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WILD SHEEP

F O U N D A T I O N

KEEPING SHEEP ON THE MOUNTAIN



Summer 2026 | Volume 34, Issue 3

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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.

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@montanawsf.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,

Summer in Montana has a way of arriving all at once. Calendars fill quickly, days stretch long, and time outside seems both endless and never quite enough. For many of us in the sheep community, this season also carries a familiar mix of anticipation, excitement, and, for some, disappointment as draw results come in.

First, to those of you who drew a tag this year—congratulations. There's nothing quite like the opportunity to pursue bighorn sheep in wild country, and we're excited for you and the season ahead. For those who weren't as lucky this time around, know that you're not alone. The reality of limited tags means most of us spend more seasons dreaming than hunting—but that shared pursuit, and the work behind it, is what binds this community together.

While hunting opportunities are a cornerstone of our passion, the work we do as an organization extends far beyond any single season or permit. Summer brings a number of opportunities to get involved—on the ground and behind the scenes. From habitat projects and volunteer days to supporting and engaging with our agency partners, there are meaningful ways for everyone to contribute. Whether you have time to lend a hand, resources to share, or simply a willingness to stay engaged and spread the word, every bit of involvement moves the mission forward.

As I reflect on the energy of this time of year, I'm reminded that what makes this organization special isn't just the work—it's the people. It's the combination of passion, perseverance, and a deep respect for Montana's wild places and wildlife that continues to drive us forward.

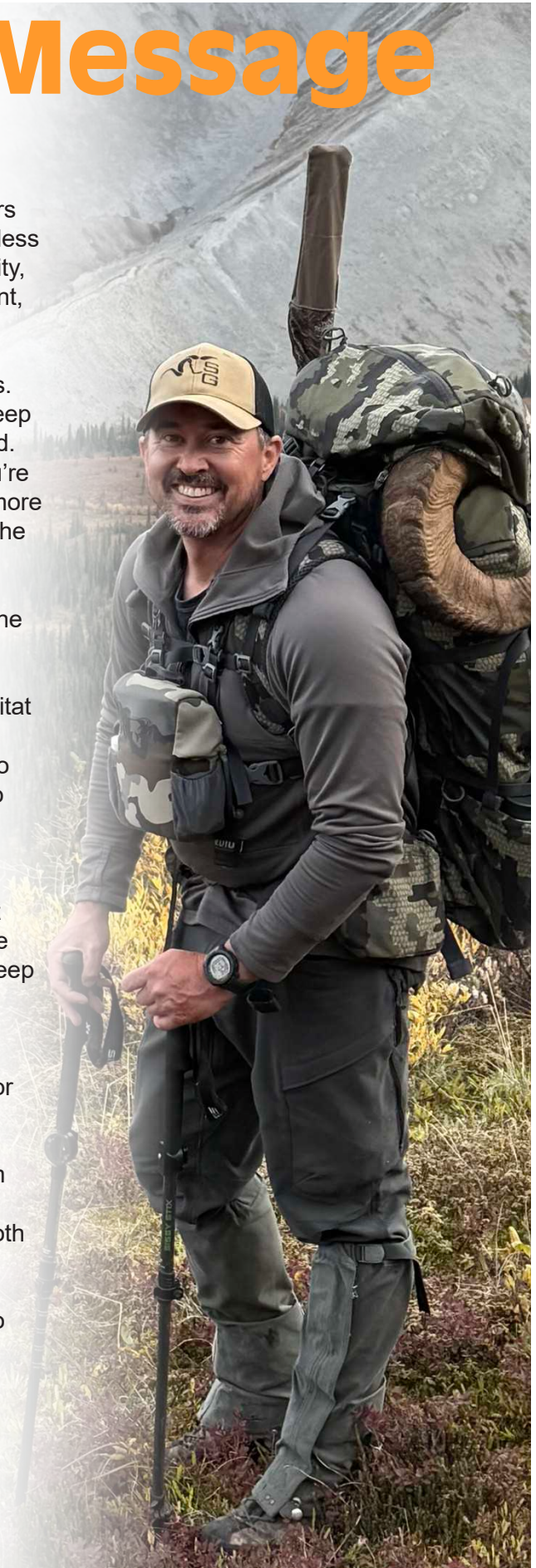
Looking ahead, our Board of Directors will be gathering soon for our annual in-person strategic meeting. This is a time we value deeply—a chance to step back, align on priorities, and dive headlong into the work that supports our mission and long-term vision. These sessions shape the direction of our efforts and ensure that we remain focused, effective, and ready to meet both the opportunities and challenges ahead.

