

California Wild Sheep

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Paul Kelly

Hunting with Sierra Crest Outfitters

2024-25 Season

14+ Year Old Ram from Kelso/Old Dads



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Happy Fall! Hunting season has begun. After many years of trying, this year I drew a coveted Chugach tag for Dall. I am doing my best to recover from an open-heart operation for an aneurysm and some extended procedures that followed. Unfortunately, I'm running out of time. I have the tag on my desktop and I'm picturing it with BBQ sauce on it as my only option may be to eat it. I am headed to Tajikistan in late November, counting on being back in sheep shape by then.

I feel more alive in the Fall with the anticipation of scheduled hunting trips. This issue includes some great hunting stories, fun pictures, drinker work, important information you want to know, fun humor, AND MORE!

Your feedback, ideas, articles, pictures & requests are always welcome. Best way to reach me is email: mike.borel@kearney.com. Due date for input to the 4Q25 issue is November 10.

Wishing you renewal and success in your hunting this fall!



Blueberry Balsamic Glazed Venison from Tony Gigilotti

INGREDIENTS

- 1.5 cup blueberries
- 1 tbsp balsamic
- 1/2 tsp brown sugar
- 1/4 tsp salt

DIRECTIONS

- 1) In a saucepan heat cook the blueberries down, stirring to keep from burning
- 2) Add the balsamic, brown sugar, and salt to the blueberries, cooking until it thickens. If you would like this thicker add a tablespoon of cornstarch
- 3) Salt and pepper the meat - if cooking on a grill you can continuously glaze the meat. If cooked inside in a pan, sear both sides cooking to your final temp and then finish with the glaze.



He's MUCH better!



**My
new
tractor
is so
relaxing!**

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California Wild Sheep is published quarterly.

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

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

Content editing by John Ware
Humorous outtakes provided by Tammy Scott
Published by Beverly Valdez, ORC-KF1 LLC

Events

2025

October 24-26 New GALAD RWWS installation
Location SL13

November 10 Due date for articles for 4Q2025
CA WSF Newsletter

December 5 Sheep Summit XXXVII
"All Virtual"

December 5-8 New GALAD Installation
Location Casebier Property

2026

January 9-12 New GALAD Installation
Location SL82

January 22-24 WSF International Sheep Show
Reno, NV

February 18-21 SCI Convention, Nashville
February 21-22 GSCO Convention, Nashville

February 20 Due date for articles for 1Q2026
CA WSF Newsletter

February 20-23 New GALAD Installation
Location SL61

April 24 Sheep Summit XXXVIII
DoubleTree by Hilton, Sacramento

April 25 CA WSF Fundraiser/Banquet 2026
DoubleTree by Hilton, Sacramento

May 20 Due date for articles for 2Q2026
CA WSF Newsletter

June 1 2026 Election ballots sent to members

June TBD, WSF Chapter and Affiliates Meeting

June 28 2026 Election ballots must be completed
and sent to CA WSF

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Greetings CA WSF members,

First I would like to thank the CA WSF Board of Directors for their confidence in voting for me as President for the next term. I promise to lead with integrity, vigilance and teamwork to further the goals of our organization.

I would also like to give a big shout-out and thank Donald C. Martin for his outstanding leadership these last 6 years. He really stepped up to the plate when he agreed to a third term. Thanks Don.

I would like to welcome the new and returning Board of Directors and let them know we appreciate their participation and enthusiasm for CAWSF. New directors are Brad Aboltin Tony Gigliotti, Jake Bricker, and Vince Bloom.

I would also like to give a huge thanks to the outgoing directors for their years of dedicated service to promote wild sheep in California. Outgoing members are: Bob Keagy, Ken Crother, Matt St. Martin, and Mike Torres. To those members of CA WSF that ran for the Board of Directors and were not successful, thank you for your efforts and I encourage you to try again in future elections.

I can confirm to you that all committee chairs have agreed to continue in their current duties and are currently rounding out their committees with additional members (see page ## for committee chair contacts). If you would like to serve on one of these committees, please reach out to me or any board member and we will get you pointed in the right direction. As a reminder, you do not need to be a board member to serve on a committee. Any member can serve.

We also have some exciting news on the fundraising front:

Yukon Stone's Sheep Hunt (2026): We have secured another incredible Stone's sheep hunt for our random drawing tag—a 14-day, one-on-one guided hunt with Yukon Stone and Moose Creek Outfitters in August 2026. Our thanks to owner Aaron Florian for his continued generosity and support of both our chapter and the Wild Sheep Foundation.

Online-Only Auction (September): Later this fall, we will host an online-only auction featuring outstanding hunts and vacation opportunities for 2026–27. We encourage everyone to participate and help support CAWSF.

In addition, **Challenge Coins** are now available in our online store. Proceeds benefit our GALAD (Give A Lamb A Drink) program. Pick up one for yourself and consider grabbing an extras as a gifts for a fellow member or friend.

Finally, a reminder: we have **four state-land guzzlers** scheduled for installation between this fall and next spring (see page 26 for dates). Mark your calendars—we look forward to seeing many of you in the field as we continue this important work together.

Good hunting and be safe.
Jim Fitzgerald



A sheep tag isn't just a piece of paper —
it's a passport to the high country.

EAGLE EYE

By Brad Lucich, Member

It was a sad day when I had to run to the hospital after hearing the news that my mother, Susan, was in the emergency room, and not doing well. After exploratory surgery, which resulted in zero findings, she was settled into the ICU to try to stabilize her unknown condition. As the family rallied together to be with mom and tried to take care of things around the family farm, I received an email from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

“Congratulations on drawing the Desert Bighorn Sheep tag in the Cady Mountain Range.”

I was speechless as I looked at my wife. After twenty-three years of applications, I finally got it. After twenty-three talks with my dad as we both applied, dreaming of the chance to go hunt for such a majestic creature, it finally happened. I was both ecstatic that I finally drew the desert bighorn tag, while at the same time somber at my mother's condition. This feeling was quickly resolved on my next phone call with my mother as I told her the news. She was ecstatic that I had drawn the extremely rare tag. This was some good news in a trying time.

As my mother was on the road to recovery, things were progressing along, I began to research different outfitters, wanting to make sure I had someone with expertise to help me with this hunt of a lifetime. I contacted Matt and Cliff St. Martin with Dry Creek Outfitters and immediately felt comfortable with their experience in hunting Desert Bighorn Sheep.

In the month prior to the season opener, conditions looked favorable to hunt on opening weekend. Cliff St. Martin, Casey Nick, and Matt Divine began scouting a few days before we arrived to get a game plan together.

The crew got on some rams early on and spent considerable time glassing and scouting. When I, my 81-year-old dad Paul, my brother (also Paul), my son Cash, and friend Steve Magill showed up, they were briefed on the crew's findings as well as a quick game plan for the following day. Little sleep was in store for that night.

Early in the morning the team was awake and split up to put eyes on two sides of a steep rocky mountain. The sheep were spotted early on and were following a similar pattern crossing from one side of the mountain to the other. While we were glassing over a mile away through the heat signature, Steve stepped back and started to glass the hills surrounding the crew, and suddenly, running, seemingly out of nowhere, two nice rams ran by about four hundred yards off to the side. Paul



Brad Lucich and Cady Mountain ram

(Sr.), super excited, shouted, “Shoot ‘em Bradley!” I looked inquiringly at Casey and Matt, excited to see rams so close, however they stated these were not what we were after. This calmed me down and everyone watched as the two new rams trotted away, towards the previous rams.

A call came in from Cliff, on the other side of the mountain, that two rams of interest were spotted. He called one a “No Brainer,” and told me, “If it was my tag, I’d shoot it.” Everyone met up and glassed to see if the rams would come out of the draw, they were last seen walking into.

After a few hours, and no sign of the rams, a plan was put together for Casey and I to try to walk around and get a vantage point where Cliff thought the pair would come out for the afternoon and move back up the mountain. Casey spied a good rock outcropping to set up on and waited to see any movement. After about an hour, the glassing crew saw the rams making their way up to the outcropping. My heart started pumping with the thought that after all this time, I would have a shot at a great ram on the first day. After 45 minutes, and no sign of either ram, Casey whispered “don’t move, don’t move.” The rams had unexpectedly dropped down to the bottom of the canyon a few hundred yards away, and with just one horn and part of his face exposed, the ram detected me and Casey. In a flash, he was gone. In this brief encounter both Casey and I could see this was a special ram.

As Casey and I slowly walked back down the mountain, slightly dejected that we had spooked the rams and figuring they had left the county, we began glassing up the long canyon about a mile away. Perched at the base of a rocky precipice both rams were spotted, and they looked like they were bedding down. The dejected feeling left as a new game plan was set for the next

day to try and get into position to harvest the ram now named “Eagle Eye.”

Waking early the next morning, spirits were high, as well as expectations. The team again split up to try and lay eyes on the target ram. It did not take long before the pair were located high on the mountain. Exposed as they were, there was no feasible way to get in range. Thinking the rams would follow their previous route, plans were made to intercept them as they moved back over the mountain. Glassing continued until the rams worked their way up and over a steep rocky pass, into a large bowl, in a new direction with bleak chances to be able to try and make a stalk on them.

The crew broke up again, trying to figure out a way to line up a shot. Viewing the new side of the mountain from a variety of positions revealed no sign of the rams and just a guess as to their whereabouts. The crew figured they would just watch for the rest of the afternoon to try and set a plan for the next day. Then Cliff contacted Casey, and they came up with the plan for Casey and I to work up the mountain and get into position if the rams made their way back up to the top. The rest of the team would glass the mountains surrounding the bowl where the rams were, making sure they did not give Casey and I the slip.

With little to no cover, Casey and I surreptitiously made our way up the mountain. Stopping every few yards of elevation to glass the massive boulder field that was increasingly visible. As we climbed higher, almost to the rim of the bowl, we dropped our packs and gear to be as quiet as possible. Both Casey and I could now see most of the bowl, and it seemed as if the rams had slipped away yet again.

After about fifteen minutes sitting on the edge of the bowl, I heard a faint noise and notified Casey. This happened again about 2 minutes later. It was a noticeably light sound, but notable as it was the sound of small rolling stones. Out from below Casey and I, under the sheer edge of the bowl... RAMS!

I scrambled to get a rest as the rams made quick work running up the boulder field. At this point, the sheep were 175 yards away with only a view of the ram's rear end. I waited with my scope on the target ram... 210 yards, 250 yards, still facing straight away. The Rams were gaining more and more elevation as I lay prone, with very few rocks in front of me to steady my rifle, I put my 270 WSM on top of my hand to steady the rifle, as my heart was beating out of my chest. Finally at 270 yards Eagle Eye turned his head to his left looking back briefly at myself and Casey. This afforded me the opportunity to pull the trigger in a fraction-of-a-second.

