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The RAMPAGE



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New Life Members

752 William Campbell
753 Steffen Hammer
754 Nick Hansen
755 Jeremy Schaad
756 Olivia Roskowiak
757 Jim Roseberry
758 Debbie Cheesbrough
759 Dave Cheesbrough
760 Jozie Coy
761 Pete Fazio
762 Tony Mong
763 Dave Jones
764 Joe Hill
765 Aly Courtemanch
766 Scott Kincheloe
767 Helen Bishop
768 Josh Metten
769 Shawn Porter
770 Charley Kelly
771 Hank Flatow
772 Mike Bouton
773 Ken Lynch
774 Elena Johnson
775 Randy Taylor
776 Daniel Quinn
777 Aaron Vincent

Wyoming WSF would like to thank and recognize Life Members who have signed up since the Spring 2026 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 are 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!

2026-2027 CALENDAR

December 4-5, 2026
WY WSF Board & Membership Winter Meeting
Newcastle, Wyoming

February 3-6, 2027
50TH Annual WSF Sheep Show
Reno, Nevada

May 7-8, 2027
WY WSF Annual Convention
Casper, Wyoming

June 17-19, 2027
WSF Chapter and Affiliates Meeting
Salt Lake City, Utah

June 23-24, 2027
Wyoming Bighorn Sheep Summit
Burgess Junction, Wyoming

2025-26 Governor's License Sales Totals

Sale Location	2026 LICENSE SALES	2025 LICENSE SALES
WSF	$250,000	$215,000
Eastern	$234,000	$221,000
Midwest	$265,000	$130,000
Iowa	$275,000	$150,000
Wyoming	$181,000	$300,000
Total	**$1,205,000**	**$1,016,000**



Jameson Owens, The Happiest Person on the Ride In.

The RAMPAGE

Features

Fall 2026
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Magazine Editor - Kendra Young

Advertisement Information

For more information about submitting information or advertisements for the WY WSF RamPage, contact Kendra@wyomingwildsheep.org.

Each membership address will receive one mailed copy of the RamPage. If you would like to receive more copies contact RamPage@wyomingwildsheep.org

Membership Information

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Front Cover Photograph: Zach McDermott
"2026 Hunt Area 9 Ram"

Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation



Bralli Clifford
President



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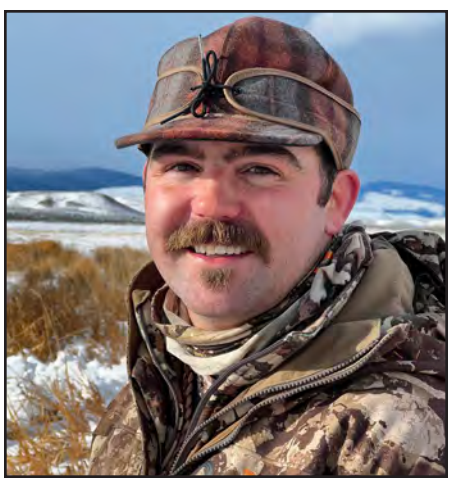
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Kendra Young
RamPage Editor

WYOMING
WILD SHEEP
FOUNDATION

The Responsibility of What We Inherit

By Katie Cheesbrough, Executive Director, Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation

There is a natural tendency in conservation to look ahead. We look toward the next project, the next opportunity, the next place where we might make a difference for wild sheep. That ambition is important. Much of what the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation has accomplished over the years began because someone looked at a challenge and believed we could do better.

But lately, I have also been thinking about the importance of looking back.

WY-WSF did not arrive where we are today by accident. We stand on decades of work by board members, directors, volunteers, members, agency partners, landowners, biologists, and conservationists who gave their time, knowledge, money, and sometimes a considerable amount of stubborn persistence to bighorn sheep conservation. Their work is visible across Wyoming.

It is there in habitat projects that continue to benefit sheep years after the work was completed. It is there in healthy herds, restored populations, research programs, partnerships, policies, and relationships that took years to establish. Some of our greatest conservation successes today began as difficult decisions made by people whose names many of us may not know.

Those successes deserve more than our gratitude. They deserve our stewardship.

As conservationists, I believe we have an obligation to understand and consider what came before us before jumping into what should come next. New opportunities will always be exciting. But progress should not require us to forget the lessons already learned, undervalue hard-won conservation gains, or put past successes at unnecessary risk for the next novelty.

Sometimes leadership means pushing boldly toward something new. Sometimes it means recognizing that something precious has already been built and having the discipline to slow down and ensure we protect it.

That idea has been particularly meaningful as we have worked on a retrospective of the RamPage. In this issue, you will see the beginning of a project Dean DiJenno has taken on to look back through decades of WY-WSF history. Digging through old issues reminds us how much work came before us. Projects we now see as fixtures in Wyoming's conservation landscape once existed only as ideas. Today's successes were yesterday's risks, debates, partnerships, and long hours of work.

Dean himself represents an important part of that history. As you will read in this issue, Dean has announced his plans to retire as Deputy Director in the coming year. After twelve incredibly productive years in that role, and many more years as a member, director, volunteer, mentor, and friend of this organization, his institutional knowledge is difficult to measure.



Bralli has done a wonderful job recognizing Dean and his family's extraordinary contribution within these pages, so I will simply add this: organizations are stronger when they remember the people who helped build them and take the time to learn from what those people know.

We have also been thinking a great deal about the legacy of our former Executive Director, Steve Kilpatrick. Steve's impact on WY-WSF and wild sheep conservation in Wyoming was enormous, and so much of the work we do today rests on a foundation he helped build. We are currently working toward what I believe will be a particularly meaningful way to honor Steve, one that reflects both his life's work and his commitment to protecting Wyoming's bighorn sheep and also highlights the power of partnerships he was instrumental in building. There will be more to share when the time is right, but I am excited by the possibility of the organization contributing to something impactful and lasting in Steve's honor that does more than commemorate his work; it will carry it forward.

Looking back should not keep us tethered to the past.

Knowing our history gives us a stronger foundation from which to move forward. It helps us understand why decisions were made, which battles were fought, what worked, what didn't, and which conservation gains are simply too valuable to take for granted.

WY-WSF has exciting work ahead of us. New landscapes may someday welcome wild sheep back, new science can improve management, new partnerships can be built, and new conservation challenges await us. We should pursue those opportunities boldly.

But we should also remember that we are temporary stewards of something much bigger than ourselves. Our responsibility is not simply to leave our mark. It is to leave Wyoming's wild sheep, their habitat, and this organization stronger for those who come after us.

The people who came before us deserve that.

And the people who come after us should expect nothing less.

"Where Legends End"
Dan Quinn

(This image was from 13,000 feet in the Wind Rivers, 2025.)



President's Message

By: Bralli Clifford, President, Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation

As I sit down to write this message, I find myself thinking less about where the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation has been and more about where we're headed. We've built something strong here — but strong organizations don't coast, they keep building. Over the next two to five years, I want to share where I believe our focus needs to be, and more importantly, how you can be part of it.

Growing our Membership

Everything we do starts with our members. Continued growth of our membership base isn't just a numbers goal — it's how we build the volunteer energy, the donor base, and the political and social capital that lets us punch above our weight on behalf of wild sheep. We need to keep asking people to join us, and just as importantly, keep giving them reasons to stay.

That growth also has to include reaching beyond our traditional base. Younger hunters and conservationists are out there, and so are young and middle-aged adults who haven't found their way to organizations like ours yet, often simply because we haven't reached them through the channels they actually use. You can help here more than you might think: bring a friend, a coworker, or your adult kids to a banquet or a work weekend. Tag the chapter in your hunting or hiking photos on social media. If you know a younger hunter who's serious about conservation but hasn't joined yet, a personal invitation from someone they trust does more than any ad we could run.

Now, Later, and Always

I think about our financial foundation in three timeframes, and I'd encourage our members to think about it the same way.

Now is our general fund — the working capital that keeps the lights on and lets us respond to opportunities as they come up. Your annual membership dues, banquet ticket, and raffle purchases all feed this fund directly, so simply renewing each year and coming to our events matters more than people realize.

Later is our Life Member and Conservation funds. These are the funds that carry our commitments forward a few years out, and growing them needs to be a deliberate priority, not an afterthought. If you've been a member for a while and haven't considered upgrading to a Life Membership, or making a designated gift to the Conservation Fund, this is a great time to think about it.

Always is our Endowment fund. This is the one I want to spend real energy on over the next several years, because it's the piece that outlasts all of us. An endowment is how this chapter is still funding habitat work, still supporting research, and still putting sheep on the mountain fifty years from now, long after today's board has handed off the reins. Building it takes patience and intention, but there's no more important long-term goal on our list.

There are more ways to contribute to the endowment than people often realize, and I'd encourage everyone to think about what might fit their own situation. That could mean a one-time donation, proceeds from a real estate sale, including the chapter in a will or estate plan, a gift through a donor-advised fund, or other options like appreciated stock, IRA charitable distributions, or naming the chapter as a beneficiary on a life insurance policy or retirement account. If any of these fit your



circumstances, reach out to a board member — we'd welcome the conversation.

Meeting People Where They Are

We need a wider reach — online, in print, and in person. You can help extend that reach without much effort at all: follow and share our posts, tag us when you're out doing chapter work or hunting a Wyoming unit, and pass along our magazine to a friend who might be interested in joining. If you prefer print, let us know your feedback on the magazine so we can keep making it worth your time. And nothing replaces showing up — banquets, chapter events, work weekends, and just being present in our communities. If you haven't been to an event in a while, this is your invitation to come back.

Stronger Partnerships

None of our conservation work happens in isolation. Over the coming years, we're committed to strengthening and deepening our relationships with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service, our tribal partners, and other conservation organizations working alongside us on this landscape, as well as with the Wild Sheep Foundation at the national level and our fellow chapters and affiliates across the range. If you have a professional or personal connection to any of these agencies or organizations, or experience working alongside them, we'd love to hear from you — those relationships are often built one introduction at a time.

We also need to strengthen our presence with our elected officials. The decisions that shape wildlife management and habitat conservation in this state are made in large part by people we can and should be talking to directly. If you know your state legislator or a member of our congressional delegation, or you're comfortable showing up to a town hall or writing a letter when an issue matters to wild sheep, that kind of grassroots engagement is exactly what strengthens our voice.

Showing What We're Accomplishing

We do remarkable work — habitat projects, disease research, transplants, youth programs — and we need to get better at showing it to the people who support us and the people who could. If you've been part of a habitat project, a transplant, or a youth event, send us your photos and a few lines about your experience. Member stories are often more compelling than anything we could write ourselves, and they help others see exactly what their support makes possible.

Honoring Where We Came From

As we push forward, we can't afford to lose sight of how we got here. This chapter was built by people, and a lot of that history lives only in memory right now. I'd like to see us put real effort into building out our archives — collecting stories, biographies, and photos from our past board members and our long-standing members before those details fade. If you've been around this chapter a long time, or you know someone who was, consider sitting down for an interview, writing up a memory, or digging through old photo albums for us to scan. It's easy to let this slide in favor of what's urgent today, but once that history is gone, it's gone for good. Preserving it is part of how we honor the people who built this chapter, and it gives our newer members something to connect to.

Investing in Our People

Finally, none of this works without engaged members and a board ready to carry it forward. There are more ways to get involved than serving on the board — committee work, helping run an event, mentoring a younger member, or simply showing up consistently are all valuable. And if leadership is something you've thought about, don't wait to be asked. Talk to a current board member about what it involves. We need to be intentional about succession planning, identifying and developing the next generation of leaders now, so the transitions ahead are smooth and this organization never misses a step — and that starts with members like you raising your hand.

None of these goals happen overnight, and none of them happen without all of you. Thank you for being part of this chapter, and for everything you do for wild sheep in Wyoming.

Bralli Clifford, President, Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation







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The Woman Who Never Left the Mountain

By: Bralli Clifford

President, Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation



Author's Note: This hunt took place in September 2026.

By the time it was over, my husband, Greg, and I had put more than 200 kilometers of mountain terrain behind us on foot. We moved camp eight times in ten days, because that's what it takes to hunt Dall sheep the way they're meant to be hunted. We weren't simply moving from point to point. We were clearing basins and ridgelines as we went, glassing new country every time we broke camp, ruling terrain in or out one drainage at a time. It is, without question, the hardest sustained physical effort either of us has ever put our bodies through.

I harvested my ram on Day 11. Greg harvested his on Day 12. Everything in between those twelve days is what actually matters.

This was our second Dall sheep hunt with guide Alan Klassen, and our first as a couple — Al had guided our family once before, taking our son on his first Dall sheep hunt back in 2019, with my husband alongside him.

This trip marked something else, too. June of 2026 was our tenth wedding anniversary, and somewhere in the planning, Greece quietly lost out to twelve days in the Northwest Territories. We didn't spend much time deliberating over it, honestly. There will be time for Greece someday. There is only so much time for mountains like these — for bodies still capable of carrying heavy packs through eight camp moves and two hundred kilometers of drainages. Ten years in, we decided that was the anniversary trip worth taking: together, while we still can.

Anyone who has spent time in sheep camp with Al will tell you the same thing: his skill for finding rams is considerable, but it isn't what makes him who he is. What makes Al who he is, is what happens both before and after the shot.

Al keeps journals. Has for his entire guiding career. Every ram, every hunter, every hunt gets recorded — not as a tally, but as a record of something he clearly considers sacred. When a ram is down, and if the hunter allows it, Al will sleep in his tent with the harvest for one final night before the hunt ends. It's not a tradition he performs for an audience. Most of his hunters, I'd guess, never even hear about it unless they ask. It's simply how he honors the animal, every time, whether anyone is watching or not.

That reverence is contagious. It changes how you understand your own ram once you've watched Al hold that same moment with the weight it deserves. And it's not just Al — his son, Dak, hunted alongside us this trip, and it was obvious within a day that Al has passed every bit of that ethic down to the next generation. Watching a father and son move through some of the most demanding country in North America, each one carrying the other's exhaustion without ever saying so out loud, was its own kind of privilege to witness.





Because make no mistake — this trip demanded something out of everyone in camp, guides included. Al has guided through injuries that would have sent most people home for the season. He does it without letting it slow the hunt or show on his face, because in his mind, his hunter's experience always comes before his own comfort. That kind of selflessness isn't something you can teach a guide. It's something a person simply is, or isn't.

By Day 10, we had covered more ground than either of us thought our bodies had in them, moved camp for the eighth time, and were running out of both daylight and easy answers. Sheep hunting has a way of humbling you exactly when you think you've found your rhythm. Day 11 changed that. My ram came together fast, after days of nothing — one of those moments where months of scouting, hours of glassing, and Al's stubborn refusal to settle for anything but the oldest ram in the basin all collapsed into a single, suspended few minutes, after an extended climb and the effort of getting into position to make it happen. Twenty-four hours later, on Day 12, Greg got his, after another grueling but satisfying hike and stalk of his own.

I've hunted long enough now to know that the harvest is never really the point, even when it feels, in the moment, like the entire point. The point is the 200 kilometers. The point is camp number eight, pitched somewhere neither of us could have found on a map before this trip. The point is watching a guide sleep beside a ram out of respect rather than obligation, and watching his son learn to do the same. Those are the things that stay with you long after the horns are measured — if they're measured at all — and the photos are taken.



I keep coming back to something I've felt on every sheep hunt I've been lucky enough to be part of, whether I was the one carrying the rifle or fortunate enough to be along for someone else's: you arrive as one person, and the mountains send someone else home in your place. This hunt was no exception. What was different this time was doing it alongside Greg — watching him carry the same exhaustion, the same reverence, the same quiet transformation that sheep country seems to demand of everyone who's serious about it.

To Al and Dak — thank you for twelve days that asked everything of us and gave back more than we could have hoped for. To everyone at Arctic Red River Outfitters who made this trip possible — we're already counting the days until we're back. To my husband and partner in life - thank you for skipping Greece, for now, and for sharing what sheep hunting and hunting in general is actually about. And to the members of this Foundation who understand, better than most, exactly why any of this is worth 200 kilometers on foot: thank you for sharing in it with us.



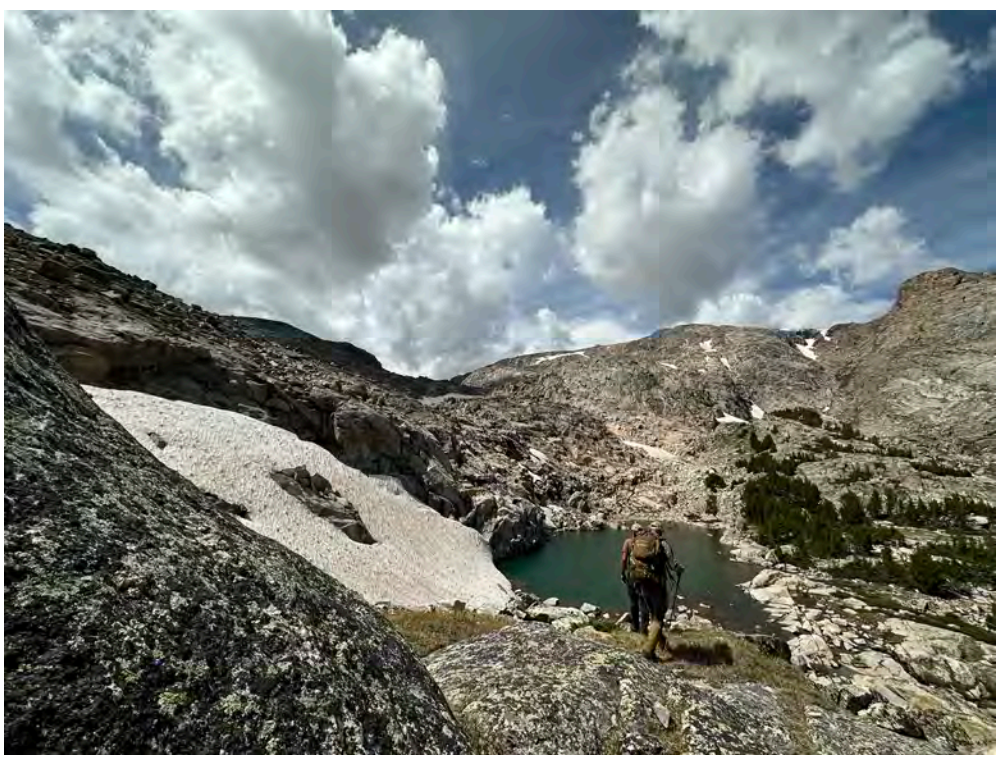
The Experience
By: Zach McDermott

With Wyoming going to the once-in-a-lifetime on their bighorn sheep and moose tags, there is now added pressure to make sure a hunter picks the right hunt area and outfitter. Several years ago, a friend of mine at Wyoming Game and Fish told me about this area having great sheep, but it had flown under the radar due to lower sheep densities and the tough terrain, which was a complete understatement. Instantly it piqued my interest. As I researched it more over the next couple years, I knew it was where I wanted to go. In my second year of applying for this specific unit, I drew. After I saw the results, I came down the stairs to tell my wife. She saw the expression on my face and knew something special had happened. I then immediately called my dad to let him know he needed to start getting in shape, we are going on a sheep hunt! He wanted to go on one more sheep hunt before retiring to the pool. My next call was to my outfitter buddy, Jimmy. He had never hunted the area before, but anybody who knows him knows he is up for any challenge. We were all intrigued by what lay ahead. Boy, were we in for a treat!!



THE PREPARATION... WITH A TWIST

With the said challenges of the terrain, I knew preparation and conditioning were going to be paramount. As all sheep hunters go through, we know it will be countless hours in the gym, hiking, on the mountain bike, and laps in the pool. Training this year had its extra challenges. Wyoming was in the middle of a severe drought and brutally hot temperatures. Whether it was biking when it's 105^0 or a 3-hour hike at 103^0, there was no way around it. It just meant the Five Finger Death Punch got turned up a little louder and I had to endure it. This became some of the best mental preparation one could ask for. But life has a tendency to throw you a curveball that you can't mentally or emotionally prepare for. Three weeks before I was scheduled to go in, my wife had an accident. While getting our daughter ready for college



in Nashville, she had a freak fall and shattered her kneecap. This required immediate surgery. I caught a last-minute flight to be with her over the next five days during the most critical time post-op. Situations like this really open your eyes to how quickly things can change. Once I returned to Sheridan, I had the difficult challenge of trying to refocus on the task at hand.

UNCHARTERED WATERS

The time had finally arrived, and it was game time. The afternoon before going in, my dad and I met up with our guides, Cameron and Chris, in Dubois. We organized our gear and cooked steaks. In most cases, this would be the time to strategize through our hunt plans but not with this one. Since none of us had ever been in this area before, the only knowledge we had was from discussions and suggestions from friends. We were truly going in blind.

As we rode into the country, we quickly realized the terrain was going to be a lot tougher challenge than anticipated. The landscape was littered with rocks as far as the eye could see. The sizes were anywhere from softballs to Volkswagens. Even the main trail into camp was hazardous. One false step or a pushy mule and a person could be seriously hurt. After the experience going into camp, my dad decided he was going to stay closer to camp and let us young guys have at it. The area was also very vast, so we knew it was going to take a lot of time and patience behind the big glass.