Thank you for being part of this community and for all you do to support Montana's bighorn sheep.

Take care and enjoy the summer,

Alex Russell

Montana Wild Sheep Foundation President



Executive Director's Message

One of the things I enjoy most about being a part of Montana Wild Sheep Foundation is finding ways to connect people with Montana's incredible wild sheep heritage. That's why it was especially meaningful to help deliver full-size Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep mount to Red Lodge High School, whose mascot is the Bighorn Ram.

The ram was generously donated by Jack Atcheson Jr., and is a truly special one. Jack harvested this ram in one of the Unlimited Districts near Red Lodge. Anyone familiar with any of the unlimited units knows they're among the toughest bighorn sheep hunts in North America, making this ram a fitting symbol for the school and the community.



Thanks to Jack's generosity, students will have a lasting reminder of the wildlife, hunting heritage, and conservation efforts that make this area so unique. I hope every student who walks past this mount feels a sense of pride in the country they call home and gains a greater appreciation for the wild sheep that continue to thrive in Montana because of decades of conservation work.

We're grateful to Jack Atcheson Jr. for making this possible and proud that this incredible ram now has a permanent home at Red Lodge High School.

Jack Jr. also donated to MTWSF the very special gift of Bighorn sheep horns from the extinct sub-species called the Badlands bighorn (*Ovis canadensis auduboni*) or Audubon sheep. Jack Atcheson Senior and Jack A. Jr found the old rustic mount in a bar in eastern Montana back in the late 70's. We hope to tell the story and raise awareness with this iconic piece of history while displaying the updated mount around the state. But for now, this poem tells a story of its own. I hope you enjoy this little piece of cowboy poetry.

Ty Stubblefield

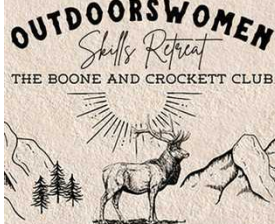
Executive Director, Montana Wild Sheep Foundation
ty@montanawsf.org

*There's a bar in old Montana with dust in every seam,
Where the beer flows cold and steady, and the stories come in streams.
A place where our good friends, the Atchesons, have spent a dime or two;
Leanin' on that old oak bar like good Montanans do.
Off in the corner, they eyed a mount of grandeur that's seen a year or two.
Not polished up for braggin', just a mount that's seen it all;
A ram you won't forget, boys hangin' quiet on that wall.
He once was a Badlands bighorn—Montana born and bred;
Now Badlands bighorns is gone for good, yep turns out they all are dead.
That dusty horn is history, but it don't just sit for show;
It warns what happens to wild sheep... when good folks let it go.
So we saddle up as one outfit, chapters, sister groups, one big crew;
And our mission ain't too complicated, it's as steady as time:
Put more sheep up on the mountain, keep rams high on the rise.
So laugh a little early, then give like you mean to stay;
Put more sheep on the mountain... and keep "extinct" at devil's bay.*

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HUNTERS LEADING THE WAY IN CONSERVATION

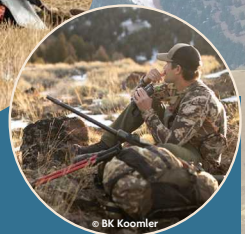
Hunting, fishing, and trapping provide direct support for wildlife management in North America. The Peregrine Fund, founded by falconers, co-founded the North American Non-lead Partnership.

After discovering lead fragments in the stomachs of dead raptors, our research revealed that these small lead fragments were primarily coming from the remains of shot animals. Scavenging wildlife can accidentally consume these tiny lead particles while eating remains left afield, getting sick and sometimes dying.