With no sound of the standard “Thwomp,” another round was quickly bolted in as the rams disappeared over a slight hill. As I scanned in my scope only one ram was now visible. The one visible ram continued up the boulder field and up and over the mountain. Casey and I started down and across the bowl and when we crested the small hill, there was the downed ram. A rush of relief settled over me, knowing I did not blow the chance I was given. Then there was a rush of excitement knowing that all the years of applying, getting the tag, and now harvesting this once in a lifetime ram was complete.

I would like to thank the Lord Jesus for his provision, mercy and grace, my wife Michelle for watching over things in my absence. I would also like to thank my dad, Paul, for getting me to apply all those years back, and faithfully taking me hunting and exposing me to the outdoors. Also, thanks go out to my brother Paul, son Cash and friend Steve, who made the trip all that much more special, experiencing this together. And lastly this could not have happened without Dry Creek Outfitters. I have done various hunts over the years mainly low country deer hunting and bird hunting, and this was a foreign environment. Cliff, Casey, and Matt brought a wealth of experience to the table that made this an exceptional hunt.



“If I’ve learned one thing in 40 years of seeking the majestic wild ram, it is that hunting him is not a privilege to be taken lightly.”

— “Sheep Hunting is an Art,” February 1971

THE "A" TEAM

By David Coleman, Member

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

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

Later that morning I drove the next four hours back home. While driving I started thinking of Outfitters that I knew who would give me the best opportunity at filling my tag. I already knew what my choice would be. I immediately called Matt St. Martin with Dry Creek Outfitters. I arranged to meet with Matt the very next day. I believe in my Lord and savior Jesus Christ and that God Almighty brings good people into my life to bless me and to make great opportunities happen.



David Coleman with his ram

While meeting Matt and his son Jonston, we discussed sheep hunting and all the details about my hunt. Matt said that he had a sheep hunt scheduled for the next week in South Bristol's and since my hunt unit was close by, he would call me when he finished the hunt, and they would begin hunting with me.

Matt said to get ready and so I did. The next week was Christmas but on December 29th Matt called and said to meet him the next day. Matt said that he and his guide Nate would be scouting and working for me to locate a ram. The next morning, I left home at 10:30 a.m. and arrived in Barstow California that afternoon and while pumping gas I received a call from Matt stating they had located two good rams. Matt said he would send me a pin location to meet him. He and Nate would meet me up on a high ridge.

As I got to their location, Matt and Nate were set up with spotting scopes. I looked through the scope and saw a real good ram about 2 miles away. Matt then said, "we need to go on this ram." I mentioned to Matt about it getting dark soon, Matt said yes, and we will be coming back in the dark whether we get that ram or not. I also said, "Is it really steep going down over there?" Matt said yes, so with a leap of faith, I paused for just a moment and then I said, "let's go." And immediately God's strength came into me and at the age of 69 I felt like I was 25 again. Being dressed in scrubs, T shirt, and tennis shoes I ran down to my truck and changed out.

We started going down a steep, deep ravine and then ascended to another steep ridge side. Keeping up with Matt

we traverse across the ridge, staying below the skyline. Then down again being steep rocky and loose. We finally got to the bottom in a rocky drainage with lots of cactus. We climbed that rocky drainage and kept going up for a while when Matt stopped and said, "there's the ram just ahead of us, he's a good ram and you need to shoot him."

From where I was standing behind Matt, I could not see him. Matt said just stay low and move ahead a bit. I literally crawled a few feet. I could not see the ram and had to lean to my left. I was finally able to locate him. I was astonished with my heart in my throat seeing a dark phantom silhouette standing on the skyline looking directly at me. I was staying as low as I could get.

Matt then said he is 165 yards and then handed me my rifle. I quickly and carefully checked my dial and made sure to turn down the power in the scope. With three rounds in the magazine, I then jacked a shell into the chamber with the safety on. I said to Matt that I would shoot from a small, elevated rock that was just ahead of me. Matt said "no, if you move forward you will blow him out of here." Matt said, "use my pack to shoot from." Matt set up his pack frame in front of me and I rested my rifle and took the safety off. As I was looking through the scope at the ram, I said to Matt that I cannot shoot because he is looking straight at me. Matt reassured me to be patient and that he would turn, and sure enough in just moments the ram turned left to give me a clear shot. My first shot was a hit.

With Matt staying on him, looking through his binoculars he said, "you hit him." You could see the ram stop and then struggle for a few moments. I put another round into the chamber. I shot once again, and the ram took about four steps and went down.

When we got to the ram, I was in stun mode. Matt said that I just killed a really nice ram. It was late and darkness was closing fast so I punched my tag, and we took a few pictures. Matt quickly prepared the ram for our return the next morning. In the desert, walking back to our vehicles in pitch darkness you can easily get lost, turned around and walk down the wrong drainage if you are not familiar with the area. With a two hour walk in the dark, I had reason to be concerned, but with Matt



David (C), Matt (R), and Nate (L)

and his GPS guiding me I was relieved with no worries.

Early the next morning Matt, Nate, and I returned to the kill site. We took several pictures and then Matt and Nate began preparing the ram for the pack out. Matt and Nate know what they are doing. They both tag teamed, skinned quarters, wrapped and loaded the ram into our packs for the journey out.

December 31st New Year's eve. What a great day, having God's blessing and walking out with a beautiful ram. It doesn't get any better than that.

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

SHEEP AT SUNSET PEAK GUZZLER AT ANZA-BORREGO



STEVE HORNADY'S CALIFORNIA DESERT BIGHORN HUNT

From World of Sports Afield Channel,

For over 20 years, Steve Hornady applied for a California Desert Bighorn Sheep tag. Then, finally, lightning struck: he drew the one and only tag available for the Orocopia Mountains. Recognizing the opportunity of a lifetime, Steve teamed up with the experienced crew at Dry Creek Outfitters—trusted for their local knowledge and strong track record of helping hunters find big rams.

In early February, Steve arrived in the Salton Sea Valley at the base of the Orocopia Mountains, where his guide, Matt St. Martin, and the team were already set up and ready to begin the hunt.

"I was lucky enough to draw a desert bighorn tag in California—my first in this state—and in the Orocopia Mountains, no less. We got into camp and spent the first evening glassing the hills, just trying to get a feel for where the sheep might be living. I've applied for sheep tags all across the western states—Wyoming, Arizona, you name it—and this was a miracle. One tag, and I got it."

The first morning found Steve and his team glassing from the south side of the Orocopias, with Copia Peak rising behind them and the Salton Sea stretching in the opposite direction.

"There's sheep in this country—we know that. But finding them is always the challenge."

As someone deeply involved in the shooting and hunting industry, Steve took a moment to highlight a game-changing optic: the Kite Optics APC Stabilized 60 ED—a handheld, image-stabilized spotting scope.



Steve Hornady and his Orocopia Mountains ram with the Dry Creek Outfitters team

"Spotting scopes are essential in country like this. Binoculars help spot movement, but to judge trophy quality at long range, you need more magnification. Traditional spotting scopes require a tripod—heavy, awkward, and slow to set up. But this unit delivers a steady, tripod-free view at 17–35x magnification with just the flip of a switch. Whether I'm on a mountain, prairie, or in Africa, this scope is always in my pack."

Back on the mountain, Steve and his team spotted a ewe with a couple of young rams trailing her.

"We picked up a ewe moving just below the skyline, and two young rams—sickle horns—were hanging nearby. Probably two-and-a-half-year-olds. Nothing shootable yet, but good signs."

That evening brought strong winds—some of the worst Southern California had seen in a decade. It was too dangerous to hunt the original area, partially closed off by the Secret Service. So the team shifted plans and headed for a spot called "The Hayfield."

"Sometimes you just have to know when to fold 'em. This storm is killing us, so we're regrouping and coming back when the weather breaks. You can't hunt sheep if you can't even get to them."

After waiting out the storm, they returned and picked up a mature ram working his way up the mountain.

"He's heading up to that big dome. The sun's just catching the top of it. We're going to follow this rim trail and try to stay above him. You don't go sheep hunting for exercise—but you better be in shape. We didn't climb from the valley floor, but we still came a long damn way."

They spotted the ram about 380 yards below.





“We’re looking for a better shooting position—something not quite so steep. My rangefinder gives me equivalent horizontal distance, which really helps on this kind of angle. If I can get set up in that flat, I’ll crawl over and call you up.”

After a few adjustments and steady nerves, Steve took the shot.

“Okay, center mass... shot underneath him. He moved about four feet. There, standing—farthest one on the left... He’s pulling blood. He’s hit.”

The ram bedded down, then fell. Steve and his team climbed down to reach the fallen giant.

“Congratulations, buddy,” said Matt. “That’s a hell of a ram.”

“We worked for this one,” Steve replied. “Everything had to come together—the tag, the weather, the spot, the shot. And it did. He’s got mass, he’s clean, and he’s mine.”

Reflecting on the experience, Steve was emotional:

“This is the hardest sheep hunt I’ve ever done. This country is brutal—rocks, canyons, heat, wind. But we earned it. Any desert sheep is a hell of a trophy, but a California desert sheep... that’s special. I’ve hunted Mexico, Arizona, and elsewhere, but this one means the most. In the Orocopias, you’re lit

CALIFORNIA WILD SHEEP FOUNDATION ELECTION 2025 RESULTS

Thanks to all members participating in the Board elections in June. A special thank you to the Board members who have dedicated so much time and energy over the past year to our goal of PUTTING AND KEEPING SHEEP ON THE MOUNTAINS, especially outgoing Board members Ken Crother, Bob Keagy and Matt St. Martin, who are leaving the Board but remain involved and dedicated to CA WSF. And a big thank you to Andrew Ohanesian and Casey Nick for standing for election this year. We look forward to seeing you on the ballot again in the future!

It’s not too early to think about joining the Board or one of the committees (see page 32). You do not need to be a Board member to get involved with a committee and it’s a great way to get involved. Contact any Board member or our administrator, Beverly Valdez (forthesheep@gmail.com) for information on committees.

Board Officers for 2025-2026 are:

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MY DESERT BIGHORN SHEEP HUNT

By Paul Kelly

The year 2024 started off the same. Applying for hunts I really don't have a chance of drawing. You always hope for that once in a lifetime tag but deep down you don't ever think it will happen. Well that all changed for me when I finally realized I drew a Desert Bighorn Sheep tag for my home state of California. After calming down realizing what I had, I needed to start my homework on what to do next. I spoke to several people which led me to Josh Schulgen of Sierra Crest Outfitters. After speaking with Josh my decision was made, he would be my guide.

