

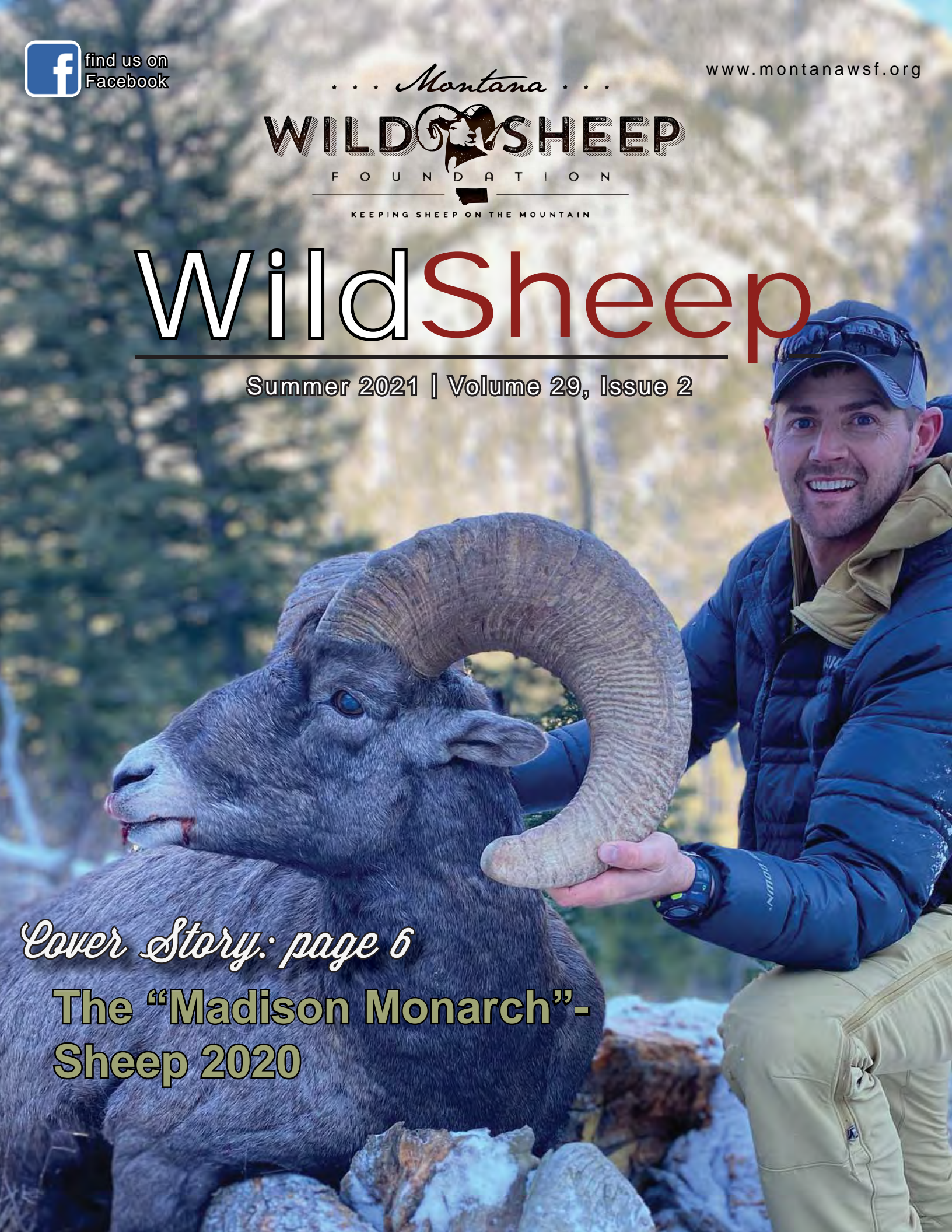
\*\*\* Montana \*\*\*  
**WILD SHEEP**  
FOUNDATION  
KEEPING SHEEP ON THE MOUNTAIN

# WildSheep

Summer 2021 | Volume 29, Issue 2

*Cover Story: page 6*

**The “Madison Monarch”-  
Sheep 2020**





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**Cover photo credit** - Matt Clyde

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Visit us online at [www.montanawsf.org](http://www.montanawsf.org)!

