

The **RAM**PAGE



David Hipp

Fall 2023

Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation



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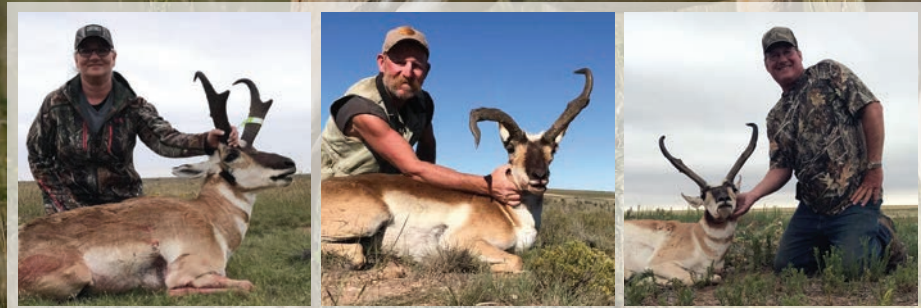
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State gaming laws prohibit residents of Kansas, Hawaii, New Jersey, Utah, and Washington from participating in online drawings. Debit cards (or cash/checks) for Montana residents. Canadian residents are eligible to participate in this drawing.

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The **RAMPAGE** Features

Fall 2023

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Contact us at:

info@wyomingwildsheep.org
Or by phone: (307)213-0998

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Address Changes

Become a member to receive your own copy of the RamPage. Dues are \$40 per year or \$750 for a Life Membership. Join at: www.wyomingwildsheep.org/shop. Please send address changes to: info@wyomingwildsheep.org or by phone to (307) 213-0998

Advertising Rates

- Full-Page \$500
- 1/2-Page \$300
- 1/4-Page \$140
- 1/8-Page \$100

Donations netting WY-WSF >2500 entitle donor to a free full page ad in the next 2 issues of The Rampage. Ads must be received in camera ready format by 09/25 & 3/5!!



Shelby Carlson, Dustin Stetter (Stetter Outfitting), and Ceirra Carlson pose with Shelby’s 2023 bighorn ram. Read about Shelby’s hunt in the Spring 2024 issue of the RamPage.

Magazine Editor - Kendra Young

2023-2024 CALENDAR

Dec 1-2, 2023
Board/Membership Meeting
Dubois, WY

January 17-20, 2024
WSF Sheep Show
Reno, NV

June 7-8, 2024
Annual Convention
Cheyenne, WY

June 13-15, 2024
WSF Chapter & Affiliates

June 20-21, 2024
Wyoming Big Horn Sheep Summit
Burgess Junction, WY

2023 Governor's License Sales Totals

2023 Sale Location	2023 LICENSE SALES	2022 LICENSE SALES
WSF	\$180,000	\$305,000
Eastern	\$180,000	\$199,500
Midwest	\$165,000	\$170,000
Iowa	\$150,000	\$190,000
WY	\$178,000	\$115,000
Total	\$853,000	\$979,500

New Life Members

- 681 Russell Grisbeck
- 682 Shad Hulse
- 683 Link Jay
- 684 Kari Friesen
- 685 William Gerhart
- 686 Becky Roskowiak
- 687 Cathy Welch
- 688 Dan Graham
- 689 Royce Roath
- 690 Thor Neuman
- 691 Sam Cunningham
- 692 Lance Trebesch
- 693 Mary Mason
- 694 Alviah Harvey
- 695 Lyle Coguill

Wyoming WSF would like to thank, and recognize, Life Members who have signed up since the Spring 2023 RamPage was published. A complete listing of WY-WSF Life Members is available for viewing on the WY-WSF web page, under the "Life Members" tab. If you would be interested in signing up or upgrading to Life Member or Ramshorn Society Life Membership status with WY-WSF, please visit our store or membership pages on the website.

We thank all of our past, current, and future Life and Ramshorn Society Life Members!!

Dear Member; To save printing costs we send one copy per address. If you would like to receive multiple copies, please contact Dean Dijenno at (307) 213-0998 or rampage@wyomingwildsheep.org.

Read about Veteran Anthony Grimaldi's Dream Hunt in the Spring RamPage



Blast from the Past - Tyler Benton, LM #40, at age 7, in 1987 with LM#104 Bill Pidd's sheep. Bill is deceased. The picture was submitted by Elaine Benton and is from Hunt Area 10, Whiskey Mountain, way before the die off. See it on page 60!

B.E.A.C.H.



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PROUD SUPPORTERS OF WYOMING WILD SHEEP FOUNDATION

Executive Director's Report

By Katie Cheesbrough

The first weekend of June every year, I have the pleasure of catching up with all of you at the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation (WY-WSF) annual banquet. We always have a heck of a time swapping stories from the past year, renewing our excitement for hunting and wildlife conservation, and raising money for Wyoming's bighorn sheep. If you enjoy the party we have in June, have you considered attending one of our Winter Meetings? Now, I get it; traveling in Wyoming in the winter can be harrowing. But, based on my experience, the WY-WSF Winter Meeting is worth traveling for.

Not only is it another excellent chance to spend time with your fellow bighorn sheep enthusiasts, but it's also an opportunity to dive deep into learning about Wyoming's bighorn sheep herds. The Winter Meeting is held in different locations around the state with bighorn sheep populations. Each meeting focuses on what's happening with bighorn sheep management and the challenges specific to that herd. With this being a smaller, less formal meeting, we can go on field trips to view bighorn sheep and their habitat. Last year, we had an incredible Winter Meeting in Cody. We toured the new Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) Office, had presentations from the Cody Biologists, and went up the North Fork, where we participated in a sheep capture with Dr. Monteith and his students. Talk about an awesome experience!

This winter, the meeting will be held in Dubois at the Military Vehicle Museum with an

opportunity to learn about one of Wyoming's most influential Core Native herds (see map next page). The Whiskey Mountain Bighorn Sheep Herd has been an important component in bighorn sheep management for Wyoming and other western states for many decades. Recognized for years as the largest congregation of wintering bighorn sheep in the country, the herd has been a management focus for the WGFD, federal land management agencies, and non-government conservation groups for over half a century.

The herd's inability to recover from a pneumonia die-off in the 90s has resulted in studies that continue to find poor bighorn sheep health and low lamb recruitment. Over the past 30 years, WGFD has taken many management actions to improve bighorn sheep health and spur population growth in this herd (learn more on pg. 45). Actions have included forage enhancement on winter range, including prescribed burns and fertilization, deworming bighorn sheep, removing clinically ill bighorn sheep with symptoms of pneumonia, salt and mineral supplementation, and predator control. The WY-WSF has been an active partner in these projects, funding management efforts, habitat enhancements, and extensive research.

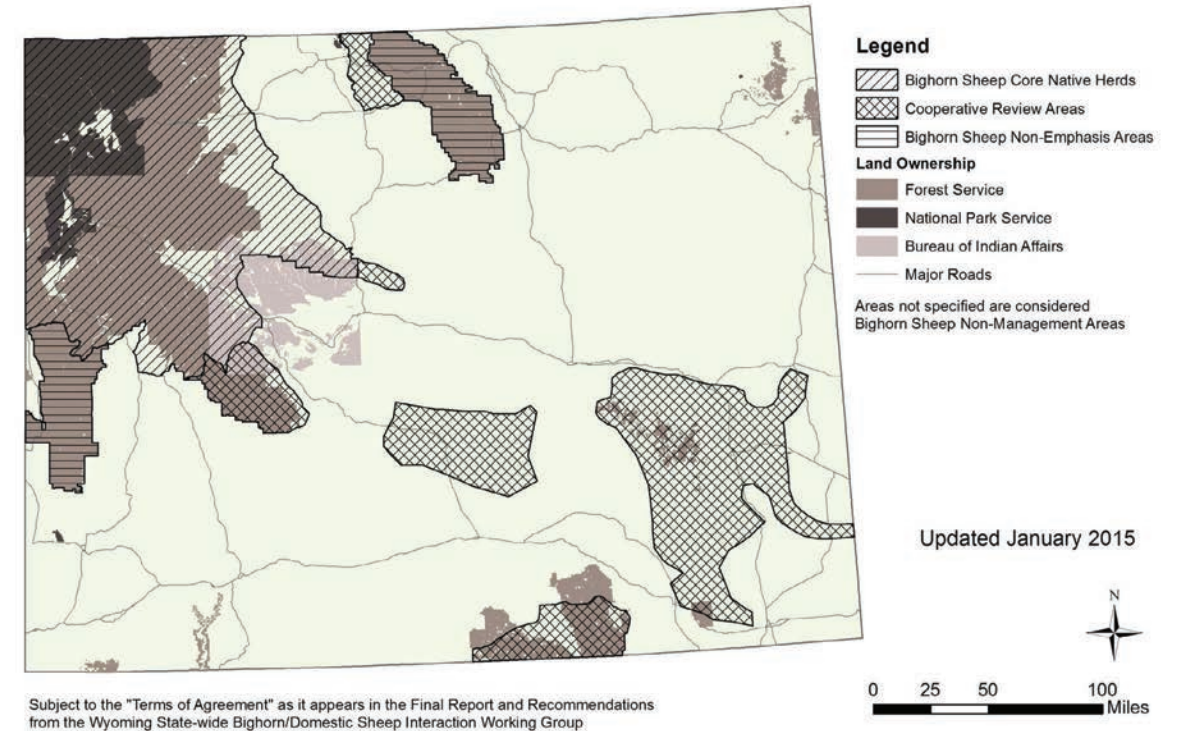
The WY-WSF sees this Core Native herd as a conservation priority and continues to support bighorn sheep conservation efforts annually. This includes funding research by Dr. Kevin Monteith and

his graduate students trying to understand why the Whiskey Mountain herd struggles to recover while nearby herds seem to bounce back. This research has resulted in the WGFD pursuing a novel management action called Test and Remove. Research has also indicated nutritional deficiencies for this herd. As such, the WGFD has partnered with the USFS to conduct a large-scale conifer removal and prescribed burns on Torrey Rim (see page 21). Habitat improvements continue in the Little Red Creek Area to reduce bighorn sheep-vehicle collisions. Additionally, our partners at the National Bighorn Sheep Center continue to educate visitors about the challenges that the Whiskey Herd faces, work within the community to discuss domestic/wild sheep disease issues and inspire youth with Camp Bighorn.

Consider joining us in the beautiful community of Dubois for the weekend of December 1-2, 2023, to learn more about the Whiskey Herd and what we can do to help them recover.



Wyoming Bighorn Sheep Management Areas



Wyoming Bighorn Sheep Management Areas

Core Native Herds

- Herds that have never been extirpated or reestablished via transplants
 - Highest priority for bighorn sheep management
- All efforts will be made to prevent contact between domestic and bighorn sheep

Cooperative Review Areas

- Areas of suitable bighorn sheep range where proposed changes in bighorn sheep management or domestic sheep use are cooperatively evaluated
- Includes most suitable bighorn sheep range in Wyoming not within Core Native or Non-Emphasis areas.

Non-Emphasis Areas

- Lowest priority areas for bighorn sheep management
- No effort will be made to prioritize/emphasize bighorn sheep unless agreed to by the statewide Domestic/Bighorn Sheep Interaction Working Group

Non-Management Areas

- Areas outside of identified management areas



Photo of Devils Gate in Sweetwater Rocks

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE BY ZACH MCDERMOTT

Evolve or fade away. We hear this everyday about business, athletics, and virtually all aspects of life. In the case of WYWSF and NGO's, we are no different.

At the summer meeting 2022, we first presented to the membership the board's goals of re-branding which included a new website, more prevalent social media presence, our conservation vision, a new logo and streamlining our overall management process for the summer and winter meetings. Our goal is evolve to stay ahead, not to keep up.

As most of you have seen, the new website has been live since September 2022. It is much more user friendly and has a wealth of information at your fingertips. We have received multiple compliments from around the industry stating it's one of the best sites they see in the sheep world. For social media, we have really increased our presence on Facebook and Instagram. We have seen a dramatic increase in the number of followers we reach and who are now interested in WY-WSF. One of the big benefits we have seen in reaching a larger audience has been in our raffle ticket sales.

At this year's winter meeting, we will be unveiling our new branding effort. This will include our conservation vision, mission statement, and the long awaited new logo. We believe this will help us have one unified message to the public about who we are, what we are about and where we want to

go as an organization. A special thank you to west edge collective for bringing this all together for us. And if you make it to Dubois, you could be one of the lucky first to get the new swag!

Also at the winter meeting, we will be utilizing a new event tracking system called Give Smart. This system allows us to wrap registration, tracking, ticketing and checkout/invoicing all into one application. You will be able to view all of your event costs in real time and pay your invoice immediately via your smartphone. No more waiting in line or waiting for an emailed invoice. You will also receive updated event info/reminders via text as the event progresses.

I would like to send a special thank you to our investment manager Ashton Thomas. Mike porter and his team have done an incredible job with all of the WYWSF investing accounts, especially strategizing not only our long term goals but constantly communicating about short term goals. We constantly communicate about taking advantage of the different markets to make sure your money is always working for you. Over the past year, they have been exceptional in utilizing our cash on hand in these short term investments making us more money to help Wyoming's wild sheep.

We hope to see you at the winter meeting in Dubois.



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“My Turn Now”

By: Evan Reish

“It’s your turn now.” That was the text that accompanied a picture of a giant 184+ inch ram harvested by long time family friend Greg Clifford Fast forward a handful of months and the word “successful” was next to the Bighorn Sheep draw results. My excitement and anticipation was at an extreme high to say the least, I mean it only took 30 years to see that word! It indeed was my turn!

Fast forward again a few months, my excitement and anticipation had turned into worry and concern. Due to an increased workload, a limited amount of vacation, busy kiddos involved in many activities and a knee that is in need of some serious attention, the season was almost upon me and I had made right at zero trips into the area. I finally had a chance to make two quick half day scouting trips which produced one young ram and a dozen or so ewes and lambs. I knew it was a long season but I also knew work would be getting busier and the kids would be starting up fall sports so worry and concern began to grow. Then I talked with my brothers who were all in and ready to

help! I also received another text from Greg saying that he and his wife Bralli were also ready to help. I went from a few half days of scouting to nearly 50 days combined in the last year and a half in the area!!