Prior to the rifle opener, we had intended to spend the first four days archery hunting. We had a quick dose of reality and knew that wasn't going to happen. In fact, we didn't see our first group of rams until the fourth day… over six miles away. We did get a glimpse of a few nice ones, so we knew it was a place to start.

THE GRIND

The rifle opener was here, and we had a game plan to get into the drainages where we believed the sheep were when we last saw them. The only trails in this area were in the main creek bottoms, so the mules were only good getting us from camp to the bases. From there it was going to be all hiking/climbing straight up. Our initial goal was to get up high enough to get a detailed up-close look at what we were facing. During our ascent, we were traversing up a narrow rock ledge when a large boulder went out from under my left foot. I had all my weight on that side, so I instantly went down, somersaulting backwards three times. When I came to a stop, I popped up and the look on Cam and Chris' faces was one of shock. Cam asked if I was okay and my immediate response was "I'm good, I do Yoga!" Still in shock, they asked if I wanted to take a break or wanted to head back down. I replied, "Nope, we have a ram to go after." We spent the day glassing all the nooks and crannies, sheep heaven, and they could be anywhere. It did give us a better game plan moving forward. On the way back down, they showed me the spot where I came to a stop from my fall. Another three feet further and I would have gone off an 8-10' ledge into a boulder field. Someone was definitely watching over me on that one.



Zach and Chris.

The next four days were the full sheep hunting experience: a mule injury, rain, rain again, and two more ascents up the nasty rock chutes. Each time seeing more and more rams, but still playing the ultimate game of cat and mouse with the ram we coined Full Curl Broomed. Just when we thought we had him figured out, he vanished like a ghost. Cam swore this ram had a

Ph.D. in hunting tactics.

Tired and beat up, we needed to regroup. The next day we decided to go back to the rock pile where we had the only true vantage point to glass into the basin where the ram was living. Of course, the rock pile was on a ridgeline across the valley over two miles away. As we glassed, there he was back in the same area and all we could think of was, *How in the h*ll are we ever going to get in there?!* Then we were reminded of Jimmy's words of wisdom, "The sheep just didn't fly in there so there has to be a way!" After multiple previous trips in and studying OnX, we knew the only way to have a chance at him was to come in from above. The route we would have to take was going to be our toughest yet. We would have to go in one drainage over and climb 2,700 vertical feet to the top of a plateau that overlooked the benches where the rams liked to congregate. The only catch to this was we could not determine what the last 50-100 feet of the climb entailed. All we could see was a glacier and a narrow rock chute. Not knowing if we would get cliffed out or not, we were willing to take the risk.


The Climb.

Three-Thirty AM came quickly that next morning. It was all business as we saddled the mules and prepared our gear. After our usual 2-hour ride to the tie-up point, we all knew what lay ahead, and we had a mission to accomplish. The climb was grueling as usual but fortunately we had cloud cover to help keep the temperatures down and the sun off us. As we stood next to the lake at the base of our steepest climb, Chris joked, "We only have 600 feet to go!" We laughed with amusement and pain. We were beyond physical and mental exhaustion, so it was time to internally dig deep. I kept thinking about the messages my daughter had been sending over inReach: "Go Get 'Em!", "Let's Go!", "Keep pushing, Dad!" Amazing how that inspiration made it an "easy" climb. We lucked out on the route we chose. As we approached the top, there was a sliver of traversable rock to allow us to pop over. We all felt an immense sense of relief but also knew there was no way we could go back down that way. The top of the plateau was a massive boulder field minimizing our field of view. While I took a few minutes to regroup, Cam and Chris went to locate the sheep. Cam came back with good news and bad news. They located the rams, but they were across a deep drainage over 900 yards away laying down facing our direction. The landscape was wide open so they would be able to see us coming right away.


Only 600 More Feet.

THE HAIL MARY



Zach and Cam.

There was no way to circle around them, so Cam felt we had to go straight at them, very slowly. He said in all likeness we would blow them out of there, but this was our only option, our end of the game Hail Mary. This meant belly crawling and butt scooting in the rock at a snail's pace not to alarm them with our movement. It was an extremely painful three hours to go over 300 yards, sometimes moving only a few feet at a time. We finally reached some larger boulders where we could be more hidden and formulate the next steps. By this time, the rams had started feeding and were slowly moving down. We wanted to try and close another 100 yards or so, but our window of time was getting shorter. Cam said the rams were just over 500 yards out. The wind had died down so I said, "Let's take it from here." Our ram was broadside and I felt we didn't have any time to waste. I laid prone across a rock getting settled in while Cam checked the yardage, 509. I did one dry fire then said, "Let's go." He checked again, 510...Boom! Ram Down!! Because we were so exhausted, it took us a second to realize what we accomplished. What a sense of joy and relief. Our next challenge was to figure out how to get to him. Once again, going at it blind, we dumped off the back of the plateau, navigating dropoffs and narrow chutes. After that, we lucked out and found what seemed to be an easier path, relatively speaking. We located the ram and it was high fives and hugs all around. After pictures and dressing out the ram, Mother Nature decided to bless us with her presence one last time. A lightning storm rocked right above our heads so we knew we had to hustle. As we finished loading the packs, the downpour started and completely drenched us before we could even get out our rain gear. We made our way to the closest large boulder we could find to get some reprieve. We had to sit tight because there was no way we could navigate those wet boulders with heavy packs. The rain continued for another 2 ½ hours. When we saw a break, we started to make our way down with the goal of making it to an area of trees where we knew we could make a fire. And what's a sheep hunt without spending at least one night on the mountain?! Around midnight, we found the trees and started a much-welcomed fire. Day break came and we had another two hours down the drainage to the mules. The descent was already hard



enough, but with heavy packs and saturated ground we had to be extra cautious. Slowly but surely, we made it down. Finally reaching the mules, we were all amazed one of us didn't get seriously injured in what we went through.

After we got back to camp and finally rested, it all sank in, we had one h*ll of a sheep hunt, the likes of which none of us had ever been through. Eleven days hunting, six of those chasing this particular ram, all in the nastiest terrain one could imagine, we earned it! We also got to realize how unique this ram was, being beyond full curl and broomed. Something very rare for Wyoming big horns.

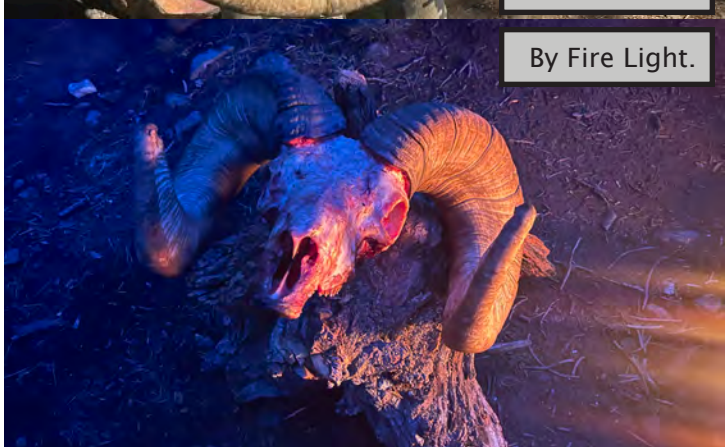
I can't thank Cameron and Chris enough for their amazing work, comradery, and expertise, the best in the business. They wanted that ram as bad as I did. I also want to thank Jimmy and Jozie at Lost Creek Outfitters for having a great crew and a top-notch operation. A special thank you to Emmi and Sam at Cold Springs Outfitting for the fantastic work they did with the logistics required to cross the Indian Reservation, plus the ice-cold beers when we came out. And to my dad for always being there, being a great hunting partner, and one h*ll of a camp jack. You made it through another sheep hunt.

I've been asked a lot about the ram and his score, I reply, "I don't know but he's a great Wyoming Ram!" I've never been much of a score guy but more of what the entire hunt is about. One thing you can't put a score or price on is your experience and this truly was a "Once in a Lifetime Experience!"


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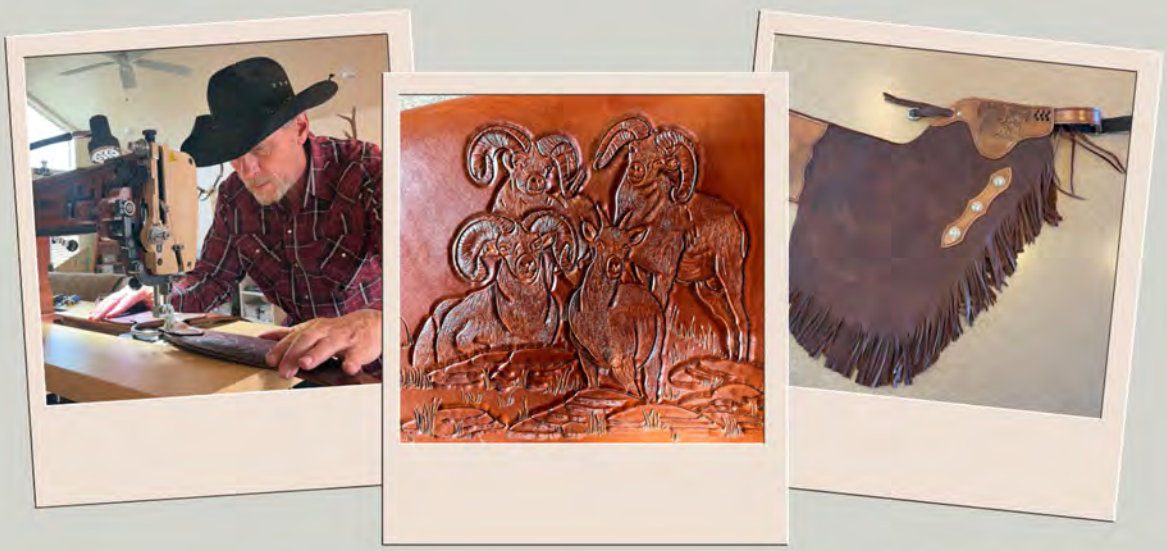
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How to Use Your Next Hunt to Prepare for Drawing a Sheep Tag

By: Jaden Bales

It is more common than not these days for someone who draws a bighorn sheep license to have never hunted sheep before.

That is not a knock on the hunter. It is simply what happens when most people wait decades for a tag—or beat ridiculous random odds and draw one long before they expected to. Sheep hunting is difficult to practice because you cannot exactly pick up an easy over-the-counter bighorn license every Fall in the Lower-48 states.

The problem is that once the tag finally lands in your pocket, the clock starts ticking. Suddenly, you have only a few months to get in mountain shape, learn unfamiliar country, figure out how to find rams, sort out your gear and prepare for what may be the most physically and mentally demanding hunt of your life.

That is a lot to learn with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity hanging over your head.

If you are a dedicated sheep hunter, or want to become one, the better approach is to start preparing long before you draw. You do not need a sheep tag to develop sheep-hunting skills. You can use the deer, elk, bear, and other hunts already on your calendar to become more capable in the mountains and more familiar with the sheep you eventually hope to hunt.

There are three ways to do that, and each one gets you a little closer to the real thing.

1. Hunt Sheep Country

The simplest place to begin is to choose hunts that put you in the kind of country sheep inhabit.

For me, that means hunting mule deer in steep, rocky basins, chasing elk in high mountain drainages, or looking for spring bears in broken country where your binoculars have to cover more miles than your boots. The species is less important than the terrain and the way you hunt it.

Mountain hunting exposes weaknesses that do not always show up on easier hunts. It teaches you how fast you can actually climb at elevation, how to plan routes without burning yourself out, and how much time it takes to cross a drainage that

looked small on a map. You learn whether your boots still fit after several long descents, whether your layering system works when the storm starts blowing in, and whether your camp is light enough to carry without leaving behind something important.

More importantly, you learn how to make good decisions when you are tired.

There is a difference between being in good shape and being in mountain shape. A gym can build the engine, but rough country teaches you how to use it. Sheep hunting often requires sustained climbs, awkward footing, long glassing sessions and the discipline to avoid spending all your energy before the hunt really begins. Those lessons are hard to understand until the mountains hand them to you personally.

You also begin to develop true mountain-hunting tactics. You learn to gain elevation in the dark, reach a glassing point before daylight, use your eyes to do the walking, and judge whether a route that looks possible from across the canyon is actually worth attempting. You learn when to move aggressively and when the smarter decision is to sit behind the glass for another hour.

In 2025, I killed the biggest mule deer buck of my life in country I found on a sheep hunt of my own. I've killed a bull elk in multiple places so rugged and remote that I discussed my hunt plan with sheep outfitters who had been there beforehand.

On neither of those hunts did I have a bighorn tag in my pocket, but both put me in sheep country. They also demanded skills that would matter on a sheep hunt: living out of my pack, traveling through big country, glassing efficiently, and staying effective after the novelty of the first hard climb wore off.

That is the point. You do not have to wait for a ram hunt to find out how you operate in ram country.

2. Spend Time Looking at Sheep Where You Hope to Draw

Hunting mountain country develops the physical and backcountry side of the equation. The next step is learning the animal itself.

If there is a sheep area you hope to draw someday, spend time there before you have the tag. Make summer and winter trips to glass. Visit during different seasons when access and wildlife regulations allow. Learn which slopes they prefer, where sheep go to get seclusion, how rams use cliffs and benches, and which pieces of country only look good from the road.

At first, you may simply be trying to find sheep. Over time, you will start noticing more. You will recognize the difference between country sheep pass through and country where they settle in. You will learn how much terrain a band of rams can cover, which angles make them disappear, and how easy it is to overlook an animal standing in plain sight among rocks, jack pines, and shadows.

There are other ways to learn, too. Talk with biologists. Attend sheep-focused events and presentations. Volunteer for habitat projects when opportunities arise. Listen to hunters who have spent years in the unit, especially when they talk about mistakes instead of only the ram at the end of the story.

None of this guarantees that the sheep will be in the same basin when your season opens years later. Wild sheep move, conditions change, and a serious hunter should be careful about treating any location as a permanent secret spot. The goal is not to memorize where one ram stood on one July morning. It is to understand why sheep use that kind of country and recognize the same ingredients elsewhere.

3. Hunt Where You Expect to Draw



Jaden's Big Mule Deer In Sheep Country.



Bull Elk Killed In Sheep Country.

The best preparation is to hunt the actual country where you may someday hold a sheep tag.

That does not necessarily mean hunting sheep. Look for legal opportunities that overlap the unit or place you in nearby terrain. Depending on the area, that could be a deer, elk, or even black bear. Even an unsuccessful hunt for one of those species can be a productive reconnaissance trip on the hunt of a lifetime if you treat it seriously.

Hunting a place teaches you things that scouting alone does not. You experience the roads and trailheads during hunting season. You learn where camps collect, where pressure pushes animals, and how long it takes to reach useful country before daylight. You find out which access routes are dependable after weather arrives and which ones turn into a mess. You locate water, campsites, and glassing points while carrying the same equipment and operating on roughly the same schedule you might use during a sheep hunt.

You also learn how your plan survives contact with the mountain.

If you eventually draw, you will still need to scout. You will still need current information about ram locations, access, weather, and conditions. But you will not be starting from zero. You will already know how the country lays, what your body can handle and which parts of your equipment and hunting system you trust.

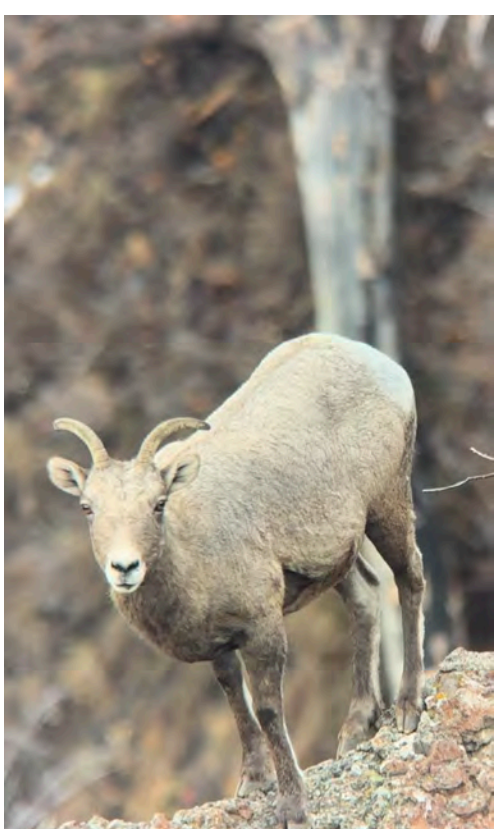
That familiarity matters when the pressure arrives. A once-in-a-lifetime tag can make hunters feel like every decision has to be perfect. Experience in the country gives you something steady to fall back on. You can focus on finding and hunting the right ram instead of learning every piece of mountain hunting at once.

Start Before the Tag Arrives.

Most of us cannot control when or whether we draw a bighorn sheep license. We can control whether we are ready when it happens.

Your next deer or elk hunt does not have to be only a deer or elk hunt. Choose a hunt that pushes you into bigger country. Spend a day looking for sheep while you are there. If possible, hunt the same mountains you hope to return to with a ram tag someday. Pay attention to what works, what fails, and what you need to improve before the next trip.

Do that often enough and, when the draw results finally deliver the news you have been waiting for - the tag may be new, but the mountains will not be.



Ewe Picture Taken While Deer Hunting.

42nd Annual Convention Casper, Wyoming June 5 & 6, 2026































Restoring Big Game Habitat Post-Fire

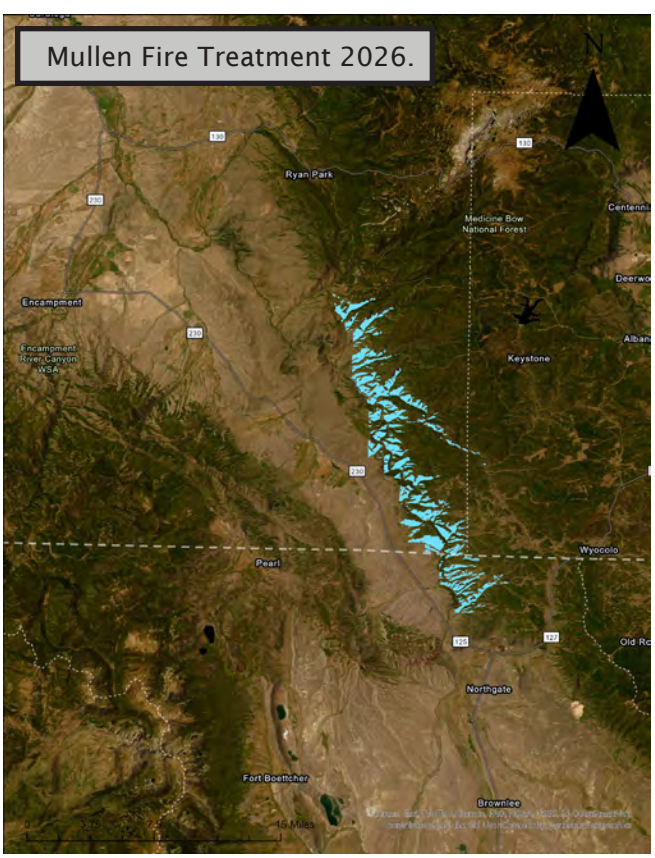
By: Cassie Hengel and Britt Burdett

Catastrophic wildfires open a pathway for rapid spread of invasive and noxious weeds. One invasive annual grass, *Bromus tectorum* or cheatgrass, flourishes in this disturbance, taking advantage of the open niches left by damaged or removed perennial grasses and plants. Cheatgrass will do what it does best – 'cheat' native plant communities out of early spring moisture during important ecosystem recovery following a wildfire. Natural recovery and plant recruitment success following a large disturbance, like a massive wildfire, can vary depending on a multitude of factors, such as soil health and precipitation, but arguably the most important aspect is the presence of native, desirable plants prior to the disturbance. Natural resource managers can influence ecosystem rehabilitation and restoration through invasive species control. By controlling cheatgrass and other noxious weeds in the burn scar, we can give native plants a headstart on recovery and rebuild critical wildlife habitats.



Douglas Creek bighorn sheep foraging among burned shrub skeletons within the burn scar.

In the Fall of 2020, the Mullen Fire burned approximately 176,850 acres across the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest in south-central Wyoming. This fire burned hot and spread quickly due to dry, windy conditions. Almost two-thirds of the total burned acres were recorded as moderate to high soil burn severity within the Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) assessment. Given the propensity for cheatgrass to spread quickly post-fire, natural resource managers recognized the need for immediate treatment to prevent ecological degradation in important wildlife habitats.