While there, visit the **Photo Gallery** page. If you would like to have a picture posted, email ([photos@montanawsf.org](mailto: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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## Board of Directors

**Shane Clouse, President**  
[shane@shaneclouse.com](mailto:shane@shaneclouse.com)

**D.J. Berg, Vice President**  
[djberg12@gmail.com](mailto:djberg12@gmail.com)

**Max Bauer Jr., Treasurer**  
[bauertranch@gmail.com](mailto:bauertranch@gmail.com)

**Grant Winn II, Secretary**  
[g.winn@nm.com](mailto:g.winn@nm.com)

**Levi Bowler**  
[levibowler@gmail.com](mailto:levibowler@gmail.com)

**Don Patterson**  
[d5357mt@gmail.com](mailto:d5357mt@gmail.com)

**Corey Piersol**  
[cpeirsol@burchbarrel.com](mailto:cpeirsol@burchbarrel.com)

**Justin Spring**  
[justin@boone-crockett.org](mailto:justin@boone-crockett.org)

**Ray Vinkey**  
[rvinkey@hotmail.com](mailto:rvinkey@hotmail.com)

**Brian Solan, Volunteer Executive Director**  
[bsolan.bs@gmail.com](mailto:bsolan.bs@gmail.com)

## Newsletter Editor & Publisher

**Traci Ulberg**  
Meetings Northwest, Inc.  
(406) 273-7224  
[tulberg@meetingsnorthwest.com](mailto:tulberg@meetingsnorthwest.com)

*Contact us at:*  
Montana Wild Sheep Foundation  
PO Box 17731  
Missoula, MT 59808

Visit us at [montanawsf.org](http://montanawsf.org).

# President's Message

*Greetings to all of our MTWSF supporters. Spring time brings warmer weather and new lambs on the landscape. 2021 has already been extremely rewarding for MTWSF as we have been involved in several sheep captures and transplants in Montana. The transplants were successful and we renewed sheep herds in the Tendoy and Little Belt Mountains. We look forward to January 2022 when a transplant in the Bridger Mountains is planned.*

Our first virtual fundraiser in Butte this past February was a great success. I owe an enormous thank you to our board for pulling together to put on the event. Again Brian Solan, DJ Berg, and Levi Bowler shouldered most of the technical burden to pull off the event. Thank you to all of you who tuned in and donated generously to help us make a profit. The proceeds from this past fundraiser will be used to assist in several habitat projects, scientific studies, and transplant projects coming soon.

With the loosening of Covid restrictions, I look forward to more in-person Montana Wild Sheep Foundation (MTWSF) events so we can all connect on a personal level. Much prosperity be to you all this spring and summer.

*Shane Clouse*

Montana Wild Sheep Foundation President

[shane@shaneclouse.com](mailto:shane@shaneclouse.com)

(406) 370-4487





# *Update:* Little Belt Sheep Transplant

by Brian Solan

Lambs are on the ground! Jay Kolbe who is the FWP biologist in the Little Belts and very instrumental in this transplant sent these photos of lambs from the herd that we helped transplant. There are even a set of twins! This is great news, but there have been some documented lion kills of transplanted sheep and we are working with Jay to develop solutions to help that situation.