Opening weekend was here! Guess where I was, Work! Luckily for me Greg, Bralli and my brothers were there! They informed me that they had found a group of rams and with them was the big ram I was after! Talk about being a little distracted at work, I should take this time to apologize to my customers! I was ready to roll as soon as I could get done at work and again luck was on my side. It was an unusually light day of junk mail and packages, so with the help of a couple selfless co-workers, I was on the road before noon, which would allow for an evening hunt!!

The group informed me that they found the rams again that morning, but they also saw the other tag holder, so they left the area with the hopes that he wouldn’t see them watching the rams. On my drive down my mind raced. It went from thoughts of the other hunter getting the “big one”, to the thought that I should have quit my job! I also went back to my younger days of saying “wouldn’t that be cool if...”. I thought, wouldn’t that be cool if I got my ram on Sunday, which was my birthday, with my brothers and good friends Greg and Bralli there! Everything being said, I was just happy to be hunting with family and friends for a few days!

I rolled into camp and everyone was ready and waiting. A plan was made, we would separate and use several vantage points. Greg and I went to the ridge they had seen the rams from that morning. We sat glassing and glassing some more. We were able to find many bands of ewes and one impressive 3 1/2 yr old ram. We discussed if the rams showed on the saddle below us, that we would move down the ridge on to a rock outcropping which would give me a 250-300 yard shot across the drainage. Finally

just before dark we spotted some rams. We were sure they had been bumped as they were nearly off the mountain! There were definitely a couple of the rams that were running with the big one but no sight of him. Thoughts of the other hunter harvesting him or him breaking off from the others when bumped began running through my mind. That night back at camp sitting around the campfire, all negative thoughts were squashed by the laughter and stories of past hunts and camping trips and of course the mesmerizing amount of stars in the night sky. We decided to stick to the plan from that night and do the same thing in the morning. It was surprisingly easy to sleep that night!

The morning came and to the mountain we went. When we reached the vantage point my brothers were on the night before, the other tag holder had beat us there, props to him and his early rising. We stuck to the plan with my brothers adjusting a bit. We glassed as the sun began to expose the beautiful scenery around us. We began to see sheep but no rams. Then Greg uttered some words that I hear plain as day today, “Its go time!”. The big ram showed himself for a split second on the saddle. Down we went to the rock outcropping just like we planned. When we got there it took a minute or

two to get settled into a good shooting position. The waiting game began. Not the best thing for a couple impatient people.



We considered dropping down the drainage and coming up on the ridge they were on. Like I mentioned earlier, I have a knee issue that as painful, as it can be, I am grateful for it as it helped calm our get up and go. Hunt smarter, we said to each other. There was a great chance as the sun started hitting the backside of the saddle, they would feed over into the shade. Just like that, there he was! Broadside at 270 yards, clicked the safety and he walked behind the only two trees in my way. The other rams joined him, 6 in all. I would like to say I wasn’t nervous, but that would be a huge lie! It seemed like forever, but in actuality, it was just a minute or two, he stepped out, BOOM! I missed! Rams running everywhere but with some help from Greg, I was back on him, this time it was that familiar THWACK sound. The ram ran 40

yards and fell and rolled until catching on a tree. I have been very lucky in harvesting many animals, a few record book, I’ve been with my kids on their first harvests but nothing has ever felt like the adrenaline dump and emotional release I had when we realized he was down for good. I was shaking like crazy, tears rolling and unable to stand. It was a good 20 minutes before we headed up to meet my brothers. When we got to the top there was a lot of hugs and high fives. Two of my brothers were able to watch the whole thing unfold which made it even better. One benefit of having three brothers and a couple great friends.... Light packs!

Back at camp I realized my “wouldn’t that be cool”, came to be. I was lucky enough to harvest a once in a lifetime, Bighorn Sheep, with my brothers and two great friends on my birthday!!

Thank you to Greg and Bralli Clifford, this could not of happened without you. To Ed, Eric and Elliot, thank you for being the best hunting partners, friends and brothers a guy could ever ask for. Also thank you to Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation and like organizations along with the Wyoming Game and Fish for there dedication to the preservation and enhancement of the Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep and its habitat.



Eric, Eddy, Evan and Elliot Reish

“Brock”

By: Jordan Seitz

“Most characters get their name when they are born, and then they live up to it as their life unfolds.”

Not this one.

By the time the ram was a showpiece above my fireplace, he'd been known as “Brock” for months. He was a stud and before I even got his 12 year old horns plugged, I knew he deserved a strong title.

Brock wasn't on my radar during a cold 2023 spring morning as I trekked into a canyon glassing for bears. Picking my way below an outcrop, a pile of bones appeared in front of me. I've probably seen 1000 bone piles and plenty of deadheads... but that pile rooted my boots to the ground as I gaped at the big pair of horns in front of it. My beagle took a sniff

and moved on, but my awe persisted as I tugged his head around and confirmed the ram was as big and old as he looked. Not only was he heavily broomed, but some of his teeth were worn to the gumline.

I sat back to absorb the scene. What had happened? Why did he die in this particular spot? Like a forensic pathologist, I began to unravel the story. Having weathered half the winter, but feeling his age and being relatively antisocial, Brock had dropped down the canyon to one of his remote bedding spots: a small bench below a 20' rock outcropping with tall sagebrush around the perimeter. It was partially protected from the wind, but had angles to watch for

predators. If snow didn't satisfy, then the creek was only a minute below him. He bedded to relax and ruminate, but with loose and broken teeth, ingesting the nutrients he needed to withstand -40 degree temperatures wasn't happening fast enough. That night, with plenty of cud in his cheeks, he lowered his head to the ground and never brought it back up.

Gradually my thoughts wandered up the canyon and into the next drainage. Have I seen this ram before? Did my students capture him on camera?

Out of the backcountry, I dove into multiple years of data, looking at every ram picture and video myself or our Sheep Study cameras had taken

Then I cross referenced the images with those of Brock from different angles. I'll be honest...at first several mature rams looked the same. I mixed them up and made false claims, until I started to hone in on the idiosyncrasies for each set of horns. What I found surprised me. He wasn't there.

I went back through everything again and

stopped on a 3 second clip of a solo ram in November of 2021. He had mass, he was broomed, he was missing chunks...it was him! Sifting further to the first video clip of any sheep we'd ever gotten on camera, I suddenly recognized the inside curl of a ram scratching his head on a pine branch in June of '21.

School was nearly over in 2023 before enough snow melted for us to get vehicles up into sheep country to check our cameras that had been soaking since September. I'd tactfully built up excitement to find data for one particular ram. It was fun to see the students pour over the footage in the field and exclaim, “I think that was Brock!” In the end, after gleaning through over 1000 video files, we had one clip from November 15, and possibly another from the 22nd.



Considering the cumulative number of animals on camera over the years, he was a ghost.

I spent weeks working on Brock's skull to clean it to perfection (search for “Bighorn Sheep Skull Cleaning” in

YouTube if you are interested in the process), giving me plenty of time to reflect on his life. I'm sure he heard the side-by-side revolution, but noticed 7 square miles quiet down when the land became an enforced wilderness study area as he left middle age. I wonder if his eyes and nose burned when wildfires blazed and the air was thick with smoke. Mule deer and pronghorn populations rose and fell, while elk numbers increased, changing the amount of winter feed he'd turn up year to year. Had he cared? As a lamb, I bet Brock was curious about the new guy from the midwest, who spent full days running and crawling around chasing pronghorn with a bow in his herd's territory, but always seemed to stop and gape at them whenever they crossed paths. Ironically, they were both clueless that the young sheep would become the main character in a story immortalizing a ram more than a decade later.



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Newly-Elected Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation Board of Directors Bralli Clifford

Having been born and raised in Wyoming, I have always been around hunting and spent time in the country. However, it wasn't until adulthood, and after meeting my husband, that I began hunting myself. This newly found passion ignited a strong desire to do more for the conservation and management of our wildlife while promoting education and involvement for our youth and woman in hunting, conservation, and the outdoors. My involvement with the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation began with attendance at their biannual banquets where our primary intent was to invest our funds towards a goal of putting and keeping wild sheep on the mountain. This evolved into volunteering my time both

at banquets and at annual conservation projects supported by the WWSF. I was approached by the boards former and long time Treasurer and Bookkeeper Joni Miller inquiring about my interest in running for a board position, which sparked a significant interest to continue and expand my work towards conservation and education.

Wild sheep hold a very special place in my heart. I am very blessed to have had the opportunity to participate in eight sheep hunts around North America to date.

"Once you have experienced the wonder of spending time on the mountain, sharing the habitat that these magnificent animals thrive

in, you know they are truly a unique ungulate."

In order to continue enjoying these sheep, I have an obligation to do all I can do to ensure their ability to survive and thrive. There is no greater contribution to this cause than my time and funds and being voted onto the WWSF board also allows me to promote these values and share the vision with friends, family and the world.

I am grateful for the opportunity to be involved and I look forward to working hard to continue the promotion of putting and keeping wild sheep on the mountain and education regarding conservation and management to our current and future generations.



Newly-Elected Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation Board of Directors Sam Lockwood



First off, I would like to thank all the people who voted for me to be on the board, this is an honor and something I do not take lightly, and with my role on the board I hope to share my love of Wyoming and all of the distinct qualities that this amazing state has to offer, including our wild sheep.

I grew up in the southwestern corner of the state the son of a wildlife biologist, and very early on I had a passion for wild places, and I was lucky enough to have a place and parents who let the wildness grow with me. I took hunter safety at the age of six and my mother would go to the classes with me and help me read through the material and when the final test came around, I scored a 98% missing only one question, I will say that is the only A I ever got in my life. From that day on I was off hunting rabbits in the winter, ducks and grouse in the fall, and in the summer fishing as often as I could. My father used to say I want my son to be raised wild with a .22 in one hand and fly rod in the other, and that is how he raised us.

It was my final year of high school when my dad drew his sheep tag in area five, I was there when he found out and the first question to me was do you want to go. I was elated it wasn't my tag but looking back at it I felt like I got to help the person who was there with all of my harvests whether it be elk, deer, or rabbits and ducks. What I did not expect on that hunt was to fall head over heels in

love with big horn sheep and that this one successful hunting trip would have me become a biologist and give me a passion and desire to work with wildlife within the state and beyond.

I went to college at the University of Wyoming and studied Rangeland Ecology and Watershed Management, with a minor in Wildlife Management. After graduation I went to work for the large carnivore section of the Wyoming Game and Fish, after a few years of that work I moved to Sybille Canyon to study disease in wildlife including pneumonia in big horn sheep. It was while

at Sybille when I met my wife Jessica who was finishing her masters in fisheries biology, after she received her master's degree, we got married and moved back to Southwestern Wyoming to be close to our family. We now live in Green River with our son Boone, and when we are not working, we are probably outside with our horses, fishing, or hunting.

Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation is an organization that has a very deep relationship with my family, my father Ron who of which most of you probably knew, was a life member and loved this organization and all of the people involved with it. He loved nothing more than being on stage at the annual banquet and telling jokes and raising money for wildlife. After his passing the amount of love that poured into my family from all of you that knew him was amazing, and I always said that when we as a family were in a good place, I wanted to contribute more to the sheep foundation, and it seemed this past winter we were in that good place and the opportunity presented itself, so thanks again to all who voted for me.



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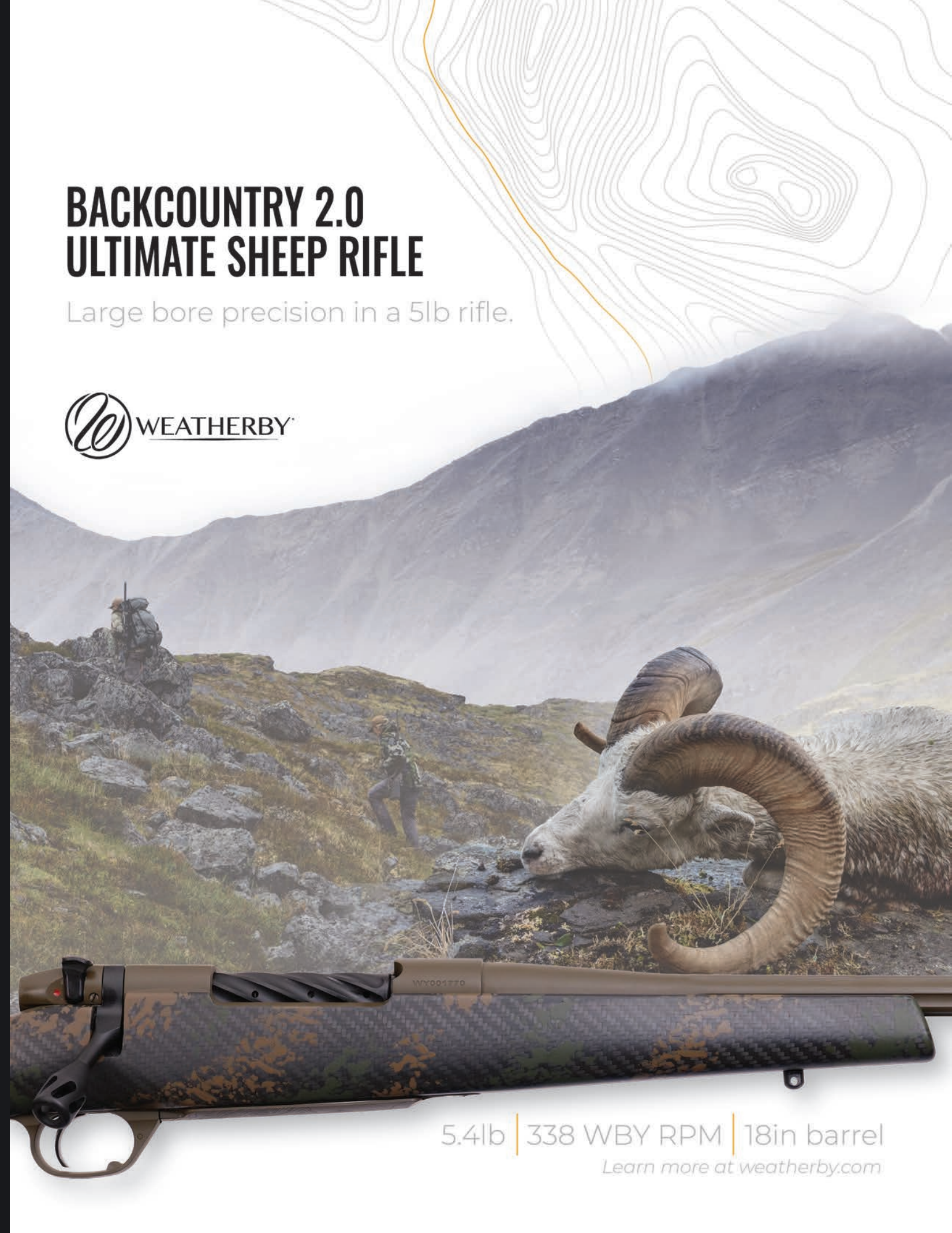


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GRANT IN AID UPDATES

Conifer Removal Project Planned for Whiskey Basin Wildlife Habitat Management Area

By: Amy Anderson, Terrestrial Habitat Biologist, Wyoming Game & Fish

LANDER - The Wyoming Game and Fish Department is planning a conifer removal project on Whiskey Basin Wildlife Habitat Management Area south of Dubois.