The **North American Non-lead Partnership** aims to preserve our wildlife conservation and hunting heritage by promoting **voluntary** efforts to reduce unintended impacts.



© Estelle Shuttleworth, DVM



© BK Koomler



Scan to learn more about the North American Non-lead Partnership

Across North America, about 50% of Bald and Golden Eagles show chronic levels of lead poisoning. **Lead exposure is the leading cause of death for an obligate scavenger, the California Condor, North America's most endangered raptor.**

HOW HUNTERS ARE HELPING

We can reduce the amount of lead eaten by scavenging wildlife by using non-lead ammunition or removing the remains of animals shot with lead from the field. However, remains of animals shot with non-lead provide a wonderful food source for scavenging wildlife, especially in the winter months when food can be scarce.



Bullet construction and location of impact influence rates of fragmentation.

WE MATTER(S)

Could you use a long-range training course?
I Didn't Think So Either.



Ten Things to Consider—When Investing in Firearm Training for Women, Men and Every Ethical Hunter

By Erika Putnam, Secretary MTWSF

A friend, who was moving, asked me to stop by so he could give me something before he left town. I agreed to the nice gesture thinking maybe it would be a bottle of bourbon or a keepsake of some kind. Instead, I had quite the surprise. Standing in the kitchen, he handed me a brand new 9 mm with the same casual attitude as if he were giving me a rib steak and a couple of potatoes. “Here ya go, you’re a hunter, you know what to do with these,” he said. I smiled, held it up, looked down the sights, “Mmm... nice.” I accepted as politely as I could and handed it back to him. I was extremely grateful but thought, “*Dang it, I really do need to take a handgun class.*”

What Changed My Perspective

I live in bear country and carry a handgun (and bear-spray) regularly, but I know I could use both handgun and rifle training. I had already been thinking about

taking a firearms class, but the gift caused me to consider both more seriously. I realized I felt more intimidated than excited and beyond that I also had Renée Thornton’s, founder of Women Hunt®, words stuck in my head. She said something important that’s been on my mind since last fall.

Renée and I were watching the women sighting in their rifles in preparation for the Montana/Alberta Wild Sheep joint elk hunt that was sponsored by Women Hunt® in Alberta. The wind was cold and gusting, and it was taking the women a very long time to zero their rifles. As we stood there freezing, watching, and waiting, Renée shared with me how much the women in the Women Hunt program benefit from the firearm training at the FTW Ranch where the event is hosted. She explained the confidence women gained as they became more comfortable with handling rifles and marksmanship. She spoke highly of the skill training and benefits received by participants in the long-range rifle training program.

As I watched the group, I noticed how easy it was to see the confidence in those who had more training, experience and practice.

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— SAFARIS —



Ewe Matter(s) continued

I had never considered taking a long-range shooting course before Renée's comments. Although I'm comfortable with my own rifle and shooting ability, I could be much more comfortable, confident, and familiar with a wider variety of firearms and hunting situations. More importantly, I would like to be more independent and competent. I've been interested in developing my own relationship with guns that includes my preferences for weight, comfort, recoil and even beauty. Why not enjoy my guns as much as my other personal treasures? With more knowledge, I think I would be more interested in getting out and including myself in conversations about things like caliber, shot placement, ballistics, brands and hunting in general. It was time for my search into firearm training.

What I Learned

I made several inquiries to schools that support wild sheep conservation, and I searched the web and included a few companies in my local area. Early on I realized the handgun training would be easy to get locally, but I wanted to learn more about long-range academies which would be a bigger investment in time and money.

I researched schools geared more toward hunting than tactical shooting. I found most schools advertise long-range training but distance wasn't my interest. My mistake. I soon learned that I had misinterpreted the meaning of the common phrase "long-range." To many it implies precision and difficulty. Shooting longer distances offers challenges to overcome to improve precision. Once I understood what "long-range" really meant I became much more interested in having conversations about making good, clean, ethical shots and how long-range practice fits into hunting scenarios.