Arriving at camp I was welcomed by Josh and his crew. After camp was set, we wanted to make sure the rifles were still on. Josh also had me shoot his long-range rifle in case the ram was well past my comfort level. His rifle shot very nicely! That night we had an incredible meal. I don't think I've ever had such a great meal while camping!

Opening day found us up early and on the road where hunting would be for the day. I was finally excited to get some boots on the ground. Just shortly after first light, Josh spotted a young ram up on the very top of the mountain. After looking him over, he was too young of a ram to take so we let him live another day. One of Josh's guides had also located a nice ram late in the day. He only saw him for a brief second but enough to tell he was a mature ram and broomed quite a lot on his left side. I had visioned something more complete, so I elected to pass and maybe keep him in my back pocket. The rest of the day we checked off canyons and before I knew it, the first day was over.

Day 2 we were greeted by high winds. We did manage to locate a group of rams. One looked like a shooter but after investigating, he only had one horn! Talk about a heartbreaker! I was still looking for something more complete. Day 3 we went back to the same spot. Josh was convinced we hadn't seen everything, and wouldn't you know it, right at daybreak a group of 5 rams were topped out soaking up the sun. There were several shooters in the bunch, so we decided this was the group we needed to pursue. It took most of the day to relocate the rams but just before dark they were found. With not enough light, we chose to put them to bed and come back in the morning.

The next morning, we found ourselves right in the same place. We had made a plan, and everyone was just about to their



Paul Kelly with his Kelso/Old Dads zone ram

locations when one of the guides noticed a ram on his knob. Not wanting to push him to our rams he waited to let him walk out of sight. I whispered to Josh and asked, could that be our group of rams? He said maybe. Sheep typically don't like to move at night, but he has seen it in the past. Not long after it was confirmed it was our group, and they left the country. Very frustrating but hey, that is hunting! Josh kept everyone's heads up and said, let's go find them!

Days 4 and 5 were a ton of walking and eyes behind the glass! We had located the group 5 miles away and made several plays on them. Just as we thought it was about to happen, they would make a mad dash to more remote country and before we knew it, they were just too far. With time winding down, we had to make a decision.

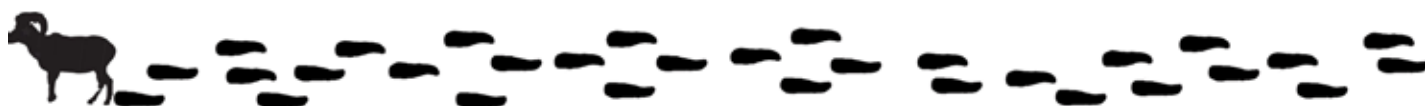
Day 6 we headed out to where we had seen the ram from opening day. Not long after first light he was located not far from where we had seen him. It was noticed he had a possible limp, and it was confirmed he did have an injury. Josh and the crew made a plan, and we were off! An hour later I found myself behind the rifle, waiting for him to stand. 45 minutes later he stood, and the rifle spoke. With a slap on the back, Josh assured me it was a solid hit and he went down.

Six long days and the pursuit was over. Walking up on him I will never forget. He was an incredible 14 year old ram! He was the ram I sent out to find. This hunt will be a



Paul with the Sierra Crest Outfitters team

hard one to beat. Living out in the desert for 6 days with some of the most amazing people I now call friends will never be forgotten. I would like to thank my wife for putting up with my obsession with hunting and Josh Schulgen again and his crew for their professional and hard work. Without them this would never have happened!



CLAUDE HOWARD POLAR BEAR 2025

Claude was hunting with Shane Black Canada North Outfitters for his polar bear and walrus, August 10-25 2025. He says:

"The polar bear trip took us two days to get there – boy it was a long ways! Then we had a cold windy day riding on back of 4-wheelers around 300 miles and another day we had to wait and go on a saltwater boat to the island – 5 hours in rough seas but we made it to island and saw bears and started hunting.

We saw four bears eating walrus and I shot one at 125 yards. The other three were still eating walrus while we took pictures when all the sudden two monsters bears came charging at us! We ran behind the 4-wheeler with guns raised, ready to shoot.

Thank goodness they ran away back to the walrus feast After that we pulled the bear about 100 yards away and I guarded with the gun while the team cleaned the bear.

Next we hunted Barron Ground caribou. I saw one had horns and I took it. Then we had a long night in a box shack – with five people snoring away.

We left for land and after five hours of getting beaten to death by seas we made it. Two days later we took off again to "Walrus Island" – 60 miles away. There were walrus everywhere! I shot one and boom...

...I'm now at North America number 19 – three closer to the Super 25 which has been my goal.

It's been great trip. The people are nice and it's cold. But boy, am I ready to get back home to family!"



PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD



*Bill Tittle, Ogilvie Mountains
Stone Sheep 2025*



*Shad Hulse, NWT
Stone Sheep 2025*



*Don Martin, California
Blacktail 2025*



*John Ware, Zambia
Crocodile 2025*



*Beverly Valdez, Zambia
Livingstone Eland 2025*



*John Ware, Zambia
Bush Buck 2025*



*Bill Tittle, Nunavut, Canada
Central Barren Ground Caribou 2025*



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.

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JUSTIN AKINS
PEGGY MAY BLOOM
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MIKE BOREL
JAKE BRICKER
JIM BRICKER
JED BRUSSEAU
ADAM CASAGRANDE
KEVIN CHENG
DAVID COMBS
KEN CROTHER
WILLIAM CULLINS
JOSHUA DARNELL
CLIFF DAVIS
BRET DISMUKES
JIM DISMUKES
NOAH DISMUKES
DAN EVENSON
SCOTT FINLEY
JIM FITZGERALD

RANDY FORTUNE,
DISTINGUISHED LIFE #7
RICK GARZOLI JR
JACOB GARRETT
SCOTT GIBSON
ANTHONY GIGLIOTTI
STEVE GINGRAS
BEN GORDON
TINA GORDON
CASEY HADDOX
JESSICA HADDOX
JUSTIN HALLOCK
DAVID HARTWIG,
DISTINGUISHED LIFE #6
STEEN HENRIKSEN
CORY HIGGINS
TYLER W. HIGGINS
GARY HILL
ERNEST HOLLOWAY
PATTY HOLLOWAY
SHAD HULSE
BRETT JEFFERSON

TRAVIS JESSOP
BOB KEAGY
BRYN KERN
MAK KERN
RANDY LASKOWSKY
PEGGY BARNETT LEE
CHASEN MARLER
MAKENA MARLER
DONALD C MARTIN
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MORGAN
PATRICK OILAR
JOHN OLDENKAMP
NATHAN OLDENKAMP

CHRISTOPHER
PEATRESS
JEREMY PECHTEL
JEFF PERACCHI
DON PERRIEN
JOHN PESTORICH
DON POWERS
DON PRIEST
CAROLINE PYNE,
DVM,
DISTINGUISHED LIFE #1
CONNOR PYNE, DVM,
DISTINGUISHED LIFE #2
GLEN PYNE, DVM,
DISTINGUISHED LIFE #5
MADISON PYNE,
DISTINGUISHED LIFE #4
TRAVIS PYNE,
DISTINGUISHED LIFE #3
TOM REA
MASON ROGERS
DAVE ROWAN

PAUL SCHULTHEIS
RICH SELLERS
ALAN SHULTZ
DAN SMITH, JR.
DAN SMITH, III
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ADAM STARR
BROOKS STILTZ
BILL TITTLE
MICHAEL TORRES
GREG TOOLEY
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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.

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

IT'S BAAAAACK!

This could be your chance!

Make your dreams come true while you can still climb mountains.



Mail checks to:
CA Wild Sheep Foundation
1630 Williams Hwy #151
Grants Pass, OR 97527

ONLY 750 tickets
\$200 PER TICKET
2026 STONE SHEEP
Special Drawing

HUNT INFORMATION

What a remarkable 14-day guided hunt FOR YOU! One-on-one with a great guide, in the breathtaking Pelly Mountains of Yukon, Canada. Does not include costs of commercial or charter flights, tag and preservation fees, government harvest fees, 5% GST, or tips.



Pizza Rolls Recipe from Tony Gigilotti

INGREDIENTS

Dough Recipe

- 250g all-purpose flour
- 40g tapioca starch
- 1 tsp salt
- 140g hot water (100F)
- 8g lard or oil
- 1 egg for an egg wash

Filling

- 200g of diced pepperoni
- 330g cubed mozzarella

Sauce

- 6oz can tomato paste
- 28oz can crushed tomatoes
- 1.5 tbsp basil
- 1/2 tbsp oregano
- 1/tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp crushed red paper flake
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder



DIRECTIONS

DOUGH

- 1) Mix the dry ingredients together
- 2) Add the lard/oil then hot water and continue mixing
- 3) Knead the dough until the consistency is smooth and then cover for 30 min

SAUCE

- 1) Add all ingredients into a pot. Rinse the tomato paste and crushed tomato cans with ~one inch of water each and pour into the pot
- 2) Bring to a boil and simmer for 10-15 min

MAKING THE BITES

- 1) While the sauce is cooling, cut the dough into four equal sections, and begin rolling it out to your desired thickness
- 2) There are multiple ways to make the individual bites: you can utilize sheets and work similar to raviolis or cut the dough into smaller pieces and fold the dough over itself to enclose the filling. If making individually, cut the dough into ~2.5x2.5 inch

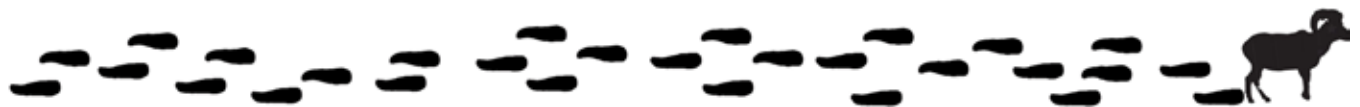
squares. You can go larger, but do not go smaller. Dust the dough with corn starch to avoid it sticking

- 3) Once the sauce has cooled, slowly add the sauce to your diced filling to get the ratio you prefer. Mix to ensure a homogeneous filling

- 4) Use a heaping teaspoon of filling on the center of a piece of dough and fold each corner in one by one to seal the bite. If using a ravioli rolling pin spread the filling on your dough about a 1/4" thick leaving 1" around the edges before laying the second layer on top
- 5) If you would like the dough to be golden brown in the oven lightly brush each roll with the egg wash

- 6) Bake at 425 for ~20 minutes

- 7) Let rest for 10 minutes after removing from the oven to avoid burning your tongue!