*Can you spot the set of twins?*



## *Banquet Recap:* Virtual Fundraiser

by Brian Solan

**What a difference a year makes.** While we were very fortunate in February 2020 to be one of the last “LIVE” events in the world, we were forced to be “VIRTUAL” for the 2021 banquet. We could see the writing on the wall and had a lot of time to prepare for a banquet format that we had zero experience with. While it was technically very challenging, it was definitely a success. The Copper King in Butte, America provided the terrific backdrop, albeit with an empty room. Our gross revenue from the banquet was down significantly from years past, but so were our expenses and we generated a similar net revenue from the event compared to previous years! While the 2021 Virtual Event was a success financially, we truly all missed the connection with other sheep hunters, the lies told about the one that got away, and certainly the laughs that are assisted by a few pints of bottomless beer.

The 2022 Banquet Committee is already working on the logistics, donations, etc. We will be back in Butte, America on February 25th-26th for a two day “LIVE” event. The Copper King hotel is a great venue and we will be back together then, drinking beers and telling lies about that 200” ram that gave us the slip. 🐏



# 2021 Legislative Session Update: MTWSF's Role

by D.J. Berg

The Montana Wild Sheep Foundation (MTWSF) kept a watchful eye on this year's legislative session. Our Executive Director and the Board of Directors frequently reviewed draft legislation as it was introduced and took positions on bills that specifically affect wild sheep. When the board agreed to support or oppose any of the legislation, Brian Solan took to the capitol to advance support or objections to bills. There really were not many bills that directly influenced wild sheep in this session, good or bad. The bill the MTWSF did speak out against was the "once in a lifetime" limit to moose, sheep, and goat tags. While the board understood that many of our members would support such a bill, MTWSF Board has taken the position that we would rather enhance hunting opportunities than restrict them. This means that we are asking our legislative delegates to focus on growing our states wild sheep herds, rather than restricting opportunity to hunt them. Brian presented some compelling mathematical evidence to the legislative committee showing that limiting the draw opportunity had very little affect on the overall successful draw percentages. The Board discussed many other bills and took positions as the bills were introduced, discussed, and amended; often creating much discussion and sometimes disagreement. I think we could all argue about the finer points of some of the bills this session, however at the end of the session there were no bills passed that adversely affect Montana's wild sheep.

Also, of note this session was that Brian Solan served as Vice Chair for the Montana Sportsman's Caucus Advisory Council. The Advisory Council serves as a resource to the Montana Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus on issues related to hunting, angling, recreational shooting, and trapping. This Caucus is comprised of a bipartisan group of legislators who share sportsman values and strive to make decisions in the best interest of Montana sportsman community. While serving on the Advisory Council, Brian brought wild sheep and Montana sportsman interests into the conversation. A big thanks goes to Brian for the time he spent advocating for us this session.

At the end of the session, the Advisory Council hosted the 2nd biannual trap shoot for the legislators to thank them for their service. The guests were teamed with



*The MTWSF Team taking their turn to shoot!*



*The MTWSF Team, left to right: Senator Mike Lang (SD 17), El-lary Tucker Williams (Congressional Sportsman's Foundation), MTWSF Director Don Patterson, MTWSF Director Grant Winn, and MTWSF Director Justin Spring.*



*Top shooters for the day all shot a 24, which included MTWSF Directors Justin Spring, and Don Patterson.*

fellow non-profit sportsmen and sportswomen for a friendly competition. While the MTWSF team didn't make the top three, it was a fun day in the outdoors with fellow conservationists.

These legislative sessions can be both stressful and rewarding for the volunteers of MTWSF leadership and board. MTWSF is proud to be at the table, advocating for wild sheep and Montana's sportsmen. We will continue serve our membership and the future of wild sheep, but we need your help. The Board of Directors would appreciate your thoughts on legislation and policy. If you would like to offer your suggestions, please reach out to Executive Director Brian Solan or any of the Directors using the contact information at the front of the newsletter. 🍷