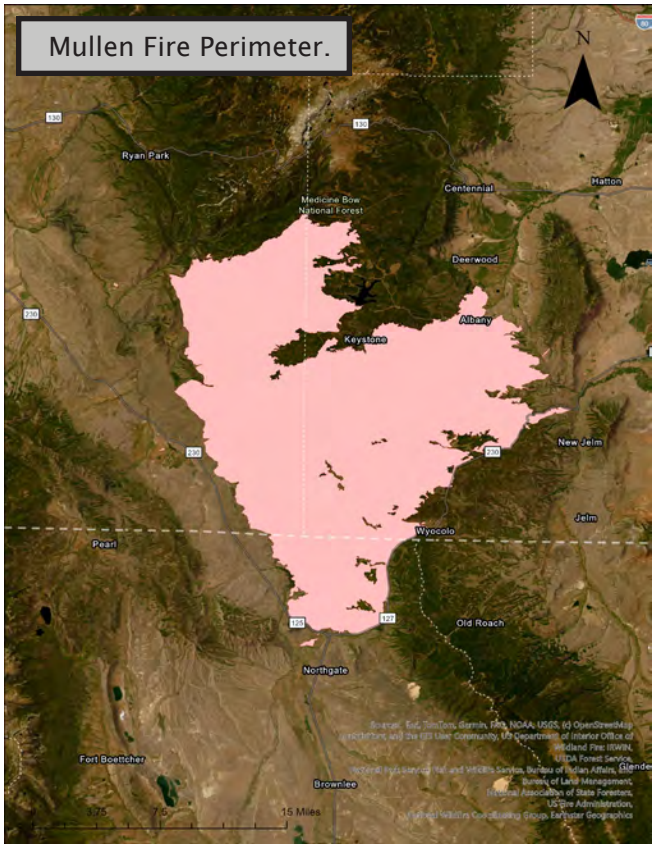
Mullen Fire Treatment 2026.

The Mullen Fire burned through portions of the Sheep Mountain and Platte Valley mule deer herd units and nearly all occupiable bighorn sheep habitat in the Douglas Creek herd. The fire burned in a mosaic pattern, meaning it created a patchwork of high and low burn intensity across the southern portion of the Snowy Range Mountains, encompassing both the Platte River and Savage Run Wilderness Areas. When we think of wilderness, a picture of pristine, rugged landscapes lush with green vegetation and abundant wildlife comes to mind. The wilderness areas of the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest are all of these things, and a great deal more – steep slopes dropping over 2,000 feet in elevation form deep canyon walls straight to the North Platte River. Aerial herbicide applications by helicopter are the most efficient and cost-effective tool land managers use to treat invasive annual grasses; however, aerial treatments are prohibited in wilderness areas. Recognizing the importance of these areas for wildlife and outdoor recreation, the Forest Service submitted a Wilderness Exemption request. Between 2021 and 2023, more than 17,100 acres were aerially treated with the herbicide Indaziflam to combat cheatgrass infestations; over 6,000 of those acres were in wilderness.

Quality data and surveying are paramount to natural resource

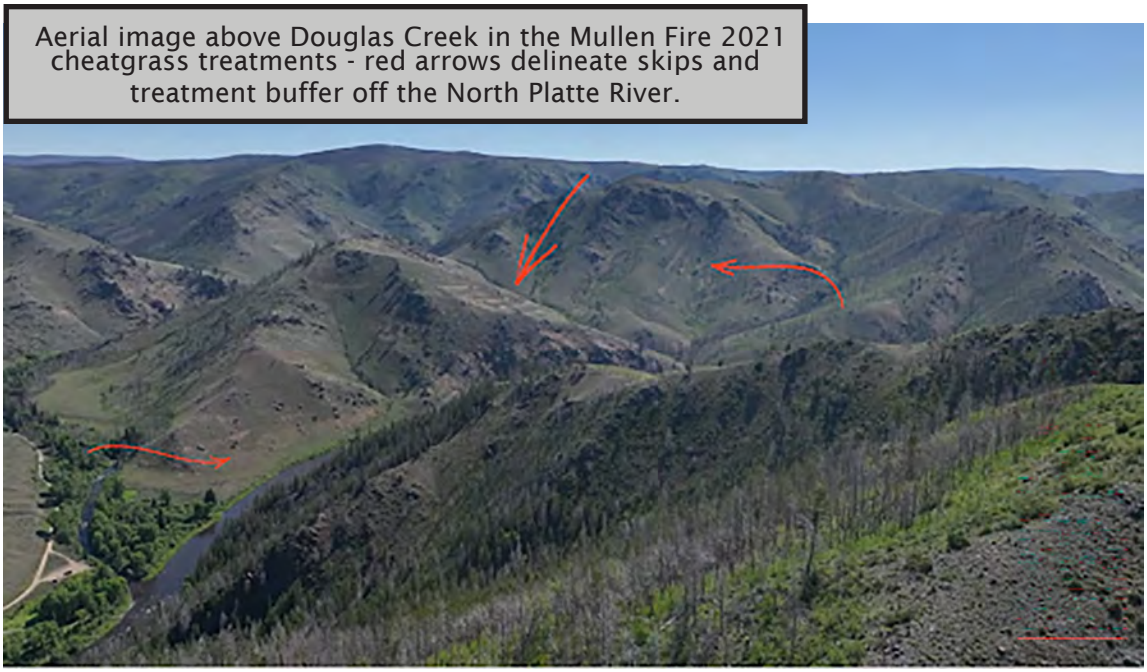
decision-making. Ten years before the Mullen Fire burned, Forest Service personnel and working group partners understood that cheatgrass expansion across Medicine Bow Forest needed management intervention. According to preliminary data in the USFS Invasive Plant Management Environmental Impact Statement, 97,461 acres of Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest were infested with cheatgrass – more than double the acreage of the next highest noxious weed listed (*Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland; Colorado and Wyoming; Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland Invasive Plant Management Environmental Impact Statement,* 2010). Monitoring efforts within the Forest and Mullen Fire burn scar have continued following the 2021 herbicide treatment – 150 monitoring plots were established in treated and untreated burned areas. Following treatment, natural resource managers reported a large decrease in cheatgrass across treated areas and recovery of native, perennial vegetation.

Beginning in 2024, natural resource managers started to observe "breaks" or "skips" in the initial treatment and areas excluded during the initial treatment where cheatgrass was increasing. Managers determined a follow-up treatment would be necessary and started securing funding. The Wyoming Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation has played a critical role in helping the Wyoming Game and Fish Department monitor bighorn sheep from the Douglas Creek herd both pre- and post-fire, as well as contributed funding for the initial treatment post-fire. With their support, the Mullen Fire Retreatment Project was nominated as the appeal project at the Wild Sheep Foundation's 18th Chapter & Affiliates Summit. The Wild Sheep Foundation and its Chapters and Affiliates pledged $213,500 to aid in retreating the Mullen Fire burn scar. Led by Carbon County Weed and Pest, over 8,700 acres were treated on the western slope of the burn scar in 2026, and 6,000 acres are planned for 2027. Managers hope ongoing habitat restoration will bolster the Douglas Creek bighorn sheep herd and encourage them to use newly created post-fire habitats.



Mullen Fire Perimeter.

Funding for this project was provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust, Wyoming Governor's Big Game License Coalition, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the United States Forest Service, Wyoming Department of Agriculture Pesticide Registration Fee Grant, Wild Sheep Foundation, Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation, Texas Bighorn Society, Rocky Mountain Bighorn Society, Alaska WSF, Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society, Wild Sheep Society of British Columbia, Midwest Chapter WSF, New Mexico WSF, Washington WSF, Idaho WSF, Iowa Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, WSF Alberta, Oregon WSF, Eastern Chapter Wild Sheep Foundation, Montana WSF, Fraternity of the Desert Bighorn, Utah WSF, and Bryan and Barbara Bartlett.


Aerial image above Douglas Creek in the Mullen Fire 2021 cheatgrass treatments - red arrows delineate skips and treatment buffer off the North Platte River.

A Legacy Still in Motion: The Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation's Enduring Impact in the Equality State

By: Chester Moore

Reprinted from the Wild Sheep Foundation

At first light, a Rocky Mountain bighorn ewe stands motionless on a narrow limestone rim above Wyoming's interior, a lamb pressed close at her side. Wind moves steadily across the slope, but she does not rush. She studies the country below, pausing at the same break in the rock before stepping onto a descent she has clearly used before. When she finally moves, the lamb follows without hesitation, hooves landing where the ewe's have worn shallow depressions into the slope. They cross the face of the hillside slowly, stopping where she stops, waiting where she waits, using a route shaped by repetition rather than chance.

For wild sheep, survival depends on decisions made deliberately and reinforced over time. Knowledge of the landscape is passed quietly, one step at a time.

The Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation (Wyoming WSF) was formed in 1983 with a clear purpose of conserving wild sheep and making way for scenes like that to play out for generations to come. What began as a small group of hunter-conservationists raising funds and volunteering their time has grown into one of North America's most influential state wild sheep organizations. Today, the chapter's impact is seen in restored habitat, stabilized herds, funded research, mentored youth, and long-term management shaped through ongoing involvement.

According to Katie Cheesbrough, that focus has always been about what happens where sheep actually live. "Wild sheep don't respond to talking points," said Cheesbrough, the organization's executive director. "They respond to what's happening on the ground—habitat quality, connectivity, disease pressure. That's where the work has to happen."

From the beginning, the organization positioned itself as a partner rather than an outside voice. Early members worked closely with Wyoming Game and Fish biologists, volunteered labor on habitat projects, and stepped in to fund projects when agency budgets fell short. That cooperative model became a defining trait of the chapter and remains central today.

Bralli Clifford, a board member of both the Wyoming WSF and the national Wild Sheep Foundation, sees that approach as essential to the chapter's long-term relevance. "If you want wild sheep to persist in Wyoming, you can't work in isolation," Clifford said. "You have to think beyond individual projects and look at the whole landscape and who's using it, how it's changing, and how we move forward together."

Grant-in-Aid funding became the chapter's main way to act. The program shifted from one-time efforts to long-term investments, selecting projects by biological need, durability, and ability to strengthen systems, not just sites. "That's where discipline matters," Cheesbrough said. "We're not just asking if a project sounds good this year. We're asking whether it still makes sense ten years from now."

Habitat First: Defending the Core

Habitat has become the largest single investment category for Wyoming WSF, accounting for roughly a third of the chapter's budget. That emphasis reflects a growing recognition that even the best disease management strategies cannot succeed without healthy, resilient landscapes.

"In the end, everything comes back to habitat," Cheesbrough said. "If the landscape isn't functioning, nothing else we do is going to hold."

Invasive cheatgrass now poses a major threat to Wyoming's



Gros Ventre Rams. Photo: Amy Anderson.



Spanish Mine Riparian Project Volunteers.

sagebrush ecosystems. Warmer winters and frequent disturbance have allowed it to move higher, changing fire cycles, boosting wildfire intensity, and replacing diverse native plants with monocultures of little use to wild sheep. Clifford views that threat through a longer lens. "We're still in a position where we can protect some of Wyoming's best remaining landscapes," she said. "But that window doesn't stay open forever. If we don't act early, we end up trying to fix things after they've already unraveled."

Wyoming WSF has taken a proactive stance, funding aerial cheatgrass treatments with Indaziflam, a newer herbicide that provides longer-lasting control while minimizing impacts on native shrubs. The goal, as Cheesbrough describes it, is defending the core, protecting Wyoming's still-intact sagebrush systems before they resemble degraded landscapes elsewhere in the West. Prescribed fire supports this effort. GPS collar data before and after major burns track sheep use of the new habitat and highlight where invasive grasses threaten. "In places where the habitat response is right, sheep will use it," Cheesbrough said. "The data shows us that. But it also shows us where follow-up work is critical."

Science on the Move

Research and monitoring are a major part of Wyoming WSF's work, especially GPS collaring studies. These collars have revolutionized wild sheep management by providing real-time insights on movements, habitat use, and responses to natural and human-caused change.

"Collars give us answers we simply didn't have before," Cheesbrough said. "They help us understand not just where sheep are, but why they're there and what might put them at risk."

Beyond basic location data, collars identify migration corridors, detect forays into high-risk areas, and trigger mortality signals that alert biologists to predation events or disease outbreaks. That information helps managers prioritize habitat projects, adjust harvest strategies, and respond quickly when problems arise. Disease research remains a critical focus, particularly respiratory disease events that have historically devastated bighorn populations. Wyoming WSF has supported sampling, long-term monitoring, and nutrition studies that allow managers to identify patterns rather than react only to symptoms.

Herd Success

The Ferris–Seminoe herd stands as one of Wyoming's notable wild sheep conservation success stories, reflecting decades of careful planning, disease prevention, and science-based management rather than a single project or moment. "That herd represents what's possible when patience and science align," Cheesbrough said. "It didn't happen quickly, and it didn't happen by accident."

Ferris–Seminoe was established through deliberate translocation efforts and intensive monitoring, guided by a long-term commitment to suitable habitat and disease prevention. From the beginning, managers treated the herd as a system that would require continued oversight as it grew and interacted with surrounding landscapes. Translocation has played a role in Wyoming's broader wild sheep recovery, but it has never been treated as a shortcut. Wyoming WSF has supported translocation efforts where biological conditions, habitat quality, and long-term management capacity aligned, recognizing that moving animals is only the beginning of a much longer commitment.

Success depends not on the act of release, but on sustained habitat protection, disease prevention, and monitoring long after sheep leave the trailer.

As the Ferris–Seminoe population expanded, new challenges followed. Young rams began dispersing farther across the landscape, increasing the risk of contact with herds carrying disease. Protecting the herd's health while allowing it to function naturally has required continued discipline and data-driven decision-making—an acknowledgment that conservation success does not mark an endpoint, but a new phase of responsibility.



Bighorn sheep herd, Torrey Rim. Photo: Amy Anderson.

Wyoming is also home to several core native bighorn sheep herds, including the famed Whiskey Mountain population. These herds have never been augmented or reintroduced, retaining genetic lineages shaped entirely by natural selection and long-term adaptation to Wyoming's landscapes.

"These herds carry value you can't replace," Clifford said. "Once they're gone, they're gone. Protecting them is foundational."

Core native herds occupy a unique place in Wyoming's wild sheep conservation framework. Their importance extends beyond population numbers, representing continuity across generations and landscapes that have never been rebuilt or supplemented through human intervention. Whiskey Mountain is designated as a core native herd under Wyoming's collaborative management framework, the Wyoming Plan. That status places it at the highest level of conservation priority when conflicts arise between wild sheep and domestic livestock use.

Working Across Fences

Few issues in wild sheep conservation are more sensitive than interactions with domestic livestock. Pathogen transmission and subsequent respiratory disease from domestic sheep and goats remains the single greatest biological threat to bighorns. Launched in 2002, Wyoming's Domestic Sheep/ Bighorn Sheep Interaction Working Group brings together agricultural producers, wool growers, Wyoming Game and Fish, federal agencies, and Wyoming WSF to address those conflicts directly. The group meets face-to-face, often for full-day sessions, to work through problems that cannot be solved from a distance.

That collaboration has led to practical, sometimes controversial solutions. One recent example involved funding a $10,000 double-fencing project for a domestic sheep producer in the Pedro Mountains. While some initially questioned why a wild sheep organization would fund fencing for domestic livestock, the project reduced disease risk, built goodwill, and opened the door for future habitat access. "If we want these landscapes to work for everyone, we have to be willing to sit at the table and invest in solutions that benefit both sides," Clifford said.

Grant-in-Aid, Partnerships, and Shared Responsibility

Between 2005 and 2025, the chapter directed more than $2.1 million in Grant-in-Aid funding to projects across Wyoming, supporting both statewide initiatives and county-level efforts tailored to local needs.

Habitat restoration accounts for the largest share of grant investment, roughly a third of total funding. Population monitoring and management account for another significant portion of funding. Grant-in-Aid support also extends beyond habitat and research. Education and outreach are recognized as essential investments in long-term conservation, particularly as participation in hunting and wildlife management continues to change. Programs such as Camp Bighorn, operated by the National Bighorn Sheep Center in Dubois, Wyoming, along with Wyoming WSF's partnerships with the Center and youth-focused activities at chapter events, introduce young people to the biology of wild sheep, conservation challenges, and management principles. These efforts emphasize understanding rather than advocacy, helping participants see how science, habitat management, and regulated harvest fit together within modern wildlife conservation.

One example often cited within the organization involves a young girl who drew a ewe tag, an experience that challenged long-held assumptions within her own family about ewe harvest. Through preparation, time afield, and engagement with the biological rationale behind the hunt, perspectives shifted. The experience underscored how education grounded in firsthand experience can reshape understanding and inspire young people to pursue a lifestyle of hunting and conservation.

Collaboration underpins all this work. Wyoming WSF partners with wildlife agencies, landowners, agricultural producers, conservation organizations, and federal

land managers to implement projects that no single group could accomplish on its own. "Wyoming WSF does a great job of engaging numerous aspects of wild sheep conservation and has had a tremendous impact on the resource as well as hunters in the state," said Gray N. Thornton, Wild Sheep Foundation President & CEO.

Whether improving habitat, funding research, or supporting education, these partnerships reflect the shared responsibility required to conserve wild sheep across Wyoming's working landscapes.

A Legacy Still In Motion

Later that day, as shadows stretch back across the same limestone rim, the ewe first seen at dawn climbs toward the narrow shelf where the morning began, the same lamb, a young ram, still close at her side. He lags briefly, then slips back alongside her at the familiar break in the rock, following the route she has shown him since his first weeks on the slope. In time, with space to roam and the country holding together beneath him, he may grow into one of the heavy-horned rams Wyoming's mountains are known for.

Nothing about the hillside draws attention to the years of planning and restraint that shaped it. The ground holds. The route remains open. The risk is manageable. That is the measure of success in Wyoming's wild sheep conservation.

Each decade brings new challenges, but Wyoming WSF's role remains steady: providing stability, funding, and support so wild sheep management stays proactive rather than reactive. Whether restoring habitat, funding research, or engaging in policy discussions, the organization operates with a long view measured in generations, not seasons. The continued presence of that ewe and the young ram learning how to use the country she knows reflects decades of effort by the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation, its members, and its partners. When conservation is done well, it creates conditions for animals not just to persist, but to mature, disperse, and reach their full potential.

The presence of bighorn sheep in Wyoming is not accidental. It is the result of sustained commitment, carried out through collaboration with biologists, landowners, and agencies dedicated to keeping wild sheep where they belong—in the wilds of Wyoming.

About the WY WSF:

Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation: A Broad Approach to Conservation

Founded in 1983, the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation (Wyoming WSF) is governed by an all-volunteer board and is powered by members who contribute time and funds. Beyond Grant-in-Aid support for habitat and research, the chapter offers hands-on volunteer opportunities in the field, from installing water developments and modifying wildlife-friendly fencing to helping with restoration projects across Wyoming's ranges.

Education and mentorship are also core priorities. Through youth outreach programs, partnerships with organizations such as the National Bighorn Sheep Center, and events like Camp Bighorn, the foundation connects new generations to wildlife biology and conservation principles.

These avenues provide not only learning, but ongoing engagement and mentorship for young hunters and outdoor enthusiasts.

Wyoming WSF also provides technical input on federal and state land-use plans, ensuring wild sheep needs are considered early in the planning process.

A permanent conservation fund provides financial continuity, allowing long-term investment in wild sheep and their habitat and inspiring future conservationists, regardless of annual fundraising fluctuations.

About the Author:

Contributing Author: Chester Moore is an award-winning wildlife journalist, wildlife photographer, and lifelong hunter from Texas. He operates the Higher Calling Wildlife® blog and podcast and contributes to many outdoors publications.



Bighorn sheep lounging in the red rocks of Wyoming.

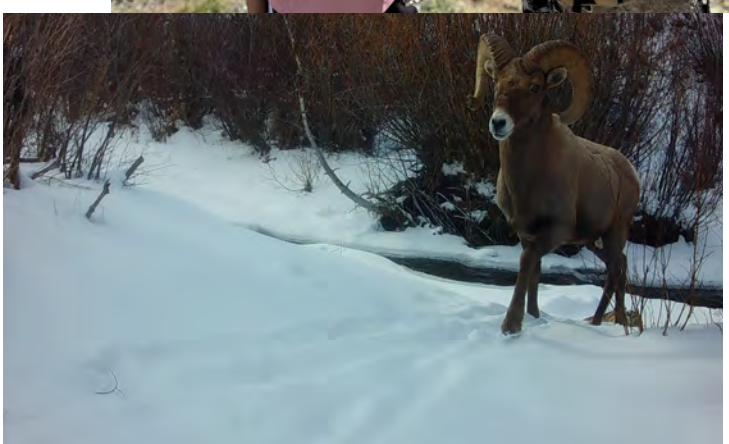
Defying the Odds
By: Jordan Seitz

DEFYING THE ODDS
Jordan Seitz
Encampment K12 Teacher

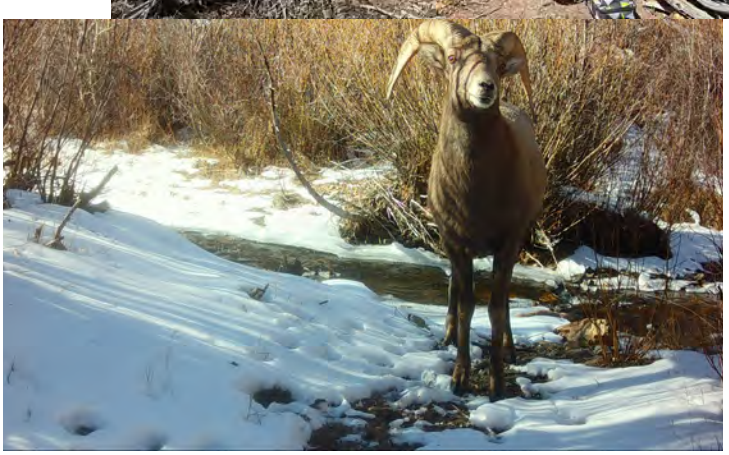
Update 18:

The odds weren't good. Capture good footage of sheep crossing the creek? Sure, if a bear doesn't eat it and "the creek don't rise"... and if I actually turned the main camera on last fall. Find some antlers? Maybe...but probably not. I should have known better, because this particular class preferred to defy the odds. Such as the two arrowheads discovered after I told them we never see any. Or the angry rattler another student almost stepped on after I said there was too much snow for snakes. When conditions were good enough, we descended into the canyon (faster than expected) for our Spring camera check, hoping for the best. We'd set three different cameras on the crossing trail, and they actually performed as planned - the footage we caught of critters from marten to moose was wild! Finally, we had footage of animals - including sheep - crossing the creek. We were excited to see how sheep reacted to water and ice. Some were calm, others backed away when the ice cracked, and others just "sent it" and launched across. Once again, pronghorn provided some of the coolest footage, even crossing the creek when it was belly deep swift water. As for antlers...I shouldn't have been slack-jawed when they hauled back a dandy elk set other hunters overlooked, and a set of deer antlers from a unique buck we had on camera almost a mile away! Moving forward, we will continue to film this crossing, but try to improve our shot angles so we don't miss the shorter animals (such as the lion) crossing the water!







