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WILD SHEEP

F O U N D A T I O N



KEEPING SHEEP ON THE MOUNTAIN

Summer 2024 | Volume 32, Issue 2



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SUBMIT YOUR ARTICLES AND PHOTOS!

Have a photo from a great sheep hunt or hunt story you would like to have published in our newsletter? Submit your photos (in .jpeg format and with a short description) and your articles to ty@montanawssf.org.

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Reward

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).

President's Message

Hello friends! Welcome to the summer edition of MTWSF's Newsletter. It's an exciting time of year. I have been hearing some of you drew a sheep tag this year! Congratulations! I know those of you who didn't draw will be living vicariously through the lucky winners. A colleague of mine was one of the draw winners and it was fantastic to see his excitement. It gave me an opportunity to reminisce about my sheep hunting experiences, offer some advice, and reinvigorate my enthusiasm for this organization.

We have been busy on several projects since we last spoke after the banquet. The first project has been essential for the continued health of our organization as we grow. We've been transitioning our financial and accounting footprint to electronic software. That has required close coordination between our accountant and the executive team. I'd like to thank Erika Putnam (Secretary) and Mark Westfall (Treasurer) for their extra effort the past few months to get the new system up and running. Thanks to this project we will be better positioned to monitor, track, and report our finances to the board of directors and our membership. It will also make doing our taxes a breeze, if you can imagine that!

The Board of Directors and Conservation Committee have been focused on finding ways to positively impact bighorn sheep in Montana. Two projects were advanced this past quarter to improve habitat and well being of two sheep herds. The Stafford Ferry Conservation Easement, which was discussed in last quarters newsletter will conserve 30 acres of critical lambing habitat if approved. MTWSF will contribute \$5,000 to that project. The East Cliffs Addition to the Blue-Eye Nellie Wildlife Management Area is a proposed land acquisition project. It is aimed at preventing a future land use change that could negatively affect the high-use bighorn sheep habitat. MTWSF is committing \$25,000 to the project and is actively pursuing additional funding to assist the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks with project funding. A special thanks is due to Ray Vinkey (Director) and Shane Clouse (past-President) for their contributions to this project. We also awarded another \$5,000 to the Alberta Wild Sheep Foundation for habitat improvements near Grotto Mountain.

Plans have been made for our annual strategic meeting, which will be held "camp-out" style near Helena, MT. The Directors will meet to establish our goals for the next year (and beyond), as well as an operating budget. The in-person meeting will be a welcome change from our monthly virtual meetings and hopefully will include viewing bighorn sheep. We have a wonderful team of volunteer board members who are dedicated to making a difference for Montana wild sheep and it will be a weekend well spent. If you have interest in joining this amazing team, the annual election is upcoming. I would encourage you to share your talent and submit your nomination!

Take care and be well.

D.J. Berg

Montana Wild Sheep Foundation President

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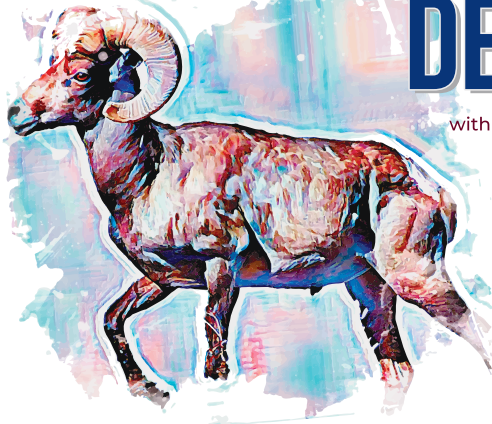
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Drawing will be held July 31, 2024

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

Hunt Information:

Hunt supplied by San Jose Trophy Hunts in Sonora, Mexico. This is a free-range Desert Sheep hunt and takes place in the San Jose Mountain Range about one hour Northwest of Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico. The winning hunter will be treated to an over-the-top lodge and guiding staff and will hunt out the back door of the lodge on the main San Jose "hog back" and satellite peaks. The hunt includes necessary permits, a guide, and the export costs of the sheep.