The Torrey Rim conifer removal project aims to mechanically remove limber pine, juniper, lodgepole pine and Douglas fir from targeted areas along the Torrey Rim slope, just above Whiskey Mountain Conservation Camp to benefit bighorn sheep. The project will commence in the coming weeks, with up to 120 acres of conifer thinning occurring within the wildlife habitat management area.

A technical committee with representation from Game and Fish, the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management identified Torrey Rim, Sheep Ridge and BLM Ridge as areas where mechanical conifer removal could be completed to open up winter ranges and movement areas historically used by bighorn sheep. These cleared areas will link preferred foraging habitats with mineral licks, watering locations and loafing/foraging areas.

Stands of conifers identified for removal were selected based on GPS collar data indicating how bighorn sheep use or

avoid this area as they move up and down Torrey Rim. Areas surrounding cultural resources will not be disturbed. Habitat improvement is one of the key aspects addressed in the 2019 Whiskey Mountain Bighorn Sheep Management Plan. One strategy identified in the plan to conserve the Whiskey Mountain bighorn sheep herd is to utilize habitat management prescriptions and wildfire to decrease conifer cover and otherwise enhance and expand winter ranges and bighorn sheep migration paths.

In addition to conifer removal, a prescribed burn is planned in the area as soon as an appropriate burn window presents itself, ideally this fall. Funding for these efforts have been provided by Game and Fish, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Shoshone National Forest, Wyoming Governor's Big Game

License Coalition, Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation and Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust. Terrestrial Habitat Biologist Amy Anderson said bighorn sheep are highly opportunistic foragers and require a diverse, open and rugged landscape to optimally forage and to avoid predators.

"Conifer encroachment has dramatically altered many areas that were once open and dominated by grasses and forbs," Anderson said. "Over time, more and more trees fill in and actively dry these sites out, reduce under story herbaceous forage, and close sight distances that bighorn sheep need to feel secure on the landscape."

"Removing conifers before they develop into a dense forest is both ecologically and economically sensible," Anderson added.

-WGFD-



GRANT IN AID UPDATES

Bighorn Sheep Managers Workshop Held at Whiskey Mountain

By: Ryan Amundson, Terrestrial Habitat Biologist and Bighorn Sheep Working Group Co-Chair, Wyoming Game & Fish Department



On May 16 - 19, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department held a Bighorn Sheep Managers Workshop for 40 Department employees. Game wardens, population biologists, habitat biologists, veterinary and administrative staff from all around the state participated.

The workshop was hosted by the Department's Bighorn Sheep Working Group, an 11 member team that focuses on topics related to bighorn sheep and their management. The workshop featured speakers from within the Department, as well as Dr. Kevin Monteith (UW Researcher) and Katie Cheesbrough (Executive Director of Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation). Presentations and in depth discussions were had on numerous topics including:

aging and plugging bighorn sheep and mountain goats, hunting regulations and license allocations, The Wyoming Plan, the Domestic Sheep/Bighorn Sheep Interaction Working Group, Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Wild Sheep Initiative, collecting field samples for disease surveillance, bighorn sheep safe handling guidelines, Test and Remove methods, population management, managing invasive grasses in bighorn sheep ranges, recent bighorn sheep research findings from the Whiskey Mountain and Jackson herds, and Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation's mission and grant in aid funding. In addition, breakout sessions were held to discuss management of several key herds in the state, including

Whiskey Mountain, Jackson, Devil's Canyon, and Ferris-Seminole. All of these herds have different management challenges and managers had important discussions on how to tackle the diverse sets of challenges facing each one.

Sara Bridge and Steve Kilpatrick attended and gave a presentation about the Sheep Center on the night of the 17th, followed by a showing of the film, "Transmission". Several Game and Fish employees stopped by the Center on their way home on the afternoon of the 19th.

This workshop was the first of its kind for the Department, focusing on an individual species' management.



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A Z Y R E G E A R



Public Land

Access Issues and Opportunities in Wyoming

By: Alex Aguirre & Josh Metten, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

As I spend time in the mountains chasing elk and scouting for pronghorn in the sagebrush this fall, it's important for me to take a minute to appreciate the ample opportunities Wyoming offers to hunters.

Not only does the state abound with wildlife, but Wyoming also boasts over 48,000 square miles of state and federal land where hunters and anglers can enjoy some of the best hunting and fishing in the West. On top of these millions of publicly owned acres are walk-in areas, habitat management areas, and other forms of private land access made possible by the cooperation between willing landowners, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, and hunters and anglers. Despite this wealth of opportunity, Wyoming also contains millions of acres of landlocked public lands where legal access remains uncertain or unavailable.

This past August, the



Elk Hunt, Taylor Glen, 2022

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership and Backcountry Hunters & Anglers sought out hunters and landowners alike and hear their positions on public access by hosting six listening sessions throughout the state. The TRCP supports collaborative solutions to these complex issues, and an interdisciplinary approach between landowners,

lawmakers, governmental agencies, and the public will be required for success. To learn more about inaccessible public land in the West, read these reports published by OnX Maps in partnership with TRCP.

Western State Landlocked Report (<https://www.onxmaps.com/landlocked-public-lands#h-western-state-landlocked-report>)

Western Federal Landlocked Report (<https://www.onxmaps.com/landlocked-public-lands#h-western-federal-landlocked-report>)

Our listening sessions were well attended by different stakeholders including members of conservation groups as well as individuals associated with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Bureau of Land Management, Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation, and



Buffalo Public Lands Listening Session

independent media outlets. All stakeholders brought meaningful discussion points about the status of public land access in Wyoming. We heard from individuals eager to see more access easements acquired, while some simply wanted existing easements to be properly signed and publicized. We discussed the importance of wildlife habitat and public access to state land in Wyoming, and how to ensure that these benefits continue into the future.

Another point of conversation was the relationship between private landowners and hunters. When it comes to private lands, sportspeople play an important role in managing populations, while private landowners provide an equally important role in managing habitat. This dynamic is unique in that hunters manage wildlife populations, while private landowners provide habitat and forage for wildlife at different times of the year. Therefore, both hunters and landowners are important for maintaining robust and healthy wildlife populations.



Casper Listening Session

One challenge landowners voiced was lack of respect for private land. One bad actor that leaves gates open or trash on the land has the potential to ruin access for all hunters. Therefore, increasing education about respecting private land could combat this unfortunate trend. Increasing enforcement on private land with access can also prevent damage to private land. Landowners stated that

merely having a Wyoming Game and Fish Department presence on the landscape minimizes damage to the land, even if the department staff is not a law enforcement officer.

Working together, the wildlife, and the habitat they rely on, can

be managed through working relationships between hunters and landowners. At the end of the day, we want what is best for our wildlife, and I think we can all agree on that.

We plan to use what we have learned through these listening sessions to work on access issues with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department as well as during the upcoming legislative session in early 2024. To be effective in our work, we rely on our partnership with conservation organizations, like WWSF. These relationships amplify the collective hunter and angler voice to advance important conservation work in Wyoming. To make a difference in hunting and fishing it will take all of us, so, stay informed, be proactive, and do not take our great hunting and fishing in the state for granted.

Alex Aguirre is the Wyoming Community Partnerships Coordinator for the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership. He resides in Powell and enjoys pursuing wildlife with archery equipment in the fall as well as helping family and friends enjoy time outdoors.



Photo Credit: TRCP

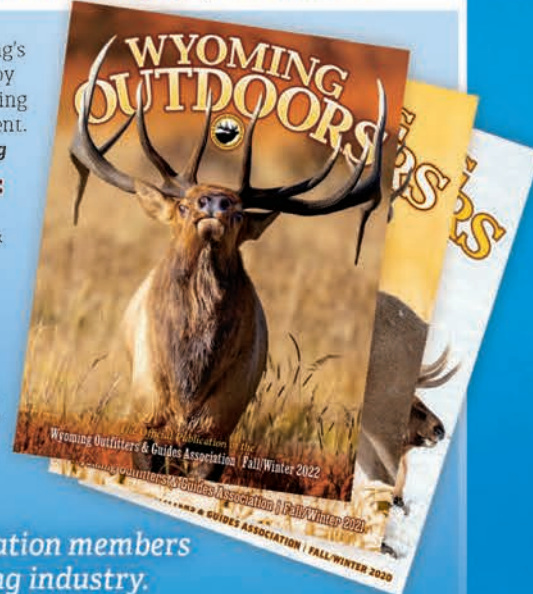
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“THE RON BALL MEMORIAL AWARD”

THE WYOMING WILD SHEEP FOUNDATION’S HIGHEST HONOR



By Kevin Hurley, LM #20
Vice President of Conservation
and Operations
Wild Sheep Foundation
Bozeman, MT

Each year since 2003, the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation has presented what is known as the “Ron Ball Memorial Award”, in recognition of one of the Chapter’s original five founders.

Ron Ball was a rancher and outfitter from the Big Piney area who served as either President or Vice-President of Wyoming FNAWS (at that time) for 11 of our first 14 years of existence. Ron was a big man, whose presence and contributions were also huge. Ron and his family were dedicated volunteers who organized many early Chapter events, meetings, and live/silent auctions. Wording on the Ron Ball Award speaks highly of the type of individual Ron was, and what he did for wild sheep in Wyoming. This award reads:

“Presented Annually, In Recognition of Outstanding Achievement Toward the Betterment of Wyoming’s Bighorn Sheep”

I was fortunate enough to be the first recipient of this special recognition in 2003, and this award holds a special spot on my wall. As you can see, over the past 17 years, a virtual “Who’s Who” of dedicated individuals have been recognized by the Wyoming Chapter for their contributions to Wyoming’s bighorn sheep.

- 2003 Kevin Hurley
- 2004 Jim Collins
- 2005 Gov. Dave Freudenthal
- 2006 Melanie Woolever
- 2007 Steve Kilpatrick
- 2008 Terry Cleveland
- 2009 Gary Butler
- 2010 Fritz Meyer
- 2011 Cole Benton
- 2012 Dennis Claman
- 2013 Bob Sundeen
- 2014 Tom Easterly (D)
- 2015 Doug McWhirter
- 2016 Lynn Stewart
- 2017 Freddie Goetz
- 2018 Ryan Amundson
- 2019 Joni Miller
- 2020 Dean DiJenno
- 2021 Jerry Galles
- 2022 Jack Welch
- 2023 Hank Edwards

The Ron Ball Memorial Award is presented during the annual June banquet. Nominations may be made by the WY-WSF Board of Directors and/or past award recipients; selection of the recipient is made by the past winners. So, if WY-WSF members know of someone they would like to see nominated for this award, please notify one of the current Board of Directors, or one of the past recipients.

None of us do what we do for wild sheep to receive credit or recognition. However, there are some individuals that do so much, and help lead the way, that taking a moment to look back, helps all of us move forward!



CHEYENNE - Hank Edwards, Wyoming Game and Fish Department Wildlife Health Laboratory supervisor, is retiring after 35 years of service to the State of Wyoming. Edwards’ career is best known for his strong work ethic, communication skills and drive for excellence.

“Hank’s positive impact on Wyoming’s wildlife and his contribution to the Wyoming Game and Fish Department is impressive,” said Rick King, chief of the wildlife division. “Hank had the unique ability to condense complex disease-related issues into publicly digestible conversations in the most humble and humorous manner. His talents were pivotal through his participation in numerous working groups and committees.”

Edwards began his career in the late 1980s at the University of Wyoming where he earned his undergraduate and graduate degrees in molecular biology and pathobiology. During that time he earned a position as a clinical pathology and parasitology technician with the Wyoming State Veterinary Laboratory, and later worked his way up to the position of necropsy laboratory manager. In 1997 Edwards earned his present role as Game and Fish Wildlife Health Laboratory supervisor, and the distinction of being its only full-time employee.

“When I started with the department the laboratory was pretty limited, and only performed tests for three diseases,” Edwards said.

Under Edwards’ supervision, the Wildlife Health Laboratory expanded its diagnostic scope and became the only National Animal Health Laboratory Network-certified laboratory run by a state wildlife management agency in the United States.

“Today, the laboratory conducts testing on tens of thousands of samples annually, and that number grows every year,” King said. “The development and improvement of diagnostic techniques to identify wildlife diseases, as well as the work of monitoring and mapping their incidence, has directly informed and benefitted the management of Wyoming’s wildlife.”

Throughout his career, Edwards played a pivotal role in numerous working groups and committees including the Wyoming Game and Fish Department’s Chronic Wasting Disease Working Group, Feedground Working Group, Bighorn Sheep Working Group, Domestic Sheep-Bighorn Sheep Interaction Working Group and chairman of the department’s Animal Care and Use Committee. Hank also served on the Brucellosis and Chronic Wasting Disease Committees for the United States Animal Health Association.

Edwards is most proud of the body of projects he was able to take part in — for Wyoming and nationally. Most recent standouts include improved sampling techniques and diagnostic assays to better isolate and identify the agents that cause pneumonia in bighorn sheep.

“I’ve been lucky throughout my career to work with a lot of really talented and bright people,” Edwards said, “and we have been able to accomplish quite a bit in the world of wildlife disease over the years.”

Edwards has contributed to the scientific body of knowledge through dozens of co-authored scientific journal articles and collaborative publications, including the Field Guide to Disease of Wyoming Wildlife in 2011.