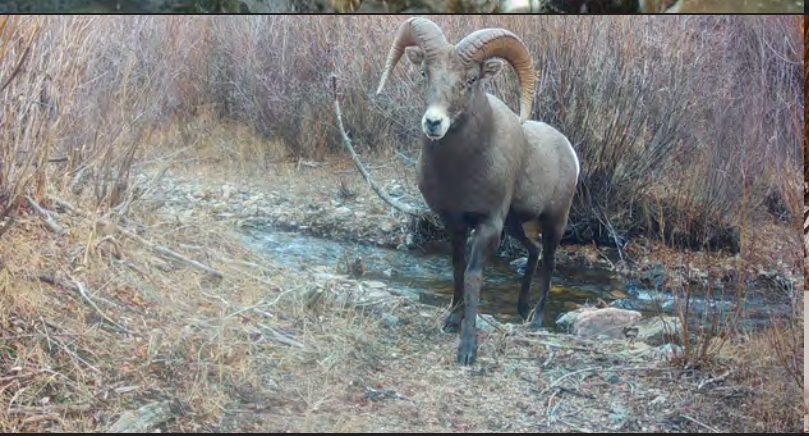


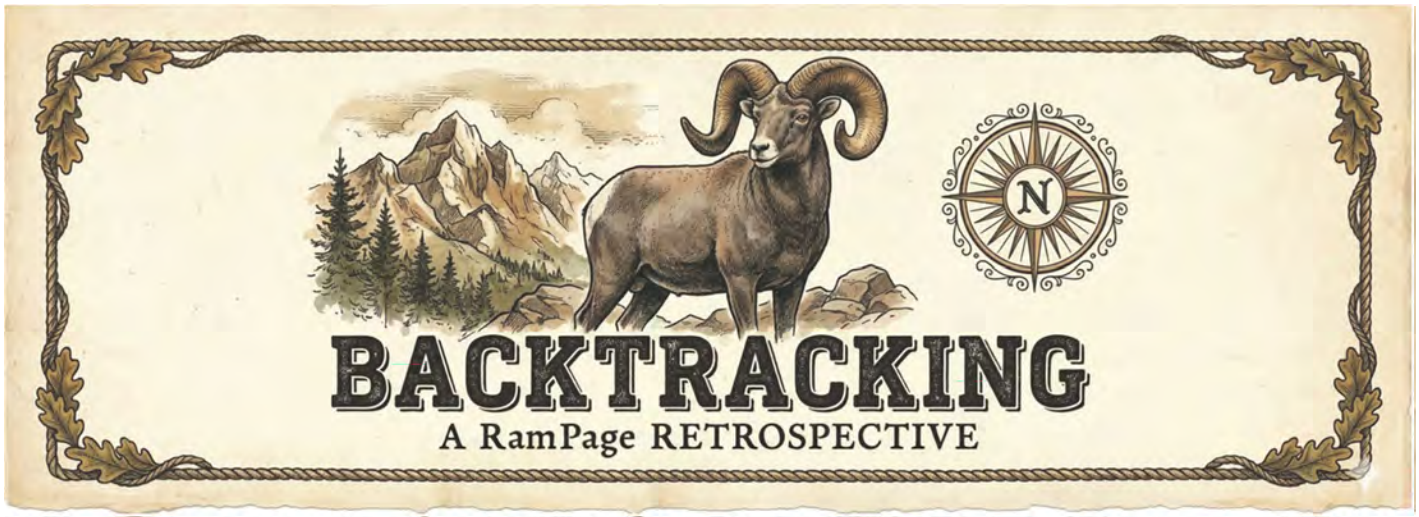










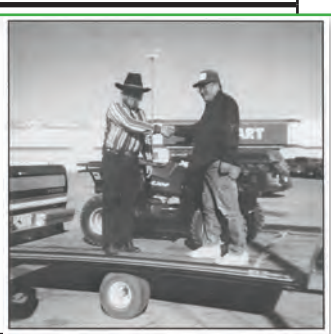
With retirement on the horizon, my thoughts have naturally turned to the incredible legacy we've built together. Reflecting on my journey with the foundation since I began in 2011, I wanted to leave this membership with a special parting gift. I have spent the last few months digging into the archives of our magazine, tracing our history from our first RamPage issued in 1993 to the present to extract the photos, facts, and milestones that define us. This regular column is a journey through our collective memory, honoring the grit and resources that first put bighorns back on the peaks.This project is proudly dedicated to Freddie Goetz, Kevin Hurley, Jim Collins, and Steve Kilpatrick—men who lived and breathed high-country conservation, and whose early work laid the very tracks we follow today. I hope you enjoy walking down these historical trails with me as we remember the foundations of our shared mission and celebrate where those sheep are today.

Dean DiSenno

Volume 1, Issue 1 - Era Focus: 1994-1999

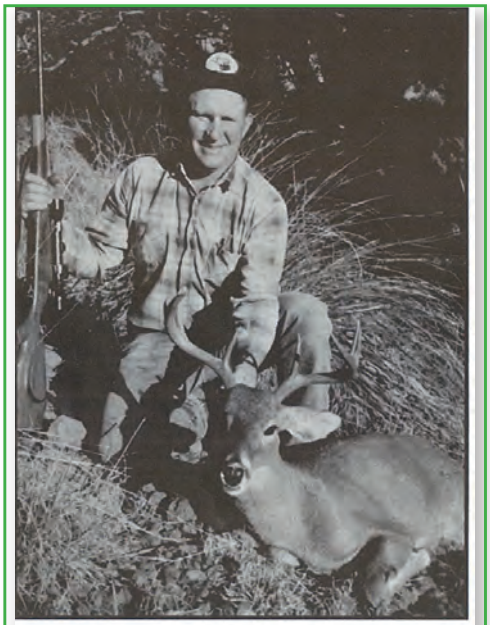
	WILD LEGACIES	BUILDING THE FOUNDATION	PIONEERS OF THE PEAKS
FALL 1994	We have two requests for GIA's at the next meeting. The Dubois Sheep Center (NBSC) opened this summer. There will be a sheep capture in Shell Canyon this January. This herd should soon number 200.	Our 11th Annual Banquet had 200 attendees. We held our first annual photography contest. Our Fall meeting will be at the Holiday Inn in Riverton.	Thanks to Jim Collins and Jim Gay for managing the convention. Carl Schrivens of Jackson Hole was nominated for the WSF Grass Roots Award.
SPRING 1995	Ongoing studies in the Temple Peak Herd near Lander. $13,500 was presented to WYO G & F for habitat projects and BHS transplants during 1995. 42 BHS were transplanted into Wind River Canyon.	Chapter members met at the Holiday Inn in Thermopolis and then went to the Gun Range for a shoot. We are raffling a 4-wheeler. Next Meeting on 12/2/95 at the Holiday Inn in Sheridan	Thanks to Freddie Goetz and Kathy Gay for conducting the raffle. President Ronald W. Ball, Vice-President Jim Collins, Secretary Jennifer Ball, Treasurer Kathy Gay, Mike Pilch, Director Jack Hildner, Director Freddie L. Goetz, Director.
FALL 1995	Dave Moody and Tom Ryder from the Lander G& F gave us information on the pending wolf re-introduction. Wild Sheep will be transplanted into the head of Owl Creek and Wind River Canyon near Thermopolis. The chapter funded $17,000 this year which is our largest ever.	Our annual meeting was a great success with nearly 150 in attendance. Spring meeting scheduled for the Holiday Inn in Thermopolis. Thanks Jim Gay for your hard work on setting up the meeting. Also B. Joe Coy and Jeff Reynolds who helped with the auction.	


Jim Collins, newly elected Chapter Vice President, handing out a shotgun to member Betty Fear of Big Piney, who was the successful bidder.


Clyde Clark from Diamondville, WY receiving the Polaris 4-Wheeler from Director Freddie Goetz. Clyde won this beautiful machine partially donated by The Brown Co. of Wheatland and Polaris Industries on the Wyoming Chapter raffle last December.

"Backtracking - A RamPage Retrospective" continued

	WILD LEGACIES	BUILDING THE FOUNDATION	PIONEERS OF THE PEAKS
SPRING 1996	We funded NBSC for $1200 and $5400 for a controlled burn on the South Fork of the Shoshone river.	We met in Thermopolis for our convention and shot. The Wyo Governor's BHS license sold for $26,000. Next banquet at Little America in Cheyenne. We are raffling a snow machine.	Thanks to Kevin Hurley for the tour of Wind River Canyon although we did not find any sheep.



Vice President Jim Collins showing off his Coues Deer taken in Arizona in 1994.



Chuck Thornton, Donor of the Pack Trip from Darby Mountain Outfitters getting ready to head out on the trail.

FALL 1996

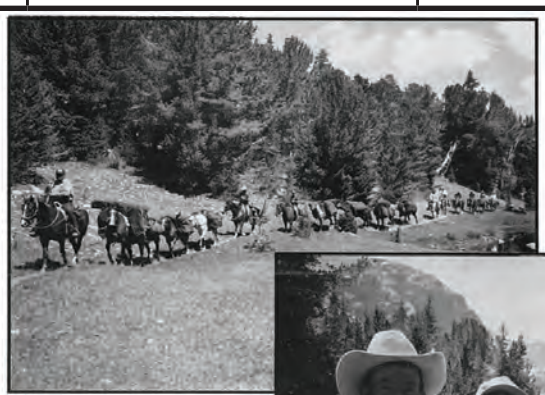
Wyoming Chapter Balance Sheet – 12-1-94 to 11-30-95

	Balance forward from 11-3-94		$ 18,725.10
INCOME			
	Dues	$ 1,005.00	
	Conv. Food and Drink	3,625.00	
	Conv. Auctions and Raffles	25,094.20	
	Interest on Checking Account	697.47	
	Cash Donations	90.00	
	Commissioner's Licenses and Hunts	26,565.00	
	Advertising	150.00	
	TOTAL INCOME		+ 57,226.67
EXPENSES			
	Conv. Food and Drink	$ 3,445.67	
	Conv. Postage and Office	1,036.26	
	Conv. Advertising	838.10	
	Conv. Auction and Raffle Items	9,920.09	
	Office and Phone	2,426.61	
	Awards and Trophies	114.82	
	Commissioners Licenses and Hunts	17,315.00	
	Sheep Projects	8,833.65	
	TOTAL EXPENSES		- 43,930.20
			$ 32,021.57
	Adjust to Balance		- .03
	TOTAL IN CHECKING ACCOUNT		$ 32,021.54
PLUS C. D.'s	1) #6550902883, 17 Mo. matures 1/19/96		3,000.00
	2) #3-386-3009-1704, 6 mo. matures 5/1/96		6,313.05
	3) 33-386-3009-8220, 9 mo. matures 4/15/96		8,605.68
	TOTAL FUNDS AVAILABLE		$ 49,940.27

Our banquet in at the Holiday Inn in Sheridan was a great success. The board added three more director positions for a new total of 10. Freddie Goetz won a shotgun and donated it back to a new life member, if 10 sign up, he will conduct a drawing at the Spring banquet.

Thanks to Jim Collins for organizing the banquet and Kevin Hurley for his presentation about the Owl Creek transplant which has been postponed due to a protest from Marathon Oil. Thanks Cole Benton for volunteering to be chair of the nominating committee for officers.

	WILD LEGACIES	BUILDING THE FOUNDATION	PIONEERS OF THE PEAKS
SPRING 1997	Completed the 400-acre South Fork Shoshone prescribed burn to boost winter forage quality. Committed $41,900 in funding, including $7,000 for the Whiskey Basin PVC pipeline, $2,500 for an Area 24 helicopter population survey, and $5,000 for the Poison Creek sheep habitat acquisition.	Preparations are underway for the big December 5–6 convention and auction at the Inn of Rock Springs. The board is aggressively recruiting new life memberships for $300 to fund high-country projects, while managing robust coffee sponsor slots and newsletter ad sales.	President Jim Collins praised our dedicated board for setting an unprecedented funding pace. Special thanks to Elaine Benton for coordinating the summer celebration, and to Chief Game Warden Jay Lawson for his visionary leadership in establishing the new Bighorn Task Force.
FALL 1997	Committed $10,000 for a water guzzler on Ferris Mountains with Rawlins BLM. Allocated $10,000 to assist the Lander BLM with fencing on the Red Creek allotment. Approved $440 for youth educational packets and $395 for brochures at the National Bighorn Sheep Center.	Voted to amend chapter bylaws, changing the fiscal year-end to April 30th to streamline financial accounting. Authorized dual-signature controls across checking and interest-bearing market accounts. Launched an outreach campaign recruiting life memberships at $300 to stabilize funding for upcoming high-country projects.	Recognized Helen McCracken for her stellar report on the successful "Becoming an Outdoors Woman" program at Whiskey Mountain. Appreciated Mary Reed for spearheading BLM cooperative actions, and thanked ground volunteers for organizing the General Business Session social with finger foods and cocktails.



SIMPSON LAKE

Elaine Benton purchased this great fishing get away, donated by long-time supporters Fritz and Connie Meyer, at the 1995 auction. A total of twelve spent four days and three nights in the majestic Wind River Mountains. The fishing was so good that all but one hook was cut off the treble hooks!



Dubbed the first annual FNAWS pack trip by those in attendance, a great time was had by all. Pictured: Elaine Benton, Cole Benton and the Hosts Fritz and Connie Meyer, Wind River Mountain Outfitters. Plans are now in the works for the second annual "FNAWS pack trip" destination Dunoir.

SPRING 1998	Funded $15,000 for the ongoing Whiskey Mountain Lamb Survival Study to determine poor ewe-lamb ratios. Relocated 19 darted bighorns to the Red Creek winter range. Updated the South Fork weed pull planning, targeting invasive Dalmatian Toadflax on the Shoshone River.	Membership surged from 130 to over 500 enthusiasts. Dan Poapalia purchased the Governor's BHS license for $35,000, generously donating it back for a $30,000 resale boost. Voted $1,253 for protective UV window film at the Bighorn Sheep Center.	President Jim Collins commended the board for achieving record funding heights. Recognized Kevin Hurley for compiling the monumental Chapter History for National's book. Thanked Ron Ball and Fritz Meyer for hands-on field assistance with trapping, darting, and collaring operations.

"Backtracking - A RamPage Retrospective" continued

	WILD LEGACIES	BUILDING THE FOUNDATION	PIONEERS OF THE PEAKS
FALL 1998	Reviewed and approved over $60,000 in collaborative high-country project requests. Voted to fund $5,000 for an intensive lamb survival study within the Whiskey Mountain herd. Allocated $1,500 to combat noxious Dalmatian Toadflax on the critical winter range of the Shoshone River.	The annual Banquet and Auction at the Inn of Rock Springs hit an all-time high, grossing over $56,000. Momentum surged with Jerome Carlson's $15,900 purchase of two Governor's elk licenses, paired with a British Columbia Dall/Grizzly hunting trip acquisition for $8,000.	President Jim Collins welcomed newly elected directors David Luzmoor and Jack Hildner to one-year terms, alongside Fritz Meyer and Dennis Clamen for two-year blocks. Extended praise to the volunteer crews who coordinated the massive "Wine and Cheese" educational seminar lineups.
SPRING 1999	Finalized a wilderness grazing agreement to permanently close the North Fork and Baldy Lake domestic sheep allotments in the Bridger Wilderness. This cooperative separation protects the adjacent Whiskey Mountain bighorn herd from catastrophic pneumonia disease transmission.	Coordinated massive state raffle tickets for the Wyoming Commissioners License, netting $7,550 in bank deposits plus $480 cash for an $8,030 grand total. Leveraged National, Eastern, and Iowa FNAWS financial matching pools to incentivize grazing permit retirement.	Lauded Dave Connor for managing license raffle sales. Thanked Kim and Kathy Bright of Boulder Lake Lodge for providing mountain camp operations, and Barb Harper for preparing wilderness meals during the June backcountry habitat inspection pack trip.
FALL 1999	Voted $10,350 in conservation project funding. Allocated $8,000 for the Jim Mountain prescribed burn habitat initiative to enhance Area 2 and 18 range quality, $1,350 for Bighorn Interpretive Center website development, and $1,000 for wintering area snowmobile closure signs.	Dedicated the Ron Ball Memorial Room on June 6, 1999, funding full interior renovations to support interpretive displays. Promoted the 17th Annual Winter Banquet at the Radisson, organizing outfitter exhibition booths and gathering high-value 50¢ raffle items.	Nominated six members for board elections, including Fritz Meyer and Craig Kling. Advanced Doug McWhirter for State Statesman and Fritz Meyer for the national Grass Roots Award. Welcomed Director Kevin Hurley to the Dubois summer session.

BRING YOUR OWN HORSE TRIP





Ron Ball with Coues deer taken in 1996 on a hunt purchased at our Sheridan Convention. Ron hunted with Dave Crockett near Tuscon and harvested this nice Coues deer, December 17th, 1996.

A Change of Seasons: Thank You, Dean.

Some people join an organization. Others become part of its foundation. For the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation, Dean DiJenno has been the latter — and this spring, after more than a decade of service, he's stepping back.

Dean has served as our Deputy Director since 2014. On paper, that's a part-time position. In practice, it has never been anything close to part-time. For twelve years, Dean has quietly logged thousands of unpaid volunteer hours on top of his official role — the kind of behind-the-scenes work that most members never see, but that has kept this chapter running: coordinating projects, managing logistics, answering the calls that come in after hours, and making sure the countless small things that hold an organization together actually got done. If WY-WSF has grown into the chapter it is today, a great deal of that credit belongs to Dean, freely given, year after year.

And it wasn't just the projects and the logistics. For twelve years, Dean has also been a steady, patient mentor — to new board members finding their footing, to new members learning what WY-WSF is all about, and to volunteers picking up their first project. Ask around the chapter and you'll find no shortage of people whose real introduction to this organization came from Dean taking the time to show them the ropes.

Dean has announced his retirement effective March 31, 2027.

A Family Affair

Ask anyone who has worked alongside Dean, and they'll tell you this was never a one-man effort. His wife, Diane, has stood beside him through it all — showing up, pitching in, and supporting the mission in ways that rarely made it into a meeting's minutes but mattered every bit as much. Their daughter, Jenene, and son-in-law, Greg, followed that same example, becoming steady volunteer presences at chapter events over the years. It's rare for an organization to be able to say that an entire family gave its time to the cause. We can say that about the DiJennos, and we're grateful for it.

A Change of Seasons

Dean's retirement marks the start of a transition, and we want our members to be part of it from the beginning. This process will begin immediately with Dean guiding our Executive Director, Katie Cheesbrough, and the BOD through the transition period.

Effective with this transition, WY-WSF's mailing address is moving to a new PO Box in Lander, and our Executive Director, Katie Cheesbrough, and our President, Bralli Clifford, will be the primary points of contact. Please update your records accordingly:

- New Mailing Address: Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation, PO Box 333, Lander, Wyoming 82520
- Katie Cheesbrough, Executive Director: (307) 399-4383
- Bralli Clifford, President: (307) 438-2043

Replacing twelve years of institutional knowledge doesn't happen overnight, and we're not pretending it does. Over the next six-plus months, Katie and the Board will be working directly with Dean to absorb the full scope of what he has carried for this chapter. Dean has been deliberate about this himself — working to break down and streamline his responsibilities into pieces the current team can realistically take on, rather than leaving a gap behind him. That's very on-brand for Dean: even on his way out the door, still thinking about what's best for the chapter.

Thank You, Dean

We talk often about WY-WSF being a family, and for more than a decade, Dean has been part of ours. But "family" only tells part of the story — Dean is also a tried and true friend to so many of us, the kind who shows up, follows through, and never makes you ask twice.