After speaking to several training centers, I found that most courses offer a foundation course that includes classroom and range time instruction in positioning, scope use, shooting habits, firing many rounds at targets and much more. The amount of classroom time varies at different schools. The second class of most series consists of less range time and more time in the field working through scenarios involving distance, angles, wind, setup, shooting under time constraints and problem-solving.

Ten Things to Consider Before Choosing a Long-Range Training Course

1. COURSE COSTS

Average pricing runs from \$1975 to \$3950 for most 2–3-day courses. Some include accommodations and meals with pricing, others don't. Most include use of school firearms and provide ammunition. Some companies offer price breaks for industry professionals, military, membership associations, private small groups, signing up for multiple classes, off season dates and gun purchases.

2. ACCOMODATIONS AND MEALS

Some schools include food and lodging and are typically more expensive. Not all schools have accommodations. Motels and food are added expenses. A local experience offers cost savings. Locations can be remote, especially if hunting is part of the package. It might come down to deciding whether you prefer hot showers and a cozy bed in a lodge with luxurious meals and a place to hang out with other participants or whether you would be more interested in a wall tent and cot, a motel or your own home.

3. LOCATION

There are many location choices. We have numerous training centers within Montana. Smaller, local companies also have competent instruction and shouldn't be ruled out if staying close to home is important. However, if you want to include a hog hunt or have a specific gun you want to purchase at a discount offered by the school, or if you are looking for a more of a destination experience, you may be more inclined to look out of state or even out of country.

4. PERSONAL GOALS

Taking a course should align with your personal goals. Choosing a school may depend on whether you are interested in safety or hunting skills or time with friends or family. You may want to go somewhere new or prefer the terrain of an area you are familiar with. The degree to which you want to learn new skills may determine the length of the course you choose. If you are interested in hunting skills as part of the experience, there are courses that include professional instruction on stalking, tracking, skinning, and transport or field-to-fork courses or even wilderness first aid. What experiences and skills you're looking for should be considered when comparing companies. In-

Ewe Matter(s) continued

structors mentioned that many people come back and repeat the same course as a refresher and don't necessarily take advanced courses.

5. STUDENT TO INSTRUCTOR RATIO

Class sizes vary from 2 to 12. One company provided a student-to-instructor ratio of 2:1 and another was 7:1. Some schools rely more heavily on shooter/spotter pairs than other programs.

6. WI-FI (YES, REALLY!)

Several companies mentioned they didn't have Wi-Fi before I even asked. Consider if you could unplug for a few days and enjoy some downtime or conversations with instructors or other participants.

7. THINK BEYOND THE TUITION

Throughout my conversations, I picked up more industry lingo and the benefits of investing in training. Developing these skills would require me to practice regularly, which could lead to time with friends or even meeting with like-minded people. The cost would be in ammo, rangefinder, tripod,

binoculars, packs, other classes, hunting trips, guns and tags. The investment could support social connections, family time, fun, pleasure, invitations and other opportunities. Further, many programs offer advanced training, opportunistic hunting options, safari options, and wilderness first aid, to name a few.

8. SUPPORTING CONSERVATION

Several of the companies sponsor and donate to WSF, state chapters, including MTWSF and provincial chapters. You may prefer choosing to invest with businesses that are affiliated with wild sheep conservation.

9. FEMALE-FRIENDLY TEACHING

Many schools offer instruction tailored for women, providing a supportive environment and encouraging participation. Look for programs that highlight female-friendly teaching methods if this is important to you.

10. DON'T OVERLOOK THE HANDGUN TRAINING

These trainings are both co-ed and female specif-



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ic. Women-specific classes are much more common for handgun training than rifle training. Likely, due to the emphasis on self-protection. By nature, many of the leaders within the teaching industry have police and military backgrounds even in the hunting-specific training schools. I was offered the advice to take a handgun training specifically. Unlike long range rifle training the value of handgun training is in repetition, muscle memory and situational awareness. I found handgun schools to be widely available, shorter in duration and significantly less in pricing. Long range academies tend to provide weapons and ammo, whereas handgun training encourages you to bring your own firearm and ammunition.

