jake pulled the tape measure to see how big he was. As he placed the tape on the longer side first, Matt turned to us with an astonished look and said it measured 38 inches! I could tell the boys were very excited, but having never hunted sheep before, I didn't know if that was good or great. The boys told me they had been hoping he would be more than 36 inches on that side.

Matt quickly moved on to measuring the other side and found that the ram was more than 36 inches on the shorter side. He then started to measure the circumference of the horns. This was where they thought the score could take a hit because of a big chip in one of the horns. Matt took the measurements around the bases and then moved down the horn for the second measurement.

"You're still getting lucky," Matt looked up at me and said,

The chip in the horn was just below and above the next two measurements, so it would not effect the score at all!

After all the excitement settled down, we positioned the ram for some photos. By this time, it was getting late in the day, and we had to decide whether to leave him overnight or pack him out in the dark. With my cousin and his son not there, we decided to put our stinky shirts on him and return in the morning to take more pictures with everyone.

By the time we met up with Tony and his son, it was almost dark. Little Tony wanted to go straight back up the hill to see the ram. We told him the plan was to head back in the morning, take group pictures, and take him out.

Back at camp, we had another great dinner, and the guys and I had a few shots of Crown to celebrate the joyous event.

The next morning, we met everyone at the main camp to head back up the mountain to recover the ram. My cousin and his son could not wait to see the ram. After taking tons of pictures with it. Matt and the boys caped him out for a full body mount and broke the ram down to pack it out.

Matt had me put his pack on, with the ram's head and cape in it, for more photos. I told Matt that I would carry him out. I wanted to soak up every last bit of this incredible hunt.

We all hunt for many different reasons. Some hunt for the incredible meat, some for the trophies, and some of us for the memories these hunts make. Every set of horns on the wall had a story to pass on to the next generation.

Back home on the wall is a very special Mule Deer mount that my grandfather took in 1962 in Wyoming. The buck is well over a 200 inch non typical buck. The buck is only dwarfed by the incredible story of how my grandfather got him.

My kids know this story word for word and that someday this mount will be passed down to them. I always wanted a special mount that had equal weight as my grandfathers to someday pass down to them also.

This ram will be full body mounted by my good friend Brian Davis of Fowl Play Taxidermy and hopefully the ram and the incredible story behind it will be shared for many generations to come.

"The only difference between a tax man and a taxidermist is that the taxidermist leaves the skin."

Attributed to Samuel Langhorne Clemens, aka Mark Twain

CALIFORNIA WILD SHEEP SUMMIT XXXVI

April 26, 2025 "All IN-PERSON"

By Mike J. Borel, VP Operations

CA WSF hosted Sheep Summit XXXVI as an "all in person" event. The purpose of these summits is "to accomplish more collectively for Bighorn sheep in CA through sharing and collaboration, than the sum of what each organization can accomplish individually. Following is a summary of Summit XXXVI (36).

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS: CDFW, USBLM, CAWSE, SCBS, key independents, and others). 26 persons participated. Due to budgets federal agencies were unable to travel.

Information reviewed:

1.	Welcome, Review Meeting Purpose & Agenda, Introduction of new persons	Mike Borel
2.	CDFW Big Picture Update	Chad Dibble, Scott Gardner and Mario Klip
3.	CDFW Statewide and Sierra Bighorn Update	Paige Prentice
4.	CDFW Desert Bighorn Sheep Update	Rick Ianniello
5.	OSU Update on Research and Activities, including new genetic data from the 2024 captures, and new directions for our research program	Clint Epps
6.	CDFW Peninsular Bighorn Update	Chris Fust & Paige Prentice
7.	Conversion of small game drinkers to DBH Value	Scott Gibson and Cara Wiedeman
8.	US BLM - Update on the Big Picture, Multiple EA's and the Programmatic EA	Brian Novosak
9.	Update on Brightline and Overpasses for Mitigation with Cal Trans and other State Issues Impacting DBH	Don Priest
10.	SCBS Guzzler (BGG) Repairs and New Drinkers (RWWS) Installations Update, State Lands Installations - experience, plan for Remainder of 2025	Steve Marschke
11.	GALAD (Give a Lamb a Drink) progress, funding	Mike Borel
12.	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
13.	Open Q & A Session	Mike Borel
14.	Suggestions for Next Summit December 15, 2025 "All Virtual"	All, Mike Borel to facilitate

Particularly notable sharing:

1. Comprehensive Sheep Plan approved and shared April 25.
2. CA DBH Sheep Tags increased by 7 for 25-26 season!
3. CDFW planning 3 new hunt zones for 2026-27 from the N. Central BCU! Granite/N Bristols, Providence/Wood/Hackberry, Castle / Piutes
4. The Northern BCU is likely next. It includes the Panamints, Inyo, Funeral, Grapevine and Argus State. Plan is to complete one BCU each year.
5. Hunting opportunity is a priority for CDFW Region 6.

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.

Summit XXXVII is scheduled for December 15, 2025. It will be an "All Virtual" format.

HOW MANY CHANCES

by Mike Smiefert

How many chances do “once in a lifetime opportunities” come along? For most of us, not even once. For a very select few that one chance does come along...once. An even fewer still are granted more than one lifetime changing opportunity. I am that rare more than once in lifetime guy.

Let's back up a little. For 40 years Ken Sodoma and Doug Silgen have been my best friends. Not only hunting and fishing allies, but through all life's challenges. We have shared countless adventures together. In 2023, after waiting and accruing the max 28 preference points, Ken and I finally drew the only two non-resident coveted “once in a lifetime” Arizona unit 10 early trophy tags. It was our shared dream hunt and the best chance to harvest a trophy bull elk. Tragically, in the dark predawn first day of the hunt, Ken collapsed. After an hour and half of CPR in the back of the guide's pickup, we raced to a location that the rescue helicopter could land and help us.

Tragically all our efforts were in vain. Ken died in my arms there in the mountains of Arizona. My best friend of 40 years was gone. Doug drove from Arkansas to the AZ elk camp to console me as we both shared memories and shed tears for our lost companion. That hunt thus ended before it even began. I did not do that elk hunt or any other hunts that year.

Fast forward to 2024. With a grief-stricken heart, it was time to try and resume the passion I shared with my two hunting friends, now down to one. So as usual, I applied for the Cady Mountain Sheep tag as I've done for the last 18 years NEVER thinking I'd become a sheep hunter. I've hunted deer, elk, antelope, birds, and even another “once in lifetime” wild Bison outside Teton park in Wyoming which was successful, but that's a story for another day. I've never hunted sheep in my life. With all my numerous health issues and injuries, I honestly thought sheep hunting would be too physically challenging. So, imagine my shock and hesitation when the news came that I drew one of the two once in lifetime bighorn sheep tags for California Cady mountain unit. With the memory of Ken still in mind I decided not to let another chance like this slip away.

So now, since I know nothing about sheep, who do I hire to help make this dream a reality. I searched the internet and spoke with a couple of guides and then reached out to my elk guide from the Arizona tragedy to see if he had any recommendations. He put me in touch with a sheep hunter he knew who recommended I call Josh Schulgen of Sierra Crest Outfitters. I spoke with Josh and was immediately impressed with his passion, enthusiasm and confidence in success for my



Mike Smiefert, friend Doug, and the Sierra Crest Outfitters team with his Cady Mtn ram

sheep hunt. I decided to go with Josh as my guide. But what really convinced me that he was the right choice was when he called back after I choose him. He called and said “Thank-you. Thank-you for trusting me with this hunt opportunity.” I knew right then I had made the right choice and found someone with pride and integrity, that understood what I'd been through and what this tag symbolized to me.

Now to prep and get in sheep shape. I purchased a Leupold VX5HD 3-15 CDS Boone and Crocket from Frey's guns in Ridgecrest mounted on the first rifle I ever bought back in the 70s, a Parker Hale .270. Many boxes of ammo spent in practicing shots out to 500yds. Confidence in the guns ability to shoot accurately, my ability still in question. Each morning up at 06:00 with a 20lb pack, walking the neighborhood hills 3.5 miles as often as my back would allow, as instructed by Josh, attempting to get conditioned for an adventure I really had no idea what would be like.

My sheep tag season ran from Dec 07 to Feb 02. After talking with Josh throughout the summer and looking at trail cam pics of the sheep captured, the decision was made to start my hunt opening weekend. My 83-year-old friend Doug, knowing the sentiment involved with this adventure, made the drive out from Arkansas to join me opening weekend. I arrived a day early to set up camp and try to instill confidence in Josh as to my shooting ability, at least to 500 yds. After showing off the old .270, Josh suggested I also practice with his 7mm long range gun just in case my one chance is beyond 500 yds. His gun shoots great. In fact, he commented that I shot it better than he did. So now the stage is set for the hunt. I told josh I know nothing about sheep, so if you say shoot, you'll hardly finish the words before I pull the trigger.

Day one was an education for me. Trying to figure out just what I was in for. Not just the open barren steep terrain, but training my eyes what to look for. The mandatory orientation class from Fish and Game provided some slide photos of sheep on location



Mike and his ram

and ID them but that's not the same as being out in the field glassing. Eventually day one, Josh and his numerous excellent spotters were able to show me some sheep, none of which were the ones they had targeted for me to try and harvest. I had told Josh previously; a big ram would be nice, but any legal ram would be a trophy in my book. This unit is not known for book rams. I know I get one chance at this tag, I've learned if the guide says shoot, you shoot.

Day Two we topped out on a high peak at first light. Within minutes Josh and I both located a couple sheep a long way off that warranted further investigation. Josh calls his spotters and has them relocate to different vantages to get better look at the sheep. The spotters located the sheep again miles away and with obvious excitement evident in their voices say "we need to get over there NOW!" So, off the hill Josh, Doug and I go into the ATV's and away to the spotter's location miles away. Josh confirms through the spotting scope that this is a ram we need to go after. But they are moving, so we need to go light and fast, so, its best if only he and I go, while Doug stays with the spotters to watch through the scopes.

So off Josh and I go. The best guess on yardage Josh was thinking would be between 500-600 yds across the ridge in a bowl. After an hour hike up the lava rock shale faced mountain, sweat pouring from my brow we approach the ridgetop. But it's all small lava rock except for one set of two large rocks on the top of the ridge. Josh tells me to drop all my gear and crawl to his location at the two rocks anticipating the shot to be about 600 yds, so I'll use his rifle.

I leave my 270 and binos on the ground with the pack and crawl up. Now behind the rocks, he has me using the scope to glass the bowl across canyon to find the sheep. Wanting to be sure I'm looking at the right one he says there's one high and one low, look for the lower ram. As I'm listening and searching for the sheep in the scope the lower one comes into view, it's a "no doubt" which ram to shoot. All I can see are these horns. At this point Josh notifies his spotters to tell them we're getting in position for a shot and to watch what the ram does. It takes me what seems like forever to try and get set up for the shot. At one point I have a solid rest and can see the ram but the barrel is aimed directly into the rock I'm resting on. There's nothing like sheep fever to rattle one's nerves. Finally, I feel stable and secure for the shot. Josh ranges the ram, 495 yards feeding broadside. BOOM, I let the shot go. The rifle recoils and I lose sight of the

ram. What happened? Josh says rams moving right, reload! Well in my excitement to reload I short stroke the bolt and jam the next shell in the rifle. Now he and I both have to take our focus off the ram and try to clear the gun and reload. Finally, I got the gun reloaded. Resettled for a second shot, we see the ram has moved slightly but still browsing as he walks broadside.

Josh ranges again, 481 yards. Boom, I take a second shot, and this time we hear a smack. Again, what happened I said? Rams are coming straight for us Josh said, get ready. WHAT?? I heard a smack. Did I hit a rock? What was the smack? Not only did the ram not drop but now he's walking the bowl toward us.

At this point we think he's going to circle the bowl right below us at about 200 yds. But there's no place to get set for another shot without being completely exposed. We're talking trying to decide, do we move, do we wait until we think he is below us and try a 200yd off hand shot... I've apparently missed two shots already with a rest, what are the odds I can pull off a 200 yard off hand shot at this point? Suddenly the spotters said the rams are now crossing our ridge through a small saddle about 200 yards to the south down the ridgeline. Not wanting to chance another jam or missed shot, we decide to abandon Josh's gun and retrieve my .270. With that in mind we turn around and start watching behind us down ridge. All of a sudden Josh whispers there he is, horns gleaming in the sunlight. Frantically I'm searching the ridgeline 2-300 yards away. I can't find him, where is he? Josh at this point reaches down, grabs my barrel and says not over there, right here and points my gun at the ram in a smaller saddle not 80 yards away. There he is walking side hill straight toward us. All I remember is the sight of those horns rocking back and forth with each step as he gets closer and closer, 80 yds, 70, 50.

Josh says it's going to be a close one. Be ready! But all I can now see from my position is just the top of his back. He's getting closer and closer. That ram walked to 25 yards of us when he finally offered me a clear shot. Boom, I let the .270 go. The ram now starts running. Josh is imploring reload, reload! I told him I know it's a good hit. I saw blood start pouring out of the shoulder. The ram goes about 25 yards, looks at us and falls over. Doug and the spotters heard the shot and they're all thinking oh my gosh what happened. But the next thing they heard were the screams and of Josh and I shouting Ram Down! It was incredible. The .270 did its job. All that practice at 500 yards and then I take my ram at 25 yards instead. You can't make this stuff up.

The joy and eyes started to well up. It had actually happened. "How many chances" do you get at a ram. Normally after one shot, he's gone into the next county. Had Josh and I relocated for the shot down the bowl, that ram would have crossed the ridge behind us and we would have never seen him. But this ram not only didn't run, he walked over 500 yards right to me at 25 yards. Things like this never happen to sheep hunters, at least that's what everyone tells me.

Oh, and that smack I heard from the second shot, it was a solid shoulder hit on the ram. Josh's gun was dead on! He walked that entire way, 500 yards with a blown-up shoulder until I placed the final shot just three inches from the first hit. I believe it was fate and my dearest friend had a guiding hand in the outcome. No one will convince me otherwise. Ken was there beside me.

And at 83 years young, Doug hiked up that steep lava shale mountain to join me where the sheep lay. We hugged and cried, both knowing Ken was there with us in spirit to make this all come true. Everyone there was all in awe of Doug's determination to share the moment with me. That's what true friends do, they are there for you. Things like this don't happen. Not these many chances. And to share it with my dear friend makes this memory one I hope to take with me for eternity. I am truly blessed to have had friends like this in my life. We should all be so fortunate. Thank-you Doug and Ken for all you've meant. I owe a debt I can only try to repay as best I can.