There isn't a tidy way to sum up twelve years and thousands of hours of service. So we'll just say it plainly: thank you, Dean. Thank you for the calls answered, the projects carried, the members helped, and the countless hours nobody asked you to give but you gave anyway. Thank you to Diane, Jenene, and Greg, for the years your family shared with ours.

Wyoming's wild sheep, and this chapter, are better off because of you. We know you'll stay close as this next chapter unfolds — you'll always have a place at our table.







Senator Barrasso and Dean.





Dean and Diane.





Grand Teton 1988.

"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 24 years, a virtual "Who's Who" of dedicated individuals have been recognized by the Wyoming Chapter for their contributions to Wyoming's bighorn sheep.

Past Recipients:

2003	Kevin Hurley
2004	Jim Collins
2005	Gov. Dave Freudenthal
2006	Melanie Woolever
2007	Steve Kilpatrick (D)
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
2024	Mike Porter
2025	Kurt Eisenach
2026	Daniel Hinz

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!



DANIEL HINZ

The Ron Ball Memorial Award has been presented annually since 2003 in recognition of outstanding achievement toward the betterment of Wyoming's Bighorn Sheep. This year's recipient personifies these award requirements, and it is my honor to welcome him tonight into this exclusive club.

Our award recipient is present at virtually every banquet, work party, and meeting hosted by our Foundation. He is always first to help, whether it's dressing mannequins at the WSF Sheep Show in Reno, selling tickets, or assisting the Game and Fish biologists with capture work. He has also transported our Foundation booth and other materials to and from Reno for many years. He holds Ramshorn Society Life Member number 182 and has been a member of the Foundation since 2001, serving nine years as a Board of Director for the Foundation.

Our recipient is also incredibly dedicated to the Wild Sheep Foundation. He is a Gold Benefactor-level CRS member and he joined in 2013, the year CRS was established. He is Summit Life member #324. One year at the Sheep Show in Reno, he was assigned to work in the Foundation's booth and almost missed a chance to win floor show credits because he stayed at the booth while everyone went to the front of the Convention Center to see if their name was called.

He also loves hunting of all types and has had the honor of harvesting a Grand Slam of North American Wild Sheep. Recently, he hunted bighorn sheep in the Cody Region and harvested his second Wyoming ram.

By virtue of outstanding dedication, superb Chapter event attendance, and his "got your back" attitude for everything Wyoming's Wild Sheep Foundation needs done, it is our pleasure to introduce the 2026 Ron Ball Memorial award recipient, Daniel Hinz.

Congratulations!









Photograph: Mark Gocke.



The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, The Wild Sheep Initiative

Daryl Lutz, Wyoming Game and Fish Department
Brent Lonner, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks

The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) represents 23 states and Canadian provinces, an area covering nearly 3.7 million square miles of some of North America's most wild and scenic country and is inhabited by over 1,500 premier wildlife species. In the 1920s, game commissions throughout the West began to assume responsibilities for the management of game and fish resources. In 1922, these visionary managers formed the precursor of today's WAFWA to advocate for state fish and game management authority and to foster regional cooperation focused on a variety of conservation topics. As member agencies became "departments" rather than "commissions", the Western Association evolved to its current name, the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. The Western Association's leadership has held strong for over 100 years and has maintained the goal to support sound resource management and build partnerships at all levels to conserve fish and wildlife for the use and benefit of all citizens, now and in the future. The Western Association's mission is to "*advance collaborative, proactive, science-based fish and wildlife conservation and management across the west*" through leadership, integrity, teamwork, excellence, support, respect, and accountability.

THE WILD SHEEP INITIATIVE

Background and Mission

The Western Association's Wild Sheep Initiative (WSI) began as the Wild Sheep Working Group (WSWG) in 2007 when agency directors saw the need, value, and urgency to convene wild sheep managers, researchers, veterinarians, and others to address the myriad of challenges they faced while managing both bighorn and thinhorn sheep in North America. The Wild Sheep Initiative is comprised of a representative from each WAFWA state, province, and territory (N=20) with wild sheep, as well as representatives from the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Tribal entities, and the Wild Sheep Foundation.



The WSI is committed to the restoration and conservation of North American wild sheep for the benefit of future generations, and its mission is, *To identify priority topics and management challenges to wild sheep in western North America; collaboratively develop solutions to those challenges; and foster strong relationships between state, provincial, and territorial jurisdictions, federal land management agencies, indigenous groups, and wild sheep advocates; and engage with domestic livestock owners and users that share the same landscapes inhabited by wild sheep.*

The WSI formally meets twice a year, once at the Summer WAFWA meetings and in the Winter at the Wild Sheep Foundation's Sheep Show. Beginning in 2007, the WSWG was chaired by Kevin Hurley (Wyoming; 2007–2011), Clay Brewer (Texas; 2011–2016), and Mike Cox (Nevada; 2016–2023). The WSWG's name was changed to the Wild Sheep Initiative in 2023 concomitant with changes in WAFWA leadership and construct. Currently, Daryl Lutz (Wyoming) serves as the Initiative's chair and Brent Lonner (Montana) is the vice-chair. In the past, these positions were funded jointly by the employing agency and WAFWA; currently, however, neither the chair nor vice-chair are paid by WAFWA. The chair's and vice-chair's employing agency each have agreed to provide full salaries, but to adjust workloads as needed and allow time to fulfill the WSI's commitments. As a result, assessments of member agencies now provide direct support for the WSI's many ventures, products,

and outcomes (see below)

Wild Sheep Initiative's Work

The WSI has focused on identifying and addressing a variety of topics surrounding wild sheep conservation in North America, many of which are among the most difficult and formidable challenges faced by the professionals responsible for managing this important resource. Among these challenges are those related to wild sheep habitat, disease, predation, population management, organizational hurdles, and climate change. The WSI has published a number of works to highlight these challenges and to recommend strategies for achieving results that will enhance the viability of wild sheep throughout their range. All of the work of WSI can be found on the WAFWA Wild Sheep Initiative web page (https://wafwa.org/initiatives/wsi/). Among the recent products or outcomes are

- Recommendations for Domestic Sheep and Goats in Wild Sheep Habitat
- Observed Changes in Populations of Thinhorn Sheep in Western Canada and Alaska
- Range-wide status of Bighorn and Thinhorn Sheep in North America
- Wild Sheep Capture and Handling Guidelines
- Test and Remove Workshops in 2021, 2023, and 2025
- Pneumonia and Bighorn Sheep: Test and Remove fact sheet
- Thinhorn Sheep: Conservation Challenges and Management Strategies for the 21st Century
- Updated maps of historical and current wild sheep distributions
- Currently updating the Bighorn Sheep Conservation Challenges and Management Strategies
- Currently updating the Records of Wild Sheep Translocations, United States and Canada - 1922 to Present.

Most recently, the WSI has been focused on two major undertakings: The first is a meta- analysis of all the test and remove (T&R) projects conducted to date. This meta-analysis can identify variables



or moderating factors that explain differing outcomes, which would be extremely useful for wildlife managers considering using T&R. Further, this approach might identify new directions for T&R or other management strategies to improve the health of bighorn sheep populations. The second, is really exciting as the WSI and Wildlife Health Committee (also a WAFWA group) are working with an interdisciplinary and international group of experts to develop therapies (i.e., a vaccine(s), anti-biotics treatments, etc.) to treat Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae (MOVI). Once developed, the use of therapeutics in conjunction with separation of domestic sheep and goats and wild sheep and continued test and remove of chronically infected animals should provide a suite of management actions to best minimize the impact of disease on both wild and domestic livestock.

SUMMARY

Wild sheep face an uncertain future due to a host of issues and challenges, and management of all wildlife in North America is complex ecologically, politically, and socially as evidenced in 1943 by Aldo Leopold's statement, "Wildlife management is comparatively easy; human management is difficult" (Flader 1974:188). The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the Wild Sheep Initiative have committed to address these challenges by (1) supporting and using the best science available; (2) providing a platform for collaboration among managers, researchers, veterinarians, disease ecologists, and others; (3) providing funding; and (4) publishing information and recommendations to best guide management and conservation of these iconic ungulates well into the future. They deserve no less than our best efforts!

Note: This article is an updated version (September, 2026) from a paper published in the Desert Bighorn Council Transactions – Volume 57, 2023.

Whiskey Basin Bighorn Sheep Habitat Enhancement

By: Amy Anderson

Introduction

This project includes strategies identified in the 2019 Whiskey Basin Bighorn Sheep Management Plan which was developed through a collaborative effort with the Dubois Community and interested stakeholders. The plan stresses the need to develop methods to improve forage condition and increase available winter range, as well as utilizing best management practices such as mechanical control, prescribed fire, and managed wildfire to decrease conifer cover to enhance and expand bighorn sheep migration paths and winter ranges.

Treatment areas were identified both inside the Fitzpatrick Wilderness, and on public lands adjacent to Wilderness, where encroached conifers are likely causing movement barriers to bighorn sheep. Knowing the difficulties associated with acquiring NEPA clearances and associated approvals to conduct treatments within the Wilderness, we propose to initiate work in areas adjacent to the Wilderness.

Historic photos show drastically less conifer cover across Windy Ridge and Whiskey Mountain, and while it will likely be difficult to reduce conifer densities to historic levels, we may be able to reduce conifer in vital movement corridors enough to allow sheep uninhibited access to their historic winter ranges.

Project Accomplishments

Project implementation was initiated during the summer of 2023. Treatment polygons were selected using recent collar data, identifying areas along the Torrey Rim slope where sheep appeared to be avoiding or traversing around patches of conifer. Also, in consulting with local residents, selecting possible mountain lion ambush areas to open up making sheep less vulnerable to depredation. A conservative 118 acres of treatment was conducted, combining both lop and scatter and cut and hand pile prescriptions depending on the density of the conifers cut. The prescription was also somewhat conservative, and cut only those trees less than 14" DBH. There were concerns that the public would be strongly opposed to managers being too aggressive with conifer treatments. This was at least somewhat unfounded, as the Dubois public is mostly supportive of project work deemed necessary to improve habitat and foraging conditions for the struggling sheep herd in the area.

In 2024, treatments resumed in the Torrey Valley, expanding on previous treatment polygons to include a much larger area along the Torrey slope. Treatments were mostly cutting and hand piling of slash. Several rock piles adjacent to the Trail Lake Meadow were also cleared of conifer due to observations that sheep appeared to avoid them, or traverse across them very quickly due to reduced visibility due to conifer cover. The prescription was more aggressive, cutting all conifer within treatment polygons less than 18" DBH. Both in 2023 and 2024, Summitt Forests Inc. were the contracted saw crews conducting the work.

For the 2025 season, no mechanical treatment was planned because the USFS found a window to conduct a hugely anticipated prescribed burn above Torrey Rim. This burn was in the planning stage for many years. Burn windows can be notoriously difficult to find, but everything aligned on May 9th, 2025, and the USFS was able to conduct a 260 acre burn. Conifer mortality within the burned areas is anticipated to be more than 80%, effectively opening up loafing and foraging habitat that will hopefully improve connectivity between Torrey Rim winter habitat and Whiskey Mountain. The success of this burn will be monitored in the coming years through observation, tracking collared animals, and use of remote cameras.

Additional mechanical treatments are planned for 2026. The BLM is currently working on NEPA clearance to conduct mechanical treatments near BLM Ridge. USFS has finalized NEPA clearance for mechanical treatment maintenance of a movement corridor above Sheep Ridge and in the Torrey Valley, and WGFD has planned treatment polygons along Torrey Creek and in the sagebrush areas adjacent. These treatments will be mechanical and use cutting and hand piling prescription.

Monitoring

The number one concern with conducting any prescribed burning- whether broadcast burning or pile burning- in these mostly intact grassland habitats is the potential for invasion by invasive annual grasses such as cheatgrass, and other problematic weeds such as dalmatian toadflax, musk thistle, or knapweed. Both the prescribed burn and the mechanical treatment areas will be annually monitored for the presence of invasive species. The USFS has a grant budget to help with both the monitoring and potential treatment of invasive species within their treated areas, and WGFD will continue to monitor the treatment areas within the WHMA.



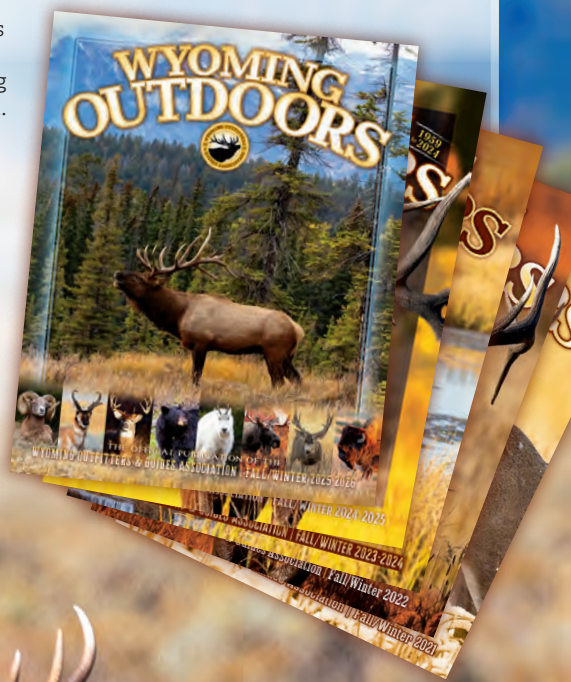
Example of Before and After Treatment- Cutting encroached conifer out of loafing and foraging habitats.

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A Hunt Beyond the Harvest: Our Argentina Red Stag Adventure

By: Kali Middelstadt

What began as an unexpected gift from my mom turned into an adventure my husband and I will never forget. After landing in Buenos Aires, Argentina, we traveled by car for nearly eight hours before arriving at our destination—a beautiful resort that perfectly blended modern comforts with a rustic, welcoming feel.

We each hunted separately with our own guides, giving us the opportunity to experience the country and the hunt in our own way. Each morning began before sunrise, stepping out into a landscape that felt surprisingly familiar. In many ways, parts of Argentina reminded us of home in Wyoming, while other areas felt more like the desert landscapes of West Texas. The air was filled with birdsong, and somewhere in the distance, red stag could occasionally be heard "barking"—a sound that was unforgettable to hear in person.

Seeing the red stag for the first time was an experience in itself. While photographs often showcase enormous trophy animals, the stags we encountered were smaller-bodied and more reminiscent of elk. For me, that was part of what made the experience so special. It wasn't simply about the size of the animal or the harvest—it was about experiencing something completely new.

I was fortunate enough to harvest my red stag on the second day. Afterward, I had the opportunity to slow down and truly enjoy everything around us. I spent time reading, visiting with locals, learning about their culture, and even making traditional Argentine empanadas from







that comes with it. A successful hunt isn't just about bringing an animal home. It's about the memories created along the way—the landscape, the early mornings, the people you meet, the stories you share, and the experience of being somewhere completely different.

scratch. Those moments ended up being just as meaningful as the hunt itself.

As hunters, we understand the significance of taking an animal's life and the responsibility and respect that comes with it. A successful hunt isn't just about bringing an animal home. It's about the memories created along the way—the landscape, the early mornings, the people you meet, the stories you share, and the experience of being somewhere completely different.

Our trip to Argentina reminded us to slow down, take things in, and appreciate the moment. Sometimes the greatest adventures happen when we step outside of our comfort zones and simply say yes to something new.

Take the trip. Try something different. Go somewhere you've never been. You may come home with a trophy, but you'll leave with memories that last a lifetime.

** Editor's Note: The Keene (Middelstadt) Family was the raffle winner of the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation's Argentina Red Stag Hunt Raffle drawn in early 2026.*





Better Together for Wyoming's Wildlife

By Craig Benjamin, Executive Director, Wyoming Wildlife Federation



Craig M. Benjamin.

Wyoming has never conserved wildlife by going it alone.

For generations, hunters, landowners, wildlife managers, conservation organizations, communities, and elected leaders have worked together to keep wildlife on the landscape and sustain the hunting traditions that define our Wyoming way of life.

That same idea is behind a new partnership between the Wyoming Wildlife Federation (WWF) and the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation (WY-WSF).

In August, our organizations signed a three-year Memorandum of Understanding formalizing something that has been growing for years. WWF and WY-WSF have worked side by side on wildlife policy, legislative issues, sporting engagement, and conservation priorities. We have stood together at Camo at the Capitol, shared information and expertise, and worked to make sure hunters and anglers have a meaningful voice when decisions affecting Wyoming's wildlife are on the table.

The MOU makes that relationship more intentional and durable while allowing both organizations to remain fully independent.

That matters because the challenges facing Wyoming's wildlife rarely fit neatly within the mission of one organization.

WY-WSF knows wild sheep. Its members bring tremendous expertise and passion around bighorn sheep, habitat, disease and wildlife management. WWF brings a different set of tools: statewide wildlife policy expertise, relationships with decision-makers, legislative tracking and advocacy, communications, and the ability to engage hunters and anglers across Wyoming.

Neither organization needs to become the other. We can each do what we do best and become more effective by doing it together.

You can see that approach on the ground in the Sweetwater Rocks, where WWF and WY-WSF are working toward the long-term goal of restoring bighorn sheep to a landscape where they historically lived.

Restoring bighorn sheep is not something any one organization can accomplish. It requires good science, suitable habitat, disease considerations, support from hunters and local communities, strong relationships with landowners and partners, and ultimately the leadership of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. WY-WSF brings deep knowledge and commitment to wild sheep conservation. WWF can help build the relationships, public support, and policy environment needed to turn an ambitious conservation idea into something durable.

That is the kind of partnership we want this agreement to foster: different organizations bringing their strengths together to accomplish something meaningful for wildlife.

That approach is particularly important right now as Wyoming considers one of the biggest wildlife policy questions we have faced in years: how we sustainably fund the Wyoming Game and Fish Department for the next generation.

For decades, hunters and anglers have provided the backbone of wildlife conservation funding through licenses and excise taxes on firearms, ammunition, archery equipment, and fishing gear. That system is one of the great conservation success stories in American history.

But the job we are asking Game and Fish to do has grown.

The Department manages wildlife and habitat while confronting disease, drought, invasive species, habitat fragmentation, and growing demands on Wyoming's landscapes. It maintains Wildlife Habitat Management Areas, supports private landowners, restores terrestrial and aquatic habitat, and provides the science and management that sustain our hunting and fishing opportunities.

Those responsibilities benefit far more than hunters and anglers alone.

That is why WWF believes this is a moment to build on the system hunters created, not walk away from it.

Our campaign, *From Restoration to Permanence*, starts with a simple idea: Wyoming has an opportunity to make a generational investment in wildlife and ensure that Game and Fish has the resources to keep doing the work Wyomingites expect of it.

We have been working closely with Game and Fish, legislators, sporting organizations, and partners across the state as the Legislature's Travel, Recreation, Wildlife, and Cultural Resources Committee studies the Department's long-term funding needs.

The question is how we build a durable, Wyoming-made solution that reflects the scale of the responsibility and keeps strong wildlife management in the hands of Game and Fish.

That is exactly where partnerships like WWF and WY-WSF become powerful.

A legislator hearing from WWF is useful. A legislator hearing from wild sheep hunters, mule deer hunters, elk hunters, anglers, landowners, local businesses, and people who care deeply about Wyoming wildlife is something different. It demonstrates that wildlife is not a niche interest. It is part of who we are.

Since 1937, the Wyoming Wildlife Federation has worked to bring people together to defend Wyoming's wildlife, habitat, and outdoor heritage. From the field to the Capitol, we turn conservation into action.

We believe one of the most important ways we can fulfill that mission is by helping build a stronger conservation community around us.

A species-focused organization like WY-WSF should not have to hire a full-time lobbyist or build an entire policy program to make its members heard in Cheyenne. Likewise, WWF should not pretend to have the depth of expertise and credibility around wild sheep that WY-WSF has spent years building.

We are stronger when we connect those things.

Our new agreement creates a practical framework for doing exactly that. WWF will continue providing policy leadership, legislative coordination, and opportunities such as Camo at the Capitol. WY-WSF will bring technical expertise, engaged members, and the powerful voice of people who care deeply about wild sheep and Wyoming's hunting heritage.

Partnership does not require uniformity. We will not agree on everything, nor should we have to.

What matters is knowing where our interests overlap, trusting one another enough to work together, and putting our respective strengths behind the places where we can make a difference. Whether that means working toward the return of bighorn sheep to the Sweetwater Rocks, bringing hunters to the Capitol, or helping secure the future of wildlife funding in Wyoming, the principle is the same.

Healthy herds. Strong habitat. World-class hunting and fishing. Working lands. A Game and Fish Department with the resources to follow the science and do its job well. Those are things worth working together for.

We're grateful to the WY-WSF staff, board, and members for betting on a partnership that we believe can become a model for how Wyoming conservation gets done.

Photograph: Mark Gocke.

