

*** *Montana* ***
WILD SHEEP
FOUNDATION
KEEPING SHEEP ON THE MOUNTAIN

Wild Sheep

Summer 2018 | Volume 26, Issue 2



*The Flathead
Lake Monster*



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Photo Gallery

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While there, visit the **Photo Gallery** page. If you would like to have a picture posted, email (photos@montanawsf.org) your name, the photo (jpeg format preferred) along with a brief one to two sentence description of the hunt.



The Montana Wild Sheep Foundation will give a reward of up to \$1000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of cases involving the illegal taking of bighorn sheep in the State of Montana. If you have information of any illegal act, contact 1-800-TIP-MONT (1-800-847-6668).

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President's Message

It has definitely been a long winter with spring slow to arrive. We've gone from fires in 2017 to inundation of snow in winter, to rain and massive flooding in spring. Mother Nature likes to keep us guessing and in total awe of her raw power! I am constantly amazed at the resilience of our Montana wildlife and their ability to proliferate no matter the weather.

As tough as our wild sheep are they still face some daunting challenges with habitat and disease issues and that is why Montana Wildsheep Foundation (MTWSF) continues to champion the causes of wild sheep. Without our efforts, Montana would not have a huntable population of Giant Montana Rams.

Our March fundraiser in Bozeman was an enormous success. We had a packed house for our Friday expo show, film festival and spirits tasting! A good time was had by all. There were many stories told and many friendships fostered. On Saturday, we had a full slate of excellent speakers leading up to the banquet and auction. The fundraiser, banquet and auction were our largest grossing and largest netting fundraiser to date! Your MTWSF board plans to use that money to preserve more quality habitat and hunting access to wild sheep. The money will also be used to fund effective projects and disease research for wild sheep. This is the third year that our banquet was "SOLD OUT" so we are going to **The Big Horn Resort in Billings** on **March 8-9, 2019**. The Big Horn Resort has banquet seating to accommodate our growing organization.

Thank you to all of you who donated money, time and products to make our 2018 MTWSF fundraiser a resounding success. I personally owe a big thank you to our MTWSF Board and Banquet Committee. Jeff Mortensen, Tom Grimes and Cory Pearsol were our eyes, ears, and enforcement on the ground in Bozeman that absolutely made the event successful. DJ Berg, Grant Winn, Ray Vinkey, Max Bauer, Levi Bowler and Justin Spring were on site to put together all of the details for the fundraiser banquet and auction. Thank you as well to all the wives and volunteers who give selflessly each year to MTWSF. It cannot be understated how much Brian Solan, our "Volunteer Executive Director" means to MTWSF. He has created an extremely organized and enormously fun template for our events that makes them much easier to implement.

I am humbled to be in the company of our all volunteer board and MTWSF membership of honorable men and women. I strongly believe the efforts of MTWSF have helped create a Montana Wild Sheep population that gave us two new world record rams and several other top 10's for 2017/18.

Please help us keep that trend moving forward. It was a great pleasure to serve you this past year and I look forward to sharing more MTWSF successes in 2018-2019.

Shane Clouse

Montana Wild Sheep Foundation President
shane@shaneclouse.com ♦ (406) 370-4487

Big Horns on the Missouri River

Story by Tom Madden



The summer of 2017 I finally drew the tag of a lifetime. It would be my first Missouri River Bighorn Sheep hunt in the coveted 482 hunting district on the south side of the river, north of Winifred Montana. I have been applying for a sheep tag for 42 years, 30 of which were for HD 482 with 16 bonus points.

On September 21st we loaded our camping gear into my jet boat at the Stafford Ferry. We then embarked on a 20 mile run down river to where our base camp would be located at Sturgeon Island. As we approached the camping area we saw 14 rams along the river a mile upstream from where we planned to make our camp. We stopped to look them over and found two big rams worth taking a good look at. We set up camp and it started raining. It rained that evening, throughout the night and most of the next day. We decided to stay in camp and keep an eye on them until the rain quit and the gumbo dried out enough to start hunting. On Saturday morning the rain finally let up and the sun came out. It was time to get a closer look to see if either ram was big enough to go after. We took the jet boat up stream

about a mile to where the rams were located. We then began our ascent to the 14 rams that were on a bluff 400 feet above us.

