

Ferris Mountains Ready for Bighorns

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I recently spent a day in August in the Ferris Mountains with BLM range and wildlife resources personnel from the Rawlins Field Office assessing habitat conditions following large scale wildfires that occurred in 2011 – 2012. Things couldn't look any better, so yes, it's time to get serious about putting bighorns "on the mountain" in 2016. As you have read from WGFD Cody Region personnel, the Devil's Canyon herd continues to perform well and can continue to serve as a source herd for in-state transplants.

Post-wildfire, the BLM monitored vegetative recovery and even lent Mother Nature a helping hand and completed aerial herbicide applications to control cheatgrass infestations. Livestock fences were rebuilt and modified to allow for safer wildlife passage, and burned mountain pastures were rested from grazing for two years. This allowed for excellent perennial, native vegetation re-establishment.

As part of our field tour, we discussed water availability on the mountain range, and are currently making plans to propose construction of guzzlers in key locations in the coming year or two. A portion of the Ferris Mountains is designated as a "Wilderness Study Area", which does limit ground disturbance activities and use of mechanized equipment.

The wildfires of 2011-2012 burned the eastern one third of the mountain range. While in the infancy stages, we are cooperatively discussing the use of prescribed fire to enhance potential bighorn sheep habitats in the western two thirds. Many parts of the Ferris's meet the criteria for escape and lambing habitats for bighorns based on steepness of slope, but their values are compromised due to the level of conifer cover. Carefully managed fire can result in "instant sheep habitat" being created.

We'll keep the Wild Sheep Foundation posted on our progress, and we'll all keep our fingers crossed that we'll see 25 bighorns making the Ferris Mountains north of Rawlins their new home in 2016.

March 2015 – Doug McWhirter

Devils Canyon-Seminole Transplant

On Friday March 6, 25 sheep were captured from the Devils Canyon herd near Lovell and translocated to the Seminole Mountains near Rawlins. The sheep (3 two-year-old rams, 21 ewes, and one ram lamb) were captured via helicopter net-gunning by Native Range Capture Services, given long-acting tranquilizers, and slung to a processing site where they received a complete health screening by the WGFD Veterinary Services crew of Dr. Mary Wood, Hank Edwards, Jessica Jennings-Gaines, and Hally Killian. The sheep were then loaded into horse trailers (including the Ewe-Hauler; donated by Nevada Bighorns Unlimited) and by 1:00pm were heading toward their new home. To prevent being released into unfamiliar terrain in the dark, the sheep were held overnight and released into the Seminole Mountains on Saturday morning (March 7). The transplant was made possible as Devils Canyon herd

recently exceeded its population objective of 200 sheep. Hopefully, this herd will provide additional sheep for transplants in the future. The Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation was a key funding partner of this transplant.