Edwards received numerous recognitions for his work and was recognized twice by the Wyoming Chapter of The Wildlife Society as their Professional of the Year in 2006 and 2020. He also received internal recognition this year for his long-lasting legacy with the department with the Game and Fish Lifetime Achievement Award. Most recently Edwards was awarded the 2023 Phillip W. Schneider Lifetime Achievement Award by the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

“I am extremely grateful and humbled to be recognized by the Schneider Lifetime Achievement Award,” Edwards said. “This is quite an honor and a wonderful way to cap a rewarding career with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.”

Edwards’ last day with Game and Fish is Aug. 1. He intends to spend time in his woodshop and gardens when he is not in the mountains enjoying the outdoors.





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Photo by Mark Gocke

Mark Gocke

WY-WSF CONSERVATION VISION



MISSION

Our mission is to conserve, enhance, and promote Wyoming's bighorn sheep populations. Safeguarding against the decline of bighorn sheep through funding research, management, education, and conservation. We seek to conserve both bighorn sheep and our hunting heritage through youth involvement, public education, and advocacy.

VISION

Foster the conservation of healthy bighorn sheep populations, promote Wyoming's hunting heritage, engage and educate citizens in scientifically sound wildlife stewardship, and encourage youth participation to ensure future conservation.

This vision shall be achieved through fundraising and educating the public on issues affecting bighorn sheep, habitat, and hunting opportunities. We support solid, science-based policies to retain and restore bighorn sheep habitats and sustainable funding for wildlife management. Our vision will be brought to life by hunters and outdoor enthusiasts who recognize both the cultural and conservation significance of Wyoming's bighorn sheep.

PURPOSE

Putting and Keeping Wild Sheep on the Mountain

CORE VALUES

Honesty * Integrity * Loyalty *
Accountability * Teamwork * Positive
Attitude * Respect for Wildlife * Hunting
ethics * Stewardship * Advocacy



HISTORY

The Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation (WY-WSF) was formed in 1983 and has a long record of actively working for the benefit of Wyoming's bighorn sheep, healthy wildlife habitats, education, and hunters' rights. Led by a volunteer Board of Directors, WY-WSF annually raises thousands of dollars through the energy and efforts of conservation-minded sportsmen and women. These dollars are put back on the ground through our Grant-in-Aid program to fund bighorn sheep population management, habitat restoration, disease research and surveillance, public outreach, and youth education.

GOALS & STRATEGIES

Support management and conservation of Wyoming's Bighorn Sheep

- Provide financial assistance to support statewide disease research and surveillance, habitat improvement projects, conservation education, and population management actions.
- Develop and maintain partnerships with state and federal management agencies, private landowners, and other stakeholders to promote healthy bighorn sheep habitat and populations.
- Support Wyoming Game and Fish Department's bighorn sheep management program through a variety of Chapter activities, including volunteering for on-the-ground projects, conducting an annual Bighorn Sheep Summit coordination meeting, and actively participating in the Interaction Working Group meetings.



Collaborate with Wild Sheep Foundation (WSF) and other WSF Chapters & Affiliates

- Coordinate Wyoming-based conservation activities with national and state WSF chapters and affiliates to support and promote bighorn sheep and their habitat throughout the state.
- Collaborate with the National Bighorn Sheep Center to enhance youth and adult educational opportunities.

Actively pursue fundraising opportunities to support the WY-WSF Grant-in-Aid program and priority activities

- Initiate and maintain fundraising through annual banquets and other fundraising activities.
- Pursue cost-sharing opportunities with other funding entities to efficiently use WY-WSF grant-in-aid dollars when supporting priority projects.

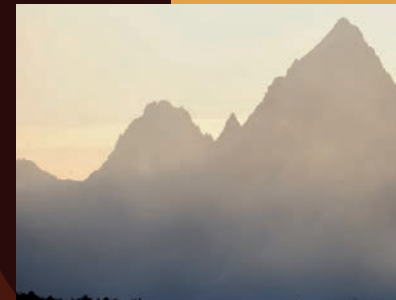
GOALS & STRATEGIES

Utilize educational opportunities and outreach to enhance public understanding of bighorn sheep management and conservation

- Support youth educational opportunities in wildlife conservation with an emphasis on bighorn sheep.
- Solicit citizen participation in WY-WSF priority activities.
- Engage with the public in activities supporting Wyoming's hunting heritage.
- Continue public interaction through various outreach outlets, including the RamPage publication, the WY-WSF website, social media, and regular contact with membership.

Maintain a sustainable base of membership and volunteers to support WY-WSF's mission, vision, and purpose

- Interact with members and supporters to ensure membership recruitment and retention.
- Maintain dialogue and outreach with sportsmen and women to increase understanding of issues surrounding Wyoming's bighorn sheep.



Maintain organizational strength and efficiency through a volunteer Board of Directors

- Actively seek volunteers with various backgrounds and skill sets to serve on BOD.
- Develop and maintain strong board member engagement.



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GRANT IN AID UPDATES

“The Canyon”

By Jordan Seitz, Encampment K-12 Teacher

We’ve been on many adventures learning about bighorn sheep since we started our Sheep Study back in 2018. At first we had minimal knowledge about our herd and junky optics. GPS collaring efforts and visiting with biologists showed us

of mouths on the landscape. Eventually a story began to materialize about the canyon and its inhabitants, but most of what we filmed was surface level, and we wanted something deeper. To get it, we were very strategic with our camera placements this past winter. Despite a massive drift almost

rams scent checking ewes and then limping by after dueling, sheep and elk bedding down, a buck chasing and mounting a doe, a bull elk shaking the snow off himself, a daytime lion, and a bobcat with her kitten. We finally had richer material for the canyon’s story. The story showed us how hard



how cool bighorns are. Then funding for quality glass and trail cameras helped us study them from a distance. We saw sheep, got cool footage, and learned about the variety

swallowing camera #1, which had been up in a tree, we hit the jackpot and gathered wild footage (a lot of sheep!) off both sets. A few highlights out of 1000+ ten second clips were

the winter was for wildlife as we watched elk struggle through belly deep snow in a storm. It decimated our deer, but a few showed up on camera looking relatively healthy thanks to



the exceptional green-up. While our sheep stayed strong and most beat the winter, we await the story’s next chapter, hoping the ewes have a good lambing season. After downloading our new data, the students voted to keep camera #2 where it was, and then pioneered a new location below it for camera #1 where a couple trails crossed in the

rocks. Biologist Teal was able to collect a few more released collars after the snow melted and we are excited to see the data this upcoming winter.

In other news, I’m proud to announce my classes have a role in a conservation film by Platte Basin Timelapse

called “Under the Wire.” It focuses on pronghorn and other wildlife moving across the landscape, the reality of fences affecting their travels, and how people can come together as a community to be stewards of the land. It is scheduled to be released this fall or winter!



Whiskey Basin Core Native Herd By Executive Director, Katie Cheesbrough

The Whiskey Mountain bighorn sheep (WMBS) herd encompasses the northern Wind River Mountain Range in west-central Wyoming. The herd has been an important component in bighorn sheep management for Wyoming and other western states for many decades. Recognized for years as the largest congregation of wintering bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*) in the country, the herd has been a management focus for the Wyoming Game & Fish Department (WGFD), federal land management agencies, and non-government conservation groups for over half a century.

From 1949 through 1995 over 1,900 bighorn sheep were captured and moved from the WMBS herd to establish new bighorn sheep herds or augment existing herds throughout the West. At its peak, the herd provided substantial recreational opportunities for hunters and photographers. Following a large, all-age die-off caused

by pneumonia during the winter of 1990/1991, the bighorn sheep herd has consistently experienced low lamb production leading to continued population decline. Observations of the bighorn sheep herd over the past 28 years also reveal the persistence of bighorn sheep (lambs and adults) exhibiting nasal discharge, coughing, parasites, viral infections, and low body mass. All of these symptoms indicate bighorn sheep in the herd are generally unhealthy, likely subject to environmental stressors, and continually exposed to contagious or transmissible pathogens and parasites.

It is unknown how many bighorn sheep inhabited the northern Wind River Mountains prior to European settlement. Early explorers noted mountain sheep were easily found throughout the Wind River Range. It is known that increased domestic livestock grazing in the late 1880s through the early

1900s had a dramatic impact on wild sheep populations throughout the West. In particular domestic sheep grazing contributed to large-scale die-offs of bighorn sheep due to transmission of bacterial pathogens. By 1940, Honess and Frost (1942) estimated there were approximately 500 bighorn sheep in the Wind River Mountains. By the mid-1950s, WGFD acknowledged the importance of maintaining crucial bighorn sheep winter ranges on and adjacent to Whiskey Mountain for bighorn sheep persistence in the Wind River Mountains.

It appears bighorn sheep numbers increased substantially during this from the 1940s-1970s. And held steady from 1958-1971 as indicated by classification data. However, WGFD personnel noted a significant decline in lamb/ewe ratios in the early 1970s which led to a study indicating poor herd health that may have been due to inadequate forage, overpopulation, and exposure

to disease. Researchers and managers had concerns that any additional environmental stress on this herd could easily result in a catastrophic disease outbreak. This prediction came true during the winter of 1990/1991, with a disease outbreak resulting in significant mortality across all age classes with the highest mortalities seen in lambs and continued low lamb recruitment.

Documented bighorn sheep pneumonia-related die-offs typically show a pattern of low lamb recruitment for approximately 3-5 years following the disease outbreak. After this period, recruitment often increases gradually and populations recover and begin to grow. In contrast, the WMBS herd has continued to decline due to poor lamb recruitment over the past 30 years.

The WMBS Herd's inability to recover from the die-off in the 90s resulted in further studies which continued to find poor bighorn sheep health attributed to nutritional deficiencies despite decreased populations and underutilization of forage. Capture studies done from 2015-2018 indicate that adult bighorn sheep maintain body condition throughout winter better than bighorn sheep in the nearby Jackson and Cody herds (Monteith 2017), suggesting that the WMBS herd may be subject to some unknown nutritional stress on their summer range.

Compounding the nutritional issues identified in this herd is the persistence of bacteria and other pathogens. Multiple

species of bacteria related to pneumonia in bighorn sheep have been consistently identified in the population during testing over the years. Recently, the presence of sinus tumors has been observed in this population as well. Other diseases and parasites such as contagious echthyma (ORF) and lungworms are also known to be present. At this point, managers do not know if poor bighorn sheep health in the WMBS herd is strictly due to pathogens and parasites or if the persistence of pathogens and parasites is the result of nutritional stress. Most recently, increased wolf activity in and around Whiskey Mountain appears to have altered the behavior and distribution of bighorn sheep on winter range.

Over the past 30 years, WGFD has taken a number of management actions aimed at improving bighorn sheep health and spurring population growth in this herd. Actions have included forage enhancement on winter range including prescribed burns and fertilization, deworming bighorn sheep, removing clinically ill bighorn sheep with symptoms of pneumonia, salt and mineral supplementation, and predator control. None of these actions have had any noticeable, positive impact on the population.

Regardless of the reasons for the continued decline of the WMBS herd, it now appears the population size is less than what it was in the 1940s at approximately 334 bighorn sheep. The management challenges WMBS herd are complex and require

novel solutions. In 2019 the WGFD engaged the public in a collaborative process to fully assess the situation in the WMBS herd and come up with a management plan to address the challenges facing this herd. The plan has been completed and the WGFD continues to work with partners like the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation to ensure the future of this very important core native herd.

It has been proposed that the persistence of pneumonia in chronically infected bighorn sheep herds may be attributed to individual ewes that consistently harbor the pathogens and continually reinfect others, especially lambs. These ewes have been termed "chronic carriers" and their removal is associated with a fade out of pathogen presence within the herd and subsequent herd growth. Researchers have created a "test and remove" strategy that requires several rounds of disease testing, determining the chronic carriers, removal of the chronic carriers from the population and continued disease monitoring within the population.

After several western states have seen success utilizing the test and remove method, the WGFD has proposed implementation and evaluation of this strategy in the Red Creek portion of the WMBS herd. In cooperation with Kevin Monteith at the University of Wyoming, this management strategy will be rigorously assessed to determine its effectiveness.



“A Sweet Homecoming”

The effort to bring bighorn sheep back to Sweetwater Rocks has spanned decades. The latest plan is poised for success.

Author: Kaelyn Lynch

In 1812, when Robert Stuart traversed Sweetwater Rocks in central Wyoming on what would eventually be known as the Oregon Trail, he would have seen the same bare-knuckle granite hilltops and windswept, shrub-dotted flats there today. Despite the development surrounding it, the Sweetwater Rocks remain a sliver of the American West as it mostly was 200 years ago.

One thing about the Sweetwater Rocks Stuart saw is drastically different today. In his writings, Stuart noted “innumerable flocks” of bighorn

sheep. They crowded the banks of the Sweetwater River, deftly hopped between perilous rocky outcroppings at Devil’s Gate, and grazed lazily on the long grasses of the prairie. Decades later in 1835, trapper Osborne Russell, another explorer in the region would confirm Stuart’s observations, writing, “An eye could scarcely be cast in any direction around, above, or below without seeing the fat sheep gazing at us with anxious curiosity.”

By 1907, a traveler to Sweetwater Rocks wouldn’t see a single wild sheep.

Decimated by a combination of over harvesting, habitat degradation, and diseases from domestic flocks, wild sheep have remained absent from Sweetwater Rocks for much of the past century. And while previous attempts to reintroduce these emblematic animals have fallen short, a renewed effort promises to return them to their traditional home.

“If not for the hand of humans, the sheep would still be there,” says Matt Hoobler, a board member of the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation and

one of the leaders of the Sweetwater Rocks bighorn restoration effort. “Now our efforts have the power to bring them back and the Sweetwater Rocks is the ideal location.”

Four species of wild sheep once inhabited a vast swath of Western North America, stretching from southern Canada into northern Mexico.

While exact numbers are hard to come by, respected naturalist Ernest Thompson Seton once estimated that at around 1800, as many as two million wild sheep roamed the high deserts, low shrub lands, and mountain peaks of North America.