TRAINING CENTERS CONTACTED

Companies marked with an asterisk () sponsor MTWSF, WSF or Women Hunt®*

*Snowy Mountain Rifles, Hamilton, MT

*FTW Ranch, Barkdale, TX

*FTW Ranch, Field to Fork

*Gunwerks, Cody, WY

Outdoor Solutions, OK & TX

Swan Mountain Outfitters, MT

*Bergara Academy, Great Falls, MT

FINAL THOUGHTS

I went from thinking I wasn't that interested in attending a long-range academy to wanting to sign up immediately. A gift, a conversation and research nudged me to evaluate my values and responsibilities as a firearm owner and hunter.

Now, I have a new appreciation for long-range training and believe my future as a hunter will benefit. As far as return on investment I realize new guns and new gear are long term investments but by attending training and gaining more knowledge and confidence it would help ensure future shots are safe, ethical, and responsible and that is personally worth my money

and aligns with my interest in impacting wild sheep conservation.

Cooking confidence doesn't come from more gadgets and cookbooks either. It comes from learning, practicing and putting in the time. Trust me, I've got a lot of gadgets and cookbooks, and I've still messed up recipes including steak and potatoes. But I have spent a lot of time in the kitchen and because of practice, I'm comfortable in the kitchen and a relatively good cook. It seems the time has come to apply my cooking wisdom to hunting and invest in training and time at the range-a new range that is.

MORE TO COME

If you are interested in joining a group of MTWSF members, women or men, in a long-range training course, reach out or stay tuned. Off season private group sessions are available and I would love to get a group together. 🔥

Draw Odds and Harvest Information
(Showing draw odds and harvest info for hunt code 01000001 - 01000001 - 01000001 - 01000001)

Draw	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Draw	3%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
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CONSERVATION Corner

Summer 2026

Montana Wild Sheep Foundation in partnership with Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks provided \$5,245 to Washington Animal Disease Laboratory last fall for hunter sampling kits which were provided to all bighorn sheep license holders. Over half of the hunters (60 of 105) voluntarily collected blood and nasal swabs for disease monitoring of our bighorn sheep populations. *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* (*M. ovi*), a bacterial pathogen which causes respiratory disease, including pneumonia, was found in 3 tested serum samples (HD 301—Spanish Peaks, HD 422—Castle Reef and HD 424—Ford Creek)—all hunting districts which were already known to be positive. Results were undetermined for 2 samples: one from HD 270—East Fork Bitterroot and another from HD 455—Beartooth WMA & Gates of the Mountains Wilderness Area. Disease monitoring plays an important role in understanding and mitigating pneumonia die-offs. We will continue to fund hunter sampling kits and encourage all lucky sheep hunters to submit them when feasible. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Veterinarian Jennifer Ramsey provides a detailed report as well as a map showing the results below.

Happy Hunting ~ Ray Vinkey, Board Member

Jennifer Ramsey – Wildlife Veterinarian Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks:

*Prior to the 2025-26 hunting season, sampling kits were mailed to all non-unlimited hunt district bighorn sheep hunters. The kits contained instructions and supplies to collect blood for *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* (*M. ovi*) competitive enzyme-linked immunoassay (cELISA) and nasal swabs for *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing at Washington Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory (WADDL).*

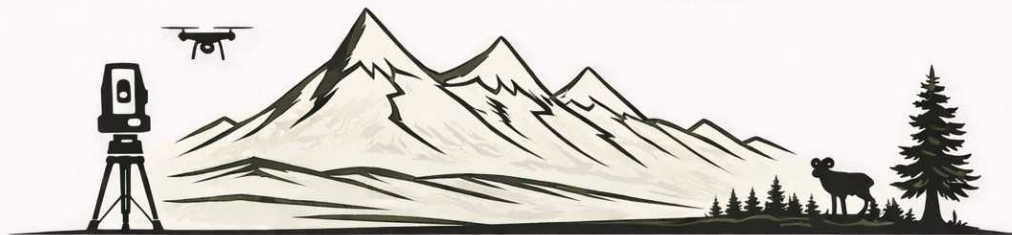
HD 680 was the most heavily sampled, with a total of 10 samples returned. Eight samples were returned for HD 270, and seven for HD 124.