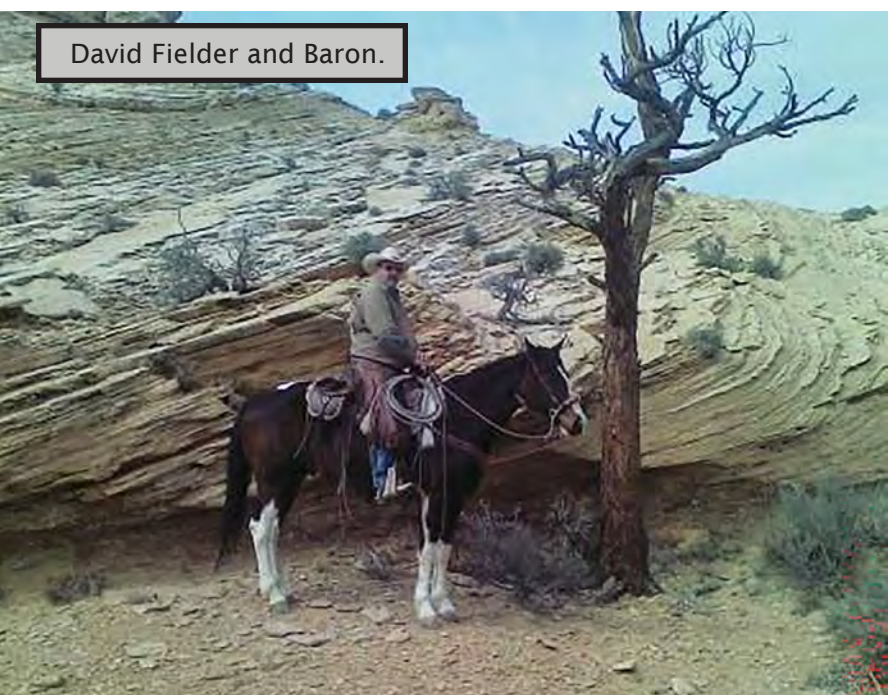


Move Over Mr. Ed
By: David Fielder

All horses have four legs, two eyes, one tail, one head, and one brain. Jake is a Thoroughbred, Quarter horse cross kind of individual. He is 18 years old. He is full of knowledge, wisdom, and sometimes a degree of common sense. He is sorrel, with a white stripe down his face. He is 15.2 hands tall, which is not tall for a horse, but on the other hand not short. He has big, soft brown eyes that look at you and say, "I am kind, gentle, and love affection." He has a serious side to him, but also (a) mischievous and playful side that can drive a person crazy. Jake is a leader. He is at the top of the pecking order, not only in his own mind, but the minds of the other horses. He always reminds the other horses that he is the boss. Jake is very athletic. Sometimes he does things that make me wonder what he is thinking. He has a mind of his own. I've seen him run to the other end of a 100 acre pasture, stand there and shake his head as if to say, "I don't want to go with you today." He will stand there, make you walk all the way to where he is, then run to the next farthest corner, and wait for you to catch him. He loves this cat and mouse game. After he plays this game, he will give in and come along. He can be unexpectedly flighty, a real knot head, do stupid things, and go crazy. He will test the inexperienced rider. He can sense who is experienced and who is not. He will take care of the inexperienced rider, or scare the wits out of them.

From 17 years of training, and being ridden, he does things once, does it right, and is always one step ahead. Old age and experience has taught him this valuable lesson.

Yeager on the other hand is quite different. Yeager is a registered Quarter Horse. Yeager stands 16.2 hands tall, which is tall for Quarter Horse standards. He has a big head, long legs, with a thin build. He is brown, with a big white spot on his forehead. He has big brown eyes that express what he is all about. Yeager is 11 years old, and acts like he is 95. He is lazy, slow thinking, and lacks ambition and motivation. He goes no faster than he needs to, does no more than he has to, and could care less how he does it. He is clumsy, maybe too lazy to pick up his own feet, or he can't keep track of all four feet at the same time. He always stands with his head down, and seldom shows any emotion to speak of. Yeager is a follower. To him it is easier to follow and play catch up than it is to lead the group. He will rub and lean on anything, even if it is a person, post, truck, or trailer. Flies and mosquitoes don't bother Yeager. He figures they don't eat much, so why bother, or spend the energy wiping them off. Although he is lazy, lacks motivation, and is slow thinking, he is basically an all around good horse.



David Fielder and Baron.

Jake and Yeager are two completely different individuals, even though one can't be without the other. I believe they are best friends, if horses have best friends. Both have their own personal space, that others do not invade. They swat flies for each other, and they also scratch and groom each other. Both are reliable and will not let you down. Both Jake and Yeager have unique personalities, even though they are quite different.

I feel both Jake and Yeager are like people. They depend on real people for their own well being, since we are the ones who actually hold them captive. We make horses a beast of burden. We use them for our own entertainment and enjoyment. Most horses accept their role in society, while others do not. Jake and Yeager have both accepted their role, and are doing quite well.

Editor's Note: An unofficial theme of this magazine issue is history; of the WY WSF, conservation efforts, and other outdoor experiences. While the horse is still paramount to outdoor work; this author, while recently retired, wrote this story years ago, early in his schooling career.


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From the National Bighorn Sheep Center...



Archery.

CAMP BIGHORN 2026

Hosted by the National Bighorn Sheep Center, Camp Bighorn 2026 saw 27 campers at the Whiskey Mountain Conservation Camp June 29-July 3. The days were filled with exploration, discovery, learning, connecting, and conservation!

This year's campers were between 9 and 13 years old and from six different states, with three returning campers. The kids participated in activities such as edible and medicinal plants, archery, canoeing and kayaking, nature journaling, water ecology, horse packing, and more! Not only did they participate in these conservation experiences, but they also worked side-by side with experts in the field.

The students received a camp t-shirt and journal. From the start, campers were immersed in hands-on nature activities that challenged them to think critically and creatively about the natural world. They worked with biologists, educators, and outdoor enthusiasts - and each other - to build relationships with history, the outdoors, and the natural world.

Shoshone Elder Ivan Posey blessed our space and shared the sacredness of the area and the petroglyphs. Directed by Rusty with CR Horse Packing Adventures, students practiced efficiently packing supplies. Applying Leave No Trace principles, the campers set up a "camp" complete with a tent and latrine with Callie Domek and the US Forest Service. The Dubois Fish Hatchery explained the basics of fish rearing and allowed students to feed the fish!

With Jupiter, the Great Horned Owl, on her shoulder, Rene Schell shared Wyoming wildlife hides and owl pellets. The campers practiced grinding grains and seeds with a mano and metate, and sampling atole, with Seth McFarland of the Dubois Museum. At Torrey Creek, Erin Hannelly assessed the water quality by doing the "streambed shuffle," stirring up, collecting, and identifying macroinvertebrates. And most importantly, the campers shared stories, enjoyed meals together, and made new friends.

The week was not without challenges. We're not sure we ever



Taxidermy.

experienced wind as we experienced on Monday, making us all *feel* Wyoming at its best. The wind and other bouts of mountain weather encouraged the staff, chaperones, and campers to turn obstacles into learning experiences: Being outdoors means being prepared and flexible!

By Friday, campers left with new skills, friendships, and connection to the natural world! Campers gained confidence and skills as they spent their days playing outside, exploring nature, and learning from local educators.

Plans are in the works for Camp Bighorn 2027! Stay tuned! If you would like to get involved or have any questions, contact the National Bighorn Sheep Center at education@bighorn.org.

"...A ditch somewhere – or a creek, meadow, woodlot, or marsh... These are places of initiation, where the borders between ourselves and other creatures break down, where the earth gets under our nails and a sense of place gets under our skin. ...Everybody has a ditch, or ought to. For only the ditches and the fields, the woods, the ravines can teach us to care enough for all the land."
Robert Michael Pyle, The Thunder Tree, 1993.

BIGHORN BASH 2026

The annual Bighorn Bash is scheduled for November 7, 2026 at the Headwaters Arts and Conference Center in Dubois, Wyoming. This is our largest fundraiser of the year and dollars raised support our conservation education programs and general operations.

This year, we are allocating part of our proceeds to our Butler Conservation Education Fund which is our educational endowment fund. This fund will ensure the longevity of our programs far into the future. Many thanks to Gary and Jo Butler for their unwavering support of our programs!

Event tickets will go on sale in mid-September; we can't wait to see you there! In the meantime, make sure to pick up some Wild Four Raffle and Spring Black Bear Hunt Raffle tickets. These are great prizes you won't want to miss!



Artwork.

NATIONAL BIGHORN SHEEP CENTER



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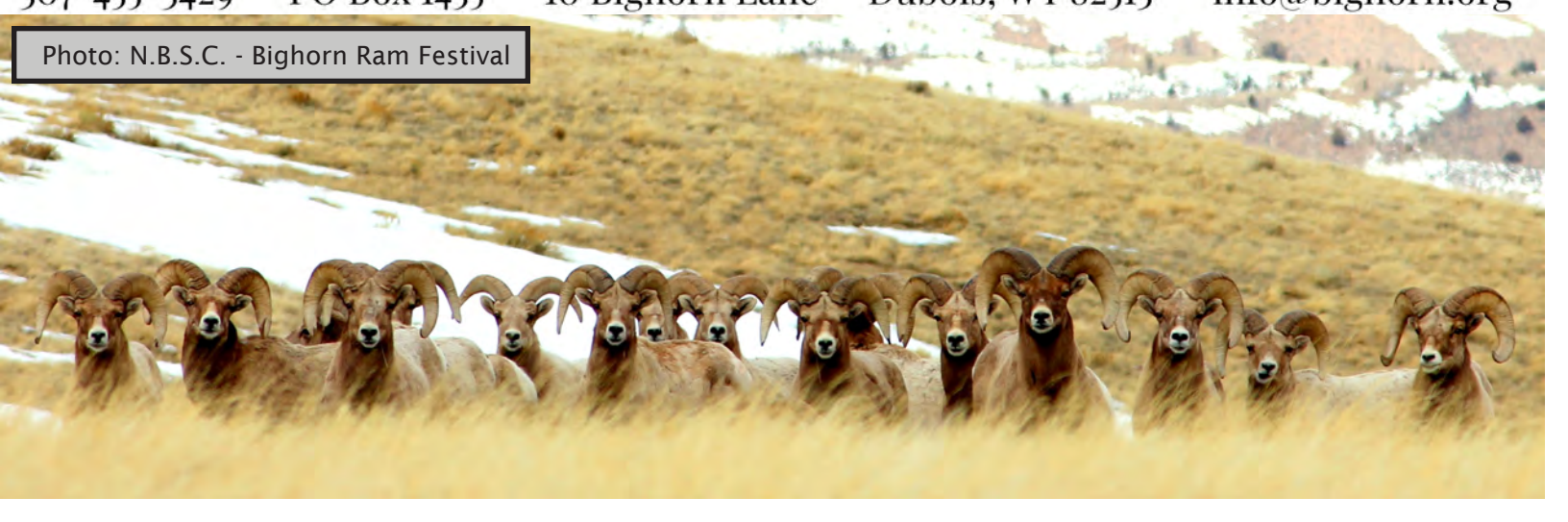


Photo: N.B.S.C. - Bighorn Ram Festival





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Full Circle
By: Greg Clifford

In 1989, I went on my first sheep hunt, a Yukon Dall sheep hunt with Stan Reynolds outfitting and his son Dan Reynolds guiding. I was young, and everything about that trip is still burned into memory: the horses, the endless country, the feeling that I had found the thing I would chase for the rest of my life. This year, 2026, thirty-seven years later, I had the chance to return to the Yukon, this time with Iron North and guided by Larry Dwyer, for another Dall sheep.



The hike from base camp to spike camp was a quick 20 kilometers. We started out ahead of another hunter's crew and their horses, who carried our gear for us over the first half of the trip. We rendezvoused with them around the midway point, where they handed off our packs, and from there we split ways and carried on under our own steam. We had no sooner arrived at spike camp and started putting up tents than we spotted two rams on the mountainside above us, and that was all it took to get the excitement building for what the next days might hold.

The next morning we got a good look at the two rams and determined they were young, so we kept looking. Over the several days that followed, we climbed the surrounding mountains and cleared the basins around us, glassing as we went. The country was some of the most stunning sheep habitat I have seen: steep limestone peaks, shale slides in mixed light and dark bands, waterfalls, hundreds of caves tucked into the rock, and bright green slopes along the mountain bases. One afternoon I found myself glassing the face of a mountain across from us, my attention caught by a particularly striking cave mouth cut into the limestone, when a ram simply stepped out of the darkness and into the light while I was still looking through the binoculars, as if the mountain had produced him just for me. On the fourth evening, coming back into spike camp just ahead of a rain storm, we spotted a nice caribou bull across the valley and spent the evening watching him as our entertainment for the night.

On the morning of the seventh day, we set out to clear a box canyon. Not far into the hike, Larry caught a quick glimpse of at least three rams cresting a rise, headed the opposite direction from where we had planned to go. He thought there might be a fourth ram with them, and since we couldn't be sure whether these were new rams or ones we had already looked over, we changed course to go check them out. We crested the rise, got the spotting scope set up, and located sheep up a shale slide. There were three, and we had indeed already seen this bunch.

While we were glassing the rest of the basin, though, I caught a glimpse down the opposite canyon of two sheep on a steep slope, just about to slip out of view. We were lucky to already have the scope out, and we pivoted it just in time to get a good look at the two of them. Larry's whole demeanor changed in an instant. "That's a ram we need to go after," he said. "Game on, boys, this is the moment we've been waiting for."

We packed up and moved toward the new rams, found a spot where we could relocate them, and settled in to judge age and figure out if a stalk was even possible.

The rams were bedded in a black, sheer-faced waterfall chute near the top of the mountain, and the wind was questionable at best. We tucked in behind a large boulder to get out of a passing rain storm and talked through our options for close to 45 minutes. Eventually we decided it was now or never and started the stalk, working up a small ravine, along a shale slide, and up under a low set of cliffs to keep our approach hidden.

We closed to within about 300 yards of where the rams were bedded and found a small mound of dirt tucked among the rocks to set up on. The rams showed themselves only briefly. The ram we were after stood once just long enough to reposition and lay back down, and after that all we could see was his head and the horns of the second ram beside him. The range read 286 yards, 214 with angle compensation. We got a solid rest and waited. Before long the ram grew uneasy, testing the wind and turning his head, and it was clear he was getting ready to stand and likely blow out of there. We agreed on the plan out loud: the moment he stood, I would shoot. Larry had the video rolling through the spotting scope, and my wife was on the binoculars, ready to call the shot and re-range if we needed it. About ten minutes later the ram stood, just as we expected, and one well-placed shot put him down out of sight.

There is a strange quiet that follows a shot like that, somewhere between celebration and disbelief, before you let yourself feel the full weight of it. We made the final climb up to find him, and when we got there it was obvious he had gone off several ledges on the way down, likely airborne more than once, before coming to rest wedged into a pile of boulders that was the only thing holding him on that steep face. He was everything I could have asked for: nine and a half years old, heavy, with tremendous character in his horns, and in that moment I was overwhelmed with gratitude for the ram, for my wife standing beside me, and for a guide who had put us in position to make it happen.

After photos, we broke him down and started the long walk back toward camp. Larry navigated the steep, treacherous descent to the valley floor without a hitch, and from there it was a heavy, but deeply satisfying, walk into spike camp. We spent the next couple of days in camp processing the ram, and that was about the time we started reaping the benefits of the other hunter's camp nearby. Blake, the other hunter, and his guides Dom and Jake had come in with horses and real supplies, which meant extra food and, more importantly, a pan. Cooking that sheep in an actual pan became the running joke of the trip. On our last evening in spike camp, Dom, Jake, and Blake were gracious enough to let us tag along and help with the pack-out of a great caribou bull Blake had taken, which rounded out an already incredible hunt.

Thanks to our new friends and their horses, the 20 kilometer hike out was light on our backs, even though it rained the entire way and we were soaked through our rain gear and beyond within the first hour. Iron North, Ben Stourac and his wife Rosi, his mother, and the whole crew back at base camp were as gracious a group of hosts as I could imagine, in a setting on that lake that is hard to put into words. Thirty-seven years after that first Yukon hunt with Stan and Dan Reynolds, I came home with a ram I will never forget, and a reminder of exactly why I keep coming back to these mountains.







When Washington Reaches Wyoming

By Katie Cheesbrough, Executive Director, Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation

Over the past six months, the pace of federal policy change affecting public lands and wildlife has been an absolute whirlwind.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has proposed rescinding the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. The Forest Service is reconsidering its national Travel Management Rule. Federal grazing policies are being revised, including renewed interest in reopening previously vacant grazing allotments. The Department of the Interior is reviewing policies governing Wilderness Study Areas and other lands with wilderness characteristics. At the same time, important decisions are moving forward on grizzly bear management and the growing number of feral horses and burros on western public lands.

Each of these actions has its own purpose, process, and political history. But on the ground, they do not occur separately.

A road built into previously undeveloped habitat can increase human disturbance, fragment seasonal big game ranges, spread invasive plants, and increase the likelihood of human-caused wildfire. Travel policies can determine whether managers retain the ability to protect lambing habitat, winter range, and big-game security through seasonal closures. Grazing decisions can either support or undermine decades of collaborative work to maintain separation between wild sheep and domestic sheep and goats. Changes to Wilderness Study Area policies can affect the future of large, intact landscapes before Congress has determined their permanent status, or give us more flexibility to manage habitat in those areas.

When several of these policies change at once, their effects can converge on the same herd, habitat, or watershed.

Grizzly bear recovery and future delisting, and the impacts on big game management, provide a clear example. Recovery criteria for the grizzlies in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem include standards for secure habitat, motorized access, developed sites, and livestock allotments. Rescinding the Roadless Rule would not automatically eliminate secure habitat. But if it leads to new roads or increased motorized access in occupied areas, it could weaken the security that helped grizzlies recover, complicate delisting, and make state management more difficult.

Grazing policy can intersect with grizzly management in similar ways. Some allotments became vacant, or were acquired from willing permittees, partly because predator conflicts made livestock use difficult. Restocking them could recreate those conflicts, increase livestock losses and bear removals, and add conflict-response and compensation costs for the state. It could also make grizzly delisting more difficult by increasing human-bear conflicts and mortality.

That matters to bighorn sheep, too. Grizzlies are not the primary predator of Wyoming's bighorn sheep, but they can prey on sheep, and additional predation can be significant for small or struggling herds. Delayed delisting or limits on state management could leave Wyoming with fewer tools to respond if grizzly predation becomes a localized concern for a bighorn population.

The result could be a frustrating contradiction: federal policies that increase conflicts or weaken secure grizzly habitat could delay state management, while that delay limits Wyoming's ability to address the effects of a recovered predator on livestock and native wildlife.

Wild sheep face another layer of risk. Reopening a domestic sheep or goat allotment near bighorn habitat becomes even more consequential if roadless protections, travel



Photograph: National Bighorn Sheep Center.

restrictions, or forest-plan separation measures are weakened at the same time.

That is why WY-WSF has become increasingly engaged in federal policy discussions. Our mission may be focused on Wyoming's bighorn sheep, but many of the decisions shaping their future are being made far beyond Wyoming.

Roadless Areas and Core Native Herds

WY-WSF recently submitted detailed comments opposing the complete rescission of the 2001 Roadless Rule without comparable locally driven protections in its place.

Wyoming contains approximately 3.26 million acres of inventoried roadless areas across five national forests. These lands include substantial portions of the Shoshone and Bridger-Teton National Forests, which support Wyoming's four Core Native bighorn sheep herds: the Absaroka, Jackson, Whiskey Mountain, and Targhee herds. Together, these herds represent approximately 85 percent of Wyoming's bighorn sheep population.

These landscapes provide lambing and security habitat, migration corridors, escape terrain, clean water, and some of the best remaining backcountry hunting opportunities in the state.

WY-WSF recognizes that the existing Roadless Rule is not perfect. Targeted vegetation treatments, conifer removal, invasive plant control, and carefully planned access can benefit both forest health and bighorn sheep habitat. Local managers need some flexibility to address real conditions on the ground.

Our concern is that a complete nationwide rescission would remove existing protections without first establishing a durable replacement for Wyoming's most valuable wildlife habitat.

New roads also create risks that extend well beyond the road itself. They can increase disturbance, provide easier travel routes for predators, introduce invasive annual grasses, and increase human-caused wildfire ignitions. In landscapes already threatened by cheatgrass and increasingly frequent fire, those effects can become a damaging cycle.

We have asked USDA to consider a more targeted or state-specific alternative and to retain meaningful protections for Core Native Herd habitat. We have also asked that future decisions fully evaluate the cumulative effects of road construction, travel management, grazing changes, invasive species, and wildfire rather than considering each issue in isolation.