While indigenous peoples were known to subsist off wild sheep, the Duka Dika, also known as Sheepeaters, were ancestors of the Mountain Shoshone in Wyoming who were renowned for their expertly-tanned sheepskin clothing and bows constructed from the iconic horns. The demise of the animals correlated with European encroachment into the West. In addition to being relentlessly pursued for their high-quality meat and hides, wild sheep soon faced competition for food and water from livestock. Their biggest vulnerability, however, came from their predisposition to respiratory infections: diseases passed from contact with their imported domestic counterparts ran rampant, and even a single infected animal could mark the end for an entire herd. By 1960, the west-wide population had dwindled to about 25,000 individuals, about one percent of their former numbers. One species, the Audubon’s bighorn, went extinct entirely.

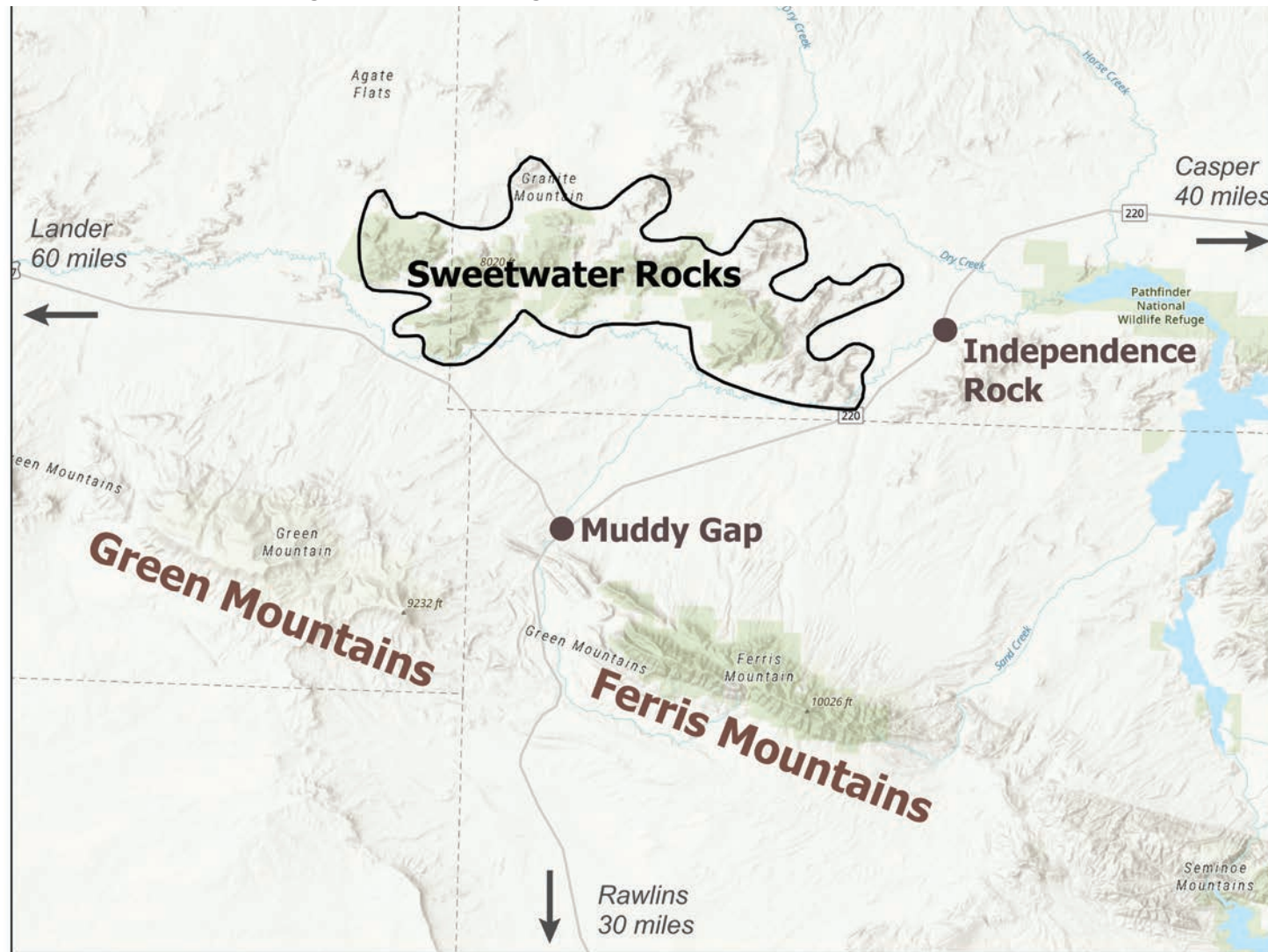
It didn’t take long for naturalists to realize there was a problem. Restrictions on

harvesting and statutes to further habitat protection date back as early as 1870 in the U.S. and Canada, but they did little to quell the sheeps’ demise. In the 20th century, newly-founded state and federal wildlife agencies, nonprofits, and concerned hunters realized the need for a more aggressive intervention. The solution was translocation, or the transplanting of wild sheep from healthy herds to an area where they once thrived. The efforts have produced iconic photos of sheep slung under helicopters, waiting to be deposited into some of the country’s most remote and inaccessible landscapes.

The first known sheep translocation was in 1922, when 20 bighorns from Alberta, Canada were released into Montana and Custer State Park in South Dakota. From then until 2015, over 1,460 trans-locations have moved an estimated 21,470 animals. The results of these efforts have varied: A review of 100 sheep trans-locations in six Western states between 1923 and 1997 clocked a success rate of only

41 percent. This, in part, was because of the process of trial and error; mistakes included mixing sheep from various source herds and dropping highland sheep species into lowland environments and vice versa. Habitat degradation from human development and livestock grazing also made it tough for the newly resident sheep to survive, as did the danger of liaisons with domestic sheep. But over time, with new technology and new knowledge, the success rate grew. Today, wild sheep are largely considered a poster child for conservation success, with populations rebounding to more than 80,000 animals spread across 15 U.S. states, two Canadian provinces, and six states in Mexico.

Sweetwater Rocks is no stranger to these restoration



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efforts. The first attempt was in 1944, with the relocation of seven desert bighorn from Nevada. “That was a mistake,” says Kevin Hurley, a former wildlife biologist for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) and the vice president for conservation at the Wild Sheep Foundation. Although this area of Wyoming can be considered the high desert, these species of bighorn were not adapted to our cold temperatures and higher elevations, and the animals quickly died off. A herd of 20 Rocky Mountain bighorns fared better, growing their numbers to between 40 and 50 by the 1960s, but began to dwindle through the 70s due to transplanting high elevation sheep not conditioned for the low elevation phenology. By 1980, the last of them was gone.

In the 1970s, a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) biologist named Jack Welch conducted an analysis to determine how many wild sheep Sweetwater Rocks could theoretically sustain, and came up with a number around 400. That kicked off a trans-location effort by the BLM and WGFD that stretched from the mid-1980s all the way through the 1990s. After more than a decade’s worth of habitat assessments, discussions with local landowners, public commentary, and obtaining the necessary approval and funding, the plan was on the verge of adoption, with 20 California bighorn slated to be re-homed in Sweetwater Rocks in early 2000. But, on the eve of success, a handful of

ranchers petitioned, spreading what advocates called, “faulty information” to other ranchers in the region, including mistaking the proposed California bighorn transplants from the Sierra Nevada, which

time, it wasn’t from federal authorities, but a landowner.

Pathfinder Ranches is a conglomerate composed of around a dozen historic ranches in central Wyoming,



are federally protected species that landowners feared could bring more government restrictions. After a petition circulated at a public meeting calling for the end to the plan, citing primarily concern of increased restrictions on federal grazing allotments, the proposal was dropped.

Plans to revive Sweetwater Rocks’ wild sheep would lay dormant for over 20 years. Then, in July 2021, a new proposal surfaced. But this

overseeing some 630,000 acres of rangeland and importantly the only remaining federal domestic sheep allotments in the vicinity of the Sweetwater Rocks. Their mission is to balance successful agricultural business with wildlife habitat restoration. In June 2021, Pathfinder sent a letter to WGFD requesting permission to formally pitch a Sweetwater sheep restoration plan at their meeting the following month. Pathfinder’s core belief that the age-old rivalry of agriculture

versus wildlife doesn’t have to exist is central to the renewed effort. Pathfinder did outline two conditions for its continued support of the initiative: first, the process must be open and transparent, and second, any reintroduction must be designed and initiated in a way that would not harm its ranching neighbors.

With a spate of failed past attempts, how could this one be any different? Pathfinder and

again see wild sheep roam the Sweetwater Rocks, the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation was a central ally to the effort. a partner with a razor-sharp focus on wild sheep conservation and keen dedication to science.

At the request of the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission, scientists from the University of Wyoming and the WGFD analyzed Sweetwaters’ habitat and the risk that wild sheep would contact domestic

Since then, the population has thrived, alongside the cattle operations that dot the landscape. There’s now around 300 animals, providing a crystal ball for how the Sweetwater Rocks wild sheep might interact with their new home.

The assessment, completed in December 2021 by nationally recognized ecological researchers Monteith and Wagler, concluded that Sweetwater Rocks has ample habitat to support wild sheep year-round without encroaching on domestic livestock or existing wildlife. It also found that the risk of contact with domestic sheep was minuscule, at just .03 contacts per year, or one every 33 years for a herd of 50. At that rate, with about a quarter of contacts potentially resulting in disease, the risk of a deadly pathogen outbreak was once every 141 years. Even when adjusted for a population of 300, the risk of contact number was less than half of the 0.37 of the nearby Ferris-Seminole herd.

With solid scientific backing that wild sheep in Sweetwater Rocks posed little risk to landowners and the bighorns themselves, WGFD went about asking ranchers

for their opinion in a series of one-on-one meetings and public forums throughout 2022. They found that when presented with the facts, 48 percent of landowners in the area were in favor of the plan, with only 22 percent opposed and 22 percent neutral. The concerns that were raised echoed those from previous decades: that government authorities and environmental NGOs would



their neighbors and partners, including the historic Split Rock Ranch and the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation, believe that technology and knowledge has evolved significantly from two decades ago, and all are determined to learn from past mistakes. The first step was to prove that Sweetwater Rocks remains suitable sheep habitat. From the inception of the renewed effort to once

sheep. To do so, they used data from GPS collars to track 111 bighorns in the Ferris-Seminole area, a region adjacent to Sweetwater that shares its high-desert habitat dotted with rocky outcroppings and sagebrush grasslands. Like Sweetwater, the Ferris-Seminole sheep had disappeared a century ago, until the early 2000s, when a series of trans-locations attempted to restore the herd.

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use bighorn sheep protection as an excuse to curtail grazing permits, that sheep would be a cover for failed wild horse policies, and that their livestock would have new competition for water and grass.

Jim Collins ran cattle in the Ferris-Seminole region for more than 30 years and has spent decades as a liaison between landowners, the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation, and federal and state government agencies. He says that ranchers' concerns are understandable, based on unkept promises elsewhere. "The government has the ability to stack control upon control," he says. "The mindset that causes fear and panic comes with a history of some real problems with some of these government regulations."

Collins emphasizes that what makes the current effort different is the Wyoming Bighorn/Domestic Sheep Plan, a 2015 statute that directs the

WGFD, the Wyoming Board of Agriculture, and Wyoming Livestock Board to all act together to maintain healthy bighorn sheep populations alongside economically successful livestock operations. The plan recommends discussions from all parties related to the overlap of habitat use between any bighorns that would interact with domestic sheep. It also brings together numerous stakeholders, including the Department of Agriculture, the Stockgrowers and Wool Growers Associations, and the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation, into the Wyoming Bighorn/Domestic Sheep Interaction Working Group. With the addition of the BLM, other private landowners, and NGOs, and the process of getting sheep back in Sweetwater is a kaleidoscope of various opinions and priorities.

"The [WGFD] in its 100-year history has worked closely with private landowners," says Zach

McDermott, Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation president. "There's not always perfect alignment and agreement, but the WGFD is very sensitive and cognizant of landowner wants and wishes because half of the state is private land, and the other half is public." Sweetwater Rocks also cleaves roughly along these lines: of the 73,000 acres predicted to be the sheeps' core range, about 60 percent of the land is located within one of the region's 19 federal grazing allotments.

The plan's advocates cite Ferris-Seminole as proof this approach can work. Jim Collins says his 500-cattle strong operation never faced any issues, whether in competition for grazing or reduced federal allotments, once the sheep were reintroduced. Matt Hoobler affirms that Pathfinder had a similar experience in the Ferris-Seminole area.

The more complicated problem is domestic sheep. While wild sheep rarely harm their domestic cousins, they pick up deadly pathogens that can wipe out whole herds, necessitating coordinated efforts to keep them separate. Luckily, Sweetwater Rocks' natural topography helps with this issue. The 2021 assessment noted that the area is surrounded by mostly flat shrub land that wild sheep are unlikely to use and is bounded by major highways, providing a natural buffer between wandering wild sheep and domestic herds. Currently, none of the federal grazing allotments that overlap with the animals' predicted core range are

slated for sheep. On the off chance a bighorn does go walkabout, WGFD director Brian Nesvik affirmed in a letter to landowners that the Department would be responsible for removing any sheep that interact with domestic herds, as per they have a current policy to remove bighorn sheep that are suspected of interacting with domestic sheep. For the Sweetwater Rocks herd, the WGFD will be the mechanism of separation and remove or relocate any bighorn sheep outside of the designated boundary.

Beyond a neutral effect on ranching operations, Pathfinder Ranches, Split Rock Ranch, and other landowners stand to benefit from trans-location of wild sheep. Landowners note that fostering a more diverse ecosystem, brought about by the restoration of sage grouse, native plants, elk, and wild sheep, increased the valuation and carrying capacity of the land. By building a sound ecological environment, agriculture benefits, as do wild species.

Another area where landowners can directly profit is through hunting. Bighorn sheep are considered the pinnacle of big-game hunting in the United States, both because opportunities to harvest them are scarce, and most involve weeks of pursuit in the backcountry, requiring an abundance of time and physical fitness. Wild sheep tags are typically run through a lottery system, and it can take decades to draw. Special conservation tags can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars—the most expensive permit to date sold in Montana in 2013 for \$480,000.

