

# GRANT IN AID UPDATES

## Custer State Park Work Project

By RHS Life Member #20, Kevin Hurley

Toiling under the hot mid-July sun, more than 25 bighorn sheep conservationists gathered July 17-18, 2021, in Custer State Park (CSP), in the Black Hills of South Dakota, for a bighorn sheep habitat improvement volunteer project. While no comparison can be made to the hordes of bikers/motorcyclists that descend on Sturgis, SD every year, our band of volunteers was every bit as intrepid and energetic as any Black Hills visitors would be. The weekend's goals were to cut down 4-9" DBH Ponderosa Pine seedlings that have re-generated on two sites totaling more than 13 acres since the 2007 Four Mile Fire in CSP.

Tapping into volunteers from the

Wild Sheep Foundation (WSF), WSF Midwest, WSF Wyoming, plus sportsmen and women from the greater Black Hills area, even including some young, strapping volunteers from Ellsworth Air Force Base who helped out, our volunteer crew used chainsaws, loppers, bowsaws, and other small power and hand-equipment to drop/lop/scatter ponderosa pine regen in two different work sites, straddling Highway 87, in the SW portion of CSP. In addition, a small work party cleaved off from our larger crew, to assist the Mystic Ranger District of the Black Hills National Forest repair a water development/guzzler site in Black Hills bighorn range.

Critical to the success of this project was the advance work done with Cabela's retail store in Rapid City, SD, where Cabela's "outfitters" (i.e., retail store associates) and customers were contacted/invited to join this volunteer work project. Even folks from Cabela's Outdoor Fund HQ office in Springfield, MO came to the Black Hills to participate, and to encourage Cabela's staffers to become involved in "hands-on" bighorn sheep conservation.

Reducing shrub and small tree cover opens visibility for foraging/travelling bighorn sheep, enhancing foraging efficiency and enabling better detection of ground-based predators





(e.g., coyote, mountain lion). Working closely with South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks (SDGFP) habitat, wildlife, and forestry staff and Cabela's corporate and retail staff, lead project organizer Kevin Hurley with WSF planned this project for weeks in advance, culminating in a successful bighorn sheep habitat improvement project.

"Once again, our thanks to the dedicated conservationists who gave up another of their precious summer weekends, to implement an important habitat project which will benefit bighorn sheep in the Black Hills of south Dakota", said Hurley, WSF Vice-President for Conservation. "And, special thanks to Bass Pro Shops/Cabela's Outdoor Fund and Cabela's retail store in Rapid City for their funding, logistical, and personnel support" added Hurley.