We left the boat at 1pm and worked our way up a large mud slide for about a mile. Once we crested the top of the ridge we could see the rams were one ridge east of our location. We stopped to catch our breath and look them over. We found the two big rams we were looking for and we guessed them to be above 185" with the biggest at 188" to 192". I decided that the biggest of the two rams was the ram I wanted to try and harvest. We traversed our way over to the ridge they were on and then made our way down the ridge until we spotted them lying down about 25 yards away. By the time I was



Big Horns on the Missouri River continued from page 5

able to find a good rest they had moved down into a ravine. We then moved down to where we could see one small ram feeding and found a vantage point we could look over the edge and watch the rams grazing undisturbed. I looked over the crest of the ridge every couple of minutes to see if we could get a shot, this went on for about 10 minutes. When I looked again I noticed the big ram was just off to the right of the smaller ram. It was the ram I was after and he was broadside at 80 yards. I was shooting my Ruger 7mm Mag with 160 grain Accubond. I was confident in the shot, therefore the shot was an easy decision. I centered my sights and pulled the trigger. The big ram lunged forward but it was hard to tell if I had hit him, so I chambered another round as all 14 rams raced for the skyline with the big ram at the back of the herd. I shot again at about 150 yards and the ram slowed down and stumbled until he lost his balance and rolled $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way down the ridge into a crevice. I was so excited, I knew he was down and that he was a big ram.

The ram ended up in a very steep, washed out ravine, which made it nearly impossible to get good pictures. It was 3pm by the time we finished taking pictures and that is when the work began for us two 60 year old guys. The terrain was so steep our only option was to field dress the ram and cut it in half, to get it to a flat place where we could cape out and de-bone the meat. At 5pm we had our packs heavy with meat and the horns and cape loaded for the quarter mile hike down to the boat. We got back to camp right at sundown exhausted and overjoyed.

It was an amazing experience and opportunity to hunt the ram of a lifetime in the Missouri River Breaks of Central Montana. The ram was 9 and 1/2 years old and officially scored 190 1/8" in Boone & Crockett. 🍖



The Past 5 Years of Growth

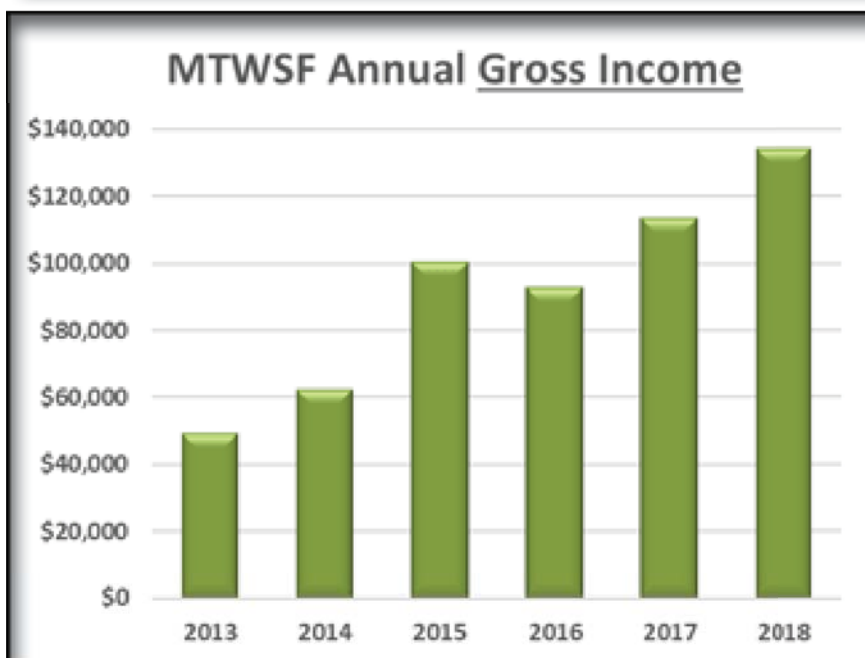
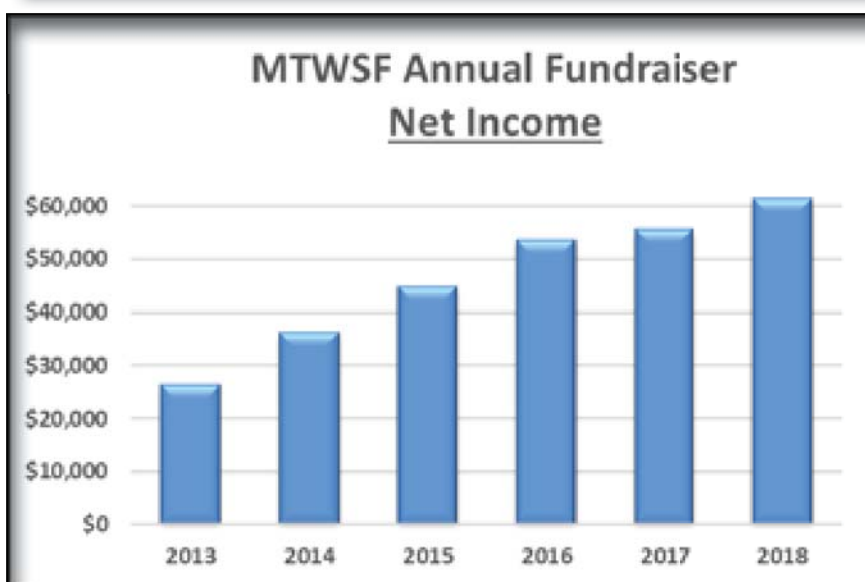
Report by Brian Solan

While there are many MTWSF members that have been involved since the beginnings of the Chapter in 1992, there have also been quite a few new faces showing up at banquets and MTWSF events in the past few years. This growth has been exciting on many levels. It's very exciting to see new faces and enthusiasm about Wild Sheep conservation. With this membership growth we have also seen annual revenue growth - primarily due to the growing membership and their dedicated financial support for Wild Sheep in Montana. While the growth of revenue and membership are certainly linked together, below is an attempt to outline some of the highlights of the growth of our chapter from both the membership and financial viewpoints.

Membership Growth: In the past (5) years, the Montana Wild Sheep Foundation has seen a total membership **increase of 54%**. The most significant area of growth in membership has been in our Life Member category. Since 2013 we have nearly doubled our Life Membership and we are currently at 280 Life Members of MTWSF. The large increase in this area is no-doubt related to the added member value of giving away a dall sheep hunt at the past two banquets. While this has an impact on the growth, it also provides a value to being a Life Member and it has indirectly contributed to added revenues and attendance at the annual banquet. This program initiated by the MTWSF Board of Directors has been a huge success.

Financial Growth of the Montana Wild Sheep Foundation: In 2013 our Annual Banquet Gross revenue was just under \$50,000 and our net from that fundraiser was roughly \$26,000. While these funds were still contributing to "putting more sheep on the mountain", our Annual Gross Banquet Income has seen a steady increase every year since, and has allowed us to increase program and grant funding across Montana. Using the 2013 Annual Gross Banquet Income as a baseline and comparing it to the most recent 2018 Banquet Income, we have seen an **increase of 273%** in those five years (2013-2018). Our 2018 Fundraiser grossed \$134,000 and the net was over \$60,000. This is an incredible increase in funds that are going to "put more sheep on the mountain". There are many contributors to this increase in revenue, but the bulk has come from our annual banquet and direct membership support. Our banquets have been sold out for the past four years and the energy at these events has been electric.

The Past 5 Years of Growth continued from page 7



Other Contributors to our Annual Revenue Increase: Implementation of the *MTWSF Montana license plate program* (started in 2012). This program provides a steady source of income for the chapter. If you don't have MTWSF plates on your vehicle, you are missing an opportunity to have a great looking license plate, you are also missing out on an opportunity to support MTWSF through this program.

An *Amazon Smile Campaign* that provides a 1% donation to MTWSF for every purchase on Amazon.com, if you use the Amazon Smile link (specifically <https://smile.amazon.com>) and designate **Foundation for North American Wild Sheep Montana Chapter** (MTWSF's Legal 501c3 Name). Again, you must use the correct Amazon Smile link (listed above) and designate Foundation for North American Wild Sheep Montana Chapter. This doesn't cost anything to you as the donation is made directly from Amazon.

State of Montana Employee Charitable Giving Campaign donation program & grant revenue. MTWSF Vice President DJ Berg spearheaded this effort and it allows State of Montana employees to charitably donate through direct withdrawals from their paychecks. While this is the first year that Montana Wild Sheep has been available, we did receive some funds through this program. If you are a State of Montana employee, be sure to use this program. You can find more information here: <https://hr.mt.gov/charitablegiving>

In summary, it's been a great few years of growth and we are hoping to continue that onward. Without the dedicated membership support, we would not be able to "put more sheep on the mountain". Thank you to all the Members of Montana Wild Sheep Foundation. 🍷

Call for Board of Director Nominations

This is the official call for nominations to the Montana Wild Sheep Foundation Board of Directors for 2019. Typically our elections happen in late summer / early fall for the following year's director positions. This year there are three Directors whose terms are up – Shane Clouse, Jeff Mortensen and Tom Grimes. If any member has the desire to serve on the board, please contact me. Thank you!

Brian Solan, bsolan.bs@gmail.com



Requesting photos and stories for John "Timmer" Reeves new book, "Giant Rams of Montana"

Timmer has been working on a compilation of Montana's giant wild sheep, the people that hunt and conserve them, and the stories they have to tell. John's report on Montana Wild Sheep was recently published in the last issue of Wild Sheep, the magazine of our national Wild Sheep Foundation. Montana has truly been blessed with the biggest Rocky Mountain wild sheep in world. Montana Wild Sheep Foundation members are the passionate hunters and conservationists leading the charge to put and keep Montana's Giant Wild Sheep on the Mountain!

Timmer is compiling the stories for his new book "Giant Rams of Montana" and hopes to have the book published for 2019. John "Timmer" Reeves would like to share your hunt of a lifetime story. Please consider sending your photos and story to John "Timmer" Reeves, MTWSF life member #36.

Please email submissions to johntimmerr@hotmail.com or visit him online at www.facebook.com/john.reeves.9277.



The Flathead



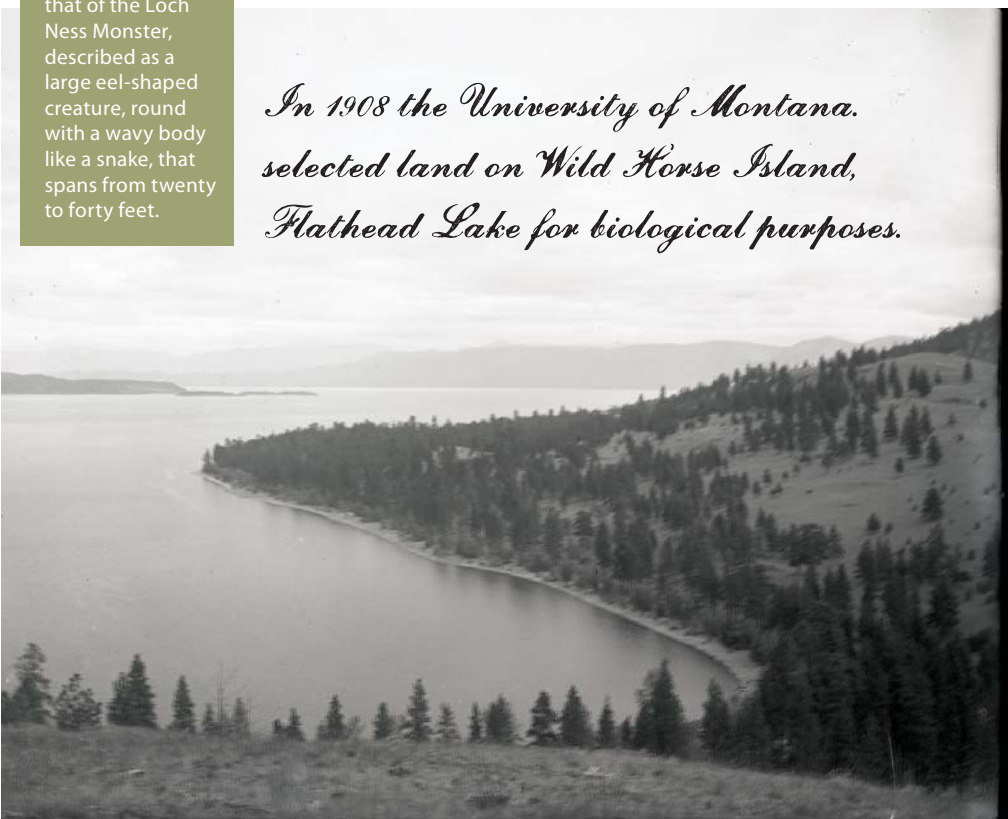
Flathead Lake lies nestled between the Mission and Salish mountains in western Montana. Carved by glacial activity, this body of water is the largest natural lake in the Western U.S. with more than 190 square miles in surface area and stretching nearly 30 miles long and 16 miles wide. Its beauty is admired by all who lay eyes on it. Folks travel from all over the world to experience everything the lake has to offer—from the deep, crystal clear waters teeming with fish to the history of the residents of the past painted on the cliff walls hugging its shore.

In Montana folklore, the Flathead Lake Monster is a creature located in Flathead Lake. Its appearance is very similar to that of the Loch Ness Monster, described as a large eel-shaped creature, round with a wavy body like a snake, that spans from twenty to forty feet.

In 1908 the University of Montana selected land on Wild Horse Island, Flathead Lake for biological purposes.

Rising from the waters, whose depth can reach nearly 400 feet, are numerous islands, some of which are privately held. Others are publicly managed, including the crown jewel of them all, Wild Horse Island State Park.

The history of the island, which has produced the largest Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep in recorded history, has a past that parallels much of the history of the American West and its wildlife—at least in relative modern times starting in the mid-1800s. The majority of Flathead Lake, including Wild Horse Island, lies within the boundaries of the Flathead Indian Reservation that was created under the Hellgate



1855: Hell Gate Treaty creates Flathead Reservation.

1887: Allotment Act (Dawes Act) begins the dismemberment of the reservation.

Reprint Courtesy of *Fair Chase Magazine*

Story by Justin Spring
Director of Big Game Records

Lake Monster

Treaty of 1855. The origins of the naming of the island are disputed; however, the first known reference appears in an 1854 journal. One of the stories is that a tribal member had some horses stolen by the Blackfeet; he then stole a band of them back and placed them on Wild Horse Island for his children in an attempt to prevent them from being stolen back.

The tale of the creation and ultimate attempts to dismantle the reservation were common in those days. Numerous regional tribes and bands of those tribes were being forced onto a section of land through a treaty whose ramifications and concept they didn't fully comprehend.

If being forced from traditional lands wasn't bad enough, the tribes endured another change when Congress passed the 1887 Dawes Act (also known as the Allotment Act), where each tribal member was allotted a set amount of land per person or family. This

land assignment was an attempt to force the tribes into more of a farming lifestyle than their historical hunting and gathering culture and was greatly opposed by the tribal leaders. Any unoccupied land or land not included in the allotments or villas was opened to homesteading. There were two parcels on Wild Horse Island that tribal members had claimed, and the rest became available to non-native settlers in 1910.

Numerous folks tried farming the area, but none successfully. The only remnants of those days are a few weathered house and barn frames and rusting farm equipment that is slowly being reclaimed by the harshness of the land that is the island. While the farming failed to take root, it began the establishment of the noxious weeds and assault on the native Palouse Prairie. The prairie once stretched from northwestern Montana westward through the Idaho Panhandle into Washington and eastern Oregon.

Palouse grasslands or prairie are a semi-arid habitat type found within the rain shadow of the Cascade mountain range. Characterized by native wheatgrass and fescue, most of these rolling plains have been converted to agriculture or allowed to be infiltrated by cheatgrass and other exotic species. Reduced to only a couple isolated areas from its once expansive range, the native Palouse Prairie exists in three known locations in Montana with Wild Horse Island being one of them.

The first major land acquisition to take place on the island happened in 1915 when Colonel Almond A. White purchased several parcels. While not much is known of his exact vision, it is believed that he had hoped to build scouting camps, a large observatory, and a luxury hotel. This also started the idea of bringing different species to the island in hopes of augmenting the prevalent mule deer and blue grouse populations already there.

The first sheep introductions took place in 1917, though all six transplants perished in rather short order. During this time, White had begun selling villas on the island in hopes that the influx of tourists visiting the newly founded Glacier National Park would purchase them. While some of the villas were sold, White died bankrupt in 1923 and the remaining unsold parcels were confiscated for unpaid taxes.

One of the parcels sold was to Robert Edgington and his wife Clara Isabelle who would later build the only commercial establishment in the island's history, the Hiawatha Lodge, which was completed in 1931. Historic photos show well-heeled folks enjoying cocktails at the establishment overlooking the lake. While the lodge was in operation, horses and powerboats were brought to the island for the guests' enjoyment.

It was in an effort to save these boats during a severe squall in 1934 that

1908: State receives a portion of the Island for biologic study area.

1910: Homestead Act opened Reservation to Non-Native Americans.

1917: First attempt at sheep introduction takes place, all six sheep perish.



The Flathead Lake Monster continued from page 11

Edgington was thrown into the turbulent waters and was unable to recover. His wife had no desire to continue to run the business, and the lodge began to fall to disrepair.

In 1939, the first successful sheep relocation took place with a private individual bringing two lambs to the island. These came from the Mission Mountains south of the lake.

A year later, Lewis Pennel bought the Edgington property and the remainder of the island's parcels from individual owners. Shortly thereafter, Dr. J.C. Burnett purchased the island and used it to produce a line of Arabian horses. It was during his ownership that the second transplant of sheep to the island took place in 1947. The population was estimated at least 12 sheep at the time, with six additional sheep (three rams and three ewes) added from the Sun River herd.

Eight years later, in 1954, the island's sheep population was estimated at 90 animals. Additionally, an estimated 300–400 mule deer lived on the island plus some 100 of Burnett's Arabian line. It was this year that Montana Fish and Game Commission started

exporting sheep from the island with the first transplant being 12 sheep taken to Kootenai Falls in Lincoln County, Montana.

Research of the island's sheep populations began in the 1950s under the guidance of past Boone and Crockett Club Records Chairman Dr. Philip L. Wright from the University of Montana. At the outset of the research, it was noted the native grasses were being heavily grazed. Much of this early research took place looking into the high prevalence of lungworm of the sheep. The scientific literature at the time revealed most populations around the West were declining, but the island's sheep population was rapidly increasing. Reading these thesis papers reveals these budding sheep biologists were really at the forefront of wildlife capture techniques. It was noted in a research paper done in 1954 that the researchers started using sheep dogs to round up the lambs for transport. This worked well until the ewes caught on to what was happening and would intervene. Research notes state that, "the dogs would not perform as desired." The researcher surmised a better trained dog may have a

higher success of capture using this method. Eventually they landed on a method where they would approach the sheep in the dark with two researchers; one researcher would shine a light in the lamb's eyes, while the second would spring forward capturing the lamb by hand.

The following winter was a severe one and even though many of the horses were pulled off the island, the majority perished. Conflicting reports exist on the extent of the die-off, but one report states that after Burnett's death in 1959, the entire island was listed for sale which included three horses and one mule.

In this period from 1954–1959, 54 sheep were transplanted off the island to numerous locations around the state in an effort to rebuild historic Montana populations. These transplants still continue today, amounting to hundreds of sheep added to the current Montana bighorn populations.

After Burnett's death, the future of the island was in limbo. There were three major players all hoping to stake their claim on the island. The Nature Conservancy, Rockefeller Foundation, and the state of Montana were all vying for the

purchase of the island. These three entities all lost out on their chance to manage the island after a vote from the Lake County Commissioners stating they wanted to sell the island with the intention of increasing the tax base.

In 1962, Bourke MacDonald purchased the island and hired a landscape architect who helped him establish 500 parcels. They were all shaped round to prevent any parcels bordering on a neighbor's parcel and also in an attempt to prevent future development. He also set the parcels 10 feet above the high-water mark to prevent shoreline development. After his purchase he worked with Montana Fish and Game Commission encouraging folks to visit the island to photograph the wildlife. Only 49 had been sold when MacDonald passed away in 1973.

His family wanted the island protected, so this time the state of Montana and The Nature Conservancy stepped up to formulate a plan to acquire the island. A negotiated purchase price of 50 percent of the assessed value was agreed upon, with the MacDonald family donating the remaining 50 percent or \$1.75 million to the state. This left \$1.75 million the

1940s: Lewis Pennel of Helena buys the Edgington Property and acquires the remainder of the island from other individual owners. He petitions Montana Game Commission to stock deer, mountain sheep, elk, antelope, and game birds on the island.

1923: Colonel Almond A. White dies bankrupt and all remaining unsold property confiscated for delinquent taxes.

1939: Two sheep are brought to Wild Horse Island. One male and one female yearling are introduced. Most likely these two came from the Mission Range south of the lake by a private individual.

1947: Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MTFWP) conducts second transplant to Wild Horse Island. There is an estimated 12 sheep on the island at this time from the original transplant. Six additional sheep are brought in from the Sun River Canyon (three ewes and three rams) by MTFWP.

1954: Approximately 100 horses are on Wild Horse Island in addition to 90 sheep and 300-400 mule deer. Twelve sheep are moved to Lincoln County, Montana from the island.

1955: Twenty-four sheep are transferred from the island to three different locations throughout Montana.



state had to come up with to purchase the island. Each year, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) allocates money to either state or federal land acquisitions in an effort to safeguard our natural resources. This fund was created by a bipartisan bill passed by Congress in 1964, which allocated oil and gas earnings from offshore leases so no taxpayer money was spent. Montana's allocation had to cover both local and state government requests and the purchase price. This would have prevented any other project under the LWCF from getting funded if the request to purchase the island happened in a single year. While this seemed daunting, the Department of Interior had produced a document on the islands of the U.S. in the early 1970s which directly named Wild Horse Island as an island to be procured and preserved.

The governor authorized the purchase of up to \$2 million for the island in 1977. Because the state was unable to purchase the island outright, it was divided

into seven equal parcels which the state agreed to purchase in a predetermined order with matching funds from the LWCF. The MacDonald family agreed to donate any increase in the appraised value to the state as well.

Since this time, the island has been managed as a primitive recreation area with no camping allowed on the island. Local charters bring visitors to the island to explore on their own as regulations prevent any outfitter or guide from accompanying guests onto the island.

Management is currently jointly managed by Montana FWP, Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Confederate Salish Kootenai Tribe (CSKT). Natural resource management actions include prescribed burning and noxious weed spraying as well as maintaining the pine stands to prevent encroachment of other trees such as Douglas fir. In addition to the sheep and mule deer, a population of 5 wild horses are maintained on the island

to preserve the namesake. When the scores of these giant rams of Wild Horse Island were first brought to the public's attention, the Club received numerous comments of how they should not be accepted as they weren't able to be hunted. While the island does provide a quality habitat where the sheep are not exposed to hunter harvest pressure, the island as a

whole is a conservation success story which has resulted in opportunities for thousands of folks to pursue rams in their native habitat.

As stated earlier, the history of Wild Horse Island is, in fact, the history of much of our wildlife today: westward expansion, development, private individuals stepping up, research, federal programs contributing to the mission through oil



Key measurements from the new World's Record ram's horns (above) that contribute to its final score are horn lengths of 48-3/8 and 49-6/8, circumferences at the bases of 16-3/8 and 16-4/8, and fourth quarter circumferences of 11-2/8 and 11-4/8 inches.

The first sheep introductions took place in 1917, though all six transplants perished in rather short order.

1957: Six sheep are moved to Jefferson County, Montana from the Island.

1958: Two transplants totaling 12 sheep are moved to two locations in Montana.

1964: There are 130 sheep and 200 mule deer on the island at this time.

1969: Twenty-three sheep are moved to Sanders County, Montana.

1971: Sheep herd is estimated at 240 individuals, 75 mule deer, one horse and one mule.

1972: Sheep herd experiences severe winter and is reduced to 205 by that spring.

1975: Two sheep are taken from the Island to Sanders County, Montana.

1978: Wild Horse Island becomes a Montana State Park managed as a "primitive area". One hundred sheep are removed from the island in an attempt to improve habitat conditions and a population goal of roughly 100 sheep is established for the island.

1979: Eighteen sheep are shipped from the Island to Washington State University (WSU) for research, 61 are sent to Sanders County, Montana, in three different locations, and 25 are relocated to Rock Creek in Granite County, Montana. Fifteen years later Jim Weatherly takes the Montana state record from this herd, which stands for nearly 25 years.

1981: Five sheep are taken off the Island to Sanders County, Montana.

1987: Two sheep from Lincoln County, Montana are transplanted to the Island.

1993: Eight sheep are shipped from the island to WSU for research, nine to Lower Hells Canyon in Oregon, 12 to Fox Creek in Oregon, 15 sheep to Teton County, Montana, 26 sheep to Gallatin County, Montana, three sheep to Lake County, Montana, and 32 sheep to Lewis and Clark County, Montana.

1994: Twelve sheep are shipped to Fox Creek in Oregon and 14 to Downey Gulch in Oregon.



NEW WORLD'S RECORD BIGHORN SHEEP

A special Boone and Crockett Club judges panel declared a ram from Montana as the new World's Record bighorn sheep. The four-member panel of senior Boone and Crockett Official Measures re-scored the ram's horns and determined the final score to be 216-3/8 points B&C, surpassing the current World's Record - a ram that scores 209-4/8.

Special judges panels are convened to declare new World's Records by confirming an official entry score. This ram's entry score accepted on February 8 was 216-3/8.

"This ram is significant for many reasons," said Justin Spring, the Club's director of Big Game Records. "One of many things worth noting is that since the Club's current scoring system was adopted in 1950, this is only the fifth World's Record bighorn, and three of these have been declared since just 2001. If anything, we're now seeing what nature and sound wildlife management are capable of producing in the wild."

The panel scoring took place at the world headquarters of the Wild Sheep Foundation, located in Bozeman, Montana. On hand were B&C officials, Montana State Governor Steve Bullock, and Wild Sheep Foundation President and CEO Gray Thornton.

"Here in Montana, we have a rich history of bringing diverse groups together to preserve and protect wildlife habitat and public lands," said Governor Steve Bullock. "This is truly a Montana conservation success story."

"Wild Sheep Foundation (WSF) is honored to host the panel certification of this World's Record bighorn and this momentous announcement from our Governor that Montana, the "Land of the Giants" is home to the largest bighorn sheep known," stated Gray N. Thornton, WSF's President & CEO. "Wild Horse Island is not only an incredible watchable wildlife asset but is an exceptional source with obviously incredible genetics to repatriate bighorn sheep throughout Montana" Thornton added.

The nine-year-old ram lived his entire life on Wild Horse Island. The ram was found by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks officials who determined it had died of natural causes. Because a hunter did not take the ram, the department entered the ram into B&C records on behalf of the citizens of Montana.

Spring said, "This ram doesn't have the longest horns on record, or the largest bases, but the mass of his horns carried over the entire length of nearly 50-inch horns is what makes this ram the largest we've seen by a significant margin. The last three World's Record rams have been 208-1/8, 208-3/8, 209-4/8 and now 216-3/8. That's a jump we just never expected to see."



The Flathead Lake Monster

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and gas revenues, and ultimately, joint management shared by numerous agencies. Regarding the trophies being ineligible due to the lack of hunting pressure, the records were never intended to serve as a competition amongst hunters or to list only hunter-taken game. The idea that somehow these sheep are any less valuable or deserving than a hunter-taken ram is simply not true.

Research shows that Wild Horse has been home to coyotes, mountain lions—and in a couple cases, grizzly bears. Early research indicated that during bad winters, the lake would freeze, and potential emigration of mule deer took place—which means that under natural conditions, the sheep can come and go as they please as long as winter severity is maintained. The one thing the island does provide is a model research station showcasing how resource management can affect the sheep. With the island being just over 2,000 acres, this provides opportunity to control factors of research that can be extrapolated to numerous populations across

the sheep's historic range.

The major issue the island faces today lies in the lack of funding necessary to maintain this gem. Managed as part of a complex of state parks around Flathead Lake, the funds to do anything are very limited. The challenges it faces today are common throughout the West—noxious weeds, long-term fire suppression, development, etc. This park is managed with state parks funds, and the sheep raised are used to supplement numerous sheep populations both in and out of the state. Montana has a small fee added to vehicle registrations to help offset parks costs but comes far short of supplying what is necessary to cover this. The new World's Record ram lived on Wild Horse Island. The buzz this sheep has generated is a prime opportunity to investigate how to fund conservation by thinking outside the box of hunter-generated revenue, which is constantly proving to fall short.

Boone and Crockett Club has always allowed the entry of found or picked-up trophies into our records as they are part of the story of

2008: Thirty-eight sheep are relocated to Lincoln County, Montana.

2010: Twenty-four sheep are relocated to Sanders County, Montana and 16 to Lincoln County, Montana.

2012: Forty-nine sheep are moved from the island to Beaverhead County, Montana.

2014: Twenty-seven sheep are moved to Sanders County, Montana, and 33 sheep to Lincoln County, Montana.

BEYOND THE SCORE

BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB POLICY ON FOUND/PICKED-UP TROPHIES

The Boone and Crockett Club sets the rules for entering a trophy into its records books, which are based primarily on principles of wildlife conservation and fair chase. The fact that the Club accepts entries that have not been harvested by a hunter, but instead are “found” by people (whether on a hunt or not) may be surprising to some, but there are sound reasons for doing so.

Found trophies include animals that die of natural causes, such as advanced age, environmental factors, and predation. Found trophies also include animals that die of unnatural causes, such as vehicle collisions. Found entries, along with the locations where found, are listed as “picked up” in the Club’s records books to distinguish them from hunter-taken entries, which are subject to different eligibility requirements, including the principles of fair chase.

The big game records of the Boone and Crockett Club are a set of wildlife and hunting data that the Club began to collect over a century ago to initially track the recovery of big game populations from decades of unregulated overharvesting. The focus today is on monitoring the quality and distribution of specimens that natural conditions and sound wildlife management are capable of producing.

Having sportsmen participate in this data collection system by voluntarily submitting their trophies is vital. Having people submit trophies they find is equally important. Mature males that have lived long enough in the wild under favorable conditions to grow large antlers, horns, or skulls to qualify for the Club’s records book are indicators of healthy ecosystems, balanced age structures within a given population, acceptable mortality (natural and human-caused) and sustainable recruitment. The Boone and Crockett Club maintains that all trophies, both harvested by hunters and those that are found, add to the data set that helps game managers adopt successful policies to benefit big game populations of North America.

The Club’s records program was never intended to be a numeric ranking of a hunter’s skills.

The special judges panel included (left to right) Official Measurers Roger Atwood, L. Victor Clark, Fred King, and Pat McKenzie.



conservation. The sheep living on this island are a testament to what modern conservation and wildlife management can accomplish. Stand with us in recognizing what sheep and this island have done in recent times and make your voice heard in finding ways to fund conservation to ensure all species of North American big game continue to thrive going forward. 🍷



John Lewton

The island provides a model research station showcasing how resource management can affect the sheep.



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Photo Gallery



Aubrie Zoner and her dad with her first black bear she shot in spring of 2017. Aubrie is a very accomplished hunter at the age of 15; she has taken 4 deer, 4 turkeys, a 6 point bull elk, and a ewe bighorn sheep. She shot her ewe in September 2015 and made a great one-shot kill at 100 yards with her .25-06.



Rick Robertson and his ram taken from HD 482.

I saw 20+ rams every day. It was difficult to pick out the one I wanted since there were so many nice rams. With a little help and encouragement from my hunting partners I made a move on a nice ram but I passed on that ram and ended up taking another ram that I didn't even realize was there. The ram had 17 inch bases; right horn was 39 inches, left horn 38 6/8. He was dark horned and had a nice dark cape. I want to give thanks to Jim Ayers for his knowledge of the area and the sheep as well as Andy Knapstad and Wade Robertson for their backpacking abilities. Out of all my experiences hunting sheep, having the opportunity to hunt in this area of Montana I realized I was truly blessed to have drawn this tag.



Joel Moellenkamp and his 2017 ram from HD 680.



Kurt Burnham and his 2017 ram from HD 423. Ram was 10 yrs old and scored in the low 170s.



Justin Sheedy and his new state record ram with a score of 208 3/8.



Marty Smorowski and his 2015 ram from HD 270.



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