In other areas where wild sheep have been reintroduced,

communities have seen huge economic benefits. In Mexico, where the Wild Sheep Foundation has spent decades restoring herds, local landowners take home between \$90,000 to \$360,000 per hunt, when adjusted for purchasing power. Collins, Hoobler, and the Foundation note that land that holds transplanted herds in Ferris-Seminole, Devil's Canyon, and around Laramie Peak are rapidly becoming premiere hunting destinations, where landowners are able to charge for access. Sweetwater Rocks could be even better, as some sections would offer more accessible expeditions to older hunters who can no longer tolerate a 10-day backcountry foray.

Counter intuitively, hunting also benefits the sheep. Trans-locations are expensive, costing as much as thousands of dollars per animal. Since the passing of the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act in 1937, much of the funding for these and other conservation projects has come from taxes on sporting equipment, the sale of tags, and donations solicited by hunting organizations. The Wild Sheep Foundation alone has raised \$136 million towards restoration since its founding in the late 1970s. There's also some recent evidence that hunting, particularly of ewes, could help stabilize sheep

populations and protect against pathogen spread. Overall, introducing sheep hunting to Sweetwater Rocks could be a rare boon to both the economy and wildlife protection.

The current proposal calls for between 25 to 50 Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, sourced from the neighboring Ferris-Seminole herd, that would be GPS-tracked and supplemented with additional transplants when necessary. Advocates pushed for the initial drop to take place in early 2023. However, despite over a year of landowner engagement and public commentary, the plan has faced an uphill battle against a small number of skeptical agricultural producers that want legally defensible assurances that their ranching operations will not be affected.

Ultimately, wild sheep's future in Sweetwater Rocks relies on the entities involved to bring the kaleidoscope vision together into one clear picture.

Visit our Sweetwater Rocks Initiative Web Page at:

<https://www.wyomingwildsheep.org/sri/>





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Life member #323 and Ramshorn Society Member

Ashton Thomas Private Wealth, LLC and WY Wild Sheep Foundation are not affiliated entities. Investment Advisory services provided by Ashton Thomas Private Wealth, LLC, an SEC registered investment adviser.

WY-WSF RHS LMs Cole and Elaine Benton were honored by the Iowa FNAWS Chapter at their 2023 Convention. They received the "A Living Legend of FNAWS" award for their many years of service to FNAWS(now Wild Sheep Foundation). Presenting (L) was Chapter President, Graig Nakamoto.



Ashton Thomas employees volunteering with the Wyoming Game and Fish, to stock the Otter Creek Ponds on Muddy Mountain - via backpack. Willow, the golden office companion, enjoyed a full day of frolicking in the sunshine and tested out the water to make sure it was fit for the fish!

"A special thanks to Hunter Burningham, senior fish culturist at the Dan Speas Fish Hatchery in Casper, Wyoming for organizing this unique opportunity for us" - Michael Porter



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“It’s Your Land, Come Enjoy It!”

Dr. Jennie and Sam Carr

It was a rather chilly February evening in Lancaster, PA. My husband had convinced me to get away for Valentine’s Day and attend the Eastern Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation (ECWSF) Convention. After two years of decreased travel, we were ready for our next adventure. It was time for the auction. We were ready to purchase a 3-night 4-day couple’s only trip to the Bahamas. I thought to myself, YES! That’s exactly what I need to escape from this blistering wind, chilly temperatures, and snowfall to the crystal blue waters, blue sunshine, and warmer temperatures. We had our bid number ready. Bid... Bid... Bid... Bid... Outbid. Bummer. There went my vacation. A few more auction items came up to bid, we turned the page and there was a trip to Jackson Hole, Wyoming. My husband said, “Well it’s not the beach, but that looks like it would be a fun time”. I shrugged and said, “Okay, well Bid”. Bid... Bid... Bid... Sold. We got it! Deep breath – we were heading west. The donated trip to Jackson Hole is the result of a partnership initiated between the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation (WYWSF) and the ECWSF in 2003. The ECWSF was chosen as a recipient of 1-of-5 Wyoming Governor’s bighorn sheep tags. The bighorn tag

is auctioned/raffled by ECWSF with most (90%) of the funds generated being returned to Wyoming for bighorn conservation. In 2018, WYWSF former Ex Dr. Steve Kilpatrick expressed his appreciation and desire to strengthen the partnership with an annual donation of a 3-day-4night ecotour in the Jackson-Dubois area to the ECWSF’s Convention. The annually donated ecotour is offered to ECWSF



on behalf of the WYWSF and the National Bighorn Sheep Center. Moreover, the WYWSF offers a field trip to view ECWSF’s adopted Wyoming sheep herd - the Bighorn – Ferris/Seminole herd complex. Our partnership to put and keep KIDS and WILD SHEEP on the mountain is amazing. Fast forward a year, and our entire family of four is on a plane heading west to Wyoming. My husband and I had been west to ski and for business, but this was our first excursion west as a family. Each day was full of exploration and appreciation of God’s amazing

creation in Wyoming. Every day my daughter would help Steve with the farm chores including cleaning the pen and feeding all his animals. She can still name every animal on the farm. After a jaw-dropping outdoor breakfast with the Badlands to our left and the mountains to our right, Steve took us to the National Wild Sheep Center. Everyone we met said Steve was a walking and talking encyclopedia. Boy, were they right? We learned so much from historical facts about the town of Dubois, Shoshone Native Americans, wildlife, and shrubbery – oh my! Steve knew every native animal and plant. His background as a former employee for Wyoming Game and Fish was such an asset. Steve’s presentation at the Wild Sheep Center was perfectly balanced for my elementary-aged children. The interactive exhibits at the National Wild Sheep Foundation were engaging and informative. My kids were able to hold wild sheep horn replicas and identify how the Shoshone Native Americans herded sheep into traps. Next, Steve took us on a tour of the Dubois badlands on his side-by-side, fondly named Little Red, where we saw countless mule deer, antelope, and elk and even found an elk shed. Steve is very passionate about Wyoming lands. As soon as we got near the Badlands. He told us it was our land, and we needed to come and enjoy it! He told us about the sage plants, and wildlife, and answered my children’s countless questions.



Later for dinner, we learned about Wyoming Dutch Oven cooking from Bryan Sage. We helped Bryan prepare the meat and vegetable stew and peach cobbler to cook naturally over the fire. We talked with Brian and Carolyn Gillette more about the town’s history and enjoyed the view of the Wind River and the kids played in the Jakey’s Fork creek while we waited for our dinner to finish cooking. We loved the Dutch Oven so much we decided to purchase one for Father’s Day so we could share this experience with our friends and family. Everyone we encountered was generous with their time and resources. We felt like family. On day two after feeding the animals, of course, we headed to the Whiskey Mountain Bighorn Sheep Winter Range where we were able to see several sheep, rams, and even a few yearlings. We learned more about the spiritual lifestyle of the Shoshone Native Americans and their petroglyphs. We then hiked the Glacier Falls trail. We didn’t get any snow in Virginia this year, so my kids were thrilled to build snowballs and toss them around for Steve’s adorable lab, Cinder. After enjoying the breathtaking views of the lakes, valleys, and mountains, we stopped at a local restaurant hotspot, The Cowboy Café, for lunch. With a full belly, we helped prepare the horses in the afternoon and saddled up for a horseback ride in the Dubois badlands.

You should have seen the smile on my daughter’s face – ear to ear. She was elated. We rode through the badlands and I could not stop taking pictures. Everything was just so breathtaking. Steve took us over to Union Pass via Little Red (his side-by-side), again reminding us about our rights to enjoy the public land. On our travels, we learned about the Wyoming Tie Hacks (cutting of lodge pole pine for railroad ties in the 1920s-1940s) and the Dubois tie hack flume (a wooden trough careening of the side of the mountains designed to transport the railroad ties down to the river for floating to a processing station) before we enjoyed bison steaks for dinner. The next day we were scheduled to tour Jackson and the Grand Tetons, but we loved Dubois so much we decided to alter our plans to stay in Dubois

one more day. We took another ride on Little Red to get a closer look at the Tie Hacks and more beautiful views of Dubois. That afternoon at my daughter’s request, we enjoyed another horseback ride in the Badlands with Cinder. The day concluded with viewing a documentary about the Wyoming Tie Hacks and elk steaks. We elected to add a few more days to our trip touring Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks. We enjoyed our time at both parks and were sure to hit all the highlights including Jenny Lake, Oxbow Bend, West Thumb, Yellowstone Lake, Old Faithful, Artist Point, Mammoth Hot Springs, and Lamar Valley. Don’t hate on us, but the commercialized tourist boardwalks just didn’t do it for us. Each day we craved to be back on the farm taking care of the animals and enjoying the natural surroundings of Dubois. Our time in Dubois with Steve was our favorite – hands down. Looking back, we are so glad we didn’t win the couple’s vacation to the Bahamas. That summer sand is something but it had nothing on our experience in Wyoming. This trip was one, we will never forget.

You’ve got us hooked, Wyoming! We promise to come back and enjoy your land real soon.



National Bighorn Sheep Center Update By Executive Director, Sara Bridge

DUBOIS, WY — As domestic goat/sheep hobby flocks increase in the Wind River Valley, home to the Absaroka herd which intermingle with the largest meta-population of wild sheep in the state, the National Bighorn Sheep Center hosted a public meeting around the risk of disease transmission. On May 1st a panel of in-person and virtual speakers met featuring Dr. Kate Huyvaert, and including Daryl Lutz (WY Game & Fish /Chair, Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Wild Sheep Initiative), Andy Pils & Joe Flower (US Forest Service), Dr. Helen Schwantje (Wildlife Veterinarian, Ministry of Forests, British Columbia). Over 100 individuals attended.

Jared and Shelley Glenn live in the Painted Hills subdivision of Dubois, Wyoming, with 4 children and 3 goats. The goats are important, and not only because they provide milk. The children are “not on devices all day,” said Jared. “They’re out having to do chores every day, taking care of our goats and our chickens.” It’s been amazing, Shelley added, watching them learn how to train goats to be milked. “It’s not easy,” she said. Besides their children and the goats, the Glenn’s care deeply about the wild bighorn sheep that sometimes cross the nearby badlands to visit their property. When they moved in, a top priority was to build fences that would keep the goats away from the bighorns. Close contact, they knew, could be deadly to the wild sheep.

Precious animals The Glenn’s told their story at a community session sponsored by the National Bighorn Sheep Center in Dubois, to discuss the risk that the bighorns may catch a deadly infection from domestic sheep/ domestic goats brought into the rapidly growing Painted Hills subdivision. Bighorns

an increase in homesteaders. Today, fewer than 500 bighorns survive in the Whiskey Basin. In the past, unrestricted market hunting certainly contributed to their decline. But it continues now, linked to bacterial pneumonia imported along with the domestic sheep raised by homesteaders.

Solutions from afar Listening on Zoom were two domestic sheep owners from distant British Columbia: Jennifer Bowes and Helen Schwantje, a veterinarian. Together, they told how they have been working to confront the problem. After Bowes and Trevor Hann brought a herd of 75 sheep to their farm near Briscoe, their immediate concern was that lambs in their flock began dying from M.ovi.

Tests showed that nearly half of the ewes were infected. While helping the couple to protect their flock, Schwantje alerted them to the risk that the sheep were posing to a bighorn herd nearby. Both women wanted to alert other farmers to that risk, for their own flocks as well as for the wild sheep. Bowes set up a mill that converts wool to pellets, which are used as mulch. In exchange for selling their wool to the mill, farmers can have their sheep tested for M.ovi, with funding supported by proceeds from the mill.

Dr. Helen Schwantje works to engage the support of other farmers in reducing the risk to wild sheep. It needs to be a collaboration, so she doesn’t summon them to her office



Join us for this pertinent discussion to address the domestic goats / wild sheep disease transmission risk in Painted Hills subdivision

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were precious to residents of the area long before they were chosen as mascots of the high school football team. The majestic creatures were important sources of food, clothing, and tools to the Native Americans who were here before Europeans arrived. Lewis and Clark saw tens of thousands of bighorns in Wyoming. In 1900, there may have been 5,000 in the Dubois area. Then, a steady decline in their numbers accompanied



for the conversation; she sits around their own kitchen tables, drinks coffee, and explains the problem. “It’s a very emotional, very difficult issue to deal with,” said Schwantje. “This is your land. You have the right to do what you want on the land. We can’t stop that. But do you know about this risk?”

Often, when domestic animals never leave the property, there may be no need for action. Then the conversation is merely informative. But if the animals go to 4-H shows, for instance, the risk is higher—just as for children in day care or people on a cruise. Then they must discuss the options, which may be costly, inconvenient, or both. One of them is to build a double row of tall fences, as the Glenn’s have done. It’s not clear exactly how far the two species must be separated, how tall the fences need to be, or who should pay to protect a wild species. It may be effective on large properties simply to change grazing patterns when the bighorns are around.

Coexisting in Painted Hills Testing will be an important part of the strategy to protect the bighorns that wander into Painted Hills in Dubois, said wildlife coordinator Daryl Lutz of Wyoming Game & Fish. “We don’t have any intention,” he stressed, to remove the entire sub-herd. The initial plan is to

briefly sedate and collar about 10 bighorn rams so they can be tested. “We’ll need a lot of neighbors’ cooperation to get that done,” Lutz said. As with herds elsewhere, any

animals that repeatedly test positive would be culled. Local wildlife managers and residents also need to be vigilant for bighorns in the subdivision that appear to be ill. “We would really like to know about it,” he said, “because we might be able to forestall any catastrophic outbreak by removing those sheep.” The normally dry, sunny environment in Dubois may help to reduce the risk, Thomas Besser pointed out on the Zoom screen, because M. ovi is very susceptible to drying and ultraviolet radiation. “I think the transmission has to happen within minutes,” he added. So, fences may be a good option. “We want to see if we can work with folks like you and figure out ways to minimize that risk,” Lutz concluded, “to see if we can help those bighorn sheep coexist in that subdivision and around Dubois.”



Members are encouraged to submit photos for publication in the RAMPAGE as well as our website galleries by emailing to: rampage@wyomingwildsheep.org.



Dan Davidson with a 2023 Ewe.



LM Jax Taylor with his Bear.



Father & Son!
LMs Ryan and Ron Amundson.



LM Kodyak Wyatt with his Wyoming moose.



RHS LM Joe Kondelis with his Wyoming moose.