Ammo Can Now Ship Direct to Californians **ON HOLD**

There was a brief window following a significant ruling by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals on July 24, 2025, which declared California's ammunition background check law unconstitutional. During that time, Californians were able to purchase ammunition online and have it shipped directly to their homes without undergoing background checks.

However, on August 7, 2025, California Attorney General Rob Bonta filed a petition for a rehearing "*en banc*." An *en banc* review means a larger panel of judges (11) will reconsider the case. This process can take weeks or even months.

The court's decision is not yet final. The mandate—an official order that puts the ruling into effect—has not been issued. This means the changes could be delayed until mid-August 2025 or later. As of this issue, the *en banc* has not been heard and no mandate issued.

Until the mandate is issued, California residents must continue to comply with existing ammunition laws, including background checks for all purchases. The California Department of Justice has confirmed that these requirements remain in effect until further notice.

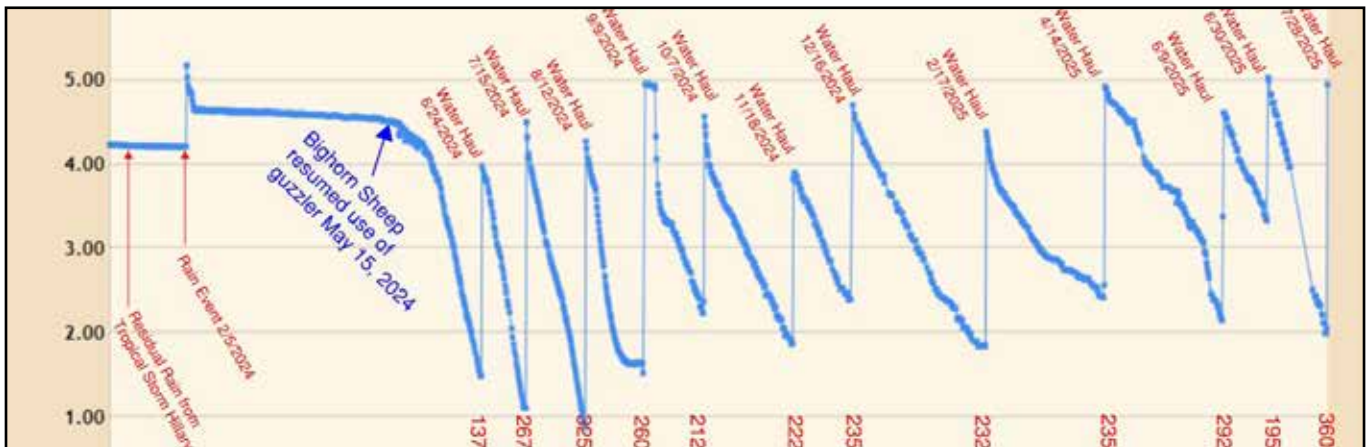
THE NEWBERRY CREW KEEPS GOING AND GOING...

By Scott Gibson, Distinguished Life Member / SCBS Member

SCBS area Captain Butch Rhodes and Water Hauler Team Leader Doug Appel have been keeping the volunteers and our CDFW personnel out at Newberry Springs busy. Since the last time SB25 Newberry BGG collected rainwater on February 5th, 2024, the Newberry crew has hauled water to the guzzler a dozen times. Total water placed in the tanks has now reached over 32,075-gallons hauled by 4x4 truck. SB25 Newberry BGG is a critical water source located in Hunt Zone10, Newberry,

Rodman and Ord Mountains. Many of the sheep harvested from this zone have received life sustaining water from this drinker.

In addition to the SB25 Newberry BGG, the crew also has been hauling water to the SB50 Quarry BGG and SB52 Sawtooth BGG. Total water hauled to those two guzzlers is more than 8000-gal. during the same time period.



Satellite Water Level Monitor Chart showing water levels with dates of water hauls and gallons delivered

Our volunteers are regularly treated to quite a show from the local bighorn sheep. They often come down to drink while we are filling the tanks. It is not uncommon for us to see upwards of twenty sheep during a water haul.



Except for the Society's truck, **Big Red**, all volunteers haul water with their own personal 4x4 trucks. Many volunteers drive hundreds of miles and come all the way from Orange County, Tehachapi, Frazier Park and all over San Bernardino, Riverside and Los Angeles Counties. All told, volunteers have driven over 25,945-miles and dedicated over 1,254-hours to these water hauls since 2024.

Our volunteers and their CDFW counterparts have formed a tight bond over the years performing these water hauls; we have become family. We always have food, refreshing drinks and a place to cool off in the shade while trucks are unloading water. The Newberry water haul has become a time when our volunteers can catch up with old friends.

While we patiently wait for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to grant a permit to build a new replacement "Raincatcher Wildlife Water System" (RWWS), water hauls will continue. It's estimated that 250-bighorn sheep regularly drink from the Newberry guzzler, so another water haul will likely be needed by the time you are reading this article.

If you have a ¾-ton 4x4 truck and would like to volunteer, please reach out to Scott Gibson @ 909-210-0548 or email scottgibson@gmail.com



Big Red - SCBS owned truck



Volunteers / friends / family



Kenetrek
Boots
FOR THE TRAIL LESS TRAVELED

ONE COUNTRY, TWO CHAMOIS SPECIES, THREE DAYS - PART 2

By John Ware, Distinguished Life Member

The second part of our chamois hunting took place in the Zlot Canyon region, known for its steep, rugged terrain. This area, located in eastern Serbia near the Romanian border, is prime habitat for the Carpathian chamois, a subspecies found throughout the Carpathian Mountains.

Before the second hunt began, we enjoyed a few scheduled diversions—Orthodox Christmas celebrations and a couple of shorter hunts for other game species. During one of these, Beverly took a very nice mouflon.



The day before the hunt, we relocated to a hotel about near Zlot. As with our previous accommodations, it felt like an upscale retreat—the best the area had to offer. Once again, our hunt would take place inside a national park.

We left the hotel at 6:00 a.m. as planned, reaching the hunting area in the predawn.

At the trailhead we met with additional local guides and park rangers, then split into two

groups. John, Stefan, and one ranger took a truck farther up the mountain. Beverly, Sasha, and the other ranger headed directly into the canyon.

Beverly's hike began with a half-mile walk along a narrow but manageable path. Her gamekeeper had already spotted chamois across the canyon, and they were working toward a position for a cross-canyon shot. Sasha and the ranger paused often to glass

the cliffs, pointing out animals along the way. At the very end of the path—the farthest point into the canyon—they stopped. "This is your shooting position," they said.

It wasn't an easy setup: a narrow rock shelf, a long cross-canyon shot, and a



Beverly with Sasha (L) and John with Stefan (R) with their Carpathian chamois on a very windy "bad hair" day!

small-bodied target. After several repositionings, Beverly finally located the chamois the guides had singled out as a good trophy. The distance was estimated at 250–280 meters. With her head pressed against the escarpment rocks and toes dug into the rock wall behind her for balance, Beverly settled in.

By 7:15 a.m., her shot was made, and the hunt was essentially over—except for the "hard work" that always follows success.

Meanwhile, John's team had climbed to a tourist overlook with picnic tables high on the canyon rim. From there, the true scale of Zlot Canyon was striking—similar in grandeur to the Grand Canyon, but harsher in tone with grey rock and the white frost of winter.

Within 15 minutes they were spotting chamois across the upper cliffs at about 300 meters. A shooting position was cobbled together among the rocks, just past the "tourist fence." Gusty wind spoiled the first attempt, and the target chamois escaped unharmed. Moments later, another shot echoed from below—Beverly's success announced itself up the canyon.

The teams stayed in touch via cell phone. Sasha and Stefan agreed John's group should head down the same trail Beverly had used, since that area held plenty of animals.



As John's group descended, they met Beverly's party (minus the gamekeeper, who was recovering her animal). Confident Beverly's chamois was secured, they pressed on beyond the end of the established trail.



Steep but no fear of falling all the way to the bottom

The going was steep, but the brushy undergrowth offered reassurance—any slip would be quickly stopped by a tree. After another half-mile, they located a shootable chamois. The shot was clean at about 200 meters. While their gamekeeper retrieved the animal from a steep section known well to him, John and Stefan began the climb out.

Soon enough everyone regrouped at the trucks, two chamois in hand, trading stories and results. A quick decision was made to haul both animals back to John's original vantage point, which offered the perfect backdrop for trophy photos.

Afterward, with the game still in the truck, the gamekeepers returned to their duties. We took a side trip to Žedna Pečina—Thirsty Cave. Though closed for the season, Sasha called a longtime friend and cave researcher who graciously opened the gates for us. The tour was fascinating, especially the stories of how the caves had been used as shelter during wartime.



The "Thirsty Cave"

Sasha and Stefan, the core of the European Hunting Adventures team, were excellent hosts—knowledgeable, friendly, and with us every step of the way. They are also generous supporters of conservation organizations such as CA WSF and Safari Club International (SCI). If you're considering a European hunt for chamois, wild boar, roe deer, red stag, or mouflon, they're well worth contacting.

<https://www.safari-eha.com/>, email info@safari-eha.com. Let them know John & Beverly sent you.



***Sheep country has a way of
humbling you. The rams don't
live where the faint-hearted tread.***

SECOND AMENDMENT FOUNDATION SCORES A BIG WIN IN JUNIOR SPORTS V. BONTA

Editor's Note: In 2023 CA WSF was forced to stop publically promoting youth sporting activities including hunting and shooting sports. Our focus on youth was not changed but due to a California law we were not able to do as much as possible to bring youth into our community. This article is a summary of information provided by the Second Amendment Foundation (SAF). Learn more about SAF at their website <https://saf.org/>

Finally some good news from the California courts!

On July 7th, a three-judge panel of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals unanimously upheld an injunction that blocks California from enforcing its so-called “Gun Advertising Ban.” This case — Junior Sports Magazines v. Bonta — was brought by the Second Amendment Foundation (SAF) along with several partner organizations.

The law in question (California Business and Professions Code §22949.80) tried to stop magazines and organizations from showing firearm-related products in any way that might “appeal to minors.” In practice, that meant shutting down ads in Junior Sports Magazine and limiting youth shooting sports programs.

The Ninth Circuit made it clear: the First Amendment protects our right to share information about constitutionally protected arms, just as the Second Amendment protects our right to own and use them.