Due to MONTANA STATE GAMBLING LAWS NO TICKET CAN BE PURCHASED ON CREDIT

Online sales are prohibited in these states: AL, AR, CA, FL, HI, KS, LA, MI, NC, NJ, 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.montanawfs.org

ANY AND ALL TAXES ARE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE RAFFLE WINNER. MTWSF WILL COLLECT TAXES AS REQUIRED BY IRS NOTICE 1340.

AN ESTIMATED \$15,000 IN TAXES MUST BE PAID BY THE WINNER PRIOR TO RECEIVING AND BOOKING THIS HUNT

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.

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Drawing On July 31st Less than 500 tickets left!

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2023 Raffle Winner
Molina Fassett

Executive Director's Message

I am pleased to announce that we have reached a significant milestone of 800+ members. This achievement is a testament to the hard work of our board of directors and the unwavering dedication of our members to bighorn sheep conservation. With a stronger voice and a larger membership base, we are better able to raise more conservation dollars and advocate for these iconic animals.

Our conservation committee has identified three of the four biggest impacts to bighorn sheep populations in Montana - habitat loss, predation, and being hit on our roadways. We are actively addressing these issues through various initiatives by breaking down the specific conservation needs region by region and herd by herd. We will be better able to tailor our efforts and make a real impact on the ground.

Another recent success is attributed to the redesign of our conservation license plate, which has raised over \$20,000 in the first quarter of 2024. Surpassing our annual plate sales in just one quarter. If this trend continues we will quadruple funds raised in the first year of the redesign. If you haven't gotten yours yet, please keep it in mind the next time you register your Montana vehicle.

Looking ahead, we are excited to announce that we will be holding a strategic planning session in July. This session will allow us to review and refine our original plan, focusing on the three and five-year portions to ensure we are effectively utilizing our resources and time. By honing our strategic focus and prioritizing our efforts, we can make a greater impact on bighorn sheep conservation and achieve our goals more efficiently.

In closing, I want to express my gratitude to all of our members for their continued support and commitment to bighorn sheep conservation. Together, we can work towards a future where these magnificent animals are stronger and more resilient than ever. Thank you for being a part of this important journey.

And remember, nothing prepares you for the mountain - like the mountain. So get out there now, hunting season will be here before we know it...

Ty Stubblefield

Montana Wild Sheep Foundation Executive Director

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Board Member Seat Available, We Need You!



The Montana Wild Sheep Foundation is accepting nominations to the Board of Directors now through July 31, 2024. The board is seeking to elect three board members this year, two board members are seeking re-election and there is one open board seat.

We are looking for passionate individuals who care about wild sheep conservation and have the ability to dedicate six or more hours a month working on Bighorn sheep issues, projects, fundraising and organizational planning. To qualify, you must be a member in good standing for at least one year.

Please submit your biography (up to 250 words) and photo by email to ty@montanawsf.org. The nomination committee will review each nomination and advance qualified candidates to the general election, which will be held electronically during the period of August 10 through August 31.

We look forward to hearing from you! 🔥

An advertisement for the ON X HUNT mobile app. The background is a photograph of a hunter standing on a rocky mountain ridge, looking out over a vast, mountainous landscape under a clear blue sky. In the foreground, a smartphone is shown displaying the ON X HUNT app interface, which includes a map with various hunting areas, trails, and points of interest. The text "ON X HUNT" is visible in the top left corner of the ad. Below the logo, the text "KNOW WHERE YOU STAND" is written in large, bold, white letters. Underneath that, it says "Trusted by Millions of Hunters". At the bottom right, there are two buttons: "GET IT ON Google Play" and "Download on the App Store". At the very bottom, the website "onxmaps.com/hunt" is displayed.

Up Coming Events

July 12th: RAM RENDEZVOUS III

WSF and Schnee will be hosting Ram Rendezvous III on July 12th as part of the summer event series

STREET FESTIVAL DOWNTOWN AT THE SCHNEE STORE ON MAIN & BLACK

- FREE live music
- Wild Sheep Foundation Smoker-Grill BBQ
- Local brew, outdoor vendors, raffles & more.