Access and Travel Management

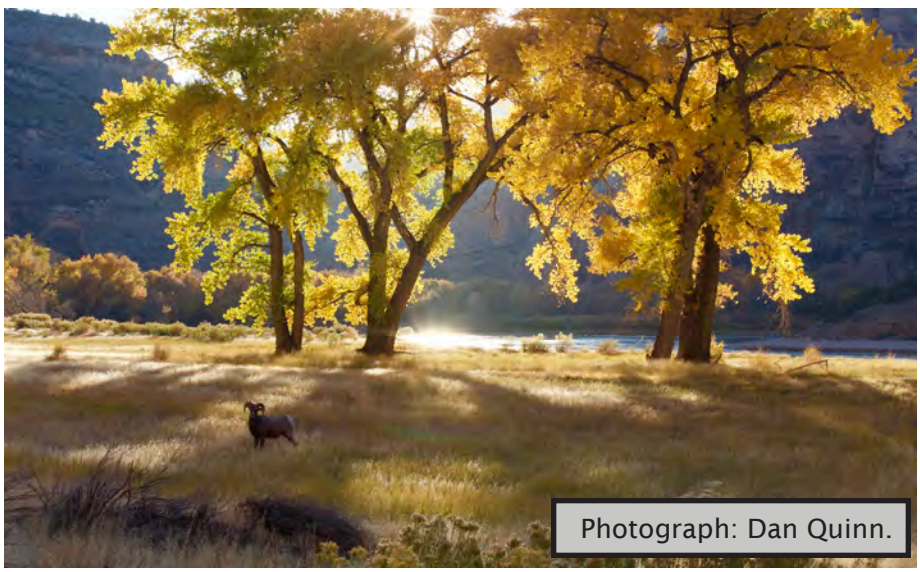
WY-WSF and WSF have also commented on the Forest Service's proposed revision of its Travel Management Rule.

Hunters depend on access to public lands. We also understand that unlimited motorized access is not compatible with every place or season. Thoughtful travel management is how we balance those realities.

Over the past two decades, national forests have developed local travel plans through extensive public processes. Those plans identify which roads and trails are open, what types of use are allowed, and when seasonal restrictions are needed. A new national policy that begins with the presumption that existing roads, trails, airfields, trailheads, and access points are open could undermine years of local work.

For bighorn sheep and other big game, the details matter. Seasonal closures can protect lambing areas, winter range, migration corridors, and hunting-season security. Route density and placement can influence wildlife movement and determine whether animals remain on public land or are displaced into less suitable areas.

We are asking the Forest Service to keep locally developed plans as the foundation for future decisions, retain science-based seasonal closures, and



Photograph: Dan Quinn.

continue involving state wildlife agencies, Tribes, hunters, and local communities. Access and habitat protection should not be treated as competing absolutes. Good travel management requires both.

Grazing, Disease, and Separation

Federal grazing policy is especially important to wild sheep conservation because domestic sheep and goats can carry pathogens associated with devastating respiratory disease in bighorn sheep.

For more than 25 years, Wyoming wildlife managers, woolgrowers, livestock producers, conservation organizations, and federal agencies have worked through the Bighorn/Domestic Sheep Interaction Working Group to reduce that risk. The resulting Wyoming Plan established Core Native Herds and a collaborative strategy for maintaining spatial separation. In 2015, the Wyoming Legislature formally recognized that framework in state law.

Willing-seller grazing permit purchases, conversions from domestic sheep to cattle, and negotiated allotment changes have helped create separation while respecting livestock producers and rural communities.

Recent federal proposals supporting the reopening or restocking of vacant allotments could affect that carefully constructed system if they are applied without considering why some allotments became vacant or how close they are to bighorn sheep habitat.

WY-WSF and WSF support modernizing federal grazing management and recognize the important role grazing can play in rural economies, working landscapes, and active land stewardship. It has also asked BLM to keep experienced conservation partners at the table, establish measurable objectives for temporary grazing changes, and improve land-health monitoring.

For Wyoming, one additional principle must remain clear: decisions about previously vacant domestic sheep or goat allotments must account for disease risk and the separation agreements already developed among wildlife managers, conservationists, and agricultural producers. Twenty-five years of collaboration should not be unintentionally undone by a policy developed without that history in the room.

Other Decisions with Western Consequences

Not every recent federal development represents a threat.

WSF has welcomed the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's proposed grizzly bear 4(d) rule, which would give state and Tribal wildlife agencies a greater role in managing grizzlies and responding to conflicts in areas where bear populations exceed local objectives. The proposal does not end federal protection, but it recognizes the progress made in recovering grizzly bears and allows management to adapt as conditions change.

That is an important example of what good policy can look like: recognizing conservation success, relying on science, and giving experienced wildlife professionals practical tools to manage recovered populations.

The growing number of feral horses and burros on BLM lands presents a different challenge. Current populations are estimated at roughly 85,000 animals, more than three times the agency's established Appropriate Management Level. When populations exceed what the land can support, native wildlife, livestock, water sources, and the horses themselves all suffer.

This is especially relevant in Wyoming, where feral horse management is already one of our most contentious public-land issues. Science-based gathers, fertility control, adoption, and other management tools are necessary if we expect BLM to maintain healthy rangelands for native wildlife.

Federal reviews of Wilderness



Photograph: Josh Metten.

Study Area policies deserve the same careful attention. These areas have often remained in administrative limbo for decades, and there are legitimate conversations to be had about their future. But decisions that could remove existing protections or change management standards must include a transparent public process and a serious evaluation of wildlife habitat, migration, public access, and landscape connectivity.

National Decisions, Wyoming Consequences

These national policy debates already show up in our work here at home.

WY-WSF continues to raise concerns about the proposed Grand Targhee Resort expansion and the lack of adequate information about how additional development and recreation could affect the Targhee bighorn sheep herd.

We continue to oppose the Seminoe Pumped Storage Project because of its potential effects on the Ferris-Seminoe herd, Wyoming's only bighorn sheep population without documented exposure to *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* and one of our most valuable source herds for future transplants and augmentations.

We are also working to ensure that the ongoing Bridger-Teton National Forest Plan revision recognizes Wyoming's Core Native Herds and provides durable safeguards for their habitat and for wild-domestic sheep separation.

These projects may appear local, but national laws, agency rules, appropriations, and administrative priorities shape them. A change in Washington can alter the standards used to evaluate a project in Wyoming, the tools available to a local land manager, or whether a conservation organization like ours has a meaningful seat at the table.

That is why Wyoming must be represented in national policy discussions.

At the time of writing this article, I'm looking forward to traveling to Washington, D.C., to represent both WY-WSF and the Wild Sheep Foundation along with Terry Meyers of the Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep Society. Our meetings will include members and staff of western congressional delegations, agricultural appropriations staff, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service international program staff.

We will also participate in the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation's Annual Banquet, one of the largest gatherings of lawmakers, conservation organizations, industry leaders, and sportsmen and women on Capitol Hill. CSF's bipartisan work helps advance policies that protect wildlife habitat, public access, hunting, angling, and America's sporting traditions.

Showing up matters.

If wildlife organizations participate only after a policy has been written or a decision has been announced, we are already behind. Effective advocacy means building relationships before a crisis, bringing credible science and on-the-ground experience into the conversation, and offering practical solutions rather than simply objecting from the sidelines.

WY-WSF's growing policy involvement does not replace our habitat projects, research investments, disease work, or support for Wyoming Game and Fish. It protects those investments.

Our members have spent decades putting money, volunteer time, and hard work into Wyoming's wild sheep. We have a responsibility to make sure federal policies do not unintentionally undermine that work.

The decisions may begin in Washington, but their consequences reach all the way to Wyoming's mountains.

We intend to be in the room when they are made.



Justin Binfet: "Bachelor Rams."

Remembering Fritz Meyer

A Remembrance
By: Jim Collins

"Many have been dedicated and served Wyoming bighorns and our Foundation in its four decades of history. With the passing of Fritz Meyer, 12/16/2025, the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation lost one of the finest!

Fritz missed the first meeting when our Chapter was founded in 1983 but he was at the second meeting, missing few in the next four decades.

Fritz (LM# 14) first served on the Chapter Board in 1989, leaving the Board in 2007. Retiring from the Board was not the end of Fritz's Chapter support. He attended Board meetings, helped at conventions, stepping up where ever needed. Fritz and Connie donated fishing pack trips, guiding, bear proof panniers, and sold numerous commissioner licenses. Their tireless work contributed thousands to the Chapter's ability to fund projects. His dedication for Wyoming bighorns was centered on the Whiskey Mountain (Area 10) sheep herd, which Fritz never quit fighting to bring back after the all age die off in the early 1990's. Fritz and Connie purchased Wasson Creek Hunting Camp (Sheep Area 10), where they ran Wind River Outfitters, one of the premier guide services in the state. The Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation was the beneficiary of Fritz's passion for Wyoming Wildlife!

Fritz was a leader in achieving our goal of keeping bighorns on Wyoming Mountains.

LIFE WELL LIVED,
YOU ARE MISSED"

The Obituary

Fritz Meyer, age 73, of Dubois, Wyoming passed away on Tuesday, December 16, 2025 at the Wyoming Medical Center in Casper, Wyoming.

Fritz, the son of Lawrence and Rosalie (Jaquish) Meyer, was born on March 21, 1952 and grew up on a dairy farm outside of Reedsburg, WI. From a young age, he developed a deep love for the outdoors, spending time hunting, fishing, and trapping with his dad and uncle, Clarence Meyer.

On July 27, 1974, Fritz married Connie Peterson of Cazenovia. Soon after their wedding, the couple moved to Wyoming just in time for the fall hunting season. Having visited Wyoming on a hunting trip, Fritz was determined to make the state his home and spend his days in its vast, open skies.

In the early years of his Wyoming life, the couple lived in Dubois and Riverton where Fritz worked logging, truck driving, in the uranium mines, and guiding. In the early 1990s, the couple purchased the Wasson Creek Hunting Camp (formerly owned by Rollie Brown) and started Wind River Mountain Outfitters. Fritz made his passion for the outdoors his livelihood, spending his days hunting, fishing, trapping, and telling stories of great hunts. Over the years, he hunted just about every animal in North America and even went on an African Safari. He will be missed for his gift to tell a good story and not to know a stranger for very long. He loved his family; was fortunate to have so many friends, a couple good horses and mules, and loyal dogs.

Fritz is survived by his wife, Connie; Daughters, Kelly (Pat) Poppe, of Dubois and Brandi (Chamuel) Marvici, of Reedsburg, WI; grandchildren, Justin Poppe, of Dubois, Reagan and Josie Marvici of Reedsburg; step grandchildren, Ben (Reedsburg. WI) and Toby (Cheyenne, WY) Marvici; sister, Jeanie (Steven) Winters, of Waukesha, WI; brother, Kenny Meyer, of Riverton; as well as many nieces, nephews, cousins and countless friends.

Fritz had a special relationship with his sister-in-law, Connie Meyer of Reedsburg and brother-in-law, John (Linda) Peterson of Richland Center, WI.

He is preceded in death by his parents, his brothers, Joe and Bob Meyer; his father and mother-in-law, John and Mildred Peterson and close family friend, Tim Cannon.

The family will host a celebration of life at 2:00 p.m., the day of the Don Scheer Memorial Packhorse Race on Saturday, June 13, 2026 at the Headwaters Center in Dubois, WY. This is an event Fritz loved and looked forward to annually where he would serve as a judge for the event. (Davis Funeral Home, Inc.)



Fritz Meyer.

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An Iranian Hunting Trip

By: Michael J. Pilch, D.V.M.

From the early days of reading amazing Jack O' Connor stories about hunting in Iran with Prince Abdorreza, another trigger to my adventurous gene became set in place. Jack hunted there in 1955, 1959, and 1970. The stories and photos of the hunting are amazing. As we know, since the revolution in 1979, the last 47 years have shut down any western hunters from the country. There is formally NO relationship between the two countries.

I was still diligent in my quest. Always asking anyone who might know how to get in. From considerations of acquiring a second passport to praying, there seemed to be no options. I had heard of a few Americans who at times made it in. There seemed to be windows of a few months that would open then close. State Department and security advisors strictly forbid any considerations.

In 2023, my network gave me a tip off that I followed and in September of 2024 my date was set. No visa, honored only through a back door letter of invite from the Pakistan Embassy. My gun and ammo were allowed, but my cameraman with a laptop and camera was denied. Two weeks before my departure, the



Sunday morning news showed Israel fighter jets bombing a ton of targets in the country. One target was Esfahan. A buddy called and said "Aren't you going to be hunting an Esfahan ram?" Little did I know there was an air force base and nuclear facility nearby.

All flights were cancelled into Tehran. Hunt cancelled. A few weeks later I was advised the country does not hunt in November because of the rut. If possible, I could try December 1. December 2nd - I found myself checking baggage, gun, and ammo in Istanbul for my three hour flight to Tehran. As I sat in my seat, a gentleman squeezed by me to sit near the window. He said, "Good morning," I replied the same. He said, "Oh, you speak English, where are you from?" I said, "The United States" He said, "Oh my God, they let you in here?!" As the door closed on the jet, I started to wonder what the h*ll I was getting into. I was warned my iPhone and iPad would not work in the country. I was heading to a new level of "off the grid!"

As I arrived in Tehran, I had my US Passport, my Iranian gun permit, a letter of invite from my host written in Farsi, and memories of my friends in Wyoming having a send off party with the Argo movie playing in the background. Customs directed me to a senior official. After a few questions, he stuck his hand out for a handshake and said, "Welcome to Iran, I hope you have a great hunt."

From that moment on, the hospitality and people of Iran treated me better than any





country I have visited. My translator Sara was nothing less than spectacular. My guides Hommed and Mehdi (excellent taxidermist), and Hossein (my fellow Clint Eastwood fan) were nothing less than fun and wonderful.

We based out of the city of Yazd. The first hunt was for Persian Ibex. We saw tons of ibex. Finally, we spotted two nice males and took a hike to stalk them. My Gunwerks 280 Ackley rang true, and my Persian Ibex was on the ground.

On the second hunt we drove further south to the Kerman region to hunt a Kerman ram. In one day, we saw many rams in many different areas. We were assisted with local game wardens and after a short hike, found a nice ram and the 280 rang true again.

My third hunt was for an Esfahan ram north of Yazd in the Esfahan region. It was a wide expansive area like my home state of Wyoming with high rolling hills and valleys. We saw many rams and finally connected on Day 3.

Now three weeks in, we traveled to the northeast corner of the country to the final part of the hunt for a Transcaspian Urial. People may not realize Iran has two major mountain ranges. The Alborz mountains to the north that rise to 18,000 feet and the Zagros mountains which border the west and run nearly the same as the Rockies





from Southern Alberta to New Mexico. Iran is large, seven times larger than Wyoming and nearly three times bigger than Texas. We would be hunting near the city of Mehdishahr. Upon arriving we had a full out blizzard hit the area; 60 mph winds and snow. We spent the next six days moving where we could find rams. We saw many, but access to them was scant. The mountains were huge. One all day hike yielded no sheep but a wondrous canyon system we walked down and a set of lion tracks in the snow that a game official described later as a Persian Cheetah. They are only located in northern Iran and numbers are endangered. I didn't punch the tag on a TCU but will be back someday.

I was amazed at the level of conservation in Iran. So many of my team asked me about Teddy Roosevelt and how great he was for the USA and world to start conservation. Sadly we have US citizens who don't know who he is. There are also Shiraz sheep to the northwest and Laristan in the deep south.

Iran is a wonderful geography and a wonderful people. Like I told my guides on every post hunt campfire celebration of tea and sheep kabob, although our countries don't get along, if they left it up to us to solve it we'd have resolution in a few days. Some of the guides literally hugged me in appreciation of the comment.

I can't wait to go back.

Little Red Creek Bridge Clearing
By: Amy Anderson

Introduction

Little Red Creek is a tributary to the Wind River located at the area known as Red Rocks, where a sub-herd of the Whiskey Bighorn Sheep herd can be found throughout the year. Due to the level of incision in the creek, the dense willow, cottonwood, and other shrub cover, and low water levels, bighorn sheep avoid using the creek as a water source.

The Little Red Creek Bridge on U.S. Highway 26 is sometimes used as an underpass for bighorn sheep, mule deer, and moose seeking water from the Wind River, but the dense vegetation under the bridge has precluded more use. The dense vegetation re-routes wildlife above grade and puts them at a very high risk for collision with vehicles.

The project has the dual objectives of both improving access to drinking water locations and improving visibility for passage under the highway bridge. Benefits are being seen for mule deer, moose, and bighorn sheep.

Project Accomplishments

Over winter 2022-2023, Habitat and Access personnel utilized a skid-steer with a mastication head loaned to WGFD from the Bureau of Indian Affairs to mow willows around the Highway 26 Bridge at Little Red Creek. The intent was to open sight lines and opportunities for improved wildlife passage. Crews also cleared willow, juniper, and other vegetation around a warm spring/ wetland upstream of the bridge to entice bighorn sheep to drink from this site rather than cross the highway to the Wind River. In late summer, Sage Vegetation Management sprayed the mowed area to maintain more open habitats and targeted species also included noxious weeds such as Russian knapweed and Canada thistle. Sage Vegetation also conducted follow-up spray operations the following spring to ensure willows and invasive species were controlled.

Monitoring

Trail cameras placed at the Little Red Creek Bridge have shown increased use by mule deer and moose moving back and forth under the highway bridge. Bighorn sheep do not appear to use the bridge as an underpass, but have been seen near the creek, so may be accessing water at the creek rather than crossing the highway to the River.

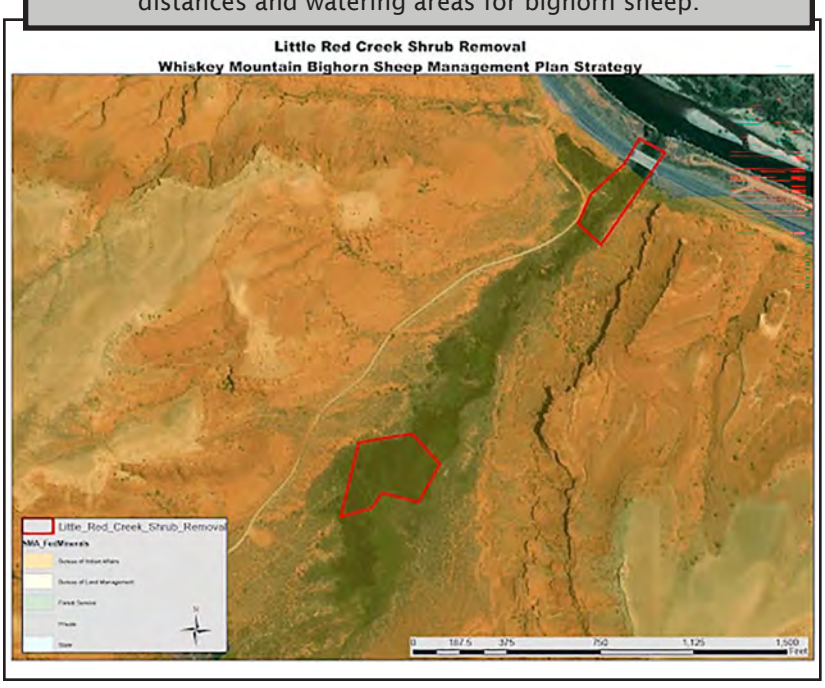
A moose crossing under Little Red Creek Bridge, a much less risky way to access the Wind River than crossing on the highway.



Mule deer crossing under the Little Red Creek bridge after vegetation clearing.



Little Red Creek, where it crosses Highway 26. Polygons represent areas cleared of willow and other brush to open sight distances and watering areas for bighorn sheep.





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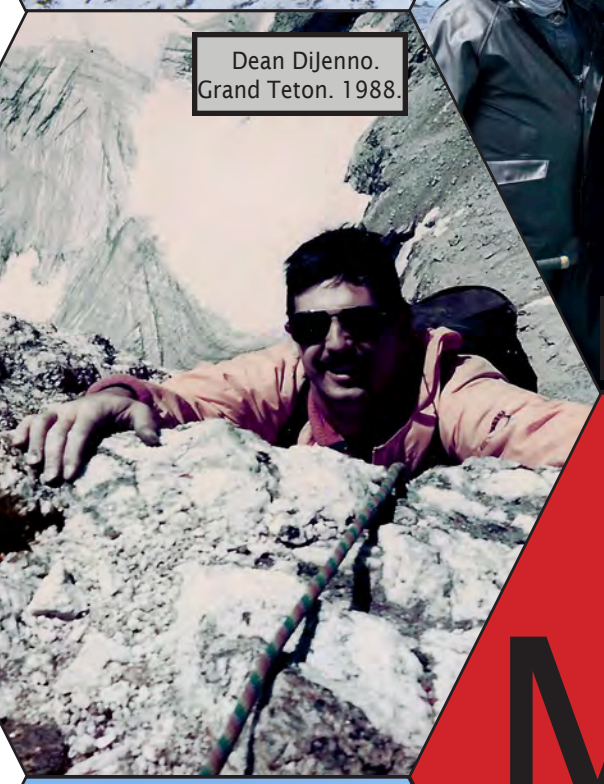
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Dean DiJenno. Grand Teton. 1988.



Tuffy Sims, Ray Lozier, Karen Lozier, Jacque Sims. Alaska Fishing.





Jimmy Owens, Cameron Schmidt, Josh Taylor. Steve Quiz 2021 Ram.

Member's Gallery



Candy McDermott. Costa Rica Fishing Trip with Tom Hunt Fishing the World.