“We reverse the district court and clarify that our constitutional analysis applied to the entirety of Section 22949.80,” the new opinion explicitly states.



Bill Sack, SAF's Director of Legal Operations, summed it up perfectly:

“The First Amendment provides the protection to advertise constitutionally protected arms just as the Second Amendment codifies the protection to keep and bear them.”

SAF founder, Alan Gottlieb, added:

“Simply because California officials don't agree with our pro-gun viewpoint, they have no right to gag free speech or censor the press.”

This victory doesn't just protect Junior Sports Magazines. It protects every member, parent, and youth shooter who values the ability to learn about and participate in our traditions without government censorship.

What This Means for Us

- Youth programs are safe: California cannot censor or restrict ads that promote junior shooting sports.
- Your voice matters: The courts affirmed that pro-Second Amendment viewpoints cannot be silenced just because officials disagree.
- A broader win: This decision strengthens both First and Second Amendment protections — securing rights for future generations.

HOW TO HUNT SHEEP EVERY YEAR!

by Vince Bloom , Distinguished Life Member

So how do you hunt sheep—and how do you do it every year? The first thing is, you have to be in the mountains where sheep live. One of my favorite sayings is, “Thoughts are things.” Another is, “Whatever the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve.” I’m constantly dreaming and scheming about going on a sheep hunt, and this article is meant to help connect that dream to reality through mindset and strategy.

Here are eight actionable ways to make an annual sheep hunting experience possible:

1. Research Draw Tags – Create a Spreadsheet

You can apply for a sheep tag by entering draws in every U.S. state that offers them. Hiring a tag application service can save you time and headaches, or you can build your own spreadsheet. List each state, their deadlines, draw odds, costs, and bonus point systems. Over time, your odds will increase. This is a game of patience and perseverance.

2. Enter Raffles – You Have to Play to Win

Raffle hunts often have better odds than public draws, especially when considering how few people participate relative to the available tags. Organizations like the Wild Sheep Foundation and various state affiliates offer raffle tickets for once-in-a-lifetime hunts. You just might win—and someone has to.

3. Apply for Ewe Hunts – They Still Count

Ewe (female sheep) tags are typically much easier to draw and cheaper than ram hunts. While you won’t get a big set of horns, you get to be out in sheep country, learning, improving your skills, and living the experience. It keeps your sheep hunting dreams alive, and every hunt builds your mountain maturity.

4. Hunt Aoudad (Barbary Sheep) – The Poor Man’s Sheep Hunt

Aoudads can be found in states like Texas and New Mexico and offer an incredibly tough, affordable, and wild sheep hunting experience. The terrain and physical demands are real, and tags are usually over the counter or accessible through private land. This hunt scratches the sheep itch until the big tag comes through.

5. Explore Montana’s Unlimited Units

Montana offers Unlimited sheep tags for certain areas—you can buy the tag and hunt without drawing, but success rates are very low. These hunts demand extreme commitment, physical preparation, and a ton of scouting, but they give you the rare chance to hunt sheep every single year if you’re up for the challenge.

6. Become an Alaska Resident

Moving to Alaska is a life shift, but one that opens massive



Vince with his Dall sheep

hunting opportunities. As a resident, you can hunt Dall sheep every year—no guide required. And if you’re 60 or older, you receive hunting and fishing licenses for free, including Dall sheep and mountain goat. This is the long game—but it’s worth considering if sheep hunting is your passion.

7. Book Combo Hunts – Add a Sheep Option

When booking hunts for species like moose, caribou, or mountain goat, ask about adding a sheep option. This alternative is often cheaper than a full-blown sheep hunt. You don’t have to pull the trigger unless you see a monster ram—but at least you’re in the mountains with the possibility. Some outfitters even offer payment plans.

8. Be a Team Player – Help Others Who Draw

When a friend or family member draws a sheep tag, offer to help. Whether you’re the cameraman, spotter, or pack mule, you’ll get nearly the same experience and learn priceless lessons for your own future hunt. It feels like you won the tag too—and helping them succeed puts good karma and momentum in your favor.

Bonus: Live Like It’s Already Happening – Get in Sheep Shape

One of the most crucial things you can do is act as if you’ve already drawn. Commit to regular mountain-style training. Get in “sheep shape”—it means next-level fitness that prepares you for steep country, long days, and high altitudes. When you’re in sheep shape, the whole world feels different. You’ll walk with confidence, like you’re carrying a quiet secret of purpose and preparation.

Final Thoughts

At the time of writing, I only have two draw results left—Arizona and Texas—but one of my best friends’ dads drew a Nevada Rocky Mountain bighorn tag. That means I’m sheep hunting this year! I couldn’t be more excited to be on the team, feel the weight of a pack on my back, and touch the magic of the mountains once again.

Sheep and sheep hunts are special. Not many people ever do them, which puts you in an elite crowd. If you want the universe to open doors for you, stay involved—volunteer with local sheep foundations, donate time or services, and stay ready. The magic is real, but you have to believe it, chase it, and most importantly—earn it.

GOVERNMENT ISSUES UPDATE

by Don Priest, Distinguished Life Member, Board Member

OPPOSITION TO THE SODA MOUNTAIN SOLAR PROJECT

The California Energy Commission (CEC) is currently reviewing the application by the Soda Mountain Solar Project (Project) proponents, with a decision at the state level for permitting by the CEC to be made within the next month. The California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation (CA WSF) strongly opposes this Project, with the CA WSF taking the lead in sending a Letter of Opposition to the CEC earlier this year.

CA WSF and a coalition of sixteen additional Conservation and Sportsman groups has just written directly to the Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum stating our opposition, taking our disapproval of the Project to the Federal level. This Project will require right of way permitting by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and we implore Secretary Burgum to deny those BLM permits. We indicated to the Secretary that we support responsible energy development, but not at the expense of our ecologically sensitive and cherished public lands. That such developments should be placed at low-conflict landscape locations that may be more easily integrated into existing infrastructure.

This solar Project will be located adjacent to Desert Bighorn Sheep (DBS) habitat within and west of the Mojave National Preserve. Our Conservation and Sportsman coalition, along with other Non-Governmental Organizations, the California Department



of Transportation and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife fought to require the Brightline High Speed Rail Project to build two wildlife overpasses specifically for these herds of DBS. These overcrossings would allow for movement between the Soda Mountains north of I-15 with the North Bristol Mountains and Cady Mountains to the south. I-15 was already a barrier to DBS, and this High Speed Rail Project would have been the nail in the coffin to this much needed connectivity for DBS across the desert landscape. This solar Project has the strong potential to eliminate DBS from utilizing these two much needed wildlife crossings, thus potentially wasting years of hard work that required the building of these crossings by Brightline.



Photo Courtesy of basinandrangewatch.org



DESERT BIGHORN SHEEP PROGRAM UPDATE

By Danielle Glass, CDFW Environmental Scientist

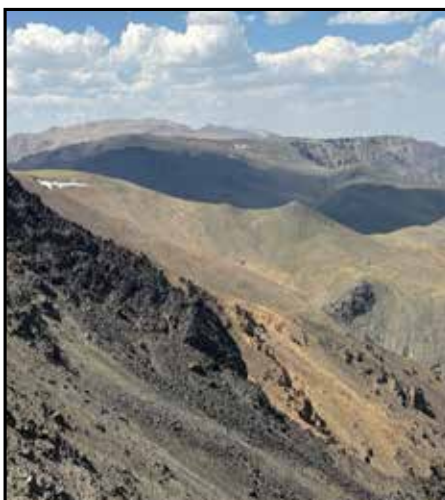
California Department of Fish & Wildlife's desert bighorn sheep program has remained as busy as ever. In early summer, we finished installing ~100 trail cameras spread across 17 desert mountain ranges to estimate population numbers. These motion-activated trail cameras will detect wildlife coming into water sources during the hot summer months, and we will retrieve them when the weather turns cool in the fall. In June, we conducted a ground survey of the Marble Mountains with Backcountry Hunters & Anglers volunteers that proved relatively ineffective due to unexpectedly cool weather. We luckily have trail cameras placed in the range that will provide us with a more robust population estimate. In July, we conducted a ground survey of the White Mountains. This estimate showed a healthy ewe population base including many yearlings.

We were lucky to recently welcome two new Scientific Aides to our program – Arioch M'Greene and Phil Keefe. They have jumped straight into fieldwork, helping us with water hauls and the hunter orientation in addition to the ground surveys. It was fun to see the 30 hunters excited for their once-in-a-lifetime hunt at the orientation. Many thanks to the California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation (CA WSF) for providing lunch and coffee to all who attended.

In other news, the North Central Deserts Bighorn Conservation Unit Plan is fully drafted and being reviewed by CDFW leadership. This plan is for bighorn populations between Interstate 15 and Interstate 40 in the Mojave Desert, and it will be considered an appendix to the newly-published Conservation and Management Plan for Bighorn Sheep in California. The hope is to have this North Central plan finalized by the California Fish & Game Commission's September meeting. CDFW plans to write six Bighorn Conservation Plans in total to encompass all desert bighorn populations in California.



Danielle Glass



Surveying the White Mountainns



Ewe Drinking at Newberry water haul

WATER DEVELOPMENT IN THE DESERT

by Steve Marschke and Debbie Miller Marschke, SCBS Board of Directors

We had an aggressive schedule for our first full year of state land lease projects and we completed three of the four that were designed and planned. The one remaining project required additional coordination with BLM for access permission. We are happy to announce that SCBS has obtained permission from BLM Needles Office, so we will be able to proceed with the installation on this particular State Lands lease during our next construction season this coming Fall. The three projects that were completed all went quite smoothly and we are grateful to CA WSF for the funding commitments from the GALAD program:

- SL15 “Aurora” in October 2024 was the first state lands project and it is located in the Cady Mtn hunt zone. This system places water on a historically dry side of the range, so the goal is to enhance the habitat for the herd that is currently populated the range.
- SL90 “Black Pearl” is south of Ludlow and while that currently isn’t a hunt zone, it adjoins the 29 Palms Marine Corp base where a significant population of bighorn is active. We expect this water development to help create permanent summer habitat and to foster connectivity from within the base to areas outside the base.
- SL03 “Lady Lu” was installed in January 2025 and is in the South Bristol hunt zone. This portion of the zone has been important to bighorn rams and the entire hunt zone has only one natural water source and now, two developments. We expect the summertime availability of water to help increase this herd’s population, spread them across the landscape to reduce density and foster connectivity.