*The cELISA is used to detect antibodies for *M. ovi* in an animal's blood serum. The serological test does not confirm current infection but is an indicator of exposure. Presence of antibodies indicates that an animal's immune system has developed antibodies as a result of exposure to the pathogen.*

*The PCR test is used to detect genetic material from *M. ovi* on the nasal swab. A positive or "detected" PCR test result indicates presence of *M. ovi* in the nasal cavity of the bighorn sheep. When a PCR test is obtained, the genetic material*



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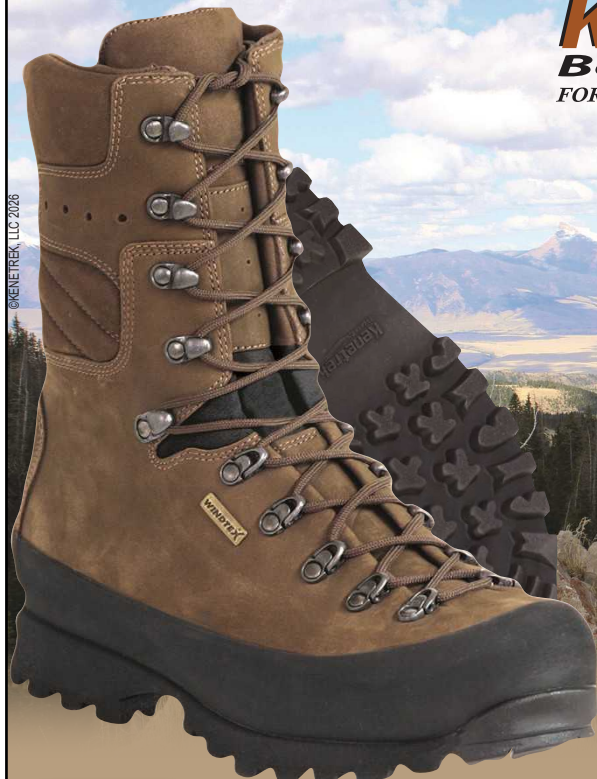


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Conservation Corner continued

detected on the swab is often then used for another test called Multi-locus sequence typing (MLST) to attempt to determine which strain of the bacteria is present. Some samples do not contain enough genetic information to determine the strain with confidence.

Of the 105 sample kits that were sent out, 60 were returned with samples. We received 51 testable blood serum samples, and all 60 nasal swabs were testable.