The party starts at 3:00, with food served at 4:00, ends around 7:00.

Stop by to see the following vendors:

- SITKA
- Duckworth
- Land Trust
- Swarovksi
- Canis
- Cody Dieruf
- Field Ethos
- Montana Wild Sheep
- RJ Knives
- MTN TOUGH
- Stone Glacier
- Montana Knife Company

July 26th: Stone Glacier Summer Bash

Let's blow the doors off summer before hunting season starts!

Where:

Stone Glacier HQ
165 All West Trail, Bozeman, MT.

When:

July 26th
5:00 pm to 10:00 pm

- Free beer
- BBQ
- Raffles and gear giveaways
- Live music

All raffle proceeds benefit the Montana Wild Sheep Foundation and food proceeds benefit 2% for Conservation.



Conservation Corner

by Ray Vinkey, *Conservation Corner Editor, Volunteer*

Every year hopeful bighorn sheep hunters like us check to see if they have been lucky enough to draw a license to hunt bighorn in Montana. More often than not when asked if this was the year we got lucky, with a resigned sigh, we say nope. We can be assured that we are in the company of many others who are still waiting. Still waiting on the lucky day when we will draw out.

In this issue's Conservation Corner, Brent Lonner provides a history of bighorn sheep licenses in Montana and the odds that this will be your year. The news is mixed. In the last decade ram license numbers have been relatively stable, but drawing odds are going down due to increased numbers of applicants. In 2023, from a cumulative statewide perspective, the odds of drawing one of the 120 limited licenses was .52%.

In light of increasing interest in hunting bighorn, MT WSF's goal to maintain and/or increase huntable populations is more relevant than ever. MT WSF is also interested in maintaining, and where feasible, expanding the opportunity to hunt rams in the hunting districts where harvest is determined not by the number licenses issued, but by a ram harvest quota. We are working to retain these 'unlimited' hunting districts so that even the unluckiest of us may have the opportunity to experience bighorn hunting in some of the wildest mountains in the country.

Here's to the hunt and everlasting hope!

Perspectives on Historic and Current Bighorn Sheep License Drawing Success

Submitted by Brent Lonner (Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Region 4 Area Wildlife Biologist and representative to the Wild Sheep Initiative)

The passage of state legislation to protect wildlife and to create the first hunting seasons was predicated on the fact that once numerous and widely distributed wildlife populations in Montana and the west were declining or had completely disappeared by the early 1900s (Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 2010).

Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep in Montana are no

exception. The first seasonal hunting closures for bighorn sheep in Montana were established in 1872, with hunting season dates extending from August 15 to February 1. It was not until 1895 that bag limits were established with limits set at eight sheep per person and hunting season dates from September 1 to January 1. Over the next 20 years, additional hunting season lengths and bag limits were established; however, by 1915—due to widespread reductions in bighorn sheep populations in Montana—sheep hunting was closed. It was not until 1953 that limited bighorn sheep seasons were reopened utilizing a $\geq \frac{3}{4}$ curl ram restriction in the Sun River, Gallatin-Madison, and Stillwater areas. Sheep licenses cost \$15 for both residents and nonresidents and a drawing was used to award licenses.

Fast forward 70 years, Montana now has 36 open hunting districts offering various sheep hunting opportunities. Montana's general bighorn sheep hunting season for most hunting districts now includes a limited archery-only season in early September and a general season (archery/rifle) which is open Septem-



ber 15 through the last weekend in November. In 2023, a total of 120 limited either-sex or legal ram licenses were allocated. Recent average statewide (cumulative) limited either-sex/legal ram license drawing success rates are 0.52% and 0.12% for residents and nonresidents, respectively. Montana also has five HDs that provide unlimited legal ram hunting opportunities managed through individual quotas.