RHS LM Chance Butler and a Wyoming Bull.

LM Scott Buckingham
Archery Elk in AZ

Member's Gallery

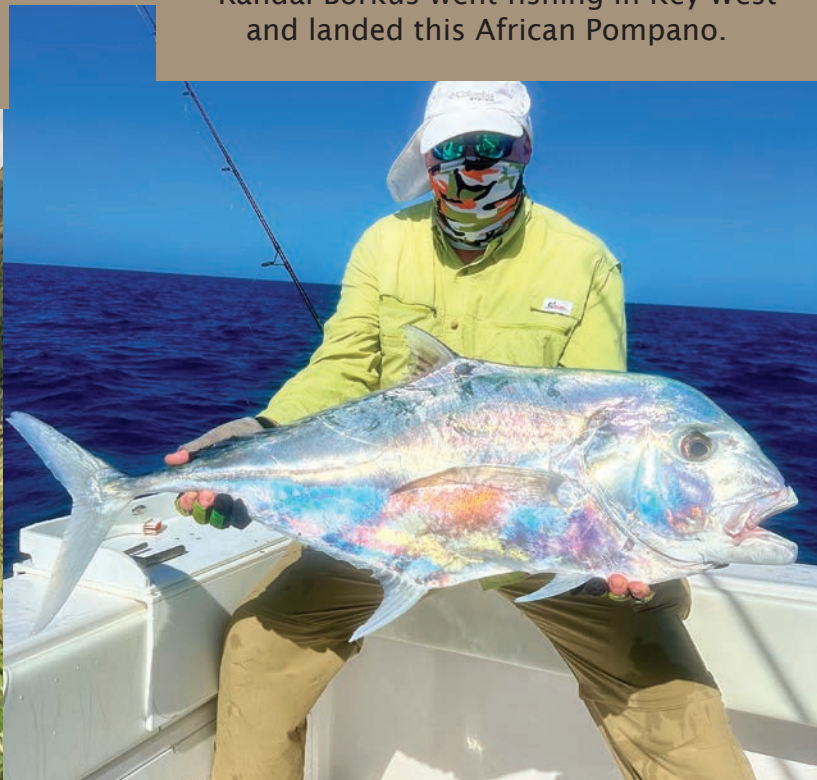
BLAST FROM THE PAST

DO YOU KNOW THIS

GUY? (Answer on Page 5)



Randal Borkus went fishing in Key West and landed this African Pompano.



RHS Life Member Steve "Quiz" Quisenberry and partner, Jaimee and a New Zealand Red Stag.



“A Three Day Hunt in Twenty-Four Hours”

By: Joe Sarvis

My luck started when, after 25 years of applying, I drew a Wyoming bighorn sheep tag. When I started applying, I lived in Alaska, was in good shape, backpacking in and bowhunting for Dall sheep, etc. But now at 76, I wasn't sure I could handle a sheep hunt anymore and my archery skills had certainly diminished. So, my excitement about the tag was tempered with trepidation, since I didn't know if I could still do it. I did a lot of telephone scouting, research, etc. before heading to the unit a few days before the season started.

“I got phenomenally lucky on the hunt! I scouted for 3 days and never found a sheep.”

Then the day before the season, I finally found a nice bunch of 16 rams, including 3 big ones. Then on opening day, they were not there, so I climbed the mountain where they had been. I worked down along the top of the hogback looking down into each gulch. Then I dropped down (1700 ft) to the main river and walked it for a mile. All this in 85 degrees. Eventually after nearly 8 hours, I had climbed and descended over 5000 feet. I finally climbed from the river

up a long gully and back to the end of a two-track leading back to the truck. So, at the two-track I drank the last of my water at 4 PM. At that point I was so exhausted, I was wondering if I could make it back to my truck. Then part way up the two-track, there were the rams bedded under a juniper tree out in the open! The wind was blowing from me to the sheep. So, I couldn't



before, I notice that whenever the big rams changed direction while feeding, the others followed. This later turned out to be key for the shot. The sheep had fed over to where I guessed they would go (from observations the day before) and had arrived there just before I did. Peering over the edge, I saw two sets of ram horns about 35 yards away. After remaining motionless for a couple of

minutes, the wind swirled and they ran off around the contour. I assumed the stalk was over and slowly started moving down to where they had been.

I only got about 10 yards when I heard a bunch of racket in a stunted, gnarly patch of aspens next to me. It turned

out the rest of the sheep had fed into that patch of aspens and were making all sorts of noise. I got ready and as they were starting to emerge, I drew back. And then unbelievably two of the big rams came out of the aspens first at 17 yards!!! I shot one and the 2 instantly ran out of sight. After 45 minutes of “stress” hoping my shot was good, I finally found the ram. It had gone 110 yards and probably was dead in less than 10

continue toward them or they would smell and see me. My thoughts were; should I wait until tomorrow (and be hydrated/rested) or see if somehow I could climb the mountain again. With newfound adrenaline, I decided to try. So, I made a 270-degree stalk, going up the mountain via an out of sight gully, behind the top, and back down partway to get downwind.

From observations the day

seconds (chest/lung shot).

By then it was 7 PM and I was hurting. I left the ram on the mountain and descended to the truck and drank a gallon of water! Then I drove back to the trailer a few miles away and my wife made a nice buffalo steak dinner.

“Now with renewed calories and hydration, I drove back to the mountain in the dark and climbed with a pack, game bags, etc. looking for the ram.”

I took my bird dog in case I couldn't find the sheep in the dark. I knew she could find it. When I found the sheep, I stuck an arrow in the ground and turned the lighted knock on, so I could easily find the location again in the dark.

The mountain was so steep (45-degree slope?), I decided to see if I could drag the sheep downhill. After tying a rope to the base of the horns, I could raise them off the ground, give a tug or two and move him a foot or so in the sagebrush. It took me

over 2 hours to get him down to the two track the truck was on. I later found out the gutted sheep weighed 180 pounds and probably was 220 pounds live weight.

But he was so heavy (and I'm now so weak), I could not get him in the truck! I drove off the road and backed the truck at right angles into the steep sided road and got the tailgate a foot off the ground. Then I got the head on the tailgate and tied it. Then with another rope I got the hind end on the tailgate and tied it off. Then with a huge heave got the body on...wheww! I got back to the trailer around 1:30 AM.

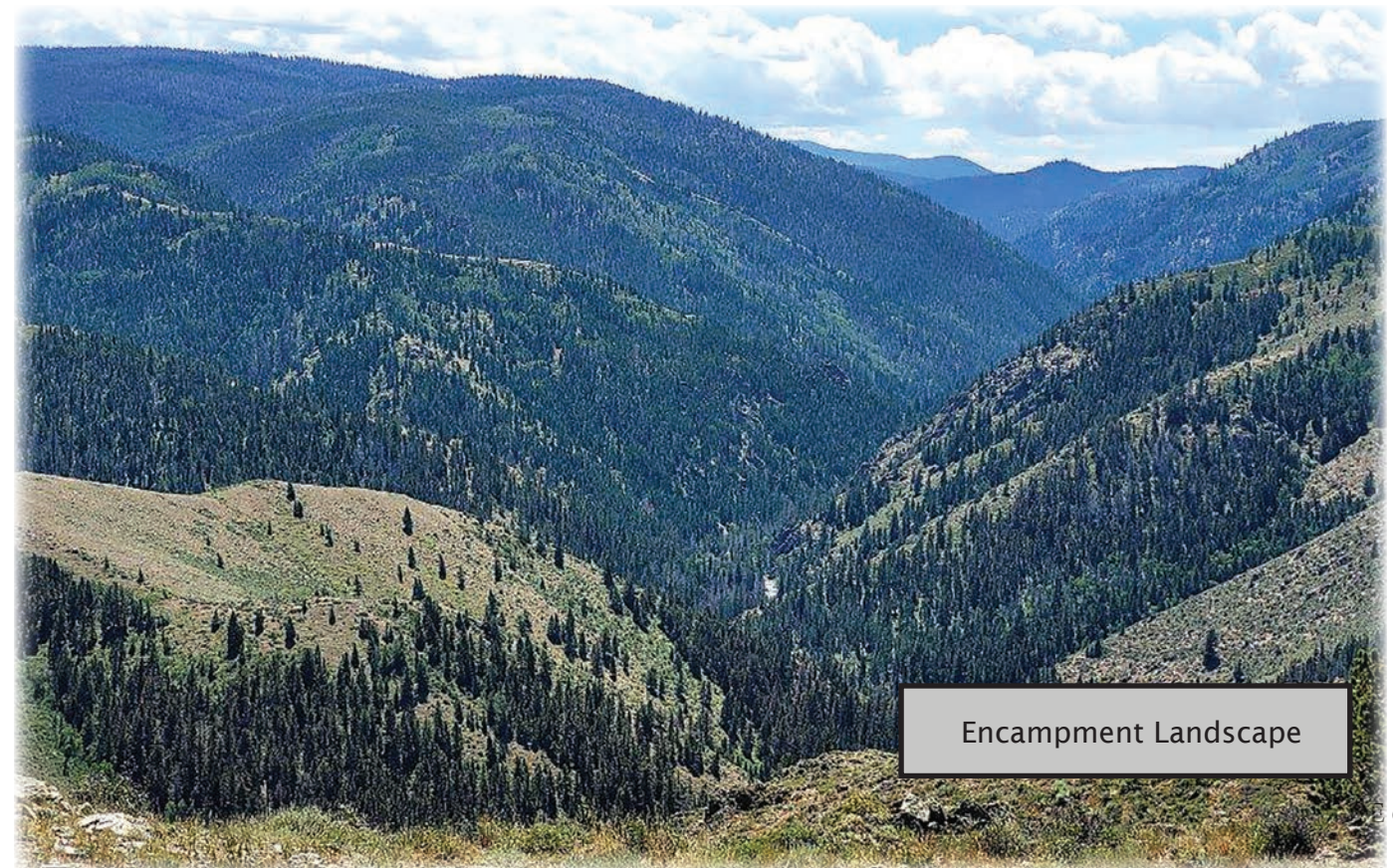
I had 3 days' worth of hunting in less than 24 hours! We



Rams from a scouting point

got it to a processing plant the next morning, picked it up 2 days later, and left the head and cape at a taxidermist in Cody.

“The meat is delicious!”



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GRANT IN AID UPDATES

Trail Lake Meadow Update By Amy Anderson, G&F Habitat Biologist



A year ago, the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation (WWSF) helped fund a project to renovate Trail Lake Meadow, an irrigated hay meadow just above the Whiskey Conservation Camp in the Torrey Valley. Reclaiming this meadow will improve wintering habitat for the Whiskey Mountain Bighorn Sheep and other wildlife. To reclaim this 35 acre meadow it first needed to be prepared for reseeding. It was dominated by smooth brome and basin wild rye, both are not preferred or utilized forage species. Wyoming Game Fish Department (WGFD), in partnership with the Shoshone National Forest and WWSF, conducted a prescribe burn and treated the regrowth of the undesired species with herbicide during winter, 2020-2021. In the spring of 2022, the meadow was re-seeded with a mixture of forage species beneficial to bighorn sheep and other wildlife such as mule deer. The seed mix included a number of native grasses, introduced grasses, and several higher stature legume species, all of which provide nutritious forage for

wintering bighorn sheep. The re-seeding was done using a Lawson aerator, a piece of equipment that breaks open the soil surface, broadcasts seed over the soil, and then covers the seed. The photo shows the aerator in action. The aerator broke down mid-way through the seeding, and replacement parts were difficult to find, which delayed the project by several weeks. So, the seeding was mostly unsuccessful, and the meadow was overtaken by lambs quarters weeds. So where do we go from here you might ask? New seed has been purchased, and will be planted this fall (2022) with a drill instead of the aerator. Drilling the seed and planting in the fall will better ensure the seed is worked into the soil profile and make it ready to capitalize on early spring moisture for germination. Once again, the gated pipe for irrigation will be laid out in the spring, and a technician will be on hand to irrigate the meadow through summer, 2023 to ensure establishment of the seeding. This second seeding, coupled with plenty of irrigation water, is expected to easily crowd out or out compete the lambs quarters and we should see much improvement over the next couple of years. As always, we greatly appreciate the

partnership through funding and support from Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation for projects benefiting Whiskey Mountain Bighorn Sheep!

Update: Wyoming Game and Fish Habitat and Access personnel worked this spring to improve the condition of the seeding on Trail Lake Meadow in the Torrey Valley, near the Whiskey Mountain Conservation Camp. The field was re-seeded with the same mix as was planted in 2022 with the addition of an oat cover crop. The oats were added in order to help hold the soil while the other plants matured, allowing the field to be irrigated with reduced erosion potential given the sandy nature of the soils. The sanfoin, clover, and alfalfa came in well under the cover crop. The grasses appeared to be more patchy, but will likely fill in during the second growing season. The legumes will be a hit with the large numbers of mule deer that winter in the valley, and as the sheep move down in the area this fall and winter, we hope to observe the sheep using the meadow, as well.





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WY WSF Volunteer Day

By: Katie Cheesbrough

On August 12, 2023, a group of 24 Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation volunteers and Wyoming Game Fish Department personnel worked side-by-side to remove a stretch of woven-wire boundary fence on the Thorne/Williams Wildlife Habitat Management Area (WHMA) in Sybille Canyon. This WHMA was purchased by the Wyoming Game and

The current boundary fence is woven-wire, sheep-tight fence topped with three strands of barbed wire. Needless to say, this is not a wildlife-friendly fence design and makes it very difficult for wildlife

quality habitat on the WHMA.

At the June 2023 Membership Meeting, the membership voted to approve funding for



Fish Commission in 1948 and encompasses nearly 3,000 acres of rugged terrain that is excellent winter range for elk, mule deer, and bighorn sheep. The rocky outcrop foothills include mixed mountain shrubs and sagebrush grasslands.

to navigate safely. As the old fence is converted to a wildlife-friendly design the Laramie Peak bighorn sheep herd will have unfettered access to high-

the Thorne/Williams WHMA fence conversion through our Grant-in-Aid program. It was

WY WSF Volunteer Day

By: Katie Cheesbrough

our great pleasure to have the opportunity to support this project through on-the-

is, why it's important for the Laramie Peak bighorn sheep herd and our plan of attack. Our volunteers loaded up in UTVs to head into the WHMA and begin work. WGFD folks split the group into teams to tackle the fence from all angles. We quickly

After scrambling up and down rocky hillsides, rolling barbed wire, pulling posts, and sharing some laughs, we achieved our goal for the day and returned to the Research Center for burgers and camaraderie. It was a beautiful day in sheep country, making it even better. We can't thank our volunteers

enough for showing up and working so hard to support this project. Many thanks to John Henningsen and the other WGFD folks who made this day possible and work so hard for our bighorn sheep.