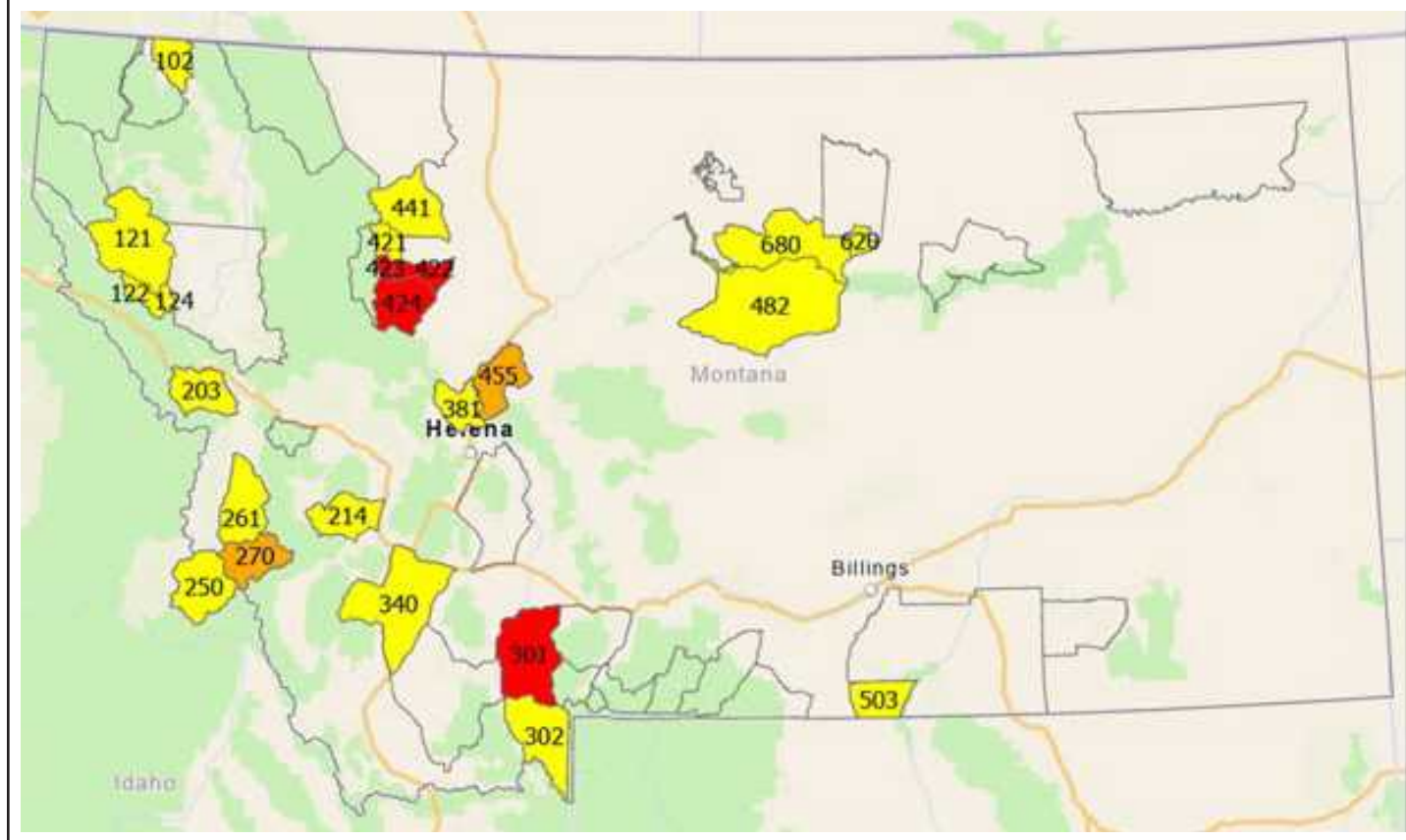
Antibodies for *M. ovi* were detected in 3 of the 51 tested serum samples: one from HD 301, one from HD 422, and one from HD 424. These three hunt districts are known to be *M. ovi* positive; therefore, evidence of exposure to the bacteria is not surprising in these animals. Results were “indeterminate” (undetermined) for 2 samples: one from HD 270, and one from HD 455.

Two of the 60 nasal swabs were designated as “indeterminate” on PCR testing: one from HD 422 and one from HD 423. An indeterminate result means that the result could not be classified as either “detected” or “not detected” with high confidence. Indeterminate results may be caused by sampling or transport issues, low level of bacterial shedding in the nasal cavity of the

animal at the time of sampling, presence of dirt or other substances that interfere with testing, or cross-reacting *Mycoplasma* species (WADDL). MLST was attempted on both indeterminate samples. A strain type could not be determined for the sample from HD 422, but the strain detected was consistent with # BHS-140 from the sample from HD 423. This strain (BHS-140) has been detected previously in neighboring hunting districts (HD 424 and HD 421) but had not been detected in HD 423 prior to this sampling effort. While sampling opportunity has been limited from HD 423, one bighorn sheep sampled by a biologist in 2021 did have a positive result on *M. ovi* cELISA, suggesting exposure to the bacterium had occurred.

