

1994 NWS&GC MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSE: OREGON'S ROCKY MOUNTAIN AND CALIFORNIA BIGHORN SHEEP MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

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QUESTION: Does your state or province have an identifiable sheep management program?

Sheep management for both species is guided by the state Bighorn Sheep Management Plan adopted by the Fish and Wildlife Commission in 1992. Flexibility does exist within the plan to take advantage of changing conditions and philosophies of other agencies and public interest groups.

QUESTION: What is your guiding policy statement?

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife management policy (revised 1993):

1. It is the policy of the State of Oregon that wildlife shall be managed to prevent serious depletion of any indigenous species and to provide the optimum recreational and aesthetic benefits for present and future generations of the citizens of this state.
2. The department will continue to serve as an advocate for habitat protection and restoration measures on both public and private lands.
3. The department will aggressively seek to reestablish sheep throughout historical ranges. However, those areas with domestic or exotic sheep will not be restocked.
4. The department will continue to manage sheep to provide hunting opportunities for the public.
5. Maintain the biological integrity of both species of bighorn sheep through spatial separation.
6. Testing of all transplanted stock to establish herd health profile.

QUESTION: How do/did you do management planning?

Up until 1992, management efforts were guided by the staff big game biologist working in cooperation with district personnel to move forward with transplants and hunting seasons. The management plan was a combined effort of staff and district biologists and contains plans for restoration efforts, habitat protection, and for maintaining species integrity.

QUESTION: What are your management goals?

1. Reestablish sheep throughout as much of their historical range as possible.
 - 1A. The department recognizes potential conflicts with domestic and exotic sheep and has excluded those areas from the list of transplant sites until such a time as land use changes occur.
 - 1B. Habitat may be in poor condition and in need of restoration. The department will work with private and public land managers to provide technical assistance to improve habitat to levels which will support and sustain viable populations of sheep.
 - 1C. The department will work with public and private land managers to maintain existing habitat and prevent degradation.
2. Provide quality hunting opportunity.

All tags are issued through a controlled drawing. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for successful applicants. During 1994 a total of 86 resident and 4 nonresident tags will be issued. Resident hunter tags cost \$94 while nonresident hunter tags cost \$979.

Season lengths vary from 9 to 14 days with no more than 7 hunters during any hunt. Oregon currently operates under an "any ram" rule where no minimum horn size is required.

3. The department recognizes that the recreational opportunities associated with bighorn sheep are highly valued by the public. Places and times for viewing sheep are identified and provided to the public.

QUESTION: What methods do you use to reach them?

1. The department maintains an active role in public and private land management plan reviews. Positive and negative impacts of different management practices are defined and recommendations are presented to the appropriate managers. Herd health is monitored through an aggressive blood screening and disease testing program and animals are treated when possible.
2. Census is conducted twice a year to determine lamb survival and recruitment. Ram to ewe ratios are noted and trend-developed. Some districts are beginning to use modeling (Pop-II) to predict herd growth and what component of the population can be removed through hunting and trap and transplant programs.
3. As populations have grown, hunt areas and tag numbers have been increased to take advantage of surplus rams. Efforts have been made to protect the quality of the hunt through manipulation of seasons, hunt areas, and hunter numbers.

QUESTION: How much effort is devoted to reaching them?

There are currently 8 biologists who have sheep within their respective districts. Each of these biologists oversees a variety of programs for all wildlife species within their jurisdiction. Time and effort spent on sheep varies to a certain extent with the workload and the interests of the local biologist; however, most districts probably average around 1 man-month per year for a total cost of \$50,400/year.

Staff time spent coordinating sheep transplants, securing grant moneys, and analyzing data

accounts for another 3-4 man-months for an additional \$19,600.

Total manpower costs associated with implementing the state's sheep management program come to \$625,000/year. All of these positions are paid for out of the general game management fund. No grant dollars are used for personnel costs.

QUESTION: What is your operating budget for sheep management?

The department currently has \$200,000 per biennium dedicated to the sheep program. These dollars are used for habitat restoration, special research, sheep transplants, and disease work. All personnel-related expenses come out of the general game management budget of \$14,000,000 per year.

Other Agency Participation in Sheep Management in Oregon

Cooperative programs are currently conducted with the U. S. Forest Service (USFS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). All USFWS activities are conducted on the Hart Mountain National Wildlife Refuge in southeastern Oregon. USFS and BLM have concentrated on habitat protection issues, and only recently have these agencies looked to commit dollars to on-the-ground projects; consequently, a spending history is unavailable.

Additional Funding and Foundation for North American Wild Sheep Participation

The department has been successful in procuring commitments of funding from private sources/groups to assist with bighorn sheep transplants, disease work, radio telemetry projects, and habitat work. Several loose-knit groups have "adopted" herds of new releases and are provided with periodic updates on herd status. Additional funds have been received from the Foundation for North American Wildlife Sheep (FNAWS) for various transplant, habitat, and disease projects. During the last year, approximately \$30,000 in grant/donation funds were received. The department has an excellent working relationship with FNAWS. FNAWS personnel have been instrumental in providing political pressure within various land management agencies to speed up environmental documents, and to discuss conflicts

between sheep restoration/livestock interactions. The department has been committed to providing timely responses to all informational requests from FNAWS and has been rewarded with prompt responses to requests for help.

The department was also granted permission by the 1991 legislature to raffle off a bighorn sheep permit.

Oregon does participate in a bighorn sheep auction tag. Legislation was passed during 1985 that permitted the department to auction a governor's tag. Since 1992, this auction has been overseen by FNAWS.

DISCUSSION

The department has been operating under a sheep management plan since 1987. This plan was updated with new information during 1992. The department has historically been very conservative in hunting seasons and tag allocations. Many of the present herds have a large surplus of legal rams. All California bighorn sheep transplants have originated from British Columbia to Hart Mountain. This stock has served as the basis for most new

herds in Oregon. Continual removal of lambs and ewes from Hart Mountain may be skewing the population towards rams. All surveys are conducted twice with efforts made in June/July to determine lamb production and again in March to determine overwinter survival. Additional surveys are conducted by local biologists depending on their individual interests and time allotments. The current management plan outlines trap and transplant opportunities for 1992-1997. Systematic relocation efforts are conducted on an annual basis depending on funding and sheep availability. The department operates under an "any ram" rule and mandatory check-in is required of all successful hunters. Age structure of the harvest is very complete and indicates an abundance of older age rams are available. More liberal season and hunting opportunities are being proposed and implemented while still protecting the quality of the hunt. Restoration of sheep into historical ranges has been accelerated with the addition of FNAWS-GIA dollars, auction and raffle tag proceeds, and private donations. Loss of revenue would mean a curtailment of the current aggressive restoration program.