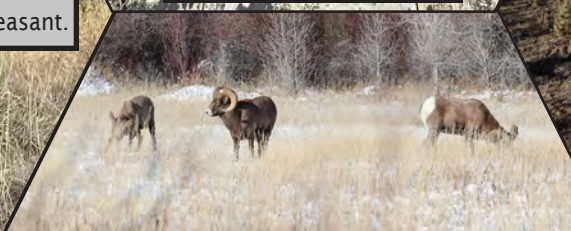


Life Members Kali and Danny Middelstadt. Alaska.



Matt. Pheasant.







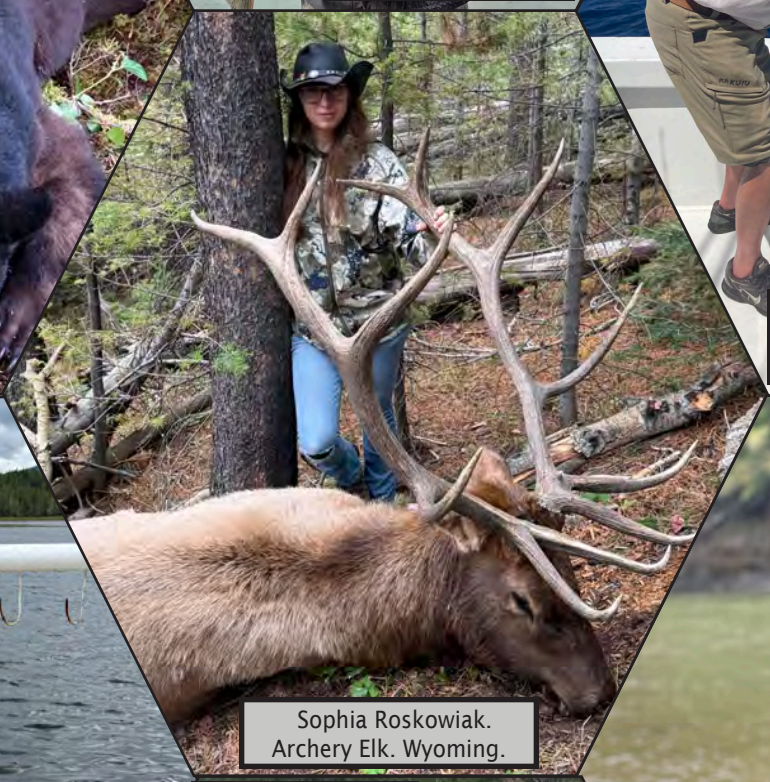
LM Ray Lozier. Alaska. Black Bear.



Gary Keene. Kenai River Sockeye Salmon.



Larry McDermott. Costa Rica Fishing Trip with Tom Hunt Fishing the World.



Sophia Roskowiak. Archery Elk. Wyoming.



Karen Lozier. King Salmon. Alaska.



Jack. Trout. Wyoming



Grandpa BJoe with William, Jackson, Jameson, Samuel.



Bralli Clifford. Pronghorn. Nevada. Silver State Guides and Outfitters Master Guide Colby Egge.



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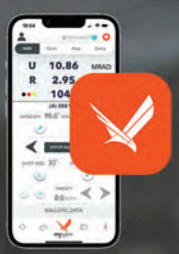


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Rolling Stone: Mark Gilbertson's Terminus Stone Sheep Adventure

By: Mark Gilbertson

Note: Mark Gilbertson was the lucky winner of a Terminus Mountain Outfitters Stone Sheep hunt, drawn after the 2025 Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation Convention in Casper. He recently returned from the field with an unforgettable story to tell—and a beautiful ram to show for it. Here, in his own words, is his report.

A Change of Plans

The morning, I was set to fly into the lodge, the outfitter let me know he wanted to put me into a low-density area they hadn't hunted in a couple of years—on foot. I'd been expecting a horseback-supported hunt, so this was a bit of a curveball. I rearranged my pack, ditched several items, and made it work.

After a bush-plane, a night at the lodge, a float plane, and a night at the lake camp, we were finally hiking in. It was a heavy couple of days going in, mixed with getting caught in a rainstorm, and drinking tarp-caught rainwater on the side of a mountain. Welcome to Northern B.C. stone sheep country! Despite these challenges, my legs and back felt great. As you can imagine, it was even heavier coming out… thankfully!

Getting It Done

Once in the target area, we saw five rams total over the course of the hunt, two of which were solid rams, including the one I took. Three rams—including a mature, long, twisty ram—kept our attention early, but lived in the craggy cliff country, which was a no-go zone for us two-legged creatures. The large boar black bear and large boar grizzly we found in the timber below the cliffs were likely at least part of the reason for their rocky sanctuary. We followed the rams closely for four days but to no avail. They ultimately went deeper into the cliff country.



Fortune favored us on the evening of Day 6, and we found my ram alone high on a ridge and watched him bed in a stalkable location. We knew he had mass, and his body, hips, and sway-back suggested age. The excitement was palpable, and we knew we had a big day ahead of us.

We woke up to frost at 4 a.m. the next day to begin our 1,000-foot ascent at first light. Once up top, we worked our way toward where we had seen the ram bed the night before. This required sneaking and peeking down both sides of the ridge, picking apart every avalanche chute, scree field, and grassy bench, knowing the ram could be anywhere.

Justin was ahead of me, and as I cautiously moved forward, I changed my angle slightly and found the back of the ram's horns, bedded 150 yards steeply below me.

After getting Justin's attention, we consulted and aged the ram for a solid 15 minutes. No wind. Thermals were right. The sun was coming up to our left. The ram was calm, and so was I—despite the weight of the moment and the 11 months of buildup, planning, shooting, training, and thinking about this hunt.

I'll never forget Justin aging the ram through his spotter, a white ptarmigan feather stuck straight in his cap from earlier

that morning for good luck. It helped break the tension.



We knew his horns were full curl and above his nose, and after confirming an age of at least eight (and likely nine), Justin gave me the green light.

The ram stood up and looked directly uphill at us, finally sensing a threat. Sitting on my rear, elbows on both knees, scope set on 4-power, I shot him through the lungs slightly quartering away. It was 8:30 a.m., and the sun was just coming into our side of one of the most beautiful alpine basins I've ever experienced.



We were on top of the world!

We took our time breaking down the ram and enjoyed a truly wonderful and spiritual morning. Grateful for the opportunity and filled with the utmost respect and reverence for the long life he had lived. During the middle of the work, Justin's playlist of classic rock, '90s alternative, and hip-hop music seemed to only cement the moment to memory. Who knew I'd be listening to Eminem and the Rolling Stones on the side of a mountain while skinning out a magnificent Stone sheep ram? It just worked.

I was thrilled that the ram ended up being 10 years old, with beautiful, dark and varied colors. For those who like inches, his bases measured 14.5 inches, and he had more than 37 inches of horn length, coming in at a green gross score of 162 3/8 inches. While the age of the ram and the experience of the hunt trump inches in my book, I must say it was a cherry on top to break 160 inches on this old warrior!

After moving camp up the mountain that evening, we packed out to our lake camp the next morning, Day 8. It was easily the heaviest pack and the steepest and most technical terrain I've done so far. Once at the lake camp that evening, we were finally able to cook the backstraps from the ram. Justin did a "chicken fry" with eggs, seasoning, and crushed saltine crackers, fried in oil over the fire. It was one of the best meals

I've ever had (and not just because of the long heavy pack-out—and seven days of freeze-dried meals, ha-ha).

The float plane came the next morning and strategically took us out of the small lake to start my journey back to society.

I've been accused of being lucky. After drawing a random Wyoming bighorn sheep tag in 2020 with only seven points, then winning this hunt in a raffle, I am now halfway to a slam.

Better to be lucky than good, I guess! More importantly, better to be blessed than lucky.

I truly feel blessed to have had this experience at this time of my life. Prayers are deeper and more frequent in the alpine, and thoughts are clear. The cell phone loses its utility for work emails, texting, and social media and becomes merely a tool to navigate maps and document the hunt. When motivation was needed, pictures of my wife and two daughters were incentive enough to keep going. My oldest daughter also gave me her "prayer cards for athletes" in which her aunt gave to her. These little scriptures and prayers also set the tone when doubt or fear crept in.

The Terminus Crew and Lodge

The Terminus Crew and Lodge made for a great experience from start to finish. The lodge itself was comfortable and accommodating, with great staff and hot food waiting at the beginning and end of the hunt.

In the field, my guide, Justin, was all in. He brought a genuine passion for sheep and the country they live in, paired with a no-quit attitude. His skill—and the care he took with the animal after the kill—was exceptional. His humor and good musical sense also added to the hunt.

I am already thinking of when, how, and where for Dall sheep!

—Mark Gilbertson



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A History of the Black Hills Wild Sheep Herd: Wyoming's Part in the Story

By: Dean DiJenno, Deputy Director, Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation

Long before the first wagon trains rolled into the Black Hills, bighorn sheep were part of the landscape. Early accounts and habitat records suggest wild sheep were likely common throughout the Black Hills and the neighboring Badlands prior to European settlement, working the same rimrock and canyon country that bighorns favor today.

That original population didn't survive contact. Unregulated hunting took a steady toll as settlers moved in, but it was disease, introduced through domestic sheep and goats sharing the same range, that delivered the knockout blow. Bighorns have almost no natural resistance to the respiratory pathogens carried by their domestic cousins, and pneumonia outbreaks swept through wild populations with brutal efficiency. By the early 1900s, native bighorn sheep were gone from the Black Hills. Western South Dakota's last remnants disappeared by around 1925.

U.S. Senator Peter Norbeck, who had already helped establish Custer State Park, arranged the first comeback attempt in 1922: eight Rocky Mountain bighorns trapped in Alberta, Canada, and released into the park. It worked for a while — the herd grew for more than three decades — but collapsed for unclear reasons in the late 1950s. Once again, the Black Hills had no wild sheep at all.

Wyoming Answers the Call

When South Dakota went looking to rebuild the Custer State Park herd in the 1960s, it didn't turn back to Canada. According to South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks' own transplant records, the sheep that re-established the park's population in 1965 came from Wyoming — making it the first documented instance of Wyoming supplying wild sheep to restock the Black Hills.

The likely source, though state transplant logs of that era don't spell it out by name, was the Whiskey Mountain herd near Dubois. Wintering in Whiskey Basin at the northern end of the Wind River Range, Whiskey Mountain was for decades the largest bighorn wintering concentration in the Lower 48 — at its peak numbering roughly 2,500 animals — and it was, by a wide margin, Wyoming's dominant source of transplant stock. Between 1949 and 1995, nearly 2,000 sheep were shipped out of the Whiskey Basin area to found or bolster herds across Wyoming and into at least five other western states. A 1965 shipment east to a struggling Black Hills population fits squarely within that program, and Custer State Park's herd has carried that Wyoming bloodline ever since.

It's a piece of the story that deserves more attention than it usually gets: the Black Hills herd that so many South Dakotans, and Wyomingites, now take pride in owes its modern existence in part to sheep that started out more than 300 miles west, in the shadow of the Wind River Range.

Building It Back, One Transplant at a Time

South Dakota's broader restoration effort, launched in earnest in the 1960s, has continued in fits and starts ever since — each new transplant patching a gap left by disease, isolation, or bad luck:

- 1961 — Bighorns from Alberta released at Slim Buttes.
- 1964 — Colorado stock released into Badlands National Park.
- 1965 — Wyoming bighorns released into Custer State Park, re-establishing the herd after its 1950s collapse.
- 1974–1982 — Surplus animals from Custer State Park shipped out to help seed herds in Colorado and Nebraska.
- 1991 — Colorado sheep released at Spring Creek and in the Badlands.
- 1999 — A second infusion of Alberta bighorns into Custer State Park.
- 2001 — Animals moved from Spring Creek to found the Elk Mountain herd in the southern Black Hills.
- 2004 — New Mexico bighorns added to Elk Mountain and the Badlands.
- 2014 — Sheep from the Chippewa Cree Tribe in Montana released into the Hell Canyon area.
- 2015 — Twenty-six Alberta bighorns released into the Grizzly Gulch burn scar near Deadwood.

The result is a mosaic of subherds spread across the Hills: Custer State Park, the Rapid City herd, the Deadwood herd, and the Elk Mountain/ Hell Canyon herd along the

Wyoming border — plus the separate Badlands National Park population on the prairie to the east. Disease has never fully let go; Custer State Park's herd alone lost roughly three-quarters of its animals to a pneumonia outbreak in the mid-2000s, bottoming out around 28 head before a slow, still-ongoing recovery.



Elk Mountain Drop Net Capture 2021.

Elk Mountain: The Story Runs the Other Way

If the 1965 Custer State Park transplant is Wyoming's outbound contribution to the Black Hills, the Elk Mountain herd is the inverse — sheep moving into Wyoming under their own power. South Dakota established Elk Mountain in 2001 with animals moved from Spring Creek, and the herd took hold on the sandstone cliffs and timbered ridges southeast of Newcastle. Over the following years, sheep began ranging west across the state line onto Wyoming ground, drawn by the same terrain that had made the South Dakota side good habitat in the first place.

By 2009, enough animals were spending enough time in Wyoming that the state issued its first legal bighorn sheep hunting license there in a century or more, for a newly created Hunt Area 20. "The sheep have pioneered from a South Dakota transplant, and they're now spending more time in Wyoming," Kevin Hurley, then the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's Bighorn Sheep Coordinator, told the Wyoming Livestock Roundup at the time, describing a herd of 110 to 120 animals moving fluidly across the border. It's a reminder that state lines mean little to a bighorn ram working a ridgeline — and that Wyoming's stake in this population, whatever its origin, is now permanent and growing.

Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation's Role

Managing a herd that ignores state boundaries takes cooperation, and that's exactly how Elk Mountain has been run for nearly two decades: jointly, by Wyoming Game and Fish and South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks. For years, though, the two agencies struggled with something basic — getting an accurate population count. Ground surveys relying on radio-collared sheep produced estimates with unworkably wide margins of error, and getting crews across private land for repeat surveys grew increasingly difficult. A 2018 attempt to survey the herd using forward-looking infrared (FLIR) technology from the air failed to reliably detect sheep in the rugged, timbered terrain.



Elk Mountain Drop Net Capture 2021.

That's when Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation stepped in through its Grant-in-Aid program, funding the development of a

helicopter-based sightability model for the Black Hills — the same statistical approach South Dakota had already used successfully for elk. The project paired capture and collaring work with repeated helicopter and ground surveys, building a model that could account for sheep present but not seen, and finally deliver a defensible population estimate without requiring constant re-collaring or crossing private ground. Developed in partnership with Wyoming Game and Fish and South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks, that sightability model has since become a standard tool for tracking the Elk Mountain herd year over year — WY-WSF dollars translating directly into better science on a herd that is, geographically and administratively, as much Wyoming's as South Dakota's.

The Elk Mountain herd has been hunted since 2008, and the two states currently split six any-ram licenses between them each year — three valid on the Wyoming side of Hunt Area 20 and three on South Dakota's Hell Canyon and Elk Mountain units. Beyond Elk Mountain, South Dakota issues licenses for the rest of the Black Hills as well: for the 2024–2025 seasons, SDGFP authorized 16 total ram licenses across the Custer State Park, Hell Canyon, Elk Mountain, Rapid City, and Deadwood units combined — up from 11 the two years prior — plus one auction tag valid anywhere in the Black Hills. Add Wyoming's three Hunt Area 20 tags and hunters have a shot at roughly 19 Black Hills bighorn licenses across the two states in a given year, out of thousands of applicants competing for them.

The LAK Ranch: Wyoming's Ground in the Partnership

Much of the Elk Mountain herd's best habitat sits on private ground on the Wyoming side of the line, and no single property has mattered more to the herd's recovery than the LAK Ranch, a working cattle operation owned by the True family (True Ranches) southeast of Newcastle. For nearly two decades, True Ranches has partnered with Wyoming Game and Fish to manage the LAK for bighorn sheep alongside its ranching operation — work recognized in 2017 when the family received the Department's Casper Region Landowner of the Year award for improving habitat and maintaining hunting and viewing access to this isolated population.


(Retired) Commissioner Richard Ladwig.

One of the ranch's signature projects tackled cheatgrass, an invasive annual grass that crowds out the native forage bighorns depend on, especially on crucial winter range. In 2015, crews treated hundreds of acres of cheatgrass-infested winter range on the LAK with an Imazapic herbicide application, achieving roughly 99 percent control — a result funded jointly by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's Habitat Trust Fund, the Wyoming Big Game License Coalition, Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation, Weston County Weed and Pest, and True Ranches itself.

The LAK has also served as the staging ground for the herd's ongoing disease-monitoring effort. Each winter, crews bait sheep to trapping sites on the ranch and use drop nets — and, when conditions call for it, contracted helicopter capture — to bring bighorns in hand for testing. Every captured sheep is sampled for the respiratory pathogens behind pneumonia outbreaks before being released, giving biologists a running health check on the herd alongside the population data gathered for the sightability model. For years this work fell to Joe Sandrini, the longtime Newcastle Wildlife Biologist who managed wildlife across northeast Wyoming's Black Hills district from 2002 until his retirement in 2024 — the same district office that, back in 2009, issued Wyoming's first Elk Mountain bighorn license under Kevin Hurley's watch as state Bighorn Sheep Coordinator.



Elk Mountain Bighorn Sheep on Bait.

The Herd Today, and What's Ahead

South Dakota's official long-term goal has been to build the statewide bighorn population toward roughly 1,000 animals. As of the most recent minimum counts, the Black Hills herds stood at Custer State Park (37), the Rapid City herd (45), Elk Mountain (60), the Hell Canyon subunit (85), and Deadwood (26) — a combined Black Hills population in the low 250s. Hell Canyon's herd nearly doubled its minimum count in a single year, prompting wildlife managers on both sides of the border to increase ram license allocations, and lamb-to-ewe ratios across most Black Hills subherds have looked healthy in recent surveys.

None of that erases the underlying risk. Pneumonia remains, one wildfire, one stray domestic sheep, or one bad winter away from undoing years of careful work, and the Black Hills herds remain small enough that a single disease event can still set a subherd back to near zero. That's precisely why continued investment in disease surveillance, habitat work on ground like the LAK, and reliable population monitoring — the kind WY-WSF has already helped fund on Elk Mountain — will matter as much in the next hundred years as transplants did in the last.

Wyoming's own numbers put that in perspective — and they're more precise than they might seem. In Wyoming's herd-unit management documents, the state's share of the Elk Mountain population isn't filed under "Elk Mountain" at all; it's tracked as the Kouba Canyon herd unit, Hunt Area 20, managed jointly with South Dakota. Wyoming Game and Fish sets a formal population objective of 150 to 200 bighorn sheep (±20 percent) for that unit — a real numeric target, not just a harvest-based rule of thumb. Recent counts have run right at the bottom of that band: an averaged 154 sheep across 2014–2018, with both the 2019 estimate and the 2020 proposed figure holding at 150, per the herd-unit report prepared by then-Newcastle Wildlife Biologist Joe Sandrini. That's a herd sitting essentially on its floor, not comfortably above it — which is exactly why the sightability model WY-WSF helped fund, and the ongoing LAK Ranch capture work, matter so much: getting a more precise handle on whether Kouba Canyon/Elk Mountain sheep are holding at 150, slipping below it, or finally building toward 200 is the difference between steady-state management and a herd that needs help.

Wyoming's fingerprints are on this herd twice over: in the Whiskey Mountain bloodline that repopulated Custer State Park in 1965, and in the wild, self-directed colonization that gave the state its own piece of the Black Hills on Elk Mountain decades later. Both threads run through the same modest stretch of country southeast of Newcastle — and both are reasons Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation has kept showing up there, one grant at a time.



Elk Mountain Bighorn Sheep Net Trail Cam.

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Wild Game Recipes

Wild Game Crock Pot Tacos
Submitted By: Bralli Clifford



Ingredients
- Any Whole Muscle Roast Type Cut
- Butter
- Peperoncino Peppers and Juice
- Taco Seasoning

Directions
1. Combine all ingredients in a crock pot and cook on high 6-8 hours.
2. Ensure a good amount of liquid throughout cooking, adding more peperoncino juice and/ or butter if needed.
3. Once meat is tender, shred with a fork.
4. Use as taco meat in your favorite soft or hard taco shells and add your favorite toppings.

Image: WY WSF participating in the Wyoming Wildlife Federation Wild Game Cook-Off with this recipe.

Dakota-Fried Venison
Submitted By: Jo Butler
Viewed in a Marlin Firearms Co. Advertisement

Ingredients (Serves Four)
- Four Venison Steaks
- Salt and Pepper
- Bread Crumbs, Dried
- 1/2 Cup Fat, Bacon Grease, or Vegetable Oil
- Elderberry, Choke Cherry, or Currant Jelly

Directions
1. Rub steaks with salt and pepper, and roll in bread crumbs.
2. Melt the fat in a heavy skillet and fry the steaks until well-browned on both sides.
3. Place on a hot platter.
4. Make gravy with the drippings and 1/2 cup jelly.

Submit your favorite wild game recipe for inclusion in the next RamPage.

Make travel plans now for the WY-WSF Winter Banquet!
December 4-5, 2026
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Image: Coy and Owens Family
2026 Trip into Camp