Aurora installation

Meanwhile we have been out scouting additional parcels in our lease and preparing for more construction. We have already selected sites and developed detailed plans for 3 additional sources and are working on several more prospects that we expect to construct next fall. The limiting factor in the schedule is generally the biological survey which has to occur during the spring wildflower bloom (many of the listed sensitive species are spring wildflowers). That task



Lady Lu installation (above)
Black Pearl installation (below)



normally becomes the schedule driver; if we miss the spring season for the biology survey, then we have to wait a full year to try again. That said, we have four sites on the docket for this spring and are working to get at least two more into the plan.

We have been selecting parcels that already have existing roads and trails that allow us to use wheeled vehicles for access and construction. In the future, as we exhaust the easy access parcels, we will have to work the more difficult parcels that require helicopter access and that will require additional funding. Right now we are concentrating on getting the most bang for your buck.

Please watch the calendar for project dates and volunteer to help us, we always need more support. Projects are formally announced on our Facebook page and by email blast. Project volunteers are notified and recruited by email, so if you are currently not on our volunteer email list, contact Debbie Miller Marschke at debmillermars@gmail.com so you can be a part of this exciting endeavor. Many hands make light work.

Next scheduled construction project dates and locations:

- October 24 – 26, 2025 Location SL13
- December 5 – 8, 2025 Location Casebier Property
- January 9 – 12, 2026 Location SL282
- February 20 – 23, 2026 Location SL61

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

by Vernon C. Bleich

This account further explores the events that led to the opening of the Sheep Hole Mountains to the harvest of bighorn sheep, and provides additional information regarding the management history of that zone. In part, establishment of this hunt zone benefited from translocations of bighorn sheep to that mountain range, as described in Part I of this account (Bleich 2025). As might have been foreseen, however, the positive results of habitat enhancements and the aforementioned translocations also generated fodder for the 'anti-hunting crowd' to use in campaigns against the consumptive use of wildlife and, especially, what they consider to be 'trophy hunting'. Some of these additional, albeit little-known, details are described herein.

Careful management of bighorn sheep at Old Dad Mountain resulted in the eventual translocation of more than 200 bighorn sheep to several geographic areas of the Mojave Desert (Bleich et al. 1990, 2021). These efforts were undertaken either to restore those native ungulates to historical ranges from which they had been extirpated, or to augment extant populations that were at an increased risk to extirpation because of small size. As explained in Part I, the intent was to restore bighorn sheep to the Sheep Hole Mountains—a vacant mountain range—and enhance the probability of continued metapopulation dynamics across a broad swath of southern San Bernardino County. Those translocations may have represented augmentations of a tiny population in that range, and the overall outcome was positive. The population increased in size from what was near zero at best, or represented a seasonal or transient presence of bighorn sheep. Ultimately, a robust population developed, and was sufficient for the Sheep Hole Mountains to be considered as an additional hunt zone despite the well-founded pessimism of Jack O'Connor (one of North America's most respected outdoor writers) who in 1974 had opined that, "The season on bighorns in California has been closed for over a century. It will never be reopened."

The population in the Sheep Hole Mountains increased substantially from zero—or near zero—following the translocations and eventually numbered between 50 and 100 animals (Torres et al. 1996, Epps et al. 2003, Bleich 2025). As a result, the California Department of Fish

and Game (CDFG) proposed that the Sheep Hole Mountains be considered as an additional hunt zone, and such was recommended to and approved by the California Fish and Game Commission. The new zone was created and opened for the 2000 hunting season. The population continued on an upward trend, reaching an estimated 101 to 150 individuals by 2010 (Abella et al. 2011).

The creation of an additional hunt zone was hailed by wildlife biologists as another example of a wildlife conservation success. Indeed, a population that was thought no longer to exist or had been on the verge of extirpation, had been brought back to levels sufficient to create an unanticipated harvest opportunity, similar to other conservation successes. Among examples are the 'rediscovered' Aleutian Canada Goose (Jones 1963), Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep in states from which they had been extirpated (Nordeen et al. 2019, Wiedmann et al. 2025), and wolves in some jurisdictions (Wyoming Game and Fish Commission 2011, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks 2025). Nevertheless, the successful recovery of the population in the Sheep Hole Mountains resulted in substantial opposition to the proposal to open the area to the harvest of bighorn sheep.

Despite the existing and long-standing objective of reestablishing bighorn sheep in areas from which they had disappeared, animal rights activists and other opponents of hunting once again raised the argument that, 'The only reason **you** [emphasis added] wanted to have bighorn sheep back in the Sheep Hole Mountains is because **you** [emphasis added] want to hunt them.' This was the first time that argument had been used in California, as previous translocations to reestablish populations of bighorn sheep to historical habitat largely had been supported by those groups. Nonetheless, it was not the last—nor is it apt to be the last—of any such arguments that have been proffered. For example, Elbroch (2020) considered the restoration of desert bighorn sheep to historical ranges in New Mexico as having occurred because the 'chief advocate' for doing so was, "[s]tubbornly set on



increasing bighorn sheep numbers **to where they could be harvested by sportsmen again** [emphasis added] ...; rather than acknowledging that desert bighorn sheep were at risk of extinction in that jurisdiction and that recovery was consistent with the State's public trust stewardship of its wildlife resources (Rominger et al. 2006).

Regardless of efforts to prevent the legal harvest of bighorn sheep in the Sheep Hole Mountains, the first hunts occurred during the 2000-2001 hunting season, and continued through the season of 2013-2014—a period of 14 years. A prolonged drought occurred toward the end of that period, however, and it had a profound and negative effect on water availability and forage quality that resulted in the deaths of numerous animals (Figure 1). A proposal to develop (up to six as I recall) additional surface water sources in the Sheep Hole Mountains was addressed in the Record of Decision for the Approved Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert Coordinated Management Plan (BLM 2002). Despite the intense efforts of CDFG Wildlife Biologist Nancy Andrew, Outfitter Terry Anderson, and Leon Lesicka of Desert Wildlife Unlimited, however, only the S-D Big Game Guzzler (BGG) eventually was constructed to complement the water sources



Figure 1. Bighorn sheep inhabiting the Sheep Hole Mountains experienced a substantial decline in numbers as a result of an extended drought that effectively eliminated surface water previously available to bighorn sheep and severely impacted quality and availability of forage across the range. Terry Anderson of San Gorgonio Wilderness Outfitters is credited with bringing this situation to the attention of concerned hunters, conservationists, and for advocating strongly to ensure water be made available. Following the population decline, California's Seventh Bighorn Sheep Hunt Zone offered no hunting opportunities from 2014 to 2023. Photographs courtesy of Terry Anderson, Sheep Hole Mountains, San Bernardino Co., California, July 2014.

(Suds Hole and Bear Claws) developed years earlier by CDFG and the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep (SCBS). Moreover, neither of those projects was completed until many years following the original requests to do so.

In the absence of additional enhancements to increase available surface water, the ultimate outcome was a severe decline in the population. Had additional wildlife water sources been on the landscape during the drought, they would have represented redundant sources of surface water that Glenn Sudmeier—of the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep—the importance of which he has advocated for decades. Had they been approved then, those sources may have provided surface water during the drought by distributing sheep across a wider area and thereby lessening use or dependence on the existing water sources, and could have increased the survival rate among animals occupying the range (Bleich 2009).

The population high of 101–150 individuals (Abella et al. 2011) decreased substantially thereafter and, as a result, no hunting occurred in the zone during 2014 through 2023. Although the number of tags proposed was reduced to zero in 2014, the population was thought to consist of 25–50 individuals at its low point (Prentice et al. 2019), but increased thereafter (Vu et al. 2021, Bleich 2025). In 2024, a proposal to reallocate a permit was approved by the Fish and Game Commission and a hunt was held that year; a tag again has been allocated for the 2025-2026 hunting season.

Although permits were unavailable in the Sheep Hole Mountains for about a decade, the zone remained 'open' with a harvest allocation of zero. This strategy originally was suggested by Dick Weaver and Vern Bleich as a way of regulating harvests without formally closing an 'open zone' to the take of bighorn sheep. A tag allocation of zero is now an option included in the range of permits for every zone on an annual basis, and achieves the same objective as would a 'closed' zone, but it took a substantial amount of effort for that to occur. Nonetheless, it is the management strategy that again will provide for the harvest of bighorn sheep in the San Gorgonio Wilderness and Sheep Hole Mountains hunt zones in the absence of extensive environmental burdens and public review—and will preclude another opportunity for animal rights or anti-hunting activists to openly attack the harvest program.

As an example, had the original recommendation for hunt zones to remain open despite a harvest allocation of zero animals been in place at the time, the East Chocolate Mountains would have continued as Bighorn Sheep Hunt Zone 3 (as it originally was designated), received a recommendation of zero tags until staff determined that the harvest of at least one legal male again was appropriate, and that tag then would have been allocated as part of the regular Fish and Game Commission approval process. As it exists now, however, if the East Chocolate Mountains were to be reopened to the harvest of bighorn sheep, the process will require preparation of an extensive and detailed environmental document, an additional burdensome and lengthy period for public review, and likely will generate opposition from 'environmental' organizations that historically oppose any harvest of bighorn sheep.

Regulations approved for the 2025-2026 Sheep Hole Mountains hunt also modified the boundary and size of the area designated in the plan for that management unit (Pauli and Bleich 1991) and with which the original hunt zone was congruent. The justification used for that change in the boundary appears well-founded (i.e., 'enhanced' hunter opportunity) in the context of adding an area not previously opened to hunting, but also included the closure of a vast geographic area that previously had been open. It is important that readers understand how and why a much larger and very precisely defined hunt zone originally was established.

Early in the process of developing the new hunt zone, Andy Pauli (the CDFG Desert Unit Manager), Steve Torres (the Bighorn Sheep Program Coordinator in the state office), and I (the Eastern Units Supervisor in Region 5) began discussing potential boundaries of the proposed zone with CDFG wildlife enforcement officers. The existing management unit already complied with repeated recommendations that the zone have well-established, easily identifiable, and 'enforceable' boundaries to ensure there could be no misinterpretation of whether a hunter was inside or outside of the proposed new zone; we also consulted with and considered the recommendations submitted by personnel at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms. Further, we reviewed all of the aerial telemetry data that had been obtained (i.e., most of the same data used to develop and initiate the habitat models and select locations for additional habitat enhancements in the form of water sources as described in Part I of this account [Bleich et al. 1992, Bleich 2025]). Finally, we reasoned that hunters would concentrate their efforts in the area or in those areas—albeit within a large zone—in which they were most apt to be successful.

Andy, Steve, and I had determined that telemetered animals ranged many kilometers northward from the northernmost end of the Sheep Hole Mountains, westward into the Bullion Mountains, and eastward into the Calumet Mountains. As a result, we concurred with the local Fish and Game Wardens that a logical—and 'enforceable'—outer boundary was best described as Amboy Road from its Junction with Iron Age Road north to the junction of Amboy Road with the National Trails Highway (old U.S. Highway 66). From that intersection, the original boundary extended eastward on the highway to the Saltus Road, then southeasterly past the Calumet Mine and continued an additional 40 km (~27 miles) along a well-established dirt road on the east side of the Calumet Mountains—once again an easily recognizable and enforceable boundary—to its junction with California Highway 62, thence westward on Highway 62 to the junction with Iron Age Road, and north on Iron Age Road to its junction with Amboy Road, the point of beginning.

This boundary was established to ensure the locations of violators or violations could be determined with certainty, that there would be no encroachment onto the military base, that any violations would be successfully prosecuted, and that it would provide the greatest hunting opportunity based

on the distribution of bighorn sheep as known at the time. It also helped ensure that animals that had moved—or were in the process of moving—to the Bullion Mountains would not be stopped short if emigrating westward from the Sheep Hole Mountains to that range.

In 2025, regulatory changes approved by the Fish and Game Commission resulted in a net reduction in the size of the Sheep Hole Mountains Hunt Zone, but also extended the boundary westward across Amboy Road and now abuts the southern boundary of the Twenty Nine Palms Marine Corps Air Ground Training Center—to which public access remains closed and whereupon hunting is prohibited. Most of the new boundary west of Amboy Road and separating military land from public land is defined by a 'property line' rather than readily identifiable landmarks or anthropogenic features. Hopefully, this will not result in trespass issues or enforcement problems.

The translocations, habitat enhancements, and subsequent increase of the bighorn sheep population in the Sheep Hole Mountains are examples of successful restoration efforts, and that success is exemplified by evidence of genetic connectivity to the Coxcomb Mountains to the south, the Bullion Mountains to the west, and still further west to the Newberry and Ord mountains. Despite evidence of these successes, the translocations to the Sheep Hole Mountains also created an unanticipated opportunity for protests by those that argued (and continue to argue; Elbroch 2020) that the only reason wildlife agencies want to enhance the distribution of bighorn sheep is to increase hunting opportunities.

Few things could be further from representing a rational argument. Hunting opportunities are a by-product of successful conservation efforts, but are not *the* justification for conservation. During my career, I spent numerous days and nights in the Sheep Hole Mountains, and it is among the mountain ranges I found most difficult to navigate or travel within. Those who have had the opportunity to harvest a bighorn sheep in the Sheep Hole Mountains, and the lucky individuals who will be able to hunt there during upcoming seasons likely have experienced, or will experience, similar difficulties. But, those individuals also are the beneficiaries of a successful management program that some thought would never be possible in California.

A SPECIAL NOTE: In Part I of this history of the Sheep Hole Mountains Hunt Zone (Bleich 2025), I erroneously referred to the second BGG constructed as the "Bear Claw BGG", and noted that I did not recall why it had been so named. I have been reminded that the correct name for that development is the "Bear Claws BGG". It was so christened to recognize the contributions of a now-retired former member of the CDFG Wildlife Habitat Development Crew (i.e., Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Project W-26-D). That individual, Ross Shadduck, had hands the size of a grizzly bear's front paws, and provided the stimulus for his nickname, "Bear Claws". The Bear Claws BGG was named for Ross in recognition of his dedication to desert bighorn sheep and the management of their habitat.

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—This article is part of a series by Dr. Vern Bleich, who increasingly is concerned that many aspects of the history and management of bighorn sheep in California are being lost. That history is long and complex, and at times has been misinterpreted, or even wrongly conveyed to others by those not having a direct connection to the past. Articles in the series are based on field experiences, monthly and annual reports, memoranda, past verbal discussions, and personal recollections. Vern was employed by the California Department of Fish and Game for 34 years, during which he worked extensively with large mammals occupying the Great Basin, Mojave, and Sonoran deserts of California and, in particular, desert bighorn sheep. He was fortunate to have joined the Department shortly after completion of a thorough inventory of bighorn sheep in California, and has remained active in the conservation and management of that species since 1973. He currently is Research Professor at the University of Nevada Reno, serves on the Advisory Board of the Texas Bighorn Society, is Science Advisor for the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep, serves on two committees of the California Wild Sheep Foundation, is a member of the Wild Sheep Foundation's Professional Resource Advisory Board, and represented wildlife conservation and management interests on the National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board from 2019 to 2022. Parties interested in material presented in this article can contact Vern directly (vcbleich@gmail.com).

PLEASE HELP BRING BACK BALANCE

The Wild Horse & Burro Crisis: Why Action Can't Wait
By Scott Gibson, Distinguished Life Member



Photo courtesy of SCBS member, Rick Halter

Wild horses and burros are a powerful symbol of the American West—but their unchecked populations have pushed western rangelands, native wildlife, and public land budgets past the breaking point. Please encourage your elected representatives to get back to the original text of the Wild Horse and Burro Act —remove the appropriations riders that have cost us hundreds of millions of dollars, caused significant damage to ecosystems and displaced native wildlife like bighorn sheep, deer, elk, pronghorn and more.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) now estimates more than 73,000 wild horses and burros roaming the range—nearly three times the congressionally established Appropriate Management Level (AML) of 25,556 animals. Another 62,853 are in holding facilities, costing taxpayers about \$101 million annually to feed. That's over 70% of the Wild Horse & Burro Program's entire budget, which has totaled \$786 million over the last six years—without addressing the root cause of the problem.

Here in California, the situation is especially alarming. BLM estimates more than 3,000 wild horses and 4,000 burros on our public lands—**over 318% of the state's AML**. See (https://www.blm.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2025-03/2025_

[Wild_Horse_and_Burro_Population_Estimates.pdf](#))

This crisis stems from annual riders in federal appropriations bills, in place since 2005, that block BLM from fully implementing Section 1333 of the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act. Those restrictions prevent the use of critical tools such as sale without limitation and humane euthanasia (as a last resort for unadoptable animals over 10 years old). Stripped of these tools, BLM has been forced to warehouse animals instead of managing populations.

At the current pace, holding facilities will be full within a year. Without space for newly gathered animals, gathers will halt—and wild horse and burro populations could double again in as little as four years. The ecological consequences would be devastating: stripped vegetation, degraded riparian areas, lost habitat for bighorn sheep, elk, deer, antelope, and sage grouse—and ultimately, starvation and death for the horses and burros themselves.

The law is clear: the Secretary of the Interior “shall” manage wild horses and burros to maintain a thriving natural ecological balance. But without access to every tool Congress provided in 1971, BLM is set up to fail—and so is our landscape.

It's time to return to the Act, before it's too late.

Our friends at Backcountry Hunters and Anglers have a “Take Action” button on their website that will allow you to email your congressional representatives. This only takes a few minutes; you can go to their website and take action here: https://www.backcountryhunters.org/take_action#/

Encourage your Representatives to end the Rider Blocking the 1971 Wild Horse & Burro Act

TWO NEW WILDLIFE CROSSINGS PROPOSED IN THE MORONGO BASIN

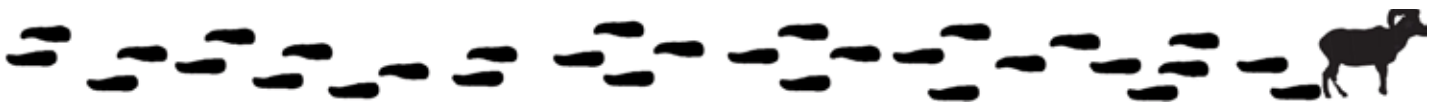
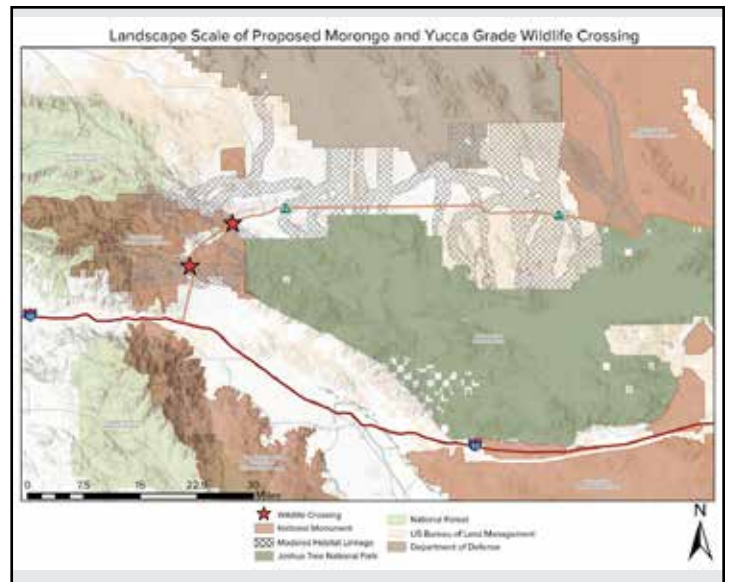
The crossings will reduce wildlife/vehicle collisions and enhance connectivity

By Scott Gibson, Distinguished Member

MORONGO VALLEY, CA - Wildlife crossings are being conceptualized for two points along State Route 62 in Southern California where 232 wildlife deaths have been documented in the last year, this includes bighorn sheep. The two crossings would provide safe routes for animals moving between the San Bernardino and Little San Bernardino Mountains and benefit residents by reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions.

The project is being led by the Mojave Desert Land Trust (MDLT), which currently owns land on either side of the

highway in a wildlife connectivity corridor that connects Joshua Tree National Park to the Bighorn Mountains Wilderness to the north. The second crossing would connect the San Geronio Wilderness on the west to the Little San Bernardino Mountains on the east side of the highway. The area on the west side of Highway 62 is the San Geronio Desert Bighorn Sheep Hunt Unit #5. Some "dandy" sheep are often seen on the east side of HWY 62, connectivity would only help the unit. The area on the east side could be added as a hunt zone.



CA WSF COMMITTEE CHAIRS – NOW IS THE BEST TIME TO SHOW YOUR INTEREST

Each year the President of CA WSF appoints the Chair for each standing committee. These Chairs are requesting YOUR help!