The map below shows hunt districts from which samples were collected. Hunt districts colored red had *M. ovi* or *M. ovi* antibody “detected” results on at least one test (serology, PCR, MLST). Hunt districts colored orange had *M. ovi* “indeterminate” results on serology of PCR. Samples were collected from hunt districts colored yellow, but *M. ovi* or *M. ovi* antibodies were not detected, although sample sizes may be too low to have detected *M. ovi* if it were present. 🔥

Hunting Districts sampled in 2025 with positive, indeterminate and no detection of *M. ovi* (Red shows HDs with a detection, orange indeterminate and yellow no detection.)





 _Elena_johnson

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REGION 1 Update

102 Galton: No progress with comingling prevention at border. Ethan Lula has met with tribal biologists on B.C. side to ensure cooperation there. I received very useful vaccination and other information from Dr. Bimczok, the Montana State U. researcher for the landowner. Look at her work on the WSF news on web site.

101 Ural/Tweed: Controlled burn on upper Tweed Ck went well. Ethan has cameras up. No cell service there. I still get reports of sheep on HWY 37. No deaths.

100 Kootenai Falls: The controlled burn did not get done, planned for next winter.

123 Berray/Cabinets: Zack Farley is lobbying for controlled burns next year. Difficulty getting lion hunters up there. Quotas not met.

121 T.Falls: We discovered a section of short fence along tracks that sheep get over to circle back to HWY 200. Trying to get permission to fix it. 8 feet is the minimum height for bighorns, although they have been known to get over that height. No road kills that I am aware of in those units this year.

The Spring newsletter arrived in May, after sheep permit application deadline. Some members texted me for advice and I sent them the report early. The newsletter version was chopped up. If you want the original, text me. 406 752-9006. 🍷

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Wild Horse Island Update

Bennie Rossetto, Reg 1 CC Member

A photograph showing a person in a blue jacket and dark pants standing on a rocky shore, looking towards a small boat. The boat is labeled 'SEA RUNNER' and 'MT 4089 AT'. The background features a calm lake and a large, forested mountain under a blue sky with scattered clouds.

In April, Franz Inglefinger, Region One biologist for the Flathead area and Wild Horse Island, asked me to join him and a biologist crew, combing Wild Horse Island, counting bighorn sheep, assessing habitat, and winter mortality. Bighorns were reportedly brought to the island from British Columbia by CSKT tribal members in the early 1900's, but the first to establish themselves were a ram and ewe from the Missions in 1939. Six bighorns from the Sun River herd were relocated there in 1947, and two from Ural/Tweed in 1987. There have been ups and downs (winter kills, lightning strikes, mountain lions), but from 1955 to 2021, the island has been the source of over 500 bighorns translocated to other parts of Montana and the West.

Western Montana has been blessed with devoted bighorn sheep advocates over these decades, supporting Fish Wildlife and Parks biologists with translocations, radio and GPS collaring, habitat enhancement and other efforts. But biologists and bighorn disciples come and go. In 2024, Ty Stubblefield, MTWild Sheep Foundation executive director, asked me to represent Region One on the relatively new Conservation Committee. I had been communicating with our local biologist in Eureka, Ethan Lula, on mule deer and Galton and Ural/Tweed bighorn issues, and extended those efforts to include new biologists, Zack Farley in Thompson Falls and Sam Martinez in

Libby. Several days in the truck and on the roadsides with them, Neil Anderson our chief biologist, and our western Montana D.O.T. Biologists established good working relationships. This is where I learned of habitat changes on Wild Horse Island (cheatgrass and conifer encroachment). Our enthusiasm to help Wild Horse bighorns led Ty to procuring a replica of the island's #world record bighorn. When you read his story, you will understand how Kirk Russell, our V.P., and I got on the boat.

We left the dock at Big Arm State Park April 17, 8 A.M. Amy Grout, Wild Horse State Park manager, was the captain. Sam, Zack and Franz were the biologists. Cynthia Inglefinger, Kirk and I were spotters. The lake was glass smooth, but eventually we would encounter all that early spring on Flathead offers. We cruised the shoreline, glassing for bighorns and mule deer, and scanning for the radio collared sheep. Kirk was the best spotter.

The island is shaped like a sunfish. We beached the boat on gravel in the crotch of the tