

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

WildSheep

Fall 2020 | Volume 28, Issue 3

Cover: Feature Story

Hunting is Hard
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All contributed material will be published at the discretion of the Editorial Board of the Montana Wild Sheep Foundation (MTWSF). The Editorial Board consists of the editor of the newsletter, the executive director of the chapter, and the president of the chapter.

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Photo on page 15 by Steve Kline.

CONNECT with Montana WSF


Visit us online at www.montanawsf.org!

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



2020 has certainly been one for the record books. We've experienced major life changes due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This late summer has brought us significant smoke from West Coast fires. Additionally, there is significant strife throughout our country and the news is troubling on a daily basis.

Even with all these societal and environmental challenges our mission to put and keep sheep on the mountain continues to move forward at an increased pace. Our Montana FWP commission approved new wild sheep transplants into the Little Belt Mountains, The Tendoy's, and

the Greenhorn mountains. This is the first transplant approval in my tenure on the MTWSF board which is very encouraging. I strongly believe that the way to improve opportunity for more hunters is to increase the wildlife resource. Your board is working to move the bar towards having more sheep, in more places throughout Montana.

I am also very excited to report that when the drawing results were posted I was successful in drawing one of the coveted sheep tags for Area 270, the East Fork of the Bitterroot. Shortly after finding out I was successful in drawing a tag, I began scouting and gaining knowledge of the wild sheep activity in the area. There are many MTWSF members and friends that helped me in my quest to locate a huntable population of quality rams. After more than five scouting trips and much research, opening day finally arrived. On September 12th, I loaded up the horses and mules with life member and past president Tom Powers, and set out for a trip into the back country to find a ram. On Sunday, September 13th, we had our camp set up and began intense scouting to locate a group of rams for the September 15th opening day of rifle season.

After scouting hard on the 13th, 14th and 15th we still hadn't located any mature rams and were preparing to break camp on the afternoon of September 16th and return home. On September 16th we arose prior to 5 am to get the horses ready and get to our glassing point at first light. After a couple of miles of riding and hiking in the dark I was on a 8500-foot ridge overlooking an open basin where the rams are known to pass through. I was able to find a group of rams feeding through the meadow and we watched them until they bedded down.

The rams were bedded nearly a mile away in extremely rough terrain. I set out on a course to sneak up on the rams and was able to get into position after nearly an hour of stealthy and methodical hiking. After the long sneak I was able to target and bag the ram I wanted. There was great joy in the accomplishment and some sadness as well for taking the life of this magnificent creature. I am still overcome with profound thankfulness for the opportunity. I am thankful to the efforts of Montana Wild Sheep Foundation (MTWSF) for it is the conservation efforts of our group that lead to my opportunity to draw the tag. Thank you as well to MTWSF Treasurer Max Bauer Jr. for his consistent sharing of knowledge of the area. A very special thank you is in order to Tom Powers, my father-in-law for all the time and expense he donated to be with me nearly every trip into the East Fork. Thank you to all of you who give tirelessly in whatever way you can to MTWSF. It is you, the MTWSF members, that provide these once-in-a-lifetime sheep hunting opportunities to the public.

Shane Clouse

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



HUNTERS NEEDED

VOLUNTEER HUNTERS
NEEDED TO COLLECT
RUMEN SAMPLES FOR AN
MSU ANIMAL AND RANGE
SCIENCE RESEARCH
PROJECT

LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEERS
WITH TAGS FOR:

MOOSE

ELK

MOUNTAIN GOATS

BIG HORN SHEEP

ANTELOPE

BISON

WHITE-TAILED DEER

MULE DEER

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WILD SHEEP
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\$100

MAXIMUM 500 TICKETS SOLD

FANNIN SHEEP HUNT

with BLACKSTONE OUTFITTERS OF YUKON, CANADA

TICKET PURCHASES MUST BE RECEIVED NO LATER THAN FEB. 14, 2021.

**Drawing will be February 27, 2021 at the MTWSF Annual Banquet
 Held at the CopperKing Hotel & Convention Center in Butte America!**

Must be 18 or over to participate in Prize Drawing · Need NOT be present to win

Hunt Information:

Blackstone Outfitters of Yukon, Canada will be taking one lucky hunter Aug. / Sept. 2021 on a hunt of a lifetime for Fannin Sheep. This hunt is transferable, but is NOT refundable. Hunter is responsible for travel to and from Yukon Canada, and will need to be in good physical condition. Visit www.blackstoneoutfitters.com for more information.

Due to MONTANA STATE GAMBLING LAWS NO TICKET CAN BE PURCHASED ON CREDIT
 Online sales are prohibited in these states: AL, CA, HI, IN, KS, MT, SD, UT, WA
 There will also be no tickets available for purchase over the phone, fax or email.
 For more information please contact Montana Wild Sheep Foundation @ www.montanawsf.org
 The taxable value of the hunt will be treated as ordinary income to the raffle winner for federal and state income tax purposes.

Montana Wild Sheep Foundation is a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization. Funds from this raffle are used for the benefit and enhancement of bighorn sheep in Montana.

Ticket Purchase Form

2021 Montana Wild Sheep Foundation Fannin Hunt Raffle

No limit to number of tickets purchased per individual. One individual per order form. This form may be copied.
 Mail this form with payment to Montana Wild Sheep Foundation, PO Box 17731, Missoula, MT 59808

* Please print clearly (all lines required)

Name : _____

Address : _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Telephone (include area code) : _____

Email : _____

No ticket stub will be mailed in return. Provide your email address and a photo of your ticket(s) will be emailed to you.

Total enclosed: _____

* Please do not send cash through the mail

- 1 Ticket for \$100 2 Tickets for \$200 ____ Tickets X \$100

Check the box next to the number of tickets you are purchasing.

Hunting is Hard

Story by: D.J. Berg

Hunting is hard. I have always preached that the harder the hunt the sweeter the reward. It's glorious to relive the excitement of a successful hunt, and even the marathon-level packout. What about the other hunts? You know the ones. Where you missed or got rained out. Those stories usually only get told to a buddy or two and slowly fade away. You certainly don't go writing magazine articles about them! But I'm going to stick my neck out here and share my story, which you might have already guessed, is about a hunt that didn't go as planned.





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Drawing a sheep tag is 100% about the right opportunity. I love to tell this part of the story. My name was drawn for the 2019 Montana Wild Sheep Foundation Life Member Drawing. The winning ticket was for a Dall Sheep hunt in Alaska, a hunt I had only dreamed about! I was dumbfounded when my name was announced. I couldn't believe what was happening, as I wandered up to the stage. When I got there, I remember stumbling on my words. I felt overwhelmed with gratitude and the heavy weight of such a tremendous opportunity all in one emotion.

Planning and preparation for the hunt began immediately. Gear upgrades, target practice, workouts, travel arrangements...I did all the things. Fast forward five months and I found myself in Fairbanks, Alaska. I was as ready as I could be and a bit nervous.

The flight into camp was darkly beautiful. The cloud ceiling pushed the pilot to fly low, granting me fantastic views of the Takeena River. We bumped along in the plane for over an hour, giving me a true appreciation of how vast the Alaska Range was. It was an exhilarating

moment to circle camp on a tight approach, then land on a short river runway. The crisp Alaska air greeted me as I opened the door and began gathering my gear. After handshakes and introductions, I settled into camp and spent most of the day glassing for sheep from the riverbank. After some good conversation and dinner, I went to my bunk with excitement for the days to come.

The next day I awoke to a hard rain and flat sleeping pad at 4 am. I tried to go back to sleep, but the cadence was hard to overcome. After laying there for a few hours, I wandered to the mess tent for coffee and heard news that the spike camp hunters were coming in. This meant it would soon be my turn to get out of camp. The hunters emerged from the rain midday, sullen and soaked. I learned they had not seen a legal ram and no sheep tags had been filled. As the hunters huddled by the stove, I retired to my tent to fix my sleeping pad and do some reading. The rain intensified as the day blurred into the evening. Everyone gathered around the table for a pork roast dinner and a few beers. I went to bed that evening remaining optimistic



that I would be chasing sheep soon.

The rain was relentless all night. By morning the paths that connected the tents were completely full of water. Even in camp, it was impossible to stay dry. The once empty camp was now full of hunters, some optimistic about their adventure, others downtrodden and pessimistic. The next couple days felt dark. It was something like living in a reality tv show, as hunters offered their opinions on the abundance of rain, lack of sheep, and the politics of who should get the first crack at a sheep. Thankfully, the sun broke the monotony on day 4. Everyone took the opportunity to get out of the tents, dry a few things out, and stretch their legs around camp.

The next day was bright and sunny, and it was my first day to hunt. My guide, Tyler, and a fellow hunter from Wyoming rode off mid-day from camp. This was what I came for, the ride was bright and warm. It was like opening a present as we rode up the valley. Alaska's wonder changing around every corner. After a few hours of riding, we tied up the horses and hiked to the top of one of the mountains. It was steep, rocky, and beautiful. We didn't see any sheep, and honestly, I didn't care. I was just happy to be out of the tent and on the mountain. We rode back as the sun set in the distance. I felt incredibly blessed to see the sun cast pink hues across the untouched landscape. Back at camp, my spirits soared higher when I learned I would be heading out with Tyler the next day to spike out for the remainder of my hunt.

With a pack mule in tow, Tyler and I rode out of camp and into the high country the next day. As we climbed out of the river drainage, the steep mountain gave way to a vast hanging valley. It was easily a mile wide and went as far as the eye could see. Caribou and grizzly bears stared at us inquisitively as we strode past them, slowly gaining elevation. After about ten miles of riding we came to a steep mountain pass. We led the horses up

and over as a group of ewes and lambs fed off in the distance. I had no doubt that adventure lay just on the other side. The journey had taken the better part of the day, so we found a campsite, and climbed to a high point to glass while we had dinner. We saw several small rams, ewes, and lambs. It was dinner with a view and my heart was full.

The plan for the next day was to ride a little further



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and set up the camp further in this new drainage. As we neared the camp, I saw one of the biggest bears I have ever seen in my life. It was a big boar, the kind whose belly drags on the ground, eating blueberries about 200 yards from where we planned to camp. After he caught our wind, he disappeared in a flash, never to be seen again. After setting up camp, we rode further up the drainage, tied the horses and found a good vantage point. Tyler spotted a ram after about an hour of glassing and after much deliberation we judged him to not be legal. We spent the rest of the day sneaking into a high basin in search of a ram. While unsuccessful, it was my first full day of Alaska sheep hunting and I loved every minute of it!

The next couple of days were tough. Rain and snow moved in and forced us to spend much of our time in the tent. I have to say it was enjoyable to get to know Tyler a little better. We exchanged stories about hunting and life, and I've got to tell you my wildest hunting stories are just a drop in the bucket compared to

his hunting experience! Only so much coffee can be drunk until you go stir crazy and venture out, even in the rain.

We ventured up the mountain, stopping regularly to hide under a tarp as snow squalls swept up from below. Later on a spine of a steep ridge, Tyler noticed some fresh scat. As he pointed it out, I saw a white body just over his shoulder. "Sheep behind you," I whispered. About 400 yards away was a young ram, probably 5 years old. We snapped a couple pictures before he dipped over the ridge. We went in search of his older brother, but heavy fog drove us off the mountain.


Time was running out with only one more day of hunting left. Our Hail Mary plan was put miles on the horses to look into some new drainages. We didn't see any rams. Instead, we saw some the most amazing country I have ever laid my eyes on. It was incredible and made me wish I had 10 more days to explore



these vast drainages. We snapped a few final pictures as the day faded and rode back to spike camp.

The next morning, we packed our belongs and set course back to the main camp. We looked up a couple drainages along the way, but each one was void of curly horns. The long ride back did give me time to reflect about the wonderful experiences I had. I thought about eating blue berries while glassing in the mid-day sun, drinking water straight from a glacier, and the faint smell of what I thought was eucalyptus in the scree fields. As the sun set and my adventure lay behind me, I felt a sense of accomplishment. Some might say that I had an unsuccessful hunt, and in some ways I'd agree. We didn't come out heavy, but I did go home with something. I made some great new friends, I got a lesson in patience, and most importantly, I found out that rock chucks whistle in Alaska. Crazy huh!? 🍷



A man in camouflage gear, a cap, and sunglasses is holding a rifle. He is standing next to the head of a ram with large, curved horns. The background shows a vast mountain valley with a winding river and a dam in the distance under a clear blue sky.

A Lot of Luck in One Year

Story by: Tom Ryan

2020 has been a lousy year for a lot of people. Corona virus and the associated economic stress left many people to consider 2020 an unlucky year. In my case, however, 2020 was about as lucky a year as one person can have!

My lucky streak started when I finally landed the job I've always wanted working in a hydroelectric dam near my home town of Helena, Montana. I had been waiting for an opening there for years and the positions there are coveted throughout the company. Therefore, after accepting my new position I figured that I had used up my allotted

luck for the year.

I had only held my new job for a few weeks when special tags were drawn. I was in the control room with my coworkers, who were attempting to teach me the finer points of operating a hydroelectric dam (with varying results). When break time rolled around everyone logged on to the FWP website to see if they had drawn any tags. As I was not expecting much, I let all my coworkers go first. I'd been applying for the big three permits since I was twelve years old without success; and thirty years later I had about given up on ever seeing any of them.

When my coworkers were done checking their draws I logged on and proceeded to check my drawing results. I was looking at the unsuccessful column and remarked to my coworker that FWP must have messed up and not put me in for sheep as it was not listed in the unsuccessful column. He opined that maybe I had drawn the tag. I quickly scrolled up to the successful column and was shocked to see that I had in fact drawn a region 482 ram tag!

Despite taking thirty years to draw a sheep tag, I've spent a lot of time around people who have been successful at drawing tags. I became a life member of Montana WSF over twenty years ago back when the organization was known as FNAWS, and even served a term on the board of directors (the youngest person to have ever done so). I attended the banquets, stared at the various sheep mounts, listened to the stories of great hunts, and dreamed of the day when I would hunt for my own ram. Now that my moment had arrived, I immediately began making preparations.

I started with a scouting trip in May with my brother who had drawn a ewe tag in the area a few years previously and my son Drake (who was at least as excited as I was). I followed this with at least one scouting trip every month from May to September. Drake accompanied me on every one of these trips and I will forever be grateful for his help and companionship on these trips. My good friend Mike Mercer also came along on one of our scouting trips and offered his services as jet boat captain on his new Woolridge jet boat. I spent the rest of the intervening time looking at examples of rams to help my judging and making the massive amount of preparation that goes into an extended hunting trip.

I prepped camping equipment, purchased On-X and a new GPS and last, but not least, had Dennis Erhardt (owner of the Frontier Gun Shop) put together what I considered to be the perfect sheep rifle. I chose a

Remington 700 with a carbon fiber barrel chambered in the potent 28 Nosler. With the last details finalized, I left Helena on September 10th and headed for Stafford Ferry north of Winifred, Montana where Mike and I were to meet.

Mike had agreed to come along on the hunt even though we could not use his boat until the 15th because of the upriver travel restriction. The end of upriver travel restrictions coincided with the opening of rifle season so I would bow hunt until then. I arrived at Stafford Ferry and began setting up camp. Mike arrived shortly after, we finished setting up camp and went to bed anxious to start hunting!

Mike and I turned out early and drove to the highest point we could find and began glassing for rams. We quickly sighted a ram, but despite much glassing we could not judge the size of him owing to the brush he had bedded in. We decided to stalk the ram and get a closer look. I accomplished this, stalking to within 35 yards of the ram who proved to be a very young. I decided to let him grow and started looking for more sheep. I stalked several sheep over the next few days without success either letting young rams go or not being able to close within bow range.

My father Jeff (also a former board member of MT-WSF) and my son Drake arrive on Saturday morning to help. The four of us hiked and glassed the breaks and fished in the evenings while Drake swam in the Missouri to cool down. My dad and Drake headed back to Helena on Monday morning so that Drake wouldn't miss too much school. As they left they both told me to get a big one and then began the long drive back to Helena while Mike and I again looked for rams. Hunting conditions had begun to deteriorate as smoke from the huge fires on the west coast socked in and made glassing very difficult.

Mike and I were both glad for the opening of rifle season and the lifting of the upriver boat restriction so that we could break out his jet boat and look at some new country. Our first day on the river proved to be somewhat frustrating as the smoke, which was already a hindrance, socked in even thicker and made glassing almost impossible. I was reduced to hiking up ridges and valleys for most of the day to look for sheep as visibility was limited to about 400 yards. Nevertheless, late in the day Mike and I found four rams bedded on a low ridge within a quarter mile of the river. I was excited until a check of the GPS showed them to be on a very small piece of private property. The rams were bedded and showed no sign of moving so as dusk fell Mike and I headed back up river to camp. That night

A Lot of Luck in One Year continued from page 13

the wind picked up out of the east and the temperature dropped about ten degrees.

The morning dawned clear and bright as the wind had blown the smoke out and visibility was perfect. Mike proclaimed that "this is the day. We'll have a sheep down by noon." I agreed that things looked much more positive and we set out down river with replenished enthusiasm. We were near the property where we had seen the rams the night before when we spotted a large group of rams on the ridge line above the river. A check of the GPS confirmed that they were on public land and one of the rams was a nice full curl. We wasted no time in scaling the five hundred vertical feet to the top of the ridge. Upon topping the ridge, we found no sheep but instead other hunters who had come in from above the river. They had spooked the rams without even seeing them.

Mike and I made our way back down to the river bemoaning our poor luck when Mike noticed more rams. They were the rams we had looked at yesterday and although they were still on private property they were near the edge and we decided to come back later in the day to see if they would move onto public land. As we launched the boat and started down river I looked back in the direction of the rams and was surprised to one ram after another pour out of a wash near the bedded rams. This was the group the other hunters had spooked and the larger group joined the first four who were now on their feet. Together they began to follow a sheep trail along the face of the canyon towards public land.

Mike and I motored up about three quarters of a mile and I jumped out and started towards the breaks.

Mike stayed near the shore to watch from a distance. The rams were moving rapidly and I had to sprint about half a mile to get below them before they rounded a bend and started up a huge draw. I dropped to the ground and ranged the rams at 263 yards. I was having a very difficult time finding a rest as the angle was so steep up to the rams. I finally took off my day pack, laid it across a rock and placed the bipod on the whole works. I was then able to see the rams in my scope.

The rams were almost around the bend by now - so picking out the largest I squeezed off a shot holding on the rocks a couple of inches below the ram's brisket because of the exceedingly steep angle. At the sound of the shot the ram disappeared from view. The others wasted no time in getting into the huge draw and out of sight but I was sure there was one less in their number.

I struggled up the nearly vertical slope to where I had last seen the ram and was relieved to find him behind the rock he had been standing near. He had collapsed in his tracks! It was 11:35 am - Mike had been right!

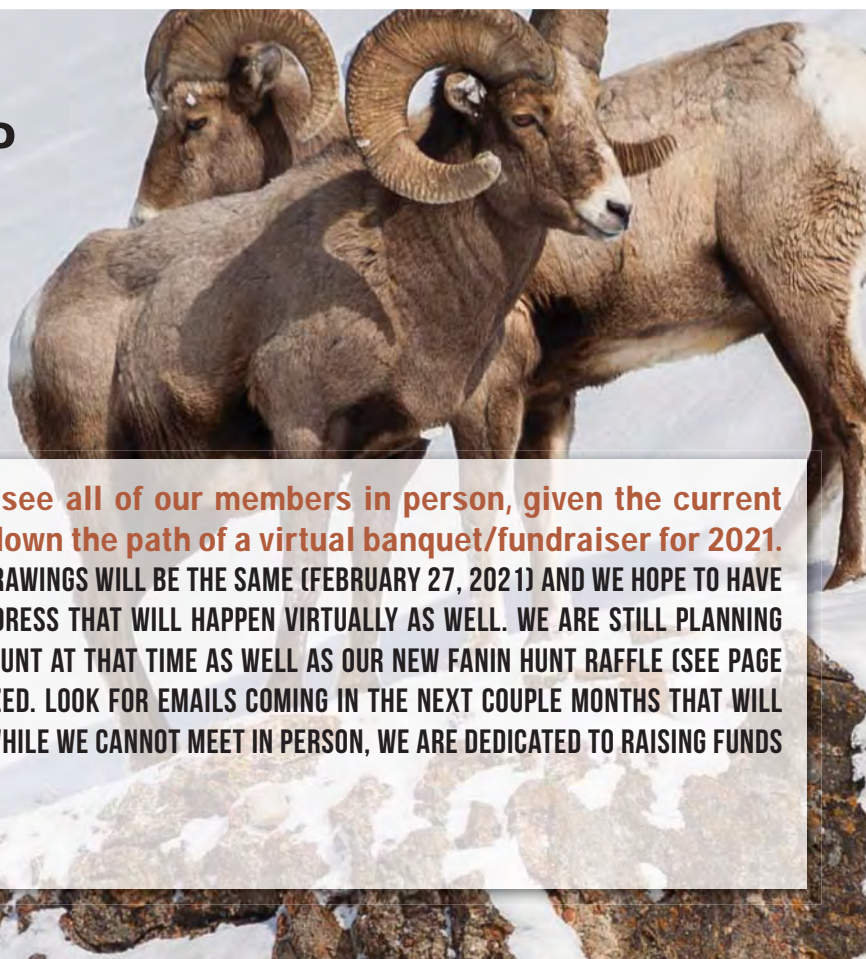
After Mike had made his way up the slope, we took plenty of pictures and then skinned and quartered the ram. We managed to take everything out to the boat in one very heavy load and arrived back in camp at two in the afternoon. Mike and I broke camp and headed into Winifred for a celebratory hamburger. I then headed for Lewistown to meet the regional biologist while Mike headed for home.

The biologist for the area, Sonya Anderson, measured and plugged the horns which scored a little over 180. I had always heard that a hunt for bighorn sheep is the hunt of a lifetime and I would have to agree. This hunt will always be one of the greatest outdoor experiences of my life. Although it was by no means easy, it always exciting and a truly rewarding experience. I hope that Mike can draw a tag soon so that I can pay him back for all the help he gave me. I am truly in his debt! As for the rest of this year, I still have hunting to do but I'm not expecting too much. After all the luck I've had this year already, I think I've met my quota! 🍷



2021 MT WILD SHEEP ANNUAL BANQUET & LIFE MEMBER RAFFLE

VIRTUAL | FEB. 27, 2021



Although we would much rather see all of our members in person, given the current environment we are proceeding down the path of a virtual banquet/fundraiser for 2021. THE DATES FOR THE AUCTIONS AND RAFFLE DRAWINGS WILL BE THE SAME (FEBRUARY 27, 2021) AND WE HOPE TO HAVE CONFERENCE SPEAKERS AND A KEYNOTE ADDRESS THAT WILL HAPPEN VIRTUALLY AS WELL. WE ARE STILL PLANNING ON DRAWING FOR OUR LIFE MEMBER SHEEP HUNT AT THAT TIME AS WELL AS OUR NEW FANIN HUNT RAFFLE (SEE PAGE 5), BUT AGAIN THE DETAILS ARE NOT FINALIZED. LOOK FOR EMAILS COMING IN THE NEXT COUPLE MONTHS THAT WILL OUTLINE THE ANNUAL EVENT AND PROCESS. WHILE WE CANNOT MEET IN PERSON, WE ARE DEDICATED TO RAISING FUNDS FOR SHEEP CONSERVATION ANY WAY WE CAN.

THANKS - MTWSF BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Last Sheep Camp - Remembering Dale Burk



Dale Burk, life member of the MWSF, passed away Wednesday, September 16, 2020 at his home in Stevensville, Montana. Born October 10, 1936 in Kalispell, Montana. He and his wife owned and operated a book publishing firm, Stoneydale Press, in Stevensville since 1978. Stoneydale Press was a contributor to our annual fundraiser since the 1990's. Dale lived an exemplary life in the world of conservation - from the rivers to the mountains and everything in between. His involvement in the writing and enactment of the 1964 Wilderness Act, as well as being

inducted into the Montana Outdoor Hall of Fame in 2018, meant he was well-known and admired by many. He leaves behind his wife Patricia and 3 daughters, Kathleen, Ruth, Rachel and her husband Joe, and several grandchildren.

Rest in Peace.

Tom Powers

2020 Montana Wild Sheep Foundation Board of Directors ELECTION RESULTS

We are pleased to announce that **Justin Spring, Ray Vinkey, and Levi Bowler** were re-elected to the MTWSF Board of Directors. Each of these gentlemen have been a tremendous resource for our organization. Join me in thanking them for their continued service. If you are interested in joining our team, we will have some vacancies in the coming years. If you would like to help out please let any of the current board members know.

Brian Solan

Executive Director, MTWSF



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