# *The "Madison Monarch" - Sheep 2020*

Story by Matt Clyde



***The spring of 2020 brought an immense amount of uncertainty for many people due to the nature of how our country was reacting to the introduction of COVID-19. I was no different in wondering what the year would bring, at least until I read the results of the 2020 sheep drawing here in Montana. I did a triple take while staring at the computer just to make sure that I truly read correctly that I was one of the 6 lucky people to draw a Madison range sheep permit. With all of the other uncertainties the year was likely to bring, one thing was not, that I was going to dedicate my entire fall to this once in a lifetime opportunity (a term my wife seems to think gets used rather loosely around here).***

Once I had the tag, I began the heavy digging and reached out to some guys I knew that had held the tag in prior years and had put in a substantial amount of time learning the unit. Because I own my own company, I have a little flexibility with scheduling work and decided that I would spend the summer working as

much as I could so that I could take the time off work in the fall when I could actually be hunting. Scouting was a little less important to me than hunting and with the info I had been given from the biologist and prior hunters, I felt confident that it was going to just be a matter of time in finding the right ram. In August, I spent

a few days in the mountains with my son Braden to get a feel for some access points and get some days in glassing basins trying to locate rams. In the first 4 hours of scouting, we ended up seeing 6 different grizzly bears which gave me a less than comfortable feeling knowing how many days I planned to be sleeping in these mountains. Thankfully, they left us alone and our attention diverted to the 8 rams that we finally spotted in the basin we were glassing! What a great feeling to be looking at my first group of rams, with a ram tag in my pocket!

I had a lot of anticipation rolling into the first week of sheep season! My good buddy Gerald Martin was gracious enough to take 5 days off from building his new house to join me in the back country looking for rams. Although it may seem a little unlucky spending 5 days in sheep country without laying eyes on more than 3 young rams, I still felt lucky because I barely dodged a serious injury while getting hit by the kickback of a large tree on the way into our camp. We put on a good 28-mile trip and spent countless hours behind the glass but only found three sheep that first week. This past year was terrible for forest fires as well, which made visibility extremely bad most days with the smokey haze.

Over the next 20 days or so, it became a lot more of a reality for me just how difficult this particular unit was for finding a big mature ram. I would hike 6 to 9 miles into the backcountry for days and not even lay eyes on a single ram. In all honesty, my positive attitude started to diminish and I started feeling the pressure of 30 years of waiting starting to slip a little bit. Thankfully, I had some great people that kept assuring me with the dedication and time I was putting in, it would pay off.

Just after mid-season, my friend Cody Feasel and I spent a few days picking over some country at the southern end of the unit where I had yet to see any sheep. It was a much-needed note to my ears after staring through the spotter for nearly an hour when he says, "I got a couple rams"! I scrambled to get them in the spotter as he gave me the location. Although I decided to pass on both rams, my spirits were lifted and the motivation for more searching quickly got amplified. Shortly after that, my son Braden and I finally found a couple days he could join me in my search for some rams. On this particular trip, we met one of the other tagholders, Tom Everett. Tom hadn't been having much luck finding rams either, but we exchanged info so that we could keep in touch. The very next day, as Braden and I were glassing, his eagle eyes picked up two rams in a small canyon across the drainage. It appeared these were the same two rams that Cody

and I were watching the week prior. We didn't hesitate this time, we felt this would be a great opportunity for Tom to possibly punch his sheep tag, so Braden took off down the mountain to find him! A short time later, Braden was hiking back up the hill with Tom, along with Mike and Stephen (Tom's son and friend). One look was all it took, and Tom said he would surely shoot either of the two rams Braden found. After a 6-hour stalk and wait, Tom was able to notch out his first ever bighorn sheep tag! It was such a blessing to help and be a part of Tom's success that day. Spending the day on the mountain with these guys will always have a special place for us in our memories.

For the next week, we really struggled to find any rams again. One of the previous tagholders, Brandon Wynn, had reached out multiple times and said that he wanted to help find some rams. He was currently on a moose hunt in Idaho at the time but said he would join when he could and I was thrilled for help with the lull in sheep sightings again. It was also at this time, I reached out to one of the other tagholders, Erika Nunlist.