On a statewide level, there continues to be increased interest for sheep hunting opportunity with overall a relatively stable license allocation which has led to decreased odds of drawing over time (Figure 1). This is especially true for resident applicants. For example, in 2014, over 19,000 residents vied for 116 available limited licenses compared with over 27,000 applications for 120 licenses in 2023 (Figure 1)—a reduction from 0.60% to 0.41% drawing success rate. Of course, license drawing success rates vary by hunting district, but the overall trend is that there have been relatively consistent ram license numbers and increasing numbers of applicants seeking the opportunity to hunt bighorn.

Over the last century, Montana has made considerable progress towards bighorn sheep restoration and hunting opportunity. Although the value and unique opportunity to hunt bighorn sheep in Montana is well recognized, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks places emphasis on managing wildlife first and providing other benefits (i.e., hunting) second. Demographic data derived from bighorn sheep surveys and harvest ultimately play a significant role in meeting management goals and

objectives across a wide variety of bighorn sheep herds and habitats.

Working with numerous partners, such as the Montana Wild Sheep Foundation, it is the goal of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to maintain a healthy balance between conserving bighorn and providing other recreational benefits, such as hunting opportunity. 🏹

Literature Cited:

Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks. 2010. Montana Bighorn Sheep Conservation Strategy. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Helena, Montana, USA.

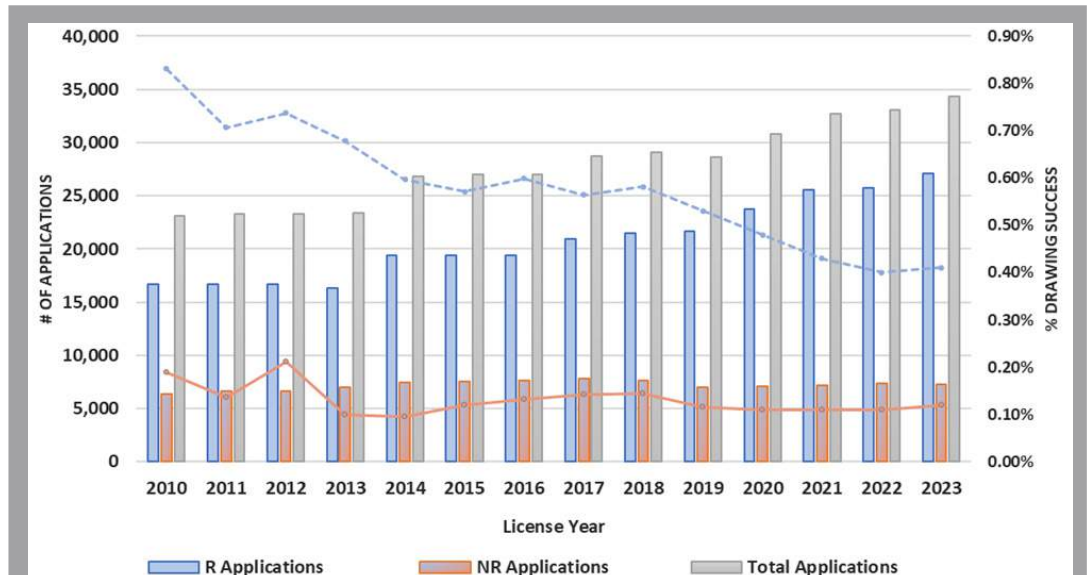


Figure 1. Cumulative number of applicants for limited either-sex/legal ram/any ram license types and associated annual percent successfully drawn.

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Chapter & Affiliate Summit

XVI Report

On July 14th & 15th Calgary, Alberta hosted the annual Chapter and Affiliate Summit. Executive director, Ty Stubblefield and Secretary, Erika Putnam, attended on behalf of the MTWSF. Presentations captured a variety of information about science, disease, chapter projects, wildlife management, predator control, land management and much more. Field trips were to the Canmore & the Evan Thomas Burn and to Sheep River Sanctuary. An auction was held on the final evening generating even more funds to keep sheep on the mountain.