Membership – Greg Tooley, Scott Gibson	Fundraiser – Donald C Martin
Newsletter – Mike Borel	Government and CDFW Affairs – Don Priest
GALAD and Water projects – Mike Borel	Projects beyond Water – Don Priest
Youth Project – Glen Pyne	Marketing & Communications – Beverly Valdez

We are a volunteer organization. Letting the CA WSF leaders know your interests and capabilities will help assure you are involved where you can help the most. See email information for all Board members on page 11.

THE POLITICS OF CONSERVATION

State Legislature Prepares for Final Push
By Bill Gaines, Gaines and Associates

Given that it is the toughest political playing field in the nation, when someone mentions California's State Capitol in the context of wildlife and hunting, it is typically for all the wrong reasons. Having spent over thirty years navigating the halls of our Capitol, I have witnessed it all – some good, but plenty of bad and ugly. In our world, no news – or at least less news – from our Capitol is often the best news for those who care about science-based wildlife management and hunting in our state. The good news is that – largely due to the extreme budget shortfall – this is one of those rare years.

On Monday, August 18th, Legislators will return to the State Capitol from their one-month "Summer Recess" with their batteries recharged and ready to tackle the frantic final four weeks of the 2025 Session – the first year of the two-year 2025/2026 Legislative Session.

While many bad bills of interest to California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation (CA WSF) have perished, several others have been tabled until the 2026 Session, with only a few bills of concern still in play. Enjoy the ride while we can – the 2026 Session is only a few months away. But, in California, even in the quietest moments, we still have our hands full.

Following is a summary of some of the issues CA WSF is currently working and/or tracking in our State Legislature on behalf of our wild sheep and our members. Bills are listed in numerical order, not in order of importance.

2025 STATE LEGISLATIVE SESSION UPDATE

AB 519 (BERMAN) – PET BROKER SALES

According to the author, the goal of AB 519 is to help eradicate "puppy mills" and irresponsible breeders that are contributing to the animal shelter overpopulation crisis by eliminating the brokers that assist them. However, AB 519 by Assembly Member Marc Berman (D/23-Palo Alto) would go much farther.

While many hunters acquire their dogs – including both puppies and started adult dogs – directly from a breeder, others depend upon assistance from third parties to help locate the dog of their choice. Reasons for this would include the buyer not having sufficient connections, familiarity, or education regarding reputable breeders – especially those from outside of California.

Poorly written, AB 519 loosely defines a "broker" as "a person or business that sells, arranges, negotiates, or processes, either in person or online, the sale of dogs....bred by another for profit". Because the language expressly states that this "... includes facilitating the transfer of a dog..." the bill would include virtually any entity assisting with the purchase of a



hunting dog – ranging from someone who assists an individual with locating the hunting dog of their choice to an auctioneer selling a puppy at a fundraising event.

To address these concerns, Gaines & Associates provided lead opposition testimony in Senate policy committee and joined some of our partners in conservation in meetings with the author's office in seeking reasonable amendments which would exempt reputable "brokers" who assist hunters with finding the right dog. In large part due to the pressure we applied, AB 519 was recently amended to only apply to brokers assisting with the adoption, or sale of dogs under one year of age, and to exempt brokers who assist in the sale or transfer of a dog to a new owner three or less times a year.

Although these amendments were helpful, they fell short of fully addressing our concerns. Even with these amendments, AB 519 would severely impact the ability of individuals to locate and purchase specialty breeds of dogs used for hunting, field trialing and other legitimate sporting purposes. Most often, these dogs are purchased as young pups – typically 8 weeks of age or slightly older – as the buyer wants to begin the training of their pup with their trainer of choice long before they are one year old.

When presenting our concerns to the author and in committee, we explained that the dogs used in conjunction with these activities are highly valued and the result of careful selection and breeding over many generations with the cost of an 8-week-old, untrained puppy typically being well over \$1,000. We also stated that individuals looking for a quality hunting or field trialing dog have specific needs and will often do a nationwide search for a dog that is a specific sporting breed, has the right pedigree, the right color, and has the right timing of the litter. We noted that most buyers do not have enough knowledge of breeders nationwide and need help from professionals that know the industry. These professionals are not the bad actors that facilitate or assist

the puppy mills. In contrast to puppy mills, when it comes to sporting dogs, it is quality, not quantity.

We were also careful to point out that nonprofit conservation organizations often sell young, quality sporting dog pups at their events and fundraisers. In doing so, these entities raise thousands of dollars to promote their conservation mission. Yet, under the language of AB 519, these nonprofits and their auctioneers would be considered “brokers” and limited in their ability to sell young dogs at these events.

AB 519 passed through the Assembly in April and off the Assembly Floor in early May. Once on the Senate side, AB 519 was heard in the Senate policy committee in late June. Following our lead testimony in opposition, the bill did pass out and to the Senate Floor – but by a narrow single vote.

Now on the Senate Floor, AB 519 could be brought up for a vote at any time following the return of the State Legislature to the Capitol on August 18th.

AB 902 (SCHULTZ) – TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING: BARRIERS TO WILDLIFE MOVEMENT

As reported in our Spring 2025 issue, AB 902 would make changes to current law which requires transportation planning agencies to prepare and adopt regional transportation plans directed at achieving a coordinated and balanced regional transportation system.

As amended July 10, 2025, AB 902 by Assembly Member Nick Schultz (D/44-Burbank) would require a

lead agency to incorporate wildlife passage features into a transportation infrastructure project to feasibly avoid, minimize, and mitigate impairment to wildlife connectivity in an area that may significantly impact wildlife habitat connectivity. AB 902 would, however, exempt a project on the state highway system from this requirement if Caltrans is the lead agency. As amended, AB 902 would only apply to projects with a project initiation phase beginning on or after January 1, 2028.

AB 902 passed through the Assembly by late May, and off the Assembly Floor in early June. Once in the Senate, AB 902 passed through two Senate policy committees and to Senate fiscal committee in late June and early July.

AB 902 is now set to be heard in Senate fiscal committee on August 18th.

AB 1169 (GONZALEZ) – WILDLIFE GRANTS: SHARE PROGRAM

As also reported in our Spring 2025 issue, AB 1169 would make changes to the Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (DFW) Shared Habitat Alliance for Recreational Enhancement Program, or “SHARE”, under which DFW enters into voluntary agreements with private landowners to provide public access to their lands for hunting and other wildlife-dependent recreational activities. Limited by current law to paying landowners a maximum of \$30 per acre, or \$50 per public participant per day, to enroll, DFW has struggled to expand SHARE to provide high-quality hunting opportunities. As

amended July 17, 2025, AB 1169 by Assembly Member Jeff Gonzalez (R/36-Coachella) would help address this concern by increasing the cap to \$52 per acre, or \$87 per public participant per day, and requiring those amounts to be adjusted annually for inflation.

In addition, AB 1169 would require DFW to contract some of the work necessary to carry out SHARE to nonprofit conservation groups. Further, as recently amended, AB 1169 would require DFW, on or before October 1, 2029, to submit a written report to the Legislature that evaluates the effect of changes to the SHARE program made by the provisions of this bill.

As amended, AB 1169 would sunset on January 1, 2031.

AB 1169 easily passed through the Assembly, off the Assembly Floor, and over to the Senate by early June without a single “no” vote. Maintaining its momentum on the Senate side, AB 1169 was heard in the Senate policy committee in mid-July, passing out on yet another unanimous vote.

AB 1169 is set to be heard in the Senate fiscal committee on August 18th.

AB 1187 (CELESTE RODRIGUEZ) – FIREARMS: SAFETY CERTIFICATES

As covered in our Spring 2025 issue, existing law requires any person who purchases or receives a firearm to possess a firearms safety certificate. AB 1187 by Assembly Member Celeste Rodriguez (D/43-Arleta) would also require a personal firearm importer to obtain a valid firearm safety certificate. Further, AB 1187 would prohibit a person from bringing a firearm into the state without obtaining a valid firearm safety certificate within 60 days.

In addition, under current law an individual must only pass a short test to acquire a firearms safety certificate. AB 1187 would require an applicant for a firearm safety certificate, beginning 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 passed the Assembly policy committee and advanced to the Assembly fiscal committee in early April on a party-line vote. However, AB 1187 was held in Assembly fiscal committee in late May.

While AB 1187 remains technically alive as a “two-year” bill and could be considered in the 2026 Session, the bill is, for all practical purposes, considered dead.

AB 1316 (ADDIS) – HUNTING LICENSES: INFORMATION ON FIREARMS

As also reported in our Spring 2025 issue, 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 information on the safe storage of firearms, basic California firearm laws, and how to legally transfer or relinquish a firearm.

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 passed the Assembly policy committee and advanced to the Assembly fiscal committee in late April on a party-line vote. However, AB 1316 was held in Assembly fiscal committee in May.

While AB 1316 remains technically alive as a “two-year” bill and could be considered in the 2026 Session, the bill is, for all practical purposes, also considered dead.

SB 427 (BLAKESPEAR) – HABITAT CONSERVATION FUND

Current law requires that the Habitat Conservation Fund (HCF), established via the passage of “The California Wildlife Protection Act of 1990”, is appropriated \$30 million annually for the acquisition, restoration and enhancement of wildlife habitat. However, under current law, the HCF is to sunset on July 1, 2030.

As noted in our Spring 2025 issue, SB 427 by Senator Catherine Blakespear (D/38-Encinitas) proposed to remove that current sunset date and allow the important annual transfer of these funds into the HCF, and the benefits they provide to our wildlife, to continue in perpetuity.

SB 427 passed through the Senate policy committee and to Senate fiscal committee in early April on a unanimous vote. However, SB 427 was held in Senate fiscal committee in May.

Like AB 1187 and AB 1316, while technically a “two-year” bill, SB 427 is likely dead.

SB 818 (ALVARADO-GIL) – MOUNTAIN LIONS: PILOT PROGRAM: PERMITTED HOUNDSMEN

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, including the attack of Taylen and Wyatt Brooks which took Taylen’s life in March 2023, and an unacceptable increase in domestic animal predation in El Dorado County.

As introduced, SB 818 by Senator Marie Alvarado-Gil (R/4-El Dorado Hills), would have allowed for a regulated program, restricted to El Dorado County, 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 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.

As reported in our Spring 2025 issue, SB 818, was heard in Senate policy committee in April, failing passage via a party-line vote. The committee then granted the bill “reconsideration” via another party-line vote – allowing the bill to be heard again. Then, via a third party-line vote, gutted out the original language out of the bill – replacing it with hostile amendments which eliminated 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.

SB 818, as gutted and amended, was then passed out of the Senate policy committee and to the Senate fiscal committee.

SB 818, as amended, was held in the Senate fiscal committee in May. Technically a “two-year” bill, SB 818 must be considered dead.

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