I had never met Erika, but through conversations with the biologist and mutual friends, it sounded like she was also struggling finding rams. I felt that if we kept in touch, we could help each other in possibly covering different areas and reporting back to each other with our findings. With only a few weeks of season left, we were both feeling a little more pressure and Erika didn't have quite the time available to her that I did so I told her that if I found any rams, I would reach out.

Very shortly after that conversation, Gerald and I were out searching for Rams again and just when we were about ready to give up, I located a band of 10 rams that had just come over the ridge about 2 miles away. I quickly looked at all the rams and decided to hike down, hustle out to find cell service and get a hold of Erika. That evening, I was able to visit with Erika and give her the location of the rams. It would be a brutal hike, but it was pretty apparent to me that she wasn't afraid of that! I told them if they could be there first thing in the morning, the rams should still be close. Ericka and her boyfriend James literally left their house at around 2:30 am so they could make the 2-hour drive, plus the 4 to 5 hour hike to be in a good position to find the rams shortly after daylight. I couldn't join them as I had a football game for my son that day but asked them to keep me posted on their day.

About midafternoon, I got a text message from Erika that they were within 100 yards of the bedded rams and were just waiting for an opportunity for a good shot! I was so excited, and I prayed that this would



## The “Madison Monarch”-Sheep 2020 continued from page 7

work out for them. As I paced frantically with huge anticipation, waiting for my phone to beep, I couldn't help but wish I was sitting there with them. Then, the beep hit my phone and a message that said... “Ram down!!!!” It's funny how excited a person can get for a complete stranger but my excitement level for her was off the charts! And my hats off to those two as they packed that sheep out in one heavy trip, and basically didn't get home until about 2 am which was 24 hours straight of grinding in some tough country.

With 10 days left of season, Brandon Wynn joined up with me after his successful moose hunt in Idaho. We were both excited that a big weather front looked to be moving in and we felt that was just what we needed to get some rams moved out of the timber and feeding more in the open. On a Thursday evening while I was at my son's football game, Brandon called with some exciting news that he had spotted 5 rams but they were in and out of sparse timber so he was having trouble sizing them up. He felt though that one look he got told him that there was a big mature ram in the bunch. I told him I was packing up the following day and I would be staying the entire rest of season down there. We knew the forecast was calling for below zero temperatures and snow which is not a lot of fun to sleep or hunt in, but it was getting to be do or die time now. I had 6 days left to make this happen and was

willing to do whatever it took. Thankfully, I had some guys willing to give up some time to help those last days of season.

I loaded up the truck with 7 days' worth of food and water and headed for my last trip to the south Madison range where I met my friend Nigel, Brandon, and Gerald just before daylight to come up with a good game plan of trying to find a ram. We all agreed that splitting up into different drainages gave us the best coverage so off we went. After thoroughly scanning the drainage I was in and being convinced there were no rams, I started watching some elk through the spotter. And like it appeared out of thin air, 80 yards to the left of the elk, I picked out a really nice ram, all alone. I studied him for a long time but decided this ram was slightly smaller than the goal I had set for myself at the beginning of the season. After a long debate with myself whether passing on this ram was a good decision or not, I decided to hike down and warm up in the truck for a while since it was 18 below zero and my toes were starting to go numb.

As I sat at the truck thinking about my next move, Nigel pulled up and had a smirk on his face that told a story without saying any words. He said he found 5 rams and 2 of them looked really good! So off we went to head up to see if we could relocate them and







## Members

## Photo Gallery

identify if one was the old warrior ram we were after. Nigel stopped us when we hit the last spot he was able to see the rams from and after a few minutes of searching, we found them. 5 rams in total, and 2 that quickly caught our attention from the others.

After sizing them up in the spotter I made the executive decision that today was the day, and this was the ram. We loaded the packs with all the gear we would need for the day and took off on the stalk. About an hour had passed as we pushed through brush, made a sketchy creek crossing, and hiked up to the avalanche chute we had hoped would be our intercept point. As we approached the bottom of the chute, one of the smaller rams appeared and I instantly hit him with the rangefinder at 435 yards. I knew this was it, we were in range and 32 days of pounding these hills was about to come to fruition. As the other 4 rams fed out, Nigel and Gerald helped confirm which ram was the best as I settled the crosshairs on the heaviest looking ram. I squeezed the trigger on the 28 Nosler and watched the tuft of hair behind his shoulder fly. As the ram staggered, I put a second shot in for insurance and the monarch of the Madison came tumbling down the chute.

I have done a lot of awesome hunts in my life, but the emotion overwhelmed me at this moment more than any hunt I've ever done. The reward of 32 days of persistence was a part of it but sharing the experience with guys who were willing to give up their time to help me punch this once in a lifetime tag was much more of it. Being able to watch my son share the excitement of helping others fulfill their dream tag was an irreplaceable lesson that added to the emotion of this moment.

It took me over 30 minutes to gather myself and hike up to put my hands on my ram. There was no ground shrinkage on this one. Finding a 12-year-old ram is difficult anywhere, but for a ram to live that long in this unit is truly astounding and what a credit to him to survive the wolves, grizzly bears, hunters, bad winters, etc. for that long. For the first time as I sat with my hands around his bases, the numbers didn't matter. How we got to this moment and the people involved is all that mattered, and I can't thank all the people enough that shared in this hunt whether in person or just helping with info. After eating some sheep backstrap over the fire and loading up heavy packs, we started our journey back to the truck giving the "Madison Monarch", his final trip down the steep chutes of the Madison Mountains. 🍖



**Clay Leibold** was joined on this hunt-of-a-lifetime by his wife Jennifer. Harvested in November 2020 in HD 622 (near Fort Peck Reservoir), it took 18 years to draw this tag. The ram scored 173" and was 7.5 years old.



**Kyle Skibsted.** Thirty years ago, my wife was in labor with our son as I harvested a bighorn ewe. This year I finally drew a male tag. After 13 days of scouting, spotting, hiking and tracking I found a band of 12 big guys a mile away. Through rain, fog, snow, and driving winds we hiked up for the sneak. When we got to them we realized we were 140 feet above them resting on a ledge. I shot between 30mph wind gusts and a 10ft opening in the bushes. He jumped at the shot, back-flipped onto a 5ft ledge and came to rest hanging off. There was another skull about 5ft from him. It took 3 of us to 2.5 hours to pack him out in 80lb packs off the mountain on wet scree, in the dark, of course. What a day!



# Dad's Final Hunt

Story by Chase Bouma

***It's easy to take for granted the time you get to spend with family. Luckily for us, we knew this would most likely be a once in a lifetime experience getting to finally go on a sheep hunt, so we cherished every moment!***

It was a typical Sunday family lunch get together when we sat down at the table and Dad threw an envelope in front of my brother and I. As we began to read the letter, we realized that after putting in for 20 plus years in over 6 different states, our Dad was finally blessed with a sheep tag in Montana!

As you may have guessed, the celebration began along with the research and scouting. Countless hours were spent pouring over maps and reaching out to people to try and acquire as much information as possible to raise our chances of having a great, successful hunt. Including a trip over to scout and put eyes on the country we would be hunting.

Through all our research we found that the best time to be there was nowhere near the opener. The decision to wait and let days go by without being there was a struggle, but it meant we would be able to spend more time there when the hunting would be better. Dad was also able to get in touch with some great guys who helped us out glassing and searching for animals. It was incredibly helpful having them there as they knew the area well and knew what kind of rams this unit could produce.

Dad's plan was to head over for nine days during the early stages of the rut. Then, if he didn't tag out, he would have to head home for two weeks for work, and then he could head back for another week.



My brother, Hunter, was tied up with work and it was looking like he may not be able to join in on this hunt at all. Luckily for me, I was able to take off all the time needed to help my Dad fulfil this dream of his.

After loading up the truck and heading to Montana, Dad and I met up with our new friends and spent that first week trying to look over as many rams as possible. Our top ram was nicknamed #1. He was broomed off on one side and still had his lamb tip on the other. He also held his mass very well. Our second favorite ram was nicknamed Ric Flair. He had both his lamb tips still and flared way out making him look an awful lot like a Dall Sheep, but he had a very large chip missing from one side. As we approached the last couple days, Dad had finally made the decision that if #1 put himself in a position that we felt we had a high chance of putting a successful stock on, that we would go after him. Unfortunately, after Dad made the decision #1 vanished and we weren't able to pick him back up before having to leave.

We left Montana feeling very nervous not having filled Dad's tag, but our friends kept saying not to worry because when we came back the hunting would be even better than what we had experienced our first week there. It turned out to be quite a blessing not filling the tag that first week as we found out that Hunter would be able to join us for the second week in Montana.



After a long two weeks we loaded up the truck again and the three of us headed back over with a goal of trying to fill Dad's tag as soon as possible with the thought of #1 on our minds. We met up with our friends again and started picking apart the unit. Right away we found a great ram that we hadn't seen the first trip there. We watched him for a very long time and decided that he was pretty close to the same size as #1 but we weren't sure, we thought it would be nice to see him next to #1. This new ram had an incredibly dark cape and very dark horns whereas #1 had the lightest cape and light horns. There was snow on the ground and the new ram had snow packed into a chip on his horn which made it look like someone threw a snowball at him and left a little on his horn. Because of this he got the nickname Snowball. We continued to pick apart the unit trying to locate #1 or another big ram. Many rams were spotted, some we had seen a few weeks prior and some were new that we hadn't seen before.

Day two we picked up Snowball again as the light began to crest the hill. Dad and I hung out watching Snowball so we didn't lose him and were hoping #1 would show up. We spotted a few other rams but nothing of that caliber. Hunter and our buddies searched in other areas to try and turn up a good ram. Many were spotted including Ric Flair but nothing the caliber of #1 or Snowball. Finally, early afternoon a ram popped up on a ridgeline and it was obvious he was a massive ram. When I got the glass on him it didn't take long to confirm it was #1 and he was headed straight for Snowball. Within minutes our dream came true and they were standing side by side. There were sheep everywhere so we couldn't make a move right away, so we spent a couple hours looking at them comparing them trying to figure out

which one was going to be "the one". Every changing angle changed which ram looked bigger than the other. In the end it was decided that it was too hard to tell and you couldn't go wrong with which one was best. Finally, both rams ended up in a position where we felt we could make a move on them.

We all took off on the stalk and as we got closer, we could hear the loud CRACK of them slamming together. As we crested the ridge, we still couldn't see them so we decided to sit and wait as the ewes were higher on the hill and the rams would have to show themselves as they went to reunite with them. Finally, after a long wait, they stepped out, so we got Dad into position as fast as possible. We didn't know which ram he was going to choose but his first question was "Which one is snowball?". He was in love with the dark cape and dark horns of Snowball and didn't care if #1 may have scored slightly better. As they walked away #1 kept covering Snowball and my Dad couldn't get a clean shot off. After a few minutes of anxious frustration watching them get closer to the edge of his affective range, Snowball finally presented a shot. With Hunter over his right shoulder videoing and me over his left shoulder telling him the yardage and where to hold, the crack of the rifle was the confirmation that Dad finally fulfilled his dream of taking a beautiful Rocky Mountain Bighorn Ram!

This entire experience was so amazing and the fact that we got to share these memories together with Dad is something we will cherish forever. Our Dad passed away less than two months after getting his ram. This was our Dad's final hunt. That he got to spend it with his two boys chasing an animal he had been dreaming about getting a chance at for over 20 years was such an incredible blessing! 🍷

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