To Josh and all his crew, Thank-you can't begin to express my gratitude. My faith and decision to trust you was well warranted and worth the adventure. You were all fantastic in bringing a once in a lifetime opportunity home to the heart. Also, a heartfelt thank you to all the volunteers with California Wild Sheep Foundation (CA WSF), Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep (SCBS) and the Dept. of Fish and Game that dedicate the time and energy to insure we still have huntable populations of sheep.

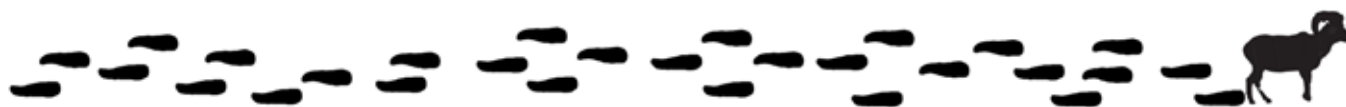
Early on in my story I mentioned that I never thought I'd be a sheep hunter. That has obviously changed. I am now hooked, have applied in other states, and would do it again without hesitation. We should not let these chances pass us by, no matter the odds.

Since my friend Kens passing, I've become a strong advocate to anyone that will listen, if there is anything you need to say or do, do not hesitate, do it!

We never know just "How Many Chances" we have.



Mike with his friend Doug at the top of the mountain



STEVEN G. TORRES, CA WSF BOARD MEMBER, HONORED WITH DESERT RAM AWARD

CA Wild Sheep Foundation Board Member Steven G. Torres (right in photo) has been recognized with the Desert Bighorn Council's highest honor — the Desert Ram Award.

The award is inscribed with the following tribute:

"For a lifetime of unselfish dedication and commitment working with agencies, wildlife conservation organizations, the academic community, and professional societies on behalf of desert bighorn sheep. Your numerous contributions to science, willingness to mentor young scientists, and your ability to resolve disagreements and conflict. Your support of scientific rigor as being foundational to successful conservation and your capable leadership of California's Bighorn Sheep Conservation Program."

The award was presented at the 58th Desert Bighorn Council meeting, held in Gold Canyon, Arizona, April 2025.

We congratulate Steve on this well-deserved recognition for his outstanding leadership and lifelong commitment to desert bighorn conservation.

BEYOND THE HUNT – A GIRLFRIEND’S JOURNEY ON THE ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME DESERT BIGHORN SHEEP HUNT

By Tami Douglas and Todd Roberts

June 12, 2024, at 8:31am I receive a text from Todd that reads: “OH MY GOD. I pulled a once in a lifetime tag. I pulled a Bighorn Sheep tag in California. HOLY SHIT.” That was followed by a phone call that I am not sure even had one complete sentence. He was so excited I think I heard “babe, sheep, hunt, oh my, tag, odds, what?”... over and over for about 5 minutes straight.

It’s funny because just about 10 days prior (yes, we waited until the last minute to apply for our California Tags) we went to the Big 5 Sporting Goods in Napa to apply for our CA hunts. As we are both applying for Zone 10 – Newberry, Rodman and Ord Mountain Bighorn Sheep Tags, Todd looks at me and says, “We are never going to pull this tag, but we are going to keep trying”. I don’t think he has ever been happier to be wrong about something.

And so, the preparation and planning began. We are DIY hunters and have never used a guide service. That comes with its fair share of success and disappointments, so the first decision was for this hunt, do we attempt to rally some hunting buddies and DIY it, or do we spend the money and hire a guide. I didn’t hesitate to share my two cents... It’s a once-in-a-lifetime tag, if you try to DIY and are not successful, you will never get another shot. Spend the money, get the guide and do this right. Todd did his research and contacted Dry Creek Outfitters, Matt and Cliff St. Martin.

On July 20, Todd, Logan (his son) and I traveled to Sacramento for the Bighorn Sheep Orientation. We learned so much, met the outfitters, and he got his actual tag... the golden ticket to the hunt-of-a-lifetime. We were in a room with people who had been applying for a long time and kept it to ourselves that Todd was a random draw for Zone 10, and actually only had 2 preference points (seriously his winning lotto ticket, a random tag out of 2,275 applicants). Watching him accept his tag was great, and suddenly, it became “real”.

Over the next almost 5 months it was lots of preparation. We did some hunting in California for deer (no success but great memories) and Todd and Logan went to Wyoming and had success with Antelope. From watching videos, hiking and conditioning, target practice, quite a few Kuiu trips and online orders (I do love a good excuse to shop) and making sure we had everything we needed for the trip. Todd had quite a few conversations with our guides and figured out what type of ram he was really looking for in this hunt: a ram who was older, has some scars and imperfections, and told a story about living



Tami and Todd with the DCO team and a fine Newberry ram

in the desert. A ram that was representative of the California Desert Bighorn Sheep.

One of the many advantages of opting for a guided hunt was that camp would be all set up when we arrived, so we really just needed our personal belongings and anything extra that we wanted to bring. We packed enough to get us through 5 days of hunting, plus 2 travel days (arrival and departure). I have traditionally been more of a “glamper” than “camper”, so I chose to bring some additional “amenities” like a portable restroom and privacy tent, and of course being from the Napa Valley, some really good wine.

Travel day was finally here! December 11th we hit the road around 6am for the 7 hour trip down south. I think we went over our packing checklist about 17 times that morning, but we had everything we needed and were so excited. We made great time, and there is something so refreshing about headed off the beaten path and seeing the “pavement ends” sign. I drive so that Todd could grab his binoculars and start glassing as we ventured about 40 minutes down a dirt path. We got to camp and unpacked. I have never been so excited to camp out in the middle of nowhere. I was on the adventure of a lifetime with the love of my life, and it was the greatest! The sunset was gorgeous behind our little tent. We got settled in and met the guides that night at dinner. We were fortunate to have a wonderful group of guides: Matt, Cliff, Jonston, Nate, Clay, Casey and Carlos. We had a wonderful meal together in the food tent, and then enjoyed some smores and a campfire. Todd and I made our lunches, packed snacks, filled out water bottles and got our backpacks ready to go. We went back to the tent, set out our clothes for the morning and settled in for the night, as 5am was going to be here before we knew it.

Day 1 of our hunt was here! Breakfast and coffee at 5:15am and then off we went. We went with our Guide Matt and took

the buggy to the Newberry's, and the other guides scattered in various other areas. The first couple of miles of the hike in wasn't bad, but then we reached some steep rocky hills and some cold, cold weather. As we got close to the top, Matt waved us both down, as about 5 rams jumped out in front of us about 65 yards away. One ram in particular was really nice, and at that time Matt and Todd decided whether to go for it or not. I just remember sitting there on the mountain thinking "we are literally 3 hours into day 1 and possibly getting his ram... wow". He ended up passing on that ram as we just came up on it too quickly and he wasn't able to set up for the shot without spooking the group. We continued hiking and found a great spot at the top to glass from. I found a little cove to try and stay warm as it started to snow on us. It sure was beautiful up there. I loved watching Todd and Matt interact and spot Rams and even got some cool candid shots of them both. I knew this was an experience that Todd would never want to forget, and I wanted to support in every way I could, and document every step of the journey. We ended up heading back down the mountain around 3 pm, and decided to glass another area before we lost daylight. Because of how the wind was shifting (did I fail to mention it was crazy windy?), we saw a ton of rams on the side of one of the mountains, as they were getting out of the wind. One ram in particular sparked a big interest, and we called it a day and decided we would start there tomorrow. Back to camp for another delicious meal, some cold beers and then prepare for Day 2 and a good night's sleep.

On day 2 we met for breakfast and coffee around 5:30am and were headed out of camp by 6am, off to try and find the ram we saw yesterday. We were joined by most of the guides and then some split off. We found the ram, and spent a couple hours glassing there, but where the ram was on the mountain, it would have been a risky and dangerous climb to get to him and pack him out. Ultimately, the team made the decision to pass on that ram, and try out another mountain. I remember leaving there and on the buggy ride the next mountain Todd started second guessing the decision, on if he should have stuck with it and would find another ram he liked that much. I tried to reassure him that we were only on day 2 and I was sure there were some more great rams out there. Around 10am Matt noticed he had a few missed texts and calls as the guides were trying to get ahold of him. They had found a couple really nice rams and next thing you knew we were on our way. That buggy ride was about 40 minutes and we met up with our group.

And stuff just got real... Todd and the guides had identified the ram that he was looking for, and he was along the deck more toward the bottom of the mountain. To make the shot it would require hiking a couple of miles out, and up some steep, rocky terrain. Our guide, Matt, had told Todd that given the hike, it might be best if just the two of them went, as when there are more people, it makes extra noise and could spook the rams. He thought it would be best if I stayed back and watched through the binoculars or spotting scopes. As soon as Todd came to me with the plan, and the words came out of Todd's mouth, he just said "nope, that's not right" and went back to the guide and said, "Tami's going, I'm not leaving her behind". Oh boy, the pressure is on now... I cannot be the reason this ram spooks and we must start all over again tomorrow. We took a 2nd guide with us, Matt's son Johnston, so that if for some reason I needed to stay back at some point, I wasn't alone on

the side of a mountain. Well almost 2 hours later, the 4 of us all completed the hike, the rockiest terrain I have ever climbed, up to the peak at the top, and Todd was set up for a downhill shot from about 325 yards. I remember the silence and watching him as he waited for the ram to get in the right position. Matt was up top with Todd, and Johnson and I were down on a rock just below. It seemed like forever, but it was really just about 15 minutes. Todd had no idea, but I was taking photos and videoing the whole time. I just knew he was going to do it, and that soon we could all do a big sigh of relief. Then, it



"you made a damn good shot"

happened, he did it – a PERFECT shot, Ram Down and I was beaming with pride. Hearing Matt say, "I tell you what, you made a damn good shot" and knowing that the ram went right down with one shot was all we could ask for. The position that Todd was in for that shot made it the toughest shot of his hunting career that started when he was a teen (I won't say how many years ago that was), but when it mattered

most, he did it. There were high fives, hugs and the obligatory selfie of the 4 of us before we headed down to the ram. Truth be told, I think Todd has watched the video from his shot more times than he probably knows I hear him listen and watch, but it makes me smile every time knowing he gets to relive that moment, and even more special that we did it together.

It took us about 35 minutes to hike back down the rocks and get to the ram. Wow - was he everything Todd had hoped for. He was beautiful, he was majestic, and he told a story of years of battles and survival in steep, rough, mountain terrain and harsh weather. His features embodied everything about the older California Desert Bighorn, and he had gray hair around his face, he had a scar on his forehead, he had chips out of his left horn, and the end of his right horn was broomed off. He represented dominance, resilience and absolutely perfect imperfections. He was 14, his horns were heavy and beautifully etched. Todd got to him, and placed some grass in his mouth, I held his face in my lap, kissed his horns and thanked him for the food he was about to provide to our family. The guides took care of dressing him and Todd packed the horns off the mountain. We walked hand in hand down the mountain as the sun started to set. It was a perfect day.

Before the hunt, Todd and I decided that we wanted to share the backstrap with our guides, after all, if it weren't for them, this may not have been possible, and we wanted them to enjoy it. I brought a bottle of champagne for the occasion, and a couple of nice bottles of wine to enjoy with the group as well. We were all about celebrating this success with everyone who made it



possible. That night, I was also informed that it's a tradition to enjoy the "Rocky Mountain Oysters" back at camp too. I had Todd do the honors and open the bubbles, and then one of the guides did a cheers, "To Sheep nuts and Champagne", and we all got a good chuckle. And yes, I did try them (side note I am the pickiest eater at times) and they were actually good! The backstrap was prepared perfectly and was delicious. We all sat around the table, enjoyed a fantastic meal, with great wine and

amazing company. Where 3 days ago the 6 guys we met up with at camp were pretty much strangers, we had built connections, and even started planning for some future hunts together. We laughed, we told stories, we drank and enjoyed another night around the campfire.

The next morning we got to sleep in, enjoy our coffee, pack up and then start the adventure home. We were meeting with Fish and Wildlife in the Mojave Desert for the Hunter Check In, Measurements and to have the horns plugged. As we thought, our Ram was 14 (would be turning 15 on January 1st) and scored 162-7/8. After our check-in, we headed to the taxidermist to drop him off. We were still pinching ourselves that this was real, and so grateful we got to experience this together.

Beyond the hunt, there is so much that I took away from this experience. From applying for the tag, to dropping our ram off at the taxidermist (Rick White) and every experience in between, Todd and I did it together, as partners. For us, our shared passion for hunting is something that not a lot of couples get to experience, but it just makes our relationship even stronger. It requires immense trust and collaboration, teamwork, and relying on each other for safety and success. It is about pushing yourselves out of your comfort zone, trusting your instincts and knowing your partner has your back, in hunting and in life, no matter what challenges life puts in your way.

This hunt may be over, but our adventure is truly just beginning. Since the hunt, we have gotten engaged and are planning our wedding and "hunting-moon" for later this year. Some couples may opt for the resort or a beach for their honeymoon, but we can't think of any better way to start the next chapter of our relationship than in camo making more epic memories




BOOTS THAT YOUR GUIDE TRUSTS

★★★★★

SCAN ME



MOUNTAIN HUNTER



- 3.75 lbs
- 9" Tall
- 2.6mm Perwanger Leather
- eVENT Waterproof Lining
- L&S Perfect Shank
- L&S PU Rocker Cam Midsole
- Pro-Form Rubber Heel
- PU Heel Stabilizer
- Vibram Madox EVO Outsole
- Full Length Removable Insole

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PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD



*Casey Nick, Mexico
Goulds Turkey 2025*



*Jim Fitzgerald, Florida
Osceola Turkey 2025*



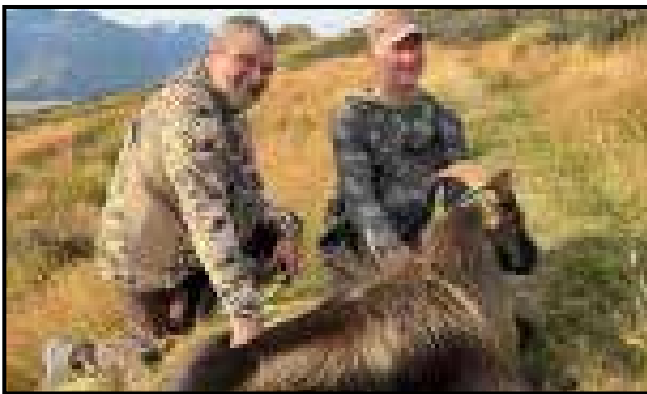
*Susan Fitzgerald, Florida
Osceola Turkey 2025*



*Susan and Jim Fitzgerald, Florida
Jim's alligator 2025*



*Susan Fitzgerald, Florida
Iguana, 2025*



*Claude Howard, New Zealand
Tahr, 2025*



*Claude Howard, New Zealand
Chamois, 2025*



Claire F. With her first Turkey taken on her first hunt ever with Donald C. Martin and her Father Ryan on the Jim Bardin Ranch. This youth turkey hunt was purchased at the CA WSF annual fundraiser.



*Greg Tooley, British Columbia
Stone Sheep, 2025*



Left: The winner of the "Best Horned Game Animal" award—sponsored by CA WSF—at the 2025 California Association of Taxidermy (CAT) show was a beautifully mounted Barbary (Aoudad) sheep, complete with detailed habitat work by Eric Gould. Eric is a longtime supporter of CA WSF, a frequent donor to our fundraiser dinners, and a proud Life Member.

Below is the award being presented to Eric.



The Give A Lamb A Drink challenge coin and Pontious Drinker challenge coin, very popular at the fundraiser, are both now available in the CA WSF store for just \$20 each. Your purchase directly supports efforts to provide vital water sources across Southern California for our majestic bighorn sheep and other desert wildlife.

Also available: Pontious GALAD numbered bronze coins, created to support the installation of a wildlife drinker dedicated to our friend Andrew Pontious, who gave his life in the line of duty fighting fires in 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.

BRAD ABOLTIN	RANDY FORTUNE, DISTINGUISHED LIFE #7	TRAVIS JESSOP	CHRISTOPHER PEATRESS	PAUL SCHULTHEIS
JUSTIN AKINS	RICK GARZOLI JR	BOB KEAGY	JEREMY PECHTEL	RICH SELLERS
PEGGY MAY BLOOM	JACOB GARRETT	BRYN KERN	JEFF PERACCHI	ALAN SHULTZ
VINCE BLOOM	SCOTT GIBSON	MAK KERN	DON PERRIEN	DAN SMITH, JR.
MIKE BOREL	ANTHONY GIGLIOTTI	RANDY LASKOWSKY	JOHN PESTORICH	DAN SMITH, III
JAKE BRICKER	STEVE GINGRAS	PEGGY BARNETT LEE	DON POWERS	DANIEL SMITH, IV
JIM BRICKER	BEN GORDON	CHASEN MARLER	DON PRIEST	RENEE SNIDER
JED BRUSSEAU	TINA GORDON	MAKENA MARLER	CAROLINE PYNE, DVM,	ADAM STARR
ADAM CASAGRANDE	CASEY HADDOX	DONALD C MARTIN	DISTINGUISHED LIFE #1	BROOKS STILTZ
KEVIN CHENG	JESSICA HADDOX	JEFF F. MARTIN	CONNOR PYNE, DVM,	BILL TITTLE
DAVID COMBS	JUSTIN HALLOCK	JOSEPH MASSOLO	DISTINGUISHED LIFE #2	MICHAEL TORRES
KEN CROTHER	DAVID HARTWIG, DISTINGUISHED LIFE #6	ROGER MCCOSKER	GLEN PYNE, DVM,	GREG TOOLEY
WILLIAM CULLINS	STEEN HENRIKSEN	RICHARD M. MCDREW	DISTINGUISHED LIFE #5	NATHAN TREADWELL
JOSHUA DARNELL	CORY HIGGINS	KYLE MEINTZER	MADISON PYNE,	REUBEN VALLES
CLIFF DAVIS	TYLER W. HIGGINS	NICK METTA	DISTINGUISHED LIFE #4	ZACK WALTON
BRET DISMUKES	GARY HILL	ANDY MOECKEL	TRAVIS PYNE, DISTINGUISHED LIFE #3	JOHN WARE
JIM DISMUKES	ERNEST HOLLOWAY	ROBERT "BO" MORGAN	TOM REA	JIM WARNER
NOAH DISMUKES	PATTY HOLLOWAY	PATRICK OILAR	MASON ROGERS	SHAINA WARNER
DAN EVENSON	SHAD HULSE	JOHN OLDENKAMP	DAVE ROWAN	SIMON WHETZEL
SCOTT FINLEY	BRETT JEFFERSON	NATHAN OLDENKAMP		DARRYL WILLIAMS
JIM FITZGERALD				SHAWN WOOD

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)

Upgrade your CA WSF Life Membership to DISTINGUISHED Life Membership (\$1,000) to receive THREE chances to WIN the special Life Members item/hunt.

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

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

ADMINISTRATIVE/TECHNICAL AND EVENT MANAGEMENT

POSITIONS AVAILABLE AT CA WSF

After 20+ years our long-time administrator and event manager, Beverly Valdez, has decided to retire. Beverly will remain as our newsletter publisher and continues to be very committed to wild sheep. As we move forward, we are looking to fill the remaining responsibilities through one (or two) remote positions: Technical/Administrative Support and Event Management.

We are seeking one or two individual who:

- Have a passion for wild sheep and wildlife conservation
- Can work independently to accomplish project goals
- Communicates effectively and collaborates well with board members, volunteers, partners, and vendors
- Is comfortable with basic to advanced technology, remote work tools, and adaptable to learning new systems
- Brings energy and enthusiasm to managing small events, fundraisers, or field activities
- Owns computer and has internet access (Macintosh is compatible with current systems)
- Able to respond to phone calls, email and faxes within 24 hours, except during scheduled vacations, public holidays, and weekends

This opportunity is ideal for someone looking for a second career while supporting a cause they believe in. If you or someone you know might be a great fit for either (or both) of these positions please contact Mike Borel (mike.borel@kearney.com).

EVENT MANAGEMENT KEY RESPONSIBILITIES:

Follow up with venues and vendors to ensure contract compliance and event success

Coordinate event setup and breakdown, working with CA WSF volunteers

Develop and manage event checklists and timelines (Google Sheets, Excel)

Manage logistics for decor, equipment, signage, registration, and permits

Communicate with vendors, guests, volunteers, and donors to ensure smooth on-site operations

Oversee on-site execution and troubleshoot issues as they arise

Maintain inventory of event supplies and promotional items as requested

Manage online auction platform (OnlineHuntingAuctions.com)

Communicate with guests, donors, and vendors before and after events

Create or assist with event materials (flyers, programs, signage)

EXPERIENCE / QUALIFICATIONS PREFERRED:

Strong organizational and multitasking skills

Experience setting up or hosting small to medium events (personal or professional)

Ability to work evenings and weekends as needed for event coverage

Comfortable working independently and as part of a team

Passion for community engagement and the mission of CA WSF)

TECHNICAL/ADMINISTRATIVE KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

Provide essential administrative, communications, and technical support to ensure smooth operations, coordination between board members and partners, and effective execution of projects and events.

Act as initial contact for email, phone, postal mail, and fax inquiries

Route communications appropriately to board members or committee chairs

Maintain digital records and organized filing systems (Google Drive or similar)

Provide communication support (drafting, editing, distributing emails, etc.)

Manage basic website updates and e-commerce (ECWID, hosting platform)

Support the Treasurer with bookkeeping tasks (invoices, reimbursements, PayPal, QuickBooks)

Maintain and update contact databases (Filemaker), donor/ membership records

Segment and send custom email communications using Mailchimp and Filemaker

EXPERIENCE / QUALIFICATIONS PREFERRED

Strong organizational and time-management skills

Excellent written and verbal communication

Comfortable working remotely and independently

Proficiency in standard office products (word processing, spreadsheet, email, cloud storage)

Ability to communicate effectively with diverse stakeholders

Able to build and manage multi-table relational database, adding new features as required

Please call Mike Borel 925-330-0463 to discuss further.

ANNUAL FUNDRAISING DINNER UPDATE

*By Donald C Martin and Ken Crother
Fundraising Committee Co-Chairs*

Thank all of you for making California Wild Sheep Foundation's Annual Fundraising Dinner one of the best wildlife conservation events in the State of California. What a great time! All of you, our members deserve the credit. 90% of life is "just showing up" and all of you certainly did! We had record turnout and that's the closest we've ever come to having 300 people in the room! Once again, this successful event was the byproduct of the sum of efforts provided by your entire Board of Directors. I want to thank them all! But none of it could be possible without all of you!

I'd like to thank our guest speaker, Matt Ward of "A Hunter's Quest", for joining us and sharing his unique personal story and how hunting has dramatically changed his life. Matt gave a very compelling presentation during his afternoon key-note speech and was very well received by all of you that were able to make it. Even more so, his abbreviated video presentation and personal message of conservation that he shared with us during the dinner was not only heartfelt and genuine but reflects the positive impact all of us can make when we dedicate to sharing all that is "good" about hunting with those around us. Thank you Matt!

Thanks to all of our Board members and volunteers that worked the event. Special thanks to: Caroline Pyne and Roz



**CAROLINE PYNE (L) AND
ROZ BOREL**

Borel who volunteered for our wine wall, Scott Gibson and Greg Tooley who manned our membership booth, Jim and Susan Fitzgerald who headed up our silent auction, Beverly Valdez and John Ware for handling our payments, Glen Pyne and Dr. Ryan Brock and Family for our youth activities, Matt St. Martin and Family for all of their hard work before and during the event, Bob Keagy for

his hard work on event underwriting and Don Priest for his efforts on the live auction, and finally, Mandi and Noel from Mandi's Models handling ticket sales. In addition, thanks to all the Board members and volunteers too numerous for me to name them all. If I left you out, don't feel left out. I thank you.

We had a very busy schedule for the evening and had a wide line up of awards and recognitions. Congratulations to our Ram award winners. Todd Roberts was the "Oldest Ram" Award winner with a 14 year old ram from the Newberry/Rodman/Ords taken with the help of Dry Creek Outfitters. David Comer was our "Largest Ram" Award winner with a 170 4/8 net, 169 1/8 net ram taken with the help of Kellogg Trophy

Hunts.

To follow, this year's "Bleich/Weaver Service Above Self" Awards for dedication to the conservation of wildlife and specifically desert bighorn sheep by an agency employee were awarded to: Alex Hunter, Laboratory Technician II, CA Dept. of Fish and Game, and Tim Glenner, Fish and Wildlife Investigative Aid, Wildlife Investigations Laboratory, CA Dept. of Fish and Game. Congratulations to them both for a lifetime of service and dedication to CA's bighorn sheep.

And finally, the 2025 CA Wild Sheep Foundation "Above and Beyond" Award in recognition of service and support of the CA Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation and California's desert bighorn sheep was awarded to Distinguished Life

Member and Board Member Jim Fitzgerald.

Jim has served on the Board from 2004-2011 and 2018 to present. Jim has been a longtime volunteer and supporter of the chapter, serving in many capacities. He has served as an SCBS area captain and has participated in drinker monitoring,



**JIM FITZGERALD (L) AND
DON MARTIN**

construction, and repair/replacement projects. Jim has participated in emergency water hauls, GALAD drinker construction and has been a generous supporter of CA WSF Youth and fundraisers. Congratulations Jim and thank you for your hard work for CA's wild sheep.

Our live auction portion of the evening was pre-empted with our standard call for support for "Give a Lamb a Drink", however this year there was a special fundraising effort to raise funds for a wildlife drinker that would be dedicated to our friend Andrew Pontious who gave his life in the line of duty 06/14/2024 while responding to a heavy equipment fire in Southern California. I'm confident we raised enough to meet our goal and then some. Thanks all of you in attendance for supporting this very special project. We will keep all of you informed as the water project in his honor moves forward.

Our spotlight item for the live auction this year was, for the first time ever, a desert bighorn Unit 10-Newberry/Rodman/Ords Governor's fundraising permit. In its first time ever at auction, it set the bar high selling at an impressive \$110,000. Taking into consideration the 1937 Pittman Robertson Act's 3 to 1 matching Federal funds, that will generate nearly \$418,000 for California's bighorn sheep program. That's a pretty good start to this new fundraising tag opportunity. Congratulations to the lucky winning bidder and good luck this Fall!

We had a lot of winners in the room as we went through our random drawing giveaways and I want to thank everyone who participated. Thanks to Turners Outdoorsman-Sacramento for acting as our FFL and helping in that effort to provide opportunity to all of our members. I would also like to thank them for donating \$25 gift cards to some of our youth attendees. Thank you Turner's Outdoorsman. But everyone was there 'til the end to see the big winners of the evening and, unfortunately, our Stone Sheep winner, Jerome G. of New Mexico was not in the room. But we congratulate Jerome and want to thank Aaron Florian of Yukon Stone Outfitters for helping us make this opportunity possible for our supporters. However, for our life member giveaway, the winner had to be in the room and that lucky winner was new life member Robbie J. He walked away with a Weems Desert Bighorn

sheep hunt in Baja, Mexico with our good friend Bo Morgan of Go with Bo Outfitting and Guide Service. Congratulations Robbie and Thanks to Bo and his family for their continued support!

I want to thank each and every one of you that attended for participating and making this one of the best events we have had in years. Our event will be moving next year and as your fundraiser co-chair, I will keep you informed as soon as possible to all the opportunities we will provide you in 2026.

Thanks again for making California Wild Sheep Foundation's Annual Fundraising Dinner the best wildlife conservation party in the State!



MIKE BOREL



JIM AND SUSAN FITZGERALD



ROBBIE JOHNSON



MATT WARD



Braud and Co Iceland Cinnamon Rolls (2 Day Recipe) from Tony Gigilotti

INGREDIENTS

Dough Recipe

- 750g of 00 or pizza flour
- 10g of salt
- 112g of sugar
- 112g room temperature butter
- 1 egg
- 25g of fresh yeast or 1 tablespoon of instant yeast
- 315g of room temperature water

Filling

- 200g of sugar
- 200g of butter
- 200g of marzipan
- 15g of cinnamon

Wash/Icing

- 1 egg
- 2 tablespoon of milk
- Powdered sugar



DIRECTIONS

DAY 1

DOUGH

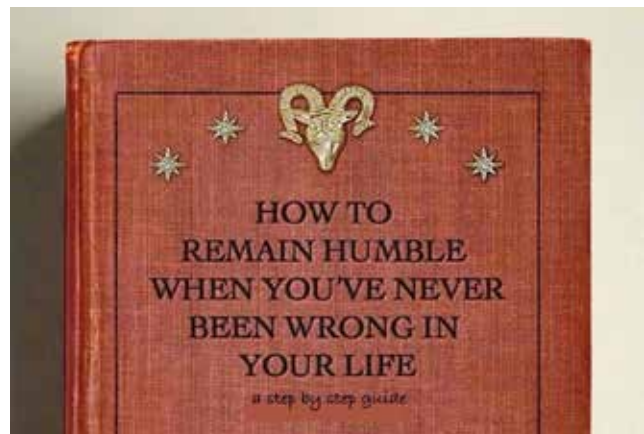
- 1) Mix water and yeast well allowing to sit for 5 minutes
- 2) Mix the flour, salt, sugar, egg, and butter mixing until the dough is smooth
- 3) Roll the dough into a ball and place onto a cooking sheet our mixing bowl utilizing parchment paper to prevent sticking and then cover with foil
- 4) Let the dough rest for 30 mins before putting it in the fridge overnight

FILLING

- 1) Use a cheese grater to break the marzipan up as much as possible
- 2) Mix the marzipan and sugar first before slowly adding the butter then the cinnamon
- 3) Continue mixing until it is a consistent spreadable texture then cover with saran wrap and leave on the counter over night

DAY 2

- 1) Roll the dough out to ~20" wide and 35"
- 2) Spread the filling on the dough in an even layer. If you have a dough cutter cut the dough into 12 strips
- 3) Roll the dough tightly, tucking the end underneath the bottom before placing them on parchment paper and covering with saran wrap
- 4) Let the buns rise for about an hour
- 5) Preheat your oven to 375
- 5) Mix the egg and milk then brush over the buns before dusting with powdered sugar
- 6) Bake for 10-15 minutes



CA WSF DIRECTOR CANDIDATE BIOGRAPHIES FOR THE 2025 ELECTION SLATE

Listing is Alphabetical by Last Name



BRAD ABOLTIN — Tehachapi, CA

Bradley Aboltin: born and raised in California; I started hunting at the age of 12 and ever since that young age have been interested in one day hunting sheep. I have been fortunate enough to hunt all over the United States, including Alaska for my very own Dall sheep in 2022 and hope to have more opportunities throughout my life to hunt what I consider the pinnacle of hunting. Living only two to three hours from all the California Desert Bighorn sheep ranges has provided me the opportunity to be able to put boots on the ground and see the herds firsthand. Additionally, being a guide for the past six years for San Geronio Wilderness Outfitters has given me experience and knowledge of the landscape of the Desert sheep and situations presented to these animals, as well as having my hand in water haul projects, repair projects and observation projects. I am a Summit Life member of Wild Sheep Foundation as well as a Distinguished Life member of the California Wild Sheep Foundation and a member of S.C.B.S. Being 36 years

of age, I hope to bring a younger perspective and vision to the California Wild Sheep Foundation with a mindset of having a helping hand in the growth of the sheep herd and future opportunities! I have a 9 year old son and am hopeful to do my part in conservation and management of wild sheep to afford him the opportunities and experiences I have been blessed with and to share my passion with him.

MEMBERSHIP – Distinguished Life Member



VINCE BLOOM — Galt, CA

Conservation has been in my life from an early age. Growing up I lived on the Modoc National Wildlife Refuge, my Dad was the refuge manager. I helped him band ducks and spent countless hours in the field.

Being raised in that environment was life changing. Hunting has always been in my life and makes me feel grounded. Hunting is family.

I have been on 3 sheep hunts, and have taken a Dall sheep in the Wrangles AK. I have a BC Stone sheep hunt booked for this September.

I met my wife at a Sacramento Safari Club Banquet and my entire family supports hunting and conservation. I am a member of many organizations: Life Member of WSF, RMEF, GSCO, SCI, Arizona Antelope Foundation, Arizona Wildlife Federation, Idaho WSF, Montana WSF, Wyoming WSF, Oregon WSF, Eastern WSF.

Doubling the number of desert bighorn sheep in California is a worthy ideal I'd like to be a part of! Thank you for your consideration.

MEMBERSHIP – Distinguished Life Member



JAKE BRICKER — Yorkville, CA

. Jake brings a unique and dynamic background to the board, blending a lifetime of outdoor expertise with professional leadership experience. With over 30 years of personal hunting experience and two decades as a professional hunting guide, he has a deep-rooted passion for backcountry hunting and wildlife conservation. A former competitive freediver and freediving instructor, he thrives in extreme environments and has participated in numerous endurance and extreme races. As a successful outdoorsman and aspiring sheep hunter, Jake is committed to protecting wild sheep populations and the rugged landscapes they inhabit.

Professionally, Jake has served as a project manager across a range of industries including construction and agriculture, where he honed his skills in logistics, operations, and stakeholder coordination. He has extensive experience working with government permitting agencies such as the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service,

and the Army Corps of Engineers. This background gives him a strong understanding of the regulatory landscape surrounding habitat and wildlife management. Jake is eager to bring his deep field knowledge, regulatory experience, and commitment to conservation to support the mission of putting and keeping sheep on the mountain.

MEMBERSHIP – Distinguished Life Member



MATTHEW BURKE — San Jose, CA

Matthew (Matt) Burke was born and raised in Southern California. His educational experience includes a bachelor's degree in Agricultural Business Management from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and a Masters of Business Administration from Santa Clara University. Matt retired in 2021 following a 25-year career with Wells Fargo where he managed credit portfolios comprised of businesses ranging from family-owned farming enterprises to fortune 500 corporations.

In his capacity as a California WSF board member/current Treasurer, Matt has been active in the chapter's finances, administration and fundraising activities. He was Auction Chair for the 2006 banquet and Raffle Chair for the 2007 banquet. A passionate bowhunter, Matt has hunted a number of western states and Canadian provinces, and Alaska. He has a great interest in wildlife conservation and the defense of the rights of hunters, evidenced by his distinguished

life membership in the California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation, life memberships in the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and National Rifle Association (NRA), and membership in the Wild Sheep Foundation.

MEMBERSHIP – Distinguished Life Member



TONY GIGLIOTTI — Davis, CA

Tony has worked in land rights, environmental permitting, and is currently a project manager for hydroelectric facilities ensuring projects have beneficial use for a variety of environmental and recreation stakeholders. Tony is a life member with California Wild Sheep Foundation (CA WSF), Wild Sheep Foundation (WSF), Society for Conservation of Bighorn Sheep, National Rifle Association, California Rifle and Pistol Association, Muley Fanatic Foundation, and California Waterfowl Association.

Tony grew up hunting waterfowl alongside his father and grandfather who each instilled a love of the outdoors, and appreciation for wildlife in him at an early age. With many fond memories of enjoying, not just the hunt, but also the time spent outdoors with friends and family, he would like to volunteer to be a CA WSF board member. As a strong proponent of wildlife conservation, he recognizes the importance of the CA WSF organization in supporting the success of the

sheep population in California. He looks forward to serving on the board and ensuring opportunities for the next generation of outdoorsmen and hunters.

MEMBERSHIP – Distinguished Life Member



BOB KEAGY — Lafayette, CA

Bob, aged 80, is completing his seventh term as CA WSF Director. He is still an avid hunter, holding both the SCI World Hunting Award Ring, together with the GSC/OvisTriple Slam and "Capra Super Twenty". Bob was both surprised and honored at our 2022 Fundraiser to receive our Chapter's "Above and Beyond Award" for his efforts.

Bob firmly believes in the "Great Arc of the Wild Sheep", the range of sheep hunting opportunities stretching from the Mediterranean islands through the Alps, Himalayas, Pamirs, Altai, and, in America, the Rockies, ending up in the sere mountains of Sonora and Baja. "You can grow old and grey waiting to draw a North American sheep tag, or you can pay nose-bleed prices" says Bob, who, alternatively, has hunted ten different countries for 14 different varieties of sheep. His love for the writings of Jack O'Connor led him to his first sheep hunt in British Columbia in 1979, a second Stone ram in 1981, followed by Nepalese Blue, some very wonderful Asian argalis and

urial, aoudad, European free-range mouflon, and, finally, desert and California Bighorn. In addition to sheep, he has also hunted ibex. He strongly feels that North American hunting has gotten too expensive, and that more attainable alternatives such as ibex, chamois and mouflon should be considered for wonderful mountain hunting experiences.

Bob is very dedicated to the hunting cause, is an active member of several SCI national committees, President of his SCI local Chapter, and immediate past President of the Mzuri Safari Club of San Francisco, as well as a Chadwick Ram Society member. He is an active supporter of GALAD, and would like to continue to assist in California Wild Sheep's many great efforts.

MEMBERSHIP – Distinguished Life Member



DONALD C. MARTIN — Elk Grove, CA

Originally from Madera and a graduate of Humboldt State University, Don has been a Guide/Outfitter in Alaska for over 28 years. He is currently a Guide/Outfitter in California for Tule Elk, Columbian Black-tailed Deer, Wild boar and turkeys. In the off-season, Don is a bass fishing guide on the CA Delta, and resides in Elk Grove with his wife, Katie.

Having guided nearly 350 successful hunts for 18 different species of North American big game, Don recognizes the need for sound science-based wildlife management and is dedicated to "putting and keeping sheep on the mountain." He has participated in multiple drinker builds in Southern CA and is dedicated to supporting CA WSF's "GALAD" program to provide the water necessary to double the number of desert bighorns in CA and fulfill our goal to expand public hunting opportunity in our original "Drive to 35" public hunting permits campaign.

Don has been on the Board of Directors for over 16 years. He has served as the President of CA WSF 2020-2025; Vice President, both as Southern and Northern CA VP, for an additional 6 years; and the Fundraising Co-Chair since 2017. Don has hosted the annual fundraiser for CA WSF since 2017. In addition, He has hosted events for WSF, and its Chapters or Affiliates nationwide and in Canada. He was awarded the CA WSF "Above and Beyond Award" in 2015 and the Wild Sheep Foundation's "G.C.F. Dalziel Outstanding Guide Award" in 2018. Don is a Summit Life Member of WSF, a Chadwick Society Member, and a life member of 11 WSF Chapters & Affiliates. He also maintains memberships in the NRA, SCI, GSC/OVIS, and the P&Y Club.

Donald C. Martin is standing for reelection to the Board and would appreciate your vote to continue his conservation efforts.

MEMBERSHIP – Distinguished Life Member



CASEY NICK — Atascadero, CA

My name is Casey Nick and I am hoping to become a board member for the California Wild Sheep Foundation.

I am 29 years old and live on the central coast of California where I was raised on my family's cattle ranch. I have been an outdoor and hunting enthusiast all my life. From my first turkey at 8 years old I have always been passionate about hunting and the outdoors.

I took my hunting passion and turned it into a career as of 2018 when I started my business, Lost Valley Outfitters. I guide pig, turkey, blacktail deer and tule elk hunts throughout the central coast on over 30,000 acres of private ranches that I have leased.

I have had the opportunity to guide for Matt and Cliff St. Martin of Dry Creek Outfitters starting in 2020 and have become addicted to desert bighorn sheep and the places they call home. I have

gained a lot of knowledge on our sheep herds throughout the state and hope this experience can help if I am elected as a board member. I am a proud member of CA WSF and I hope to help the organization with my in-the-field knowledge to help keep sheep on the mountain as well as increase populations throughout the state. I also hope to help in adding units for hunting management in mountain ranges that have healthy and thriving herds.

MEMBERSHIP – Distinguished Life Member



ANDY OHANESIAN — Sacramento, CA

Andrew Ohanesian is a Sacramento native who began hunting as a young man with friends and family in Northern California's wetlands for ducks and foothills for deer, pig and turkey. Andrew is a Life member of the WSF and has attended many California and National banquets.

He holds a degree in business administration from UC Berkeley and is a certified public accountant and works in real estate. He and his wife Julie, a veterinarian, make their home in Sacramento, CA and are busy raising their two boys, Clyde and Woody.

If elected, Andrew will do his best to live up to the high standards of the WSF and help pass on sheep hunting opportunities to future generations.

MEMBERSHIP – Life Member



JOHN OLDENKAMP — Bakersfield, CA

I was born and raised in the Chino, CA area. I moved to Bakersfield, CA in 2005 following my father's business expansion into the Central Valley. He started a trucking company picking up raw milk from the dairies in Southern California and then in Kern and Tulare counties. My brother and I now own and operate these logistic companies after my father's passing in 2014. I give credit to him for sparking the flame that will burn a lifetime.

At an early age, my first hobby was hunting birds and small game on my grandfather's dairy farm, but after my first big game hunting trip at the age of 10 with my father Butch, it turned into my PASSION. Now, if you ask my wife if western big game hunting is my passion, she will reply "yes" but she will then tell you, that wild sheep are my obsession! Coming from a non-hunting family, she's been a great sport and supports me in all my hunting journeys. She even lets me drag her to the annual sheep week in Reno! So, I thank her for the love and support in pursuing this passion.

Memberships: WSF Summit Life Member, CA WSF Distinguished Life Member, Idaho WSF Life Member, RMEF Life Member.

John invites your call (951) 453-0646 or email john@oldenkamptrucking.com for any questions.

MEMBERSHIP – Distinguished Life Member

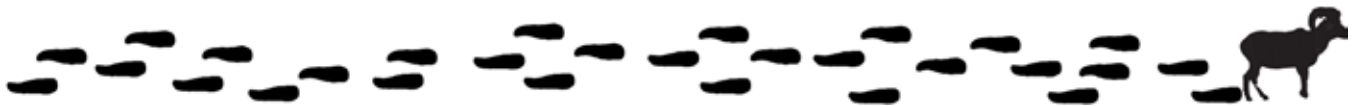


GLEN PYNE — Yorba Linda, CA

Glen Pyne was born and raised in Southern California. He received his BS in Animal Science from Cal Poly, Pomona and his DVM degree from Ross University. Although primarily a small animal surgeon today, Glen began his career as a mixed animal practitioner in Ohio and currently donates his services to the Fullerton High School Districts FFA program.

Glen is active in Rotary Club International as a former Vocational Chairperson and Paul Harris Fellow. An avid hunter, Glen has hunted most of the western states as well as Canada, Europe, and Africa. Glen has been a supporter of CA WSF and the Wild Sheep Foundation for many years, in particular helping support and grow the youth programs, and hopes to continue his conservation efforts in his third term as a member of the CA WSF Board of Directors.

MEMBERSHIP – Distinguished Life Member



Board members elected this year will join the following individuals who are currently serving the second year of their terms:

Mike Borel
Jim Fitzgerald
Scott Gibson
Ben Gordon
Don Priest
Brenton Scott
Greg Tooley
Steve Torres

We also extend our sincere thanks to Ken Crother and Mike Torres, who have decided not to seek reelection this year. They will be missed, and we are grateful for their dedicated service to CA WSF and their continued love of wild sheep.

