

SECOND QUARTER REPORT OF THE SIERRA NEVADA BIGHORN SHEEP RECOVERY PROGRAM



Photo by Tim Glenner

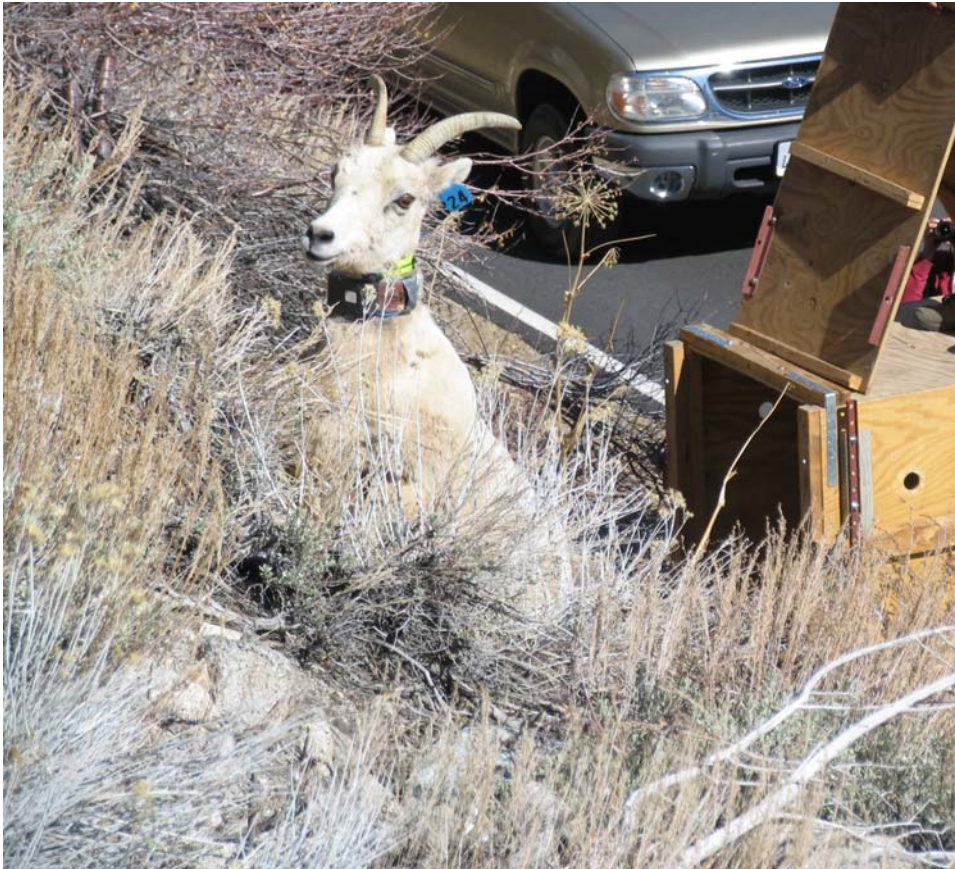
APRIL - JUNE 2009

**SIERRA NEVADA BIGHORN SHEEP RECOVERY PROGRAM
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME**

AUGMENTATION OF THE MT. WARREN HERD UNIT

Recovery of Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep is dependent upon a broad distribution of animals throughout the recovery area. In regions of the Sierra where bighorn were completely extirpated, reoccupation will only occur by removing surplus animals from healthy source populations and relocating them to vacant habitat or to augment small transplanted populations. The low numbers of bighorn sheep in the Mt. Warren herd unit, the most northerly unit that is required for recovery, prompted efforts to assist growth in a region where further natural colonization was unlikely. Translocation of bighorn sheep is identified in the Recovery Plan as one of the primary management actions that is necessary to ensure the recovery of Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep. During the first week of April 2009, we augmented the Mt. Warren herd in the Northern Recovery Unit with 6 adult female bighorn. Three were captured in the Wheeler Ridge herd and 3 in the Mt. Langley herd for removal. They were transported by truck and released in their new habitat the same day that they were captured.

To maximize the potential for translocated bighorn to succeed in their new habitat and avoid negative effects on the source population, we primarily moved animals with known histories. During handling, all 6 were determined to be pregnant using ultrasonography. With the exception of 1 yearling female from Mt. Langley, all other females moved had worn GPS collars for at least 1 year. Consequently, we knew that the females that were translocated had a history of successful reproduction, had average or



better genetic diversity, were less than 8 years of age, and were not colonizers of unique areas within their source population. In addition, we used a habitat model developed using a geographic information system to identify optimal habitat for future translocations.

As of the end of June, the translocated ewes remained in the vicinity of where they were released and were using rugged terrain in proximity to the resident ewes. All 6 females moved to the Mt. Warren herd unit produced a lamb. Through continued translocation efforts, we will further progress towards meeting recovery goals.

Release of ewe in the Mt. Warren Herd Unit.

REACHING OUT TO THE COMMUNITY

More than 75 locals and tourists attended a Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep Recovery Program fieldtrip to view bighorn sheep along Wheeler Ridge. Groups were guided by Recovery Program personnel to accessible viewpoints where families could observe bighorn on the winter range. The bighorn cooperated and were viewed by all participants. Group leaders discussed and clarified particulars of bighorn ecology, Sierra bighorn conservation history, and Recovery Program actions in the recovery effort. Families were able to borrow binoculars, use spotting scopes, and ask questions. For several long time area residents, this was their first glimpse of the endangered species.

The fieldtrip was spurred by a local festival called Celebrating Community Connections. The Recovery Program put together a booth at the festival where visitors could learn more about the recovery effort. Program personnel allowed children to hold bighorn skulls and pointed out physical differences between Sierra Nevada bighorn and desert bighorn such as those found in the nearby White Mountains. Maps were available to geographically illustrate the Sierra bighorn historical decline and recovery progress. A large poster and brochure detailed recovery actions such as disease management, translocations, predator management, and habitat restoration.

This event gave the Recovery Program the opportunity to further the outreach and education mandate of the Sierra bighorn Recovery Plan. Key messages were defined and clarified in educational materials and talking points in accordance with the overarching outreach goal of increasing public awareness and support for recovery efforts.



Display booth at Bishop City Park

PERSONNEL AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Personnel include Tom Stephenson, Ph.D., Becky Pierce, Ph.D., John Wehausen, Ph.D., Mary Conner, Ph.D., Jeff Davis, Jeff Ostergard, Dave German, Dennis Jensen, Vicki Davis, Heather Johnson, Maya Leonard-Cahn, Lacey Greene, Mark Kiner, Kathleen Knox, Jonathan Fusaro, Kelsey Ellis, Mike Dodd, Kevin Monteith, Joy Erlenbach and Katie Nelson, all of whom contributed to the preparation of this report or the collection of the data contained within it. Funding for the recovery effort is provided by the California Department of Fish and Game, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (through Section 6 grants), the Bureau of Land Management (funded GPS collars) and the Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep Foundation (a registered nonprofit).

Recommended citation:

California Department of Fish and Game. 2009. 2nd Quarter Report of the Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep Recovery Program; April - June. Bishop, CA.