During a field trip to The Sheep River Sanctuary, Provincial Big Game Specialist, Grant Chapman, was sharing with the group about action that was taken to prevent the threat and spread of disease and said, “You don’t want to get ready, you want to be ready.” They acted fast and were able to stop a massive outbreak of M-ovi. The relevance of that statement applied to that specific outbreak of disease containment and it also captures the essence of the purpose of the Chapters & Affiliates Summit.

By coming together and sharing ideas, successes and challenges we can be proactive instead of reactive about our cause of keeping sheep on the mountain. We are able to move forward and foster ideas and relationships that come from this 2-day summit. The information and collaborations between chapters are valuable assets to all of the organizations.

Ty Stubblefield gave a presentation about the unlimited areas and showed a recent presentation from our annual banquet given by Shawn Stewart. Interest was generated about this as a potential possibility to expand the unlimited’s in other states

and provinces.

There was a united front around the idea that there is more opportunity to improve public awareness in what we are doing as a culture of conservation and hunting community. The high-level overview, the details and the social and political contexts are all areas where the Chapters & Affiliates can work and make impact.

Ideas gained from the Summit will be shared with the full board at the upcoming strategic planning meeting as we evaluate the past year and plan for the future because we want to “be ready” for Montana sheep, MTWSF members and for other herds in other areas. 🍷





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Ewe Matter(s)

Spring Lambs are as Important as Big Rams

Spring lambs are adorable fluff balls of cuteness and they provide important information about herd preservation and growth. Ewes have a 6-month gestation period, with the rut occurring in November. Lambs are born starting late April each year. Some of our state biologists have been busy watching herds, looking for, and sometimes capturing lambs to monitor throughout the summer.

Biologists can monitor previously collared sheep for movement and have noticed that certain individuals tend to make small movements and hunker down in a small area when lambs are being born. This change in activity alerts the biologist to go into the field to potentially capture a new lamb for collaring. Another way to detect new births is to monitor the intervaginal devices (known as VIT's) that have been previously placed in ewes that are dropped at birth to alert the biologist of lambs on the ground. The devices signal light and temperature and indicate a birth event when the device is delivered with the lamb.

Sidney, one wildlife researcher, said, "We have to move in and catch them within 24-48 hours because after that they are too fast to catch." The lambs develop quickly and between their agility, the terrain and the mother's protective behaviors there is a small window of time to capture and collar the lambs. When a lamb is caught to be collared the ewes may become protective by kicking, charging, and snorting. The lambs are captured and weighed, ear tagged, identified for sex, evaluated for signs of disease and other behaviors such as excessive kicking or noise making. The collars expand as they grow and usually fall off in about a year. The collars signal movement patterns and help determine survival of the lamb. If a lamb is suspected dead, biologists can move into the field quickly and gather data about disease, predators or other means of death.

Most ewes give birth to one lamb per season and twins are not common. The mother often kicks yearlings away when having a lamb and the yearlings move into the nursery herd once the lambs are born. Males will leave this group around 3 years old. With only one lamb produced each season it is important

to keep these lambs safe and healthy. If we want to grow our populations fast action is required not only to capture and collar the lambs but also to proactively make necessary decisions with regards to disease, habitat and herd management. 📌



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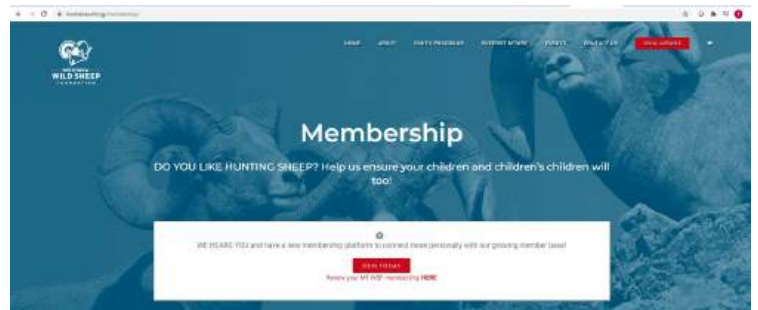
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