CA WSF 2025-2026 DIRECTORS BALLOT

The California Wild Sheep Foundation Nominating Committee is pleased to present eleven candidates for Board of Director positions. These positions are for two-year terms beginning July 1, 2025. We believe the candidate biographies on the prior pages will provide you with the input needed to vote; however, should you have additional questions feel free to contact me. You may also contact Beverly at the office (forthesheep@gmail.com or 650-302-3744 phone) and she will forward information.

Mike Borel
Nominating Committee Chair 2025
mike.borel@kearney.com

Putting and Keeping Sheep on the Mountains

VOTING FORM

This is the voting form in the newsletter (you may also receive this via email; please vote only by email or by using this form). You may vote for a total of eight candidates, including write-in votes.

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR VOTE

Your ballot must be received no later than 5 p.m. on June 28, 2025.

You may mail your ballot to the CA WSF office at:

CA WILD SHEEP FOUNDATION
1620 Williams Hwy #151
Grants Pass, OR 97527

Or reply to the email sent to you to place your vote.

Remember: Vote no more than ONCE for each candidate (no cumulative voting). Vote for up to EIGHT candidates. Vote must be received no later than 5 p.m. on June 28, 2025.

CANDIDATES (Listed randomly)

_____ Donald C. Martin
_____ John Oldenkamp
_____ Brad Aboltin
_____ Glen Pyne
_____ Matt Burke
_____ Casey Nick
_____ Vince Bloom
_____ Bob Keagy
_____ Tony Gigliotti
_____ Jake Bricker
_____ Andrew Ohanesian

_____ Your Write-in Candidate

Your Name: _____ optional

Email or Phone: _____ required

CA FNAWS dba Ca Wild Sheep Foundation is a not-for-profit organization with the goal of KEEPING SHEEP ON THE MOUNTAIN through conservation, education, and promotion of professional management to ensure generations to come are able to experience the phenomenal beauty of wild sheep. CAWSF tax identification number is 68-0481140.

ONE COUNTRY, TWO CHAMOIS SPECIES, THREE DAYS (PART 1)

By John Ware, Distinguished Life Member

It's always hard to resist the opportunity to hunt a new species in a new place—especially when that species is a mountain dweller with a unique appearance. Serbia is not a country many think of when they think of hunting. In fact, it might even be mistaken for Siberia in some people's minds. For us, our initial association was a vague recollection of the U.S. bombing it back in the '90s, and its proximity to Ukraine raised some questions about the current state of the Ukrainian/Russian conflict.

A little research reminded us that the U.S. became involved in the region through NATO, responding to Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic's campaign of ethnic cleansing against Kosovar Albanians. The history is further complicated by the fact that Serbia was then a part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia—a country that eventually splintered into several independent nations. First Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Slovenia broke away, followed by Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia, which were originally the six republics that formed Yugoslavia. Finally, Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008.

Hunting takes you to interesting places, and we believe you're obliged to learn something along the way. Luckily, we never encountered anyone who seemed to hold a grudge against the U.S. for those past conflicts.

We had planned an extended trip across Europe for both hunting and sightseeing. The trip would culminate with a hunt for chamois and other species in Serbia, guided by Aleksandar "Sasha" Belancic, owner/operator of European Hunting Adventures (EHA) Safari Art. Sasha had generously donated several hunts to our Safari Club International (SCI) chapter, and we felt compelled to take a chance on somewhere new. We initially planned to hunt predators and roe deer, but due to timing and seasons, we ultimately focused on chamois as our primary quarry.

Having spent a few weeks in Europe prior to our arrival in Serbia, we were well adjusted to the time zone and ready to dive in. We received helpful advice from other CA Wild Sheep Foundation (WSF) chapter members—particularly Mike Borel—when planning the trip.

Sasha and his son, Stefan, would be our constant companions for the duration of the hunt. From breakfast to the field to dinner, and even staying in the same hotels, they were ever-present. At first, we were somewhat ignorant of where we'd



*Tara National Park
Sacred Oak tree*

be hunting or even how large Serbia really was, but Sasha and Stefan proved to be excellent hosts, working hard to make it a great experience.

We had a hard departure deadline, set to ensure we made it back to the U.S. in time to recover and attend the Wild Sheep Foundation (WSF) National Convention. This added some pressure to complete the hunts quickly. Unlike in Africa, where a hunter might walk away satisfied even after tagging just half the species on their list, Serbia's system of pre-arranged permits, licenses, and limited tags meant Sasha had a financial and logistical stake in us being successful.

The Balkan chamois are primarily found in the mountainous western region of Serbia. One of the most stable populations resides in Tara National Park in the Drina River drainage. It was a surreal experience—driving through the gates of a national park with rifles and gear in tow. The hour-long drive from the hotel to the park saw the weather shift to snow, with a blustery cold wind. Originally, we planned to hunt from a repurposed tourist boat on the Drina, but the wind made the river too choppy for shooting.

Had time not been a concern, we might have called it a day—boat hunting is the standard procedure. But needing to take two chamois in short order, we split up. Sasha admitted our odds were low, but we had to try. Beverly went with Stefan in one direction, heading into the mountains, while John and Sasha drove along the river. Each group was accompanied by two "rangers"—our understanding was that they were park rangers and this was just one of their many duties. We were instructed by Sasha to tip them at the end of each day's hunt.

The landscape was beautiful, but harsh and steep. Beverly's vehicle reached the mountaintop after a harrowing, snow-swept drive with limited visibility. The rangers disembarked and walked the road, glassing the terrain. The road was narrow, steep, and full of switchbacks, so spotting was focused

both up and down the slopes. Stefan and Beverly waited for a report as the snow turned to freezing rain.

During the “road-stalk” down the mountain, they spotted a mature male chamois a few hundred yards below. The rangers were confident it was a good trophy. Beverly scrambled down the slope, got into position, and took her shot—aiming low to compensate for the steep angle. She followed up with a second shot. Fog rolled in quickly, thick and disorienting. When it lifted, the chamois was nowhere to be seen. Tension rose as some of the team feared it had escaped.

This was when the rangers’ true role became clear. Equipped with ropes and climbing gear, they would descend the mountain to locate and, hopefully, retrieve the animal. The gear was with John’s group, so they joined Beverly’s team to assist in the recovery. Snow accumulated quickly, and the chamois’ dark coloring blended into the black-and-white landscape. After several hours of searching, they found Beverly’s chamois—he had fallen or slid about 500 meters down, coming to rest behind a large rock. The second shot hadn’t been necessary.



Beverly with her Balkan chamois

John resumed hunting but saw no success that day. The teams regrouped at the ranger station, warming up by the stove. Pictures were taken of Beverly’s Balkan chamois with the Drina River in the background.

Over dinner, we reflected on the day’s events. We planned to try the boat again the next morning—it was expected to be calm and sunny. With fresh snow on the ground, chamois would likely move lower toward the river. This would be John’s best chance.

The next morning brought a surreal scene. A foot of snow had fallen overnight, and the streets were icy as we made our way back to the park. The temperature was a good 10 degrees colder than the day before. As we left the dock aboard a huge summer tour boat (which could hold 80 people), it felt like navigating the Grand Canyon in winter. The riverbanks on the Serbian side rose almost vertically—300 to 600 yards in places. The opposite bank belonged to Bosnia, but we ignored it for hunting purposes.



The Drina River on day two - smooth

We slowly motored upriver, passing floating summer houses that Sasha said we might need to shoot over—no one was home in winter. Eventually, the houses disappeared and the cliffs steepened to 75% or more. The hope was to find chamois near the water, allowing for 100-meter shots from the rear deck.

The boat was rigged with a clever homemade shooting rack. The hunter sat in a folding chair, rifle at the ready, surrounded by four guides—all pointing and directing simultaneously. “Next to the big tree!” someone would shout—there were thousands of big trees. “Lower! Lower!” another would say. Chamois were spotted in groups of five or more, but identifying a shooter was tough. All sexes have horns; the difference is just a few inches, barely visible at several hundred yards through black tree limbs.

After several missed shots, John finally connected. A clean hit sent the chamois rolling down the slope into the trees. The boat captain held the vessel steady in the current as an inflatable raft was deployed. Though John wanted to go along, he was persuaded not to—it was treacherous terrain, better suited to the experienced rangers.

They spent two hours trying to reach the downed animal but gave up, deeming it too dangerous. Sasha offered a solution: keep hunting. If we got another one, we’d forget about this one. If not, the rangers would try to retrieve the skull and cape after the snow melted—whether in a few days or in spring.



Hoar-frosted trees just one range beyond bare trees



John with his Balkan chamois

We continued upriver. John took a few more shots—one animal may have been wounded in the leg, but it escaped to unreachable terrain. Sasha commented, “You’re shooting high. Try holding at the bottom of the animal.” While wondering about the use of the turret, John adjusted accordingly.

Eventually, we spotted a chamois out in the open on a scree slope—much easier to see than in the forest. At about 300 meters, John took the shot. The animal dropped and rolled into the trees. The rangers launched the raft again and climbed up, this time successfully recovering the chamois. It had been hit through the brisket and shoulder. A second shot was taken at close range by one of the rangers to anchor it, unfortunately causing a 3-inch exit wound in the rear quarter.

The return trip was more comfortable, as John no longer had to freeze on deck. More photos were taken at the ranger cabin, and spirits were high. We’d seen at least 50 chamois

that day. John asked how the team determined which ones were shooters. Sasha replied, “We’ll always get the hunter a representative animal or better—sometimes it’s just luck.”

Inside the ranger cabin, we discovered it was “grind day.” A massive 11hp electric motor drove a meat grinder, and the



Rangers’ meat processing

rangers had piled hundreds of pounds of meat on a large table—over 4x10 feet, and up to two feet thick. Through Sasha, we learned the rangers saved all the animals taken that month and ground the meat for distribution among themselves and, somehow, others. It wasn’t clear how one made the “other” list—but it was a sight that would shock anyone familiar with a U.S. national park station.

With the Balkan chamois in the shed, we would soon head to another part of Serbia to continue our hunting adventure. After a rest day for Orthodox Christmas, we’d make our way to the opposite side of the country to pursue another variety of chamois: the Carpathian chamois.



ARGENTINA RED STAG

by Mike Torres, Distinguished Life Member

A couple of years ago I won a raffle for a New Mexico antelope hunt with the Arizona Antelope Foundation. This hunt was conducted by Bucks & Bulls Outfitters and run by their hunt manager Joaquin Capelle.

Joaquin also operates Argentina Outdoor Adventures in the Patagonia region of NW Argentina. A couple of hunters on my antelope hunt from Alaska and Montana had hunted with Joaquin in Argentina and shared their photos and stories of their very good hunts with him. I discussed hunting Red Stag with Joaquin and he advised mid March would be a good time to catch the roar. I booked a hunt for March 2025.

A couple of long flights put me in the alpine town of San Martin de Los Andes where Joaquin picked up me and another hunter Larry and we drove 2 hours to the ranch we would be hunting.

The ranch was about 80,000 acres, owned by the same family for the last 100 years. There was a very nice lodge with separate cabins overlooking a huge river valley surrounded by three mountain ranges. During the roar the stags leave the high country and pour into the river valley in search of the large population of resident Hinds (cow red deer). They certainly were doing just that. We saw hundreds of deer on a daily basis, with a couple hundred Red Stags competing for the Hinds. The roar was just that, instead of bugling like our elk, the Stags would roar like lions, starting in the evening going all night until mid morning. It was an incredible sound to try and sleep through.

The first 2 days we glassed the Stags sorting out many trying to locate the oldest ones. Joaquin targets the mature Stags in the 10-12 year old range. It's interesting in that the really old Stags walk with the level of their eyes lower than the line of their back. Once I got it down, it was easy to tell the difference between a big Stag and a big old Stag. Of the hundreds of Stags we looked at we determined that there were about 5 shooters and we focused on those. We had a big 14 pointer that looked like an elk and another big one with massive fronts and big crowns. I told Joaquin that I had lots of elk and wanted the one with the big crowns.

The next morning was my 74th Birthday and we decided to try for the Stag with the crowns. We found him just after dawn and stalked him through about 500 yards of brush, the wind was perfect and he stepped out at 239 yards. I was shooting a borrowed Bergara 30/06 with a Swarovski scope, I took a steady rest on shooting sticks and completely missed the Stag! I think I made a rookie mistake and jerked the trigger. I'm not used to missing very often and I was dumbfounded. We backed out, returned to the ranch for lunch and returned about 5:00pm.



Mike Torres, Argentine Red Stag

We located the Stag from the morning fiasco and started the stalk. While crawling through the brush the wind was swirling and a group of Hinds had us pinned down. We stayed motionless for 1 1/2-2 hours waiting for the wind to stabilize. We could hear the Stag roaring behind us when the wind quit and the hinds moved off. We crawled through the grass behind some low bushes and I set up kneeling on Joaquin's backpack. Not wanting to repeat the morning mistake, I took my time, squeezed off the shot and hit him solidly at 225 yards. He got up and I hit him again. He was down this time. I was very thankful that my morning shooting wasn't good enough to wound him. When we got to him we found that he had broken off a point on his left side fighting that morning.

We completed photos, processed the meat and trophy, returning to the ranch for dinner. The camp cook had prepared a Birthday Cake for me and it turned out to be a very good birthday!

I got to watch the other hunter Larry shoot a very good Stag the next day. We spent the remaining days catching huge rainbow and brown trout on a beautiful high mountain lake.

This hunt was one of the top Free Range Red Stag hunts in Argentina. These are truly wild stags that do not live behind the wire. I highly recommend this hunt with Joaquin Capelle, Argentina Outdoor Adventures, 1-561-635-3672, Joaquin. capelle@outlok.com

GOVERNMENT ISSUES UPDATE

by Don Priest, Distinguished Life Member, Board Member

STATE OF CALIFORNIA 2025-2026 HUNT SEASON DESERT BIGHORN SHEEP TAG QUOTA

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) has released and presented their 2025/2026 hunt season Desert Bighorn Sheep (DBS) Tag Quota recommendations to the California Game Commission (Commission) on April 16, 2025. These recommendations by CDFW increases the number of tags significantly from a total of 23 Tags during the 2024/2025 season to 30 Tags for this upcoming season.

The total Tags are inclusive of Fundraising Tags, increasing from two last year to three in 2025/2026. These Fundraising Tags are a vitally important part of the Tag allocations as they are typically sold at auction, bringing significant funds to CDFW for desert bighorn sheep conservation. For example, the State of California Open Zone Tag sold for over \$200,000 at the Wild Sheep Foundation's Sheep Show in Reno, Nevada this past January. Additionally the Zone 10 Fundraising Tag sold for \$110,000 at the CA WSF banquet in April.

Some of the significant changes that occurred for this upcoming season include:

- The White Mountains Hunt Zone has now been split from a Summer Only Period to two harvest seasons, a Summer/Fall and Winter Period. The Summer/Fall Period shall be approximately six weeks starting in mid-August and the Winter Period for four weeks beginning in early January 2026. The total number of Tags for this Zone also increased from four to five.
- The Newberry/Rodman/Ord Mountains Hunt Zone also experienced a significant increase in Tag Quota, from six to eight Tags given the ever-growing herd sizes in that Zone. Given this increase, CDFW has split the season into an early and late season, both of approximately four weeks in duration with four Tags being made available to draw within each. First season shall be essentially the month of December 2025 and second season the month of January 2026. Check the CDFW Regulations for exact dates.
- After being closed for a number of years, the San Geronio Wilderness Hunt Zone will be re-opened for this 2025/2026 season with a single Tag available for draw.
- Lastly, two Hunt Zones have had their number of Tags increase by one. The Kelso Peak/Old Dad Mountains are increasing from two to three. And the Clark/Kingston Mountain Ranges shall be increasing from three to four.



The California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation would like to thank CDFW for all their hard work in the conservation of DBS. Only with their staffs continued dedication to successful population growth and herd range expansion management, in cooperation with organizations like CA WSF, does this make available the ever-increasing opportunities for sportsman to harvest one of California's majestic Desert Bighorn Sheep!

“The quest to resurrect the woolly mammoth on Earth has taken another, well, small step with the creation of the Colossal Woolly Mouse. The lab-engineered rodents have seven genes that have been tweaked by scientists, giving them “core traits” of the grand extinct beasts.

— <https://newatlas.com/science/woolly-mouse-mammoth/>



DESERT BIGHORN SHEEP PROGRAM UPDATE

By Danielle Glass, CDFW Environmental Scientist

California Department of Fish and Wildlife is excited to announce the publication of The Conservation and Management Plan for Bighorn Sheep in California. The plan covers all bighorn sheep in California but focuses mostly on the non-endangered desert bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni*). It provides an overview of the bighorn sheep in California, presents specifics about desert bighorn habitat ecology and recreational hunting opportunities, and describes CDFW's goals and objectives for the management of desert bighorn. The plan also identifies six Bighorn Conservation Units (BCUs) for which CDFW will develop individual management plans. The plan can be found on CDFW's website at: <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Mammals/Bighorn-Sheep>.

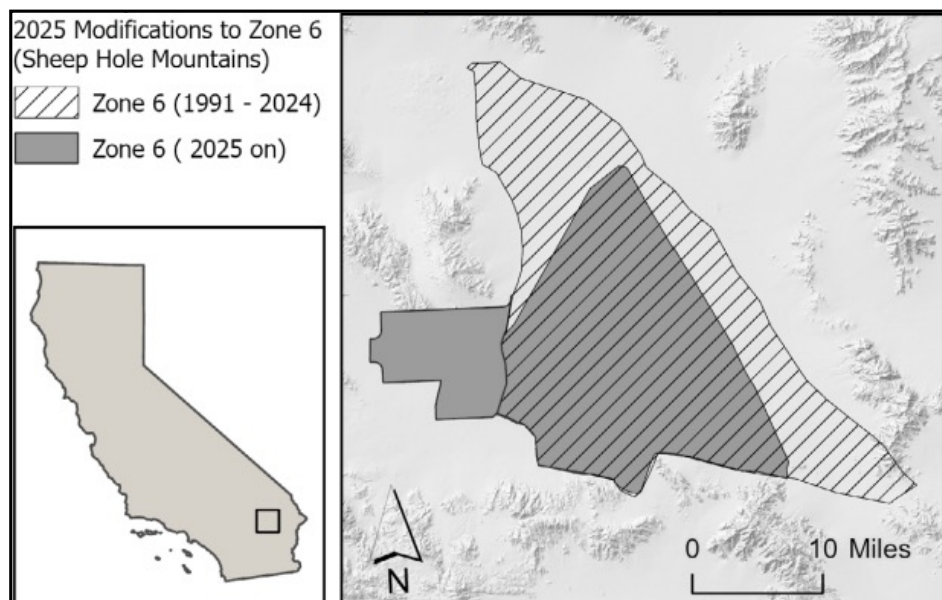
CDFW's desert bighorn program is also happy to announce changes to the hunting regulations that will increase hunter opportunity. Starting in the upcoming 2025-2026 hunt season, the Zone 7 White Mountain and Zone 10 Newberry, Rodman, and Ord hunts will have split seasons with hunters applying to hunt in a given season. The White Mountain seasons will be August 16-September 28 and January 3-February 1. This splitting of the White Mountain hunt will diversify hunting opportunities, as the White Mountain bighorn utilize somewhat different areas of the hunt zone in these two seasons. The Newberry, Rodman, Ord seasons will be December 6-January 3 and January 4-February 1. This splitting of the Newberry, Rodman, Ord hunt will facilitate hunters having the opportunity for solitude in their once-in-a-lifetime desert bighorn hunt.



Danielle Glass

There is also a modification to the hunt zone boundary of the Zone 6 Sheep Hole Mountains. This boundary was adjusted to include more habitat used by rams during the hunt season and to remove unoccupied habitat. This change was based on four years of GPS data from collared Sheep Hole rams. Lastly, language was adjusted for all three fundraising tags, ultimately allowing CDFW to maximize fundraising opportunities while ensuring sustainable harvest levels.

CDFW's desert bighorn program has remained busy over the past few months. Based on last year's camera data, we made hunt tag quota recommendations to the Fish & Game Commission.



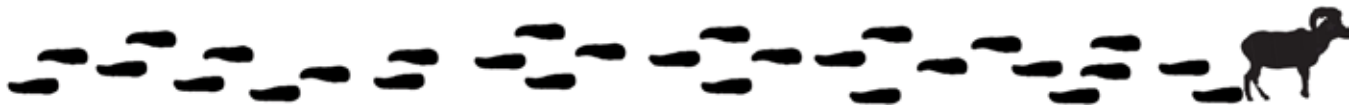
Modifications to the Zone 6 Sheep Hole Mountains boundary.

We also made significant progress installing this year's trail cameras, placing cameras in the Inyos, Last Chance, Tin Mountain, Grapevine, Hunter Mountain, Argus, Panamint, Nopah, Kingston, North Bristol, and Granite Mountains. We still plan to install cameras in the Old Dad, Marble, Orocopa, Cady, Newberry-Rodman-Ord, and Piute Mountains. In March, we collaborated with the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep to fix the Fay Dee Wildlife Water Development in the Orocopa Mountains.

Looking forward, CDFW's desert bighorn program has two new Scientific Aides starting soon. The Marble Mountain and White Mountain ground surveys, as well as the 2025 hunter orientation, are coming up. Staff time will also focus on completing scientific research, discussing water management with the Bureau of Land Management, and preparing for fall capture and helicopter work. Onwards!



CDFW and Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep volunteers after fixing the Fay Dee Wildlife Water Development in the Orocopa Mountains.



FUTURE RWWS INSTALLATIONS SCHEDULED

by Debbie Miller Marschke, Board of Directors, SCBS

Our ongoing installation of Rainwater Wildlife Systems is expanding, with even more units planned for the leased parcels of California's State Lands. After more than a decade of planning without the necessary approvals, we are now ready to take the biggest step yet in our journey to "Give A Lamb A Drink," in partnership with the California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation.

We invite you to volunteer for one of our upcoming State Lands guzzler installations. Please keep an eye out for announcements from forthesheep@gmail.com. While we often can't provide much advance notice, we'll share details with you as soon as they're available!

Dates have been selected for the 2025 Fall/Winter construction of new wildlife water systems. We've tried to work around hunting season dates with the hope that more CA WSF folks will be able to attend and pitch in. Our construction dates are:

Oct 24-26, 2025

Dec 5-7, 2025

Jan 9-11, 2026

Feb 20 - 22, 2026

Also, CDFW has a project in the Kingston Range to install cattle exclusion fencing around 2 critical springs. They've asked me to help recruit volunteers. The current target dates are October 17 - 19 2025. I realize that this date overlaps the opening day of bird season, but maybe folks can participate AND hunt as part of their trip.

CALIFORNIA'S SEVENTH BIGHORN SHEEP HUNT ZONE: THE SHEEP HOLE MOUNTAINS (PART I)

by Vernon C. Bleich

The history of bighorn sheep hunting in the Sheep Hole Mountains (SHM) is somewhat more complex than for the first six zones to be opened in California, and will appear in two parts. As with the Orocopia and San Geronio hunt zones, a management plan this management unit had been prepared earlier (Pauli and Bleich 1991), thereby paving the way for hunting bighorn sheep if ever it became appropriate to do so. Moreover, the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) previously had entered into a cooperative management plan for the mountain range (BLM 1984) that provided habitat improvement and population management options for bighorn sheep in what eventually became the Sheep Hole Mountains Bighorn Sheep Management Unit (Pauli and Bleich 1991).

The historical status of bighorn sheep in the SHM is poorly understood when compared to some populations elsewhere in California. The range is extremely rugged and very arid, and no natural water sources were known to exist at the time the management plan was prepared. Water was, however, available on a seasonal basis at a large natural rock tank, or tinaja, located in the northern part of the range (Weaver and Mensch 1971). Following their ground and aerial surveys, Weaver and Mensch (1971) recommended the development of artificial watering devices at two locations in the SHM, but only one had been constructed at the time the management was completed (Pauli and Bleich 1991).

That water development may have played a pivotal role in the persistence of bighorn sheep in the mountain range, and most certainly played a role in the upward trajectory of the population following an historic translocation of bighorn sheep to the SHM in 1984. Unlike California's other hunt zones, 31 bighorn sheep were translocated to the SHM with the intent of reestablishing bighorn sheep in a mountain range from which that species was considered extirpated, and with the hope of restoring a functioning metapopulation (Schwartz et al. 1986). The introduction of bighorn sheep was not carried out for the purpose of establishing an additional hunt zone, and its success would compound a future effort to do so.

HABITAT ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITIES

Habitat enhancements have played an important role in the history of this hunt zone, as was the situation with five of the six zones opened previously—the exception being the San Geronio Hunt Zone (Bleich 2025). In response to the recommendations proffered by Weaver and Mensch (1971), a water development was constructed in 1981 near the aforementioned tinaja, and it was christened “Sud’s Hole” in recognition of the many contributions made by

Glenn Sudmeier, of the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep (SCBS), to wildlife conservation. With that project completed, the problem of a lack of permanent surface water in the SHM was resolved—as long as annual precipitation was adequate and the new unit functioned as designed.



Despite the successful translocation and an increase in the population, bighorn sheep occupying the SHM had remained vulnerable to extirpation (Epps et al. 2004). Two additional water sources subsequently were constructed further south in the range, and the locations for those catchments were selected based on several factors to be described elsewhere in this account. Additionally, a fourth water source eventually was made available to serve as a backup for one of the additional catchments.

Representatives of the Bureau of Land Management, CDFG, SCBS, and Desert Wildlife Unlimited (DWU) worked cooperatively to construct these additional water sources. The first of these is located on the east side of the SHM, approximately midway between the north and south ends of the range. I don’t recall the rationale for the name “Bearclaw”, but site-selection for that development involved what likely was the first applications of a Geographic Information System (GIS) to the management of bighorn sheep and their habitat in California. Similar to what occurred in the Orocopia Mountains Hunt Zone, CDFG personnel collaborated with outside experts representing the University of Alaska, the University of Rhode Island, and the University of Capetown (yes, in South Africa) and used a GIS to develop a habitat selection model specific to the SHM. Information derived from that model (Bleich et al. 1992) and 401 aerial telemetry locations obtained from 11 female mountain sheep translocated to the range in 1984 and 1985 (see details below) were used to suggest the location of the new water development. Construction of the Bearclaw Wildlife Water Development was completed in 1993.

The existing management strategy was to use new sources of permanent surface water as a means of distributing bighorn sheep throughout the range by ‘stair-stepping’ them southward. Even in the absence of an increase in population density, such a result would lead to a greater number of bighorn sheep inhabiting the mountain range, and would

enhance the probability of population persistence during drought years in which forage availability likely would decline (Bleich 2008). Any enhancement of survival rates during drought years also would help maintain connectivity between the population in the SHM and those in proximate mountain ranges (Bleich 2009).

Following the positive response of the population to the Sud's Hole and the Bearclaw water developments, a third wildlife water development was constructed in 2008. This project was named "SD" to recognize Steve and DeeDee deJesus and their many contributions to the conservation of desert wildlife. The SD Wildlife Water Development is located on the west side of the SHM at approximately mid-range, and was also intended to encourage use of that general area by bighorn sheep and further expand the year-round distribution of the population. Timely construction of this development, however, was hindered by passage of the California Desert Protection Act in 1994, which also generated additional issues (Wehausen 2007, Kane 2008). As a result of the Act, the conservation of desert bighorn sheep became much more complicated (Bleich 2005; 2016). Overzealous interpretations of that legislation, bureaucratic inertia, pressure from special interest groups, and a lack of ecological foresight by legislators made wildlife conservation difficult at best (Bleich 1999a, b). As a result, construction of the SD Wildlife Water Development endured a long and difficult history, extending from its inception to final completion—a span of about 7 years.

A decade after the Bearclaw Wildlife Water Development was constructed, concerns about the efficacy of the water collection system arose. In 2014, representatives of SCBS and DWU placed an additional storage tank near the Bearclaw development, but water must be hauled to that location to ensure it is available year-round. Volunteers from those organizations have carried out that task and done so religiously since that additional water source was installed.

THE BIGHORN SHEEP POPULATION

As noted earlier, the population of bighorn sheep occupying the SHM historically was poorly understood and, until the 1980s, it had been largely ignored. Indeed, no thorough ground survey had been conducted from the time of the initial 'estimate' of 40 animals was posited by Don McLean of CDFG until Weaver and Mensch (1971) published the results of their effort (Table 1, at right). Thereafter, very little additional survey work was conducted until late in 1981 when experienced observers from CDFG Federal Aid Project W-26-D conducted an arial survey of the SHM, but no bighorn sheep were seen. That result confirmed that the population remained very low (Pauli and Bleich 1991), and at the time some considered the population to be extirpated. The result of the 1981 survey, however, paved the way for bighorn sheep to be translocated to the SHM from Old Dad Mountain, where bighorn sheep had been increasing in number and the population was providing animals for translocation to other Mojave Desert mountain ranges (Bleich et al. 1990, 2021).

The cooperative management plan (BLM 1984) that had facilitated the habitat improvements also facilitated the

translocation(s) of bighorn sheep into what became the Sheep Hole Mountains Bighorn Sheep Management Unit. In November of 1984, 11 animals (7 males, 4 females) were translocated to the SHM, and an additional 16 (4 males, 12 males) were translocated in July 1985, and four additional males were released in November 1992 (Bleich et al. 2021).

During early July 1985, an adult female that appeared to be uncollared was observed during a brief aerial survey, but no other animals, collared or uncollared, were seen during the flight. That observation suggested that a small population had persisted in the SHM prior to the initial translocation; it also is possible, however, that observers simply failed to see a collar on the animal. Given that uncertainty, the translocation of bighorn sheep to the SHM has been described as both an augmentation and a reintroduction by various investigators (Bleich et al. 2021, Epps et al. 2007, Wehausen and Epps 2021).

Whether or not an uncollared female had been present but not detected during the 1981 aerial survey, or since had immigrated to the SHM from the Bullion Mountains to the west or the Calumet Mountains to the east remains unknown. What is certain, however, is that bighorn sheep occasionally move among those mountain ranges (Pauli and Bleich 1991, Epps et al. 2007). Although the population in the SHM was thought extirpated prior to the translocations, that successful effort has helped re-establish what likely was an historical metapopulation in central Riverside County, but now is best described as a fragment of a much larger, desert-wide metapopulation that previously existed (Wehausen and Epps 2021). Jones and Deming (1953) and Weaver and Mensch (1971) had reported historical movements between the SHM and the Bullion Mountains, and between the SHM and Queen Mountain to the south, but no such movements had been reported in recent years. Shortly after the translocations in 1984 and 1985, aerial telemetry confirmed two-way movements between the SHM and the Bullion Mountains,

Table 1. Population 'estimates' of bighorn sheep inhabiting the Sheep Hole Mountains, 1940–2024.

Date	Population 'Estimate'	Source
1940	42	D. McLean (CDFG; unpublished data)
1946	15	D. McLean (CDFG; unpublished data)
1953	15	F. Jones (CDFG; <i>in</i> Buechner 1960)
1957	15	F. Jones (CDFG; unpublished data)
1971	12	Weaver and Mensch (1971)
1975	12	Weaver (1975)
1982	12	Weaver (1982)
1987	50	Weaver (1987)
1988	50	Weaver (1988)
1989	70±42(95% CI) ^a	Pauli and Bleich (1991)
1995	51–100	Torres et al. (1996)
2002	51–100	Epps et al. (2003)
2007	70 ^{b,c}	A. Pauli (CDFG; unpublished data)
2010	101–150	Abella et al. (2011)
2018	25–50	Prentice et al. (2019)
2020	51–100	Vu et al. (2021)
2024	51–100	D. Glass and R. Ianniello (CDFG; unpublished data)

^a Calculated from aerial survey mark-recapture data in Pauli and Bleich (1991)

^b Calculated from aerial survey conducted 15 October 2007

^c Aerial observations corrected for sightability and representing an estimate of the number of bighorn sheep that were available to be seen during the survey (Graham and Bell 1989)

and between the SHM and the Coxcomb Mountains (Pauli and Bleich 1991).

In 1992, bighorn sheep were translocated from Old Dad Mountain to the Bullion Mountains (Bleich et al. 2021), and telemetry data have since revealed movements by bighorn sheep between that range and the Newberry Mountains, the SHM, and the Calumet Mountains. These movements are consistent with the corridors modeled by Epps et al. (2007). The areas through which such movements occur can be expansive, however, and perhaps more appropriately could be described as 'movement conduits'. That term was coined by Jenks (2018) because such movements facilitate genetic or demographic connectivity among mountain ranges, but seldomly can be defined as specific paths of travel (Jenks 2018). Part II of this account will further explore the history of events leading to the opening of California's seventh bighorn sheep hunt unit.

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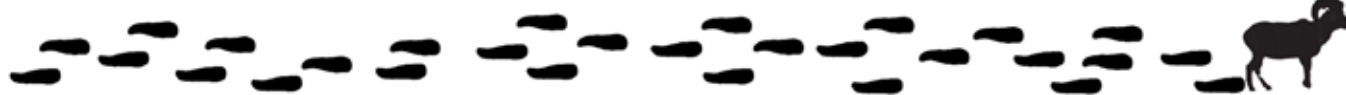
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—This article is part of a series by Dr. Vern Bleich, who increasingly is concerned that many aspects of the history and management of bighorn sheep in California are being forgotten due to the loss of ‘corporate memory’, or what has been termed by others as ‘generational amnesia’. 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 prior events. Vern was employed by the California Department of Fish and Game for 34 years and 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 Richard Weaver’s historical effort to determine the status of bighorn sheep in California had been completed, 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, and serves on two committees of the California Wild Sheep Foundation. He is a member of the Wild Sheep Foundation’s Professional Resource Advisory Board, and represented wildlife conservation and management issues as a member of the National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board from 2019 to 2022. Readers interested in doing so can contact Vern directly (vbleich@gmail.com).



Last Campfire



Richard Pierce

It is with deep sorrow that we have been advised of the passing of long-time Chapter member, former Board Member and good friend to all, Rich Pierce.

Rich was one of the earliest Board members and supported CA WSF throughout its history.

We have no details as to funeral arrangements, timing, etc., but we will advise members of the family’s wishes as soon as we receive them.

The loss of an old friend.

GENETIC ANALYSIS OF 2024 DESERT BIGHORN CAPTURE SAMPLES IN SOUTHEASTERN CALIFORNIA

*By Clint Epps, Rachel Crowhurst, Christina Aiello
Department of Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Sciences
Oregon State University*

In fall 2024, the Epps Population and Conservation Genetics Laboratory at Oregon State University (OSU) requested \$6,900 from California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation (CA WSF) and \$500 from Desert Wildlife Unlimited (DWU) to support a rare opportunity to describe genetic diversity and structure of desert bighorn sheep in southeastern California. These funds allowed the Epps Laboratory to genotype the blood samples collected during the 2024 desert bighorn sheep capture conducted by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). OSU personnel also attended parts of the capture in order to help process blood samples for later analysis. The capture operation included populations from the Big and Little Maria Mountains, the Riverside Mountains, the East Chocolate Mountains, the Chuckwalla Mountains, Orocopa Mountains, Granite-Palen Mountains, and McCoy Mountains (Figure 1, page 32). Genetic structure, diversity, and connectivity in that far southeastern portion of the state had still not been thoroughly described.

Previous genetic sampling of the East Chocolate Mountains population, in particular, had occurred only in 2003 (Epps et al. 2006), and then only with a small number of fecal pellet samples. Analyses of those samples suggested that the population had relatively low genetic diversity, but the small sample size precluded certainty. Potential isolation of the mountain range was a concern, especially given the lack of information in recent decades on the size and trajectory of the bighorn sheep population in that area. Thus, the CDFW capture and the funding from CA WSF and DWU created the opportunity to assess whether these rarely studied southeastern populations have maintained genetic diversity comparable to other populations in the California Deserts, through a combination of adequate numbers and connectivity among those small populations, or whether genetic diversity is low, suggesting declining and isolated populations.

In winter-spring of 2025, the Epps Laboratory completed genotyping of the 2024 capture samples, and, in April, conducted preliminary analysis of genetic diversity and genetic structure from those ranges, using assignment tests to group individuals into genetic clusters and estimating genetic diversity within populations, defined on the basis of mountain ranges, and genetic distance (FST) between populations. Those analyses included other genotype data generated previously from non-invasive fecal pellet sampling by Christina Aiello and other Epps Lab members in 2020-2021, as well as genotypes previously generated from captures in the Orocopa and Chuckwalla ranges since 2014. The new analyses compared genetic diversity estimates in those populations to comparable data previously generated

for other desert bighorn sheep populations, by using the same 16 microsatellite loci analyzed in the same manner as previous work (Epps et al. 2018).

The new data suggest that the East Chocolate Mountain range has continued to maintain moderately high genetic diversity, comparable to moderately well-connected desert bighorn populations farther north in the central Mojave Desert, as have all the other recently sampled southeastern populations (Table 1, page 32). Genetic assignment tests suggested four genetic clusters within this dataset (Figure 1) and showed little genetic differentiation between desert bighorn in the Granite-Palen, McCoy, Big Maria, Little Maria, and Riverside Mountains. Although the number of bighorn sheep using those mountain ranges is thought to be relatively small, these results suggest that bighorn move among those ranges frequently. Those ranges were, however, strongly genetically differentiated from populations south of Interstate 10 (Orocopa, Chuckwalla, East Chocolate Mountains, Fig. 1). Orocopa and Chuckwalla populations were genetically distinct but, based on genetic assignment tests, showed evidence of occasional movements between them. The East Chocolate Mountains, in turn, appear to be relatively genetically differentiated from the Orocopa and Chuckwalla Mountains to the north, suggesting low rates of movement, at best, have occurred between the East Chocolate and all other sampled populations in recent generations.

Additional analysis of the new genetic data will occur using other genetic data from the Desert Bighorn Sheep-Connect Database at Oregon State University, developed by Dr. Christina Aiello, Dr. Clint Epps, and Rachel Crowhurst. These early results should not be considered definitive until more thorough analysis is completed. The moderate to high genetic diversity observed in the preliminary analysis of these data, however, suggest that metapopulation connectivity remains strong in southeastern California and desert bighorn populations there are persisting. Previous research has shown that more genetically diverse populations have better outcomes when faced with respiratory disease (Dugovich et al. 2023). Genetic sampling of nearby populations in Arizona, if possible in the future, could shed other light on how the East Chocolate Mountains population has persisted and maintained genetic diversity. Genetic sampling or other information from any bighorn sheep that have persisted in the West Chocolate Mountains would also be of great interest in evaluating the likely trajectory of bighorn sheep in this region and determining how isolated the East Chocolate mountains population is at this time.

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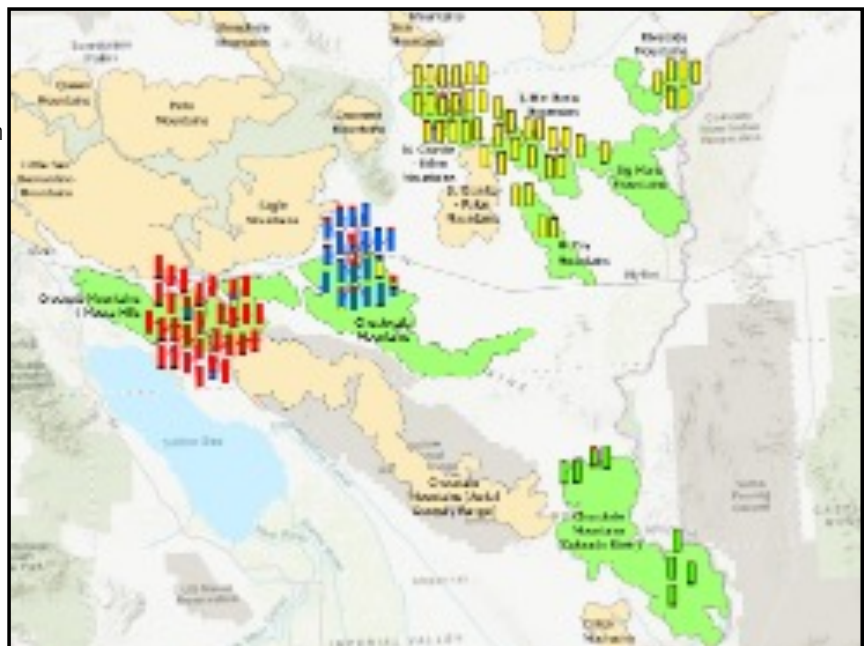


Lab tech Maddie Berry making things happen in the lab

Table 1. (Right) Preliminary estimates of genetic diversity for desert bighorn populations in southeastern California based on 16 microsatellite loci, with estimates from central Mojave populations using the same loci for comparison. Although two samples were genotyped from the Big Maria Mountains, those are not included here, as that is not regarded as an adequate sample size for this analysis.

Figure 1. (Below right) Map of the desert bighorn populations targeted for genetic analyses (green polygons) using samples from the fall 2024 CDFW capture operation as well as fecal DNA and other data previously collected by the Epps Population and Conservation Genetics Laboratory at Oregon State University, with preliminary genetic analysis. Other bighorn populations are shown in tan color. Individual genetic assignment of individuals, based on preliminary analysis of 16 microsatellite loci using Program Structure, are depicted as small colored bars. Four genetic clusters were detected. Like-colored bars are members of the same genetic cluster; bars showing multiple colors indicate individuals with genetic ancestry attributed to multiple clusters, and can indicate migrants or offspring of migrants. In this case, one individual in the Chuckwalla mountains appears to show significant genetic ancestry linked to populations north of Interstate 10 (possibly Joshua Tree National Park, although data from those populations were not included in this analysis). These results demonstrate that gene flow between the Chuckwalla and Orocochia Mountains also occurs occasionally, based on individuals with mixed ancestry occurring in both populations. However, the individuals sampled in the East Chocolate Mountains do not show significant portions of ancestry from populations to the north. Status of bighorn sheep in the West Chocolate Mountains (Aerial Gunnery Range) is unknown.

Population (southeastern California)	Sample size	Genetic diversity (expected heterozygosity)	Source
East Chocolate	8	0.60	This analysis
Chuckwalla	20	0.65	This analysis
Granite-Riverside	17	0.59	This analysis
Little Maria	13	0.61	This analysis
McCoy	4	0.61	This analysis
Orocochia	31	0.62	This analysis
Riverside	6	0.62	This analysis
<i>Central Mojave populations for comparison</i>			
Granite (MOJA)	17	0.66	Epps et al. (2018)
Marble	46	0.66	Epps et al. (2018)
North Bristol	50	0.58	Epps et al. (2018)
Newberry	25	0.53	Epps et al. (2018)
Old Dad Peak	25	0.52	Epps et al. (2018)
Clipper	34	0.65	Epps et al. (2018)



THE POLITICS OF CONSERVATION

2025 State Legislative Session at Full Speed
By Bill Gaines, Gaines and Associates

As we approach the middle of May, it is hard to believe that the 2025 California State Legislative Session is already half over. With the first round of cuts – the May 2nd deadline for policy committees to hear fiscal bills introduced in their house – now behind us, some bills have already died a quick death, but countless others of interest to the California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation (CA WSF) remain fully in play.

Below is a summary of the current status of just a few of the many bills CA WSF is currently working at California's State Capitol on behalf of wild sheep and those who pursue them on the mountain.

2025 STATE LEGISLATIVE SESSION UPDATE

AB 902 (Schultz) – Transportation Planning and Programming: Barriers to Wildlife Movement

Existing law requires certain transportation planning agencies to prepare and adopt regional transportation plans directed at achieving a coordinated and balanced regional transportation system.

As amended April 23, 2025, AB 902 by Assembly Member Nick Schultz (D/44-Burbank) would require a lead agency to incorporate appropriate wildlife passage features to feasibly avoid, minimize, and mitigate further impairment to wildlife connectivity into a transportation infrastructure project in a connectivity area that may significantly impair wildlife connectivity. As amended, the bill would allow a lead agency to use compensatory mitigation credits to satisfy these requirements if the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) concurs with the use of those credits. AB 902 would only apply to projects with a project initiation phase beginning on or after January 1, 2026.

Double-referred to the Assembly Committee on Transportation and the Assembly Committee on Local Government, AB 902 was first heard in the Assembly Transportation Committee on April 21st, passing out and to the Assembly Local Government Committee on a 11-2 vote. AB 902 was then withdrawn from the Assembly Local Government Committee and referred directly to the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 902 is set to be heard in the Assembly Appropriations Committee on May 14th.

AB 1038 (Hadwick) – Bears: Hunting: Use of Dogs

As amended April 21, 2025, AB 1038 by Assembly Member Heather Hadwick (R/01-Redding) would provide wildlife managers and those responsible for public safety with science-based tools for the responsible management of California's overabundant black bear populations. This important legislation breaks down into two parts: First, AB 1038 would enhance public safety while preserving the wild nature of bears by requiring the Fish & Game Commission to designate specific seasons during which houndsmen may use dogs in the non-lethal pursuit of bears. The intent being to reestablish the natural fear bears have of humans by hazing them out of human-populated areas with dogs. Second, AB 1038 would not mandate a hunting season



during which houndsmen may use dogs to pursue bears, but it would restore the authority of the Commission to do so, if they deemed it necessary, in areas identified by DFW as requiring management. The intent being to help bring overabundant black bear populations back in balance with their ecosystem and prey.

On April 14th DFW released their update of their 1998 Bear Management Plan (BMP) which estimates California's black bear population at 60,000 – twice their previous projection. Further, the updated BMP also states that black bears are now occupying areas they have never occupied before – including urban and suburban areas – resulting in a substantial increase in human-bear conflicts, and California's first confirmed fatal black bear attack in 2023.

In addition to public safety concerns, our overabundant black bear population is also placing substantial stress on California's deer herds and competing predatory species – most notably mountain lions. Multiple studies have documented that bears kill up to 80% of deer fawns within their first 30 days of life. Further, according to the updated BMP, bears chase mountain lions off their adult deer kills over 70% of the time. In doing so, mountain lions must not only kill again but kill more to compensate for the energetic losses – leading to the highest deer predation rates on record. One DFW study framed the significant contribution of black bears to the decline of California's deer herds as "warranting special attention."

AB 1038 was heard in the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee on April 29th. Going into the hearing, animal-rights opposition was expecting yet another easy victory on the extremely uneven playing field of the California State Capitol. Yet, following intense lobbying by Gaines & Associates, CA WSF, the California Houndsmen for Conservation, and other partners in conservation, the result was far from an easy victory.

After receiving testimony from the support and opposition to AB 1038, and a series of questions to both sides from the dais, the vote roll was called. Seven "aye" votes were needed for AB 1038 to pass out of the 13-member Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee. With most expecting AB 1038 to suffer a

quick and overwhelming defeat, the bill quickly racked up six “aye” votes against only three “no” votes. With AB 1038 needing just one more vote to pass, the committee took a five-hour nerve-wracking recess.

The lobbying team in support of the bill quickly hit the Capitol Halls once again to visit the four offices that had not yet voted - seeking that single needed “aye” vote. Following several hours of lobbying, the committee reconvened and went through the roll of those who had not voted. Failing to get that one final illusive “aye” vote, AB 1038 failed to pass on a six “aye”/four “no” vote count, with three members not voting.

But AB 1038 is not dead yet. Assembly Member Hadwick quickly asked the committee for “reconsideration” of the bill - a motion that, if carried, allows a measure that failed to be heard again in committee. On a unanimous vote, the committee agreed to allow the bill to be heard again.

Due to legislative deadlines, the bill cannot be heard again in committee until January 2026, during the second year of the 2025/2026 Legislative Session.

AB 1169 (Gonzalez) – Wildlife Grants: SHARE Program

In 2003, recognizing that much of California’s game was on private property, and few of California’s hunting public could afford to pay exorbitant fees to gain access, the wildlife conservation community successfully sponsored AB 396 – legislation which directed DFW to work in partnership with nonprofit conservation groups, landowner organizations and others to establish the Shared Habitat Alliance for Recreational Enhancement Program, or “SHARE”. Authored by Assembly Member Tom Harman (R/67-Los Angeles), AB 396 authorized DFW to enter into voluntary agreements with private landowners to provide public access to their lands for hunting and other wildlife-dependent recreational activities.

AB 396 also capped the compensation DFW could offer to a private landowner at \$30 per acre, or \$50 per public participant per day. Twenty-two years later, SHARE has proven to be successful with roughly 100,000 acres of private land enrolled in the program. However, the cap on the financial compensation DFW can offer private landowners has slowed enrollment as landowners with quality hunting to be offered on their properties have chosen more lucrative options for providing public hunter access.

As introduced February 21, 2025, AB 1169 by Assembly Member Jeff Gonzalez (R/36-Coachella) would address this concern by removing the cap on financial compensation DFW can offer to private landowners to enroll their land in SHARE. Instead, AB 1169 would allow DFW to determine the appropriate amount to pay each participating landowner, as long as it is commensurate with the quality of the wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities that are to be provided on the property.

In addition, while current law states that the SHARE Program shall be a partnership of DFW and nongovernmental organizations, DFW has not done so in a significant way – even though some organizations have excellent relationships with private landowners, operate their own outdoor access programs, or even own their own land. To address this concern, AB 1169 would require DFW to contract some of the work necessary to carry out the Program to nonprofit conservation groups.

AB 1169 was heard in the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee on April 8th, passing out and to the Assembly Appropriations Committee on a unanimous vote with a recommendation that the bill be placed on consent.

However, once received in Assembly Appropriations Committee, AB 1169 was referred to suspense file. AB 1169 must be heard and passed out of Assembly Appropriations Committee by May 23rd to meet legislative deadline.

AB 1187 (Celeste Rodriguez) – Firearms: Safety Certificates

Existing law requires any person who purchases or receives a firearm to possess a firearm safety certificate. Existing law also prohibits a person from selling or transferring a firearm to any person who does not possess a firearm safety certificate. A violation of either of these provisions is punishable as a misdemeanor. Existing law requires a personal firearm importer, within 60 days of bringing any firearm into this state to, among other things, submit a report including information concerning that individual and a description of the firearm to the Department of Justice (DOJ).

As amended April 10, 2025, AB 1187 by Assembly Member Celeste Rodriguez (D/43-Arleta) would require that a personal firearm importer also obtain a valid firearm safety certificate and include a copy of the valid firearm safety certificate within the report to DOJ. The bill would prohibit a person from bringing a firearm into the state without obtaining a valid firearm safety certificate within 60 days, except as specified.

In addition, AB 1187 would require an applicant for a firearm safety certificate, on or after July 1, 2027, to complete a training course no less than 8 hours in length that, among other things, includes instruction on firearm safety and handling and live-fire shooting exercises on a firing range.

AB 1187 was heard in the Assembly Public Safety Committee on April 8th, passing out and to the Assembly Appropriations Committee on a party-line vote.

Once received in the Assembly Appropriations Committee, AB 1187 was referred to suspense file. AB 1187 must be heard and passed out of the Assembly Appropriations Committee by May 23rd to meet legislative deadline.

AB 1316 (Addis) – Hunting Licenses: Information on Firearms

As introduced February 21, 2025, AB 1316 by Assembly Member Dawn Addis (D/30-San Luis Obispo) would require DFW, beginning July 1, 2027, to ensure that every person who purchases a hunting license receives, at minimum, information on certain topics related to firearms, including the safe storage of firearms, liability for parents and guardians who should have known their child could access a firearm at home, basic California firearm laws, and how to legally transfer or relinquish a firearm.

To obtain a hunting license, an individual must take a Hunter Education course. The course, which is the equivalent of ten hours of class time, not only teaches hunter ethics and skills, it is loaded with instruction on gun laws, firearms safety, and safe firearms storage. AB 1316 would only be duplicative of the detailed instruction on firearms laws and safety students receive in the Hunter Education class. Further, the cost of the materials the bill would require DFW to distribute with hunting licenses would surely be paid for out of the Fish and Game Preservation Fund – the account where license revenues are deposited. As such, the cost of producing these materials would only take away from the monies those who purchase hunting licenses generate for wildlife management, research, hunting opportunity, and other beneficial DFW duties.

AB 1316 was heard in the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee on April 29th, passing out and to the Assembly Appropriations Committee on a party-line vote.

AB 1316 is set to be heard in the Assembly Appropriations Committee on May 14th.

SB 427 (Blakespear) – Habitat Conservation Fund

In June 1990, the voters of California passed Proposition 117, “The California Wildlife Protection Act of 1990”. Among other things, the Act created the Habitat Conservation Fund (HCF) and guaranteed the fund \$30 million annually for 30 years for the acquisition, restoration and enhancement of habitat necessary to protect wildlife and plant populations. In 2019 – when the HCF was set to expire the following July – CA WSF and other conservation organizations worked hard to help successfully convince the Legislature and the Governor to extend the annual allocation to the HCF through July 1, 2030.

Since the passage of Proposition 117 thirty-five years ago, HCF has proven to serve as a highly effective and efficient program for assisting California’s conservation efforts throughout the entire state. In fact, in the last decade alone, the HCF has protected and/or restored well over one million acres of deer and mountain lion habitat, wetlands, aquatic and riparian habitat, and wildlife corridors.

As introduced February 18, 2025, SB 427 by Senator Catherine Blakespear (D/38-Encinitas) would remove the current HCF sunset date of July 1, 2030 and allow the important annual transfer of these funds into the HCF, and the critical benefits they provide to our wildlife and fishery resources, to continue in perpetuity.

SB 427 was heard in the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee on April 8th, passing out and to the Senate Appropriations Committee on a unanimous vote.

Once received in the Senate Appropriations Committee, SB 427 was referred to suspense file. SB 427 is set to be heard in the Senate Appropriations Committee on May 23rd.

SB 818 (Alvarado-Gil) – Mountain Lions: Pilot Program: Permitted Houndspersons

As gutted and rewritten with hostile amendments on May 1, 2025, SB 818 would require DFW to maintain, enhance, and expand its human-mountain lion conflicts program in El Dorado County, including by exercising its authority to authorize nonlethal procedures. As newly amended, SB 818 would require DFW to develop and implement a grant program to assist eligible applicants to obtain, install, and maintain equipment and other measures in El Dorado County to protect livestock and domestic animals and minimize activities that attract mountain lions into communities. Further, SB 818 would now require DFW to continue and expand its scientific research effort in El Dorado County to develop and evaluate methods to deter mountain lions from communities and to prevent habituation. In implementing these programs, the bill would require DFW to engage in specified public outreach activities. SB 818 would authorize DFW to expand these programs to areas outside of El Dorado County. The above provisions of SB 818 would sunset January 1, 2032.

As amended May 1, 2025, SB 818 would also require DFW to prepare and submit a report to the Legislature on or before October 1, 2030, describing these programs, the results of the programs, the number of department personnel involved in the programs, and recommendations to further improve the programs to protect human health and safety. SB 818 would require the Director of DFW, until the 2033 calendar year, to appear on an annual basis at a hearing before one of specified committees of the Legislature to provide a status update on the programs.

Prior to being gutted and amended with hostile amendments,

SB 818, as amended April 21, 2025, by Senator Marie Alvarado-Gil (R/4-El Dorado Hills), would have allowed for a regulated program under which DFW approved houndsmen with properly trained hounds could haze nuisance lions out of problem areas in a way that was both humane and effective. Coined “Taylen and Wyatt’s Law”, SB 818, as previously written, was an effort by Senator Marie Alvarado-Gil to take steps to increase the safety of the public of El Dorado County that she represents.

Houndsmen have historically used dogs to pursue mountain lions throughout our nation. But since the passage of Proposition 117 in 1990, this practice has been prohibited in California. Having not been pursued by hounds for over 35 years, these once highly elusive animals have lost their fear of humans – leading to regular human encounters, the fatal attack on Taylen Brooks one year ago, and an unacceptable increase in domestic animal predation in El Dorado County.

Research shows that non-lethal pursuit of mountain lions with trained dogs is an effective way to restore their natural wariness of humans and encourage them to avoid populated areas. As amended April 21, 2025, SB 818 would have authorized this proven practice to enhance public safety and mitigate the escalating loss of domestic animals by gently pushing nuisance lions out of areas they should not be, while also restoring their natural wariness of humans and dogs, before they get into real trouble and ultimately must be dealt with via lethal take. Further, as previously written, SB 818 would have also helped gather valuable data to inform future mountain lion management strategies in El Dorado County and beyond.

The lion that attacked the Brooks brothers had been in trouble before but had never been hazed by dogs. Experts conclude that, had the lion that attacked Taylen and Wyatt previously been hazed by hounds, he would never have approached them.

SB 818, as amended April 21st, was heard in Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee on April 22nd but failed to pass on a party-line vote. The committee then granted the bill “reconsideration” via another party-line vote – allowing the bill to be heard again in committee. The committee then used a party-line vote for the third time to gut out the language Senator Alvarado-Gil had worked with the Brooks family and Gaines & Associates to place in the bill and replace it with their own hostile amendments. The amendments forced into the bill fully deleted the core of the bill which was to promote public safety by allowing permitted private houndsmen to haze problem lions away from areas they should not be, replacing it with language which promotes only actions county residents are already doing to protect livestock.

SB 818, as gutted and amended, then passed out of the Senate Natural and Resources and Water Committee to the Senate Appropriations Committee.

SB 818, as amended May 1, 2025, is set to be heard in the Senate Appropriations Committee on May 19th.

Gaines & Associates is working with Senator Alvarado-Gil’s office, the Brooks family, CA WSF, and others to stop SB 818, as gutted and amended, in Senate Appropriations Committee.

Because SB 818 proposes to amend Proposition 117 it would require a 4/5th vote to pass off the Floor of both houses of the Legislature.

SB 818, as originally written, was sponsored by the Family of Taylen and Wyatt Brooks with the assistance of *Gaines & Associates*.



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