List of Volunteers/WGFD

- Freddie Goetz
- Luke Michelena
- Dirk Montgomery
- Tripp Montgomery
- Mark Wells
- Craig Kling
- Bob Van De Rostyne
- Bralli Clifford
- Chris Otto
- Ryan Amundson
- Danyelle Pace
- John Harris
- Tonya Taylor
- Casey Cheesbrough
- Hanna Cheesbrough
- Willis Cheesbrough
- Katie Cheesbrough
- John Henningsen
- Mark Cufuade
- Keaton Weber
- Nate Baas
- Corey from Guernsey
- Nat Rykerd
- Peach VanWick



ground volunteer work as well.

The day started at the Sybille Wildlife Research Education Center, where WGFD Habitat and Access Specialist John Henningsen gave the group a rundown on what the project

found out why the area is good bighorn sheep habitat as it was rocky and steep with access to excellent forage. Thanks to the efforts of Habitat Biologist Ryan Amundson, the area has been treated for cheatgrass, making native grasses and quality forages even more abundant.

“A New Experience”

By: Paul Threlkeld

First of all I'd like to say I'm not a sheep hunter, I've never even had a freshly harvested ram in my hands. But over the last two decades my passion to hunt has grown immensely. I had been scouting an area for the last Novembers, seeing sheep and trying to learn some of their habits. I had also contacted a few hunters that had the tag in previous years. One fellow, Robert from Wisconsin, was especially enthusiastic about talking about his sheep hunt. We quickly became good friends, and talked frequently on the phone about sheep hunting. After seeing several great rams, I decided to apply for that area. Finally in May of 2023, my desire of drawing the coveted once-in-a-lifetime license was realized after checking the Wyoming draw results.

The plans were to spend most of the summer weekends on the mountain to see every ram on the mountain and learning where their hangouts were. Well, after several trips out with friends and family and my best friend, Tucker (my dog), and not seeing any rams at all the reality had set in that this was not going to be as easy as I had thought. In late July, Robert was coming to Wyoming to pick up his ram from the taxidermist and wanted to go scouting with me for a day. It was that day early, in the morning, that we would see our first rams. A group of seven young rams bedded on a hillside, actually close to the road that we were driving. Later that day after seeing no others rams, we decided to go

to an area that I hadn't been to. We set up our spotting scopes and within just a couple minutes rams were in the view. Six of them, one of them had a noticeably deep curl going below his jaw line. I was excited to finally see rams. Two days later my son, Preston, and friend, Kevin, joined me to see if we could get a closer look at those same rams. I went to



where I spotted them from and Preston and Kevin went to the ridge that the sheep were on. I pretty quickly located what I believe was the same band of rams. I relayed the location to Preston and Kevin. They found another band of mature rams while on their way to look at the ones I was looking at. After they closely looked over the band that they found, they crept over the ridge and found the rams that I was looking at. They took the first photos and videos of the ram that I would later name Chip because of the nickel sized chip that he had in his left horn that was lighter colored. He's a beautiful ram with deep curl, not broomed,

with a wide flare at his tips and noticeably larger than his buddies. Over the next couple of weeks, we kept going back to the same place and would see Chip hanging in the same area. Also I started seeing more rams in the same area. Lots of them.

Finally the Thursday before the archery opener, my wife and I left town to set up camp and then go see Chip. After we finished setting up camp, we went to take a look. Sure enough, after some looking through the spotting scope, there he was. Still in the same area, now with 14 other rams. And more rams further down the ridge. More than thirty rams in total all on the same ridge. Friday morning was the same results. Saturday morning we made our way over to where I've been glassing from. After a couple of hours of glassing and seeing no sheep at all, I figured they had just found a shady spot early because of the heat. I went back that evening and also saw nothing and the same with Sunday morning.

My friend Jeff had come up to help with the archery opener and after telling that they had disappeared he suggested that we take a drive and look other places. Monday afternoon we rode together. Jeff wanted to see where I had seen the first band of rams that I saw with Robert. It was completely on the opposite side of the mountain. With an hour of daylight, we came around and there stood 23 rams and one in the middle of the band, Jeff excitedly said, "There he is, there is your ram". I could not believe my eyes. I couldn't believe we found him the night before the archery opener. We stayed with them in site until dark. The next morning we were back there at

first light. The rams were still there and bedded. We made a game plan to sneak up for a possible shot. Jeff dropped me off at the base of the mountain and I started climbing. After a bit of time I radioed to Jeff asked what they were doing. He replied, "They are gone, I can't find them". For some reason they had left without us seeing them go. I continued to the top thinking they were just over the ridge. That was not the case. They disappeared and we looked for several days. Finally on the evening of the 17th with help from my friend Kevin, he spotted some rams on a ridge moving towards where I had last seen Chip. We quickly setup the spotting scope and Chip was in the group. We watched them go over the ridge into a drainage that I knew well. I told Kevin that there is a road in front of where they're going. We loaded back up quickly and headed over to it. When we arrived the rams were nowhere to be seen. Kevin climbed up on a tall ridge for a better vantage point. While he was climbing I started glassing below the ridge that we thought they came over. There they were bedded in tall sagebrush 900 yards away. I radioed to Kevin their location and then got my pack on and grabbed my bow and headed up. The wind was light and in my face. They had gotten up and began feeding during my climb. I reached the point of where I wanted to be behind some pine trees. I stripped off my pack and tried to gather my wits and calm the hell down. They were now 130 yards away and feeding. A small thunderstorm had approached during my climb. I lowered myself down into a cut in the hill continuing my approach. Suddenly the wind from the storm swirled right to the sheep. They all quickly gathered into a tight group with all heads up looking my direction. I was 63 yards from them. Chip stepped out in front of the group broadside. Standing there with an arrow knocked, I knew it wasn't happening

today. They slowly walked to the top of a ridge and then over. I radioed to Kevin asking what they were doing. He said that they were running down as fast as they could go. I was bummed that it didn't work out but also so excited about the experience that I got to have.

The next four weeks would be a very stressful time. Seeing many rams but not Chip had my mind going everywhere. Was he harvested by another hunter, moved to the other hunt area, moved to private property that I didn't have access to? Saturday the 16th, my friends Jeff and Spencer both came up separately to help look for Chip. First thing that morning, Jeff found 17 rams. None of them were Chip. Spencer found 4 rams in another spot. No Chip. I found two rams. No Chip. Sunday the 17th, I left camp before Jeff arrived. I had glassed for a shot awhile, then I was going to go back where I had last seen him. As I reached the top of a hill my phone chimed with a text. It was from Jeff. I FOUND HIM! I had a mild heart attack, then turned my ranger around and punched the pedal. Then I suddenly realized that I didn't know where Jeff was. My phone notified me of a voice mail. Finally I reached an area with cell service and listened to the message. He wasn't far away. I floored the pedal. It's an old ATV, not fast. I felt like I would never get there. Finally I arrived at where I thought Jeff was supposed to be but didn't see anyone. I stopped and tried to call him but his phone went straight to his voicemail. UGGGG! I started to try and call again when I noticed movement out of the corner of my eye. It was Jeff hunched over scrambling up the road towards me. He gets close and excitedly tells me he's over here! We cautiously moved over to where



we can see the rams. There's was 10 of them feeding. Chip was in the lead and moving around a ridge of rocks soon to be out of sight. I got behind the gun, but the grass was so tall I had to keep moving for a clear shot. I found a large rock to set my bipod on and finally had a clear shot. I lowered the cross hairs onto his chest, took a deep breath, and jerked the trigger just like you're not supposed to do. I heard the sound of the bullet hit and Chip hit the ground. As I looked down at him he began to try rise to his feet. I crank another round into the chamber. The second shot put him down for good. I was truly amazed at what a special animal he is.

What an incredible hunt it was for me! And I remember thinking on the way to him that it's over and how bittersweet that feeling was.

I'd like to thank the people that helped me with this hunt.

**My wife Andrea
My son Preston
My good friends Jeff,
Kevin, Spencer
And new friends Robert
and (Mark, also has a ram
tag this year in that area).
Also, I want to thank
Wyoming Game & Fish
and the Wyoming Wild
Sheep Foundation.**

“Jessi’s Hunt”

By: Jessi Johnson

Area 7

*Hunt area 7, Type 6, Special Archery
Dates Aug 1 – Aug 31, Regular
Season dates, Sept 10- Oct 15,
Quota 30, Ewe or lamb valid within
the Gros Ventre River drainage
(27 residents, 3 nonresidents)*

This hunting season has been everything. It has had some of the most incredibly high highs and the lowest lows I’ve experienced in the field. It’s challenged my commitment to hunting, my ethics, and my confidence.

The morning of May 4th, 2023, I logged into my WGFD account to check draw results. I put in for sheep, moose and mountain goat tags every year, but it is always with a healthy dose of pessimism; I am not far along enough in the preference point game to warrant getting too excited. You can imagine my complete and utter surprise when discovered that I had drawn what will likely be my only Wyoming bighorn sheep tag. A ewe/lamb hunt in the Gros Ventre drainage.

I had put in for this tag for the opportunity to experience a Wyoming sheep hunt, to harvest and fill my freezer with arguably the best game meat, and also to support the management need that has arisen within that specific herd. I work in wildlife and hunting policy and much of my focus and love has been centered on bighorn sheep and their future within our state. I knew this ewe hunt was contentious due to a misunderstanding of the need and the knowledge that bighorn sheep populations continue to struggle across the country. I had looked at this tag as an opportunity to highlight the managers working to keep our bighorn sheep on the mountain and to help clarify the reasons around this hunt.

The Jackson bighorn sheep herd is consistently contending with pneumonia related mortality issues. This becomes especially apparent when the herd number exceeds 400 – 450 sheep. Sheep population numbers are directly related to the amount of good habitat available to them. As the population gets higher and the number of sheep on the ground grows more



Photo Credit: Jaden Bales

already within this herd the ability to translocate sheep into other areas or herds with suffering populations was also negated. So, managers are left with using the population decreasing tool of hunting ewes (the population growers).

I went into this hunt determined to do my part; to ethically and successfully take a ewe in classic Wyoming bighorn sheep country. After days of planning and many emails to biologists, previous tag holders and friends, I spent 4 days hunting hard in the high country of the Gros Ventre wilderness. I left that hunt empty handed, the sheep that were there were not within the legal boundaries of the hunt area. I did not count that hunt unsuccessful. Those that have been on sheep hunts understand the complete soul enriching pull to ridgelines, cliffs, and plateaus of bighorn habitat. It gets into the very marrow of your bones. It is what makes a sheep hunter, and it keeps us going back time and time again, whether we hold tags or not.

I then made plans to go back in the following long weekend, up the other side of the plateau. Into habitat I had not previously scouted. I reached out to the biologist and asking for tips and questioning sheep behavior

after snow due to a somewhat daunting weather forecast. Rather than climb high she suggested I head up drainage and look along the lower cliffs. Tactics changed and the truck left Lander at 3 am on a Saturday morning to get to the trailhead at first light.

I was 1000 yards from the truck when I looked up and saw the first sheep. Small built, small horns, likely a ewe. Feeding right under the cliff band about three quarters of a mile away. Unbelieving of my luck I hastily

climbed up the steep face and onto a bench to get a better view. After watching it in the scope and realizing there was two other ewes a little higher up the cliff from it, I made the decision to get closer. First to 300, then to 250 and finally to 135 yards prone in the sage brush of a steep slope, downhill from the sheep.

Sitting behind the rifle scope waiting for it to give me every angle as it fed along the cliff band, I passed shot after shot trying to ensure that the sheep in my scope was the right one to take. After a half hour of watching through bino’s, spotting scope, and range finder, I pulled the trigger at 190 yards. It was one of the best rifle shots I’ve ever taken, and the sheep dropped instantly. With the backdrop of dramatic cliffs, red dirt, sage brush, and the Gros Ventre River drainage. I heaved a sigh of relief over a job well done.

I walked up on this beautiful animal anticipating a feeling of melancholic joy, only to realize as I drew closer it was a yearling ram. I had a ewe/lamb tag. I’d hunted extremely hard for this opportunity; I’d looked at a LOT of bighorn sheep. I stood there in abject horror staring at this sheep and the magnitude of this mistake started to sink in.

I sat next to him for a time, in shock and grief. Questioning what to do next because I did not have service to call the game warden. I decided that treating him like I would any other animal I had killed was the best course. I punched my ewe tag; I broke him down and I packed him out. I



Photo Credit: Jaden Bales

cried a good portion of the way.

I called the biologist and the game warden as soon as I hit service and asked them to meet me at the WGFD office, telling them the mistake. The drive into town was a haze of anxiety. I’ve seen a lot of sheep in my life, I’ve collared them, I’ve hunted them, I’ve spent literal days looking at them in optics, I’ve helped write the policy



Photo Credit: Jaden Bales

that guides their management. This was a harsh and vivid reminder that hunting makes experts of no one, it humbles us, it tests us, it asks of us to face the ugly parts of ourselves when it does not go according to plan.

I left that day with a cooler full of meat, a misidentification citation, and a fine of \$250 accompanied by a healthy dose of shame and embarrassment. The biologist and the warden were extremely kind, supportive and understanding. I have yet to stop being hard on myself for this.

This is the reality of hunting. We make mistakes. Sharing

this story has opened a door to many people sharing their own mistakes with me and it has made me reflect on the fact that perhaps that is where we as a hunting community can be better. By not just portraying the stories of when things go right, but by telling the ones where it goes horribly, sickeningly, and sadly wrong. To share advice on how to handle those situations so no one is

left sitting alone on a hillside wondering what the right course of action is. To uphold each other in our ethics and be willing to face the music when we have done something wrong. So here is my offering to that narrative. Hunting is both my life’s work, joy, and the deepest of sorrows and this year was rough lesson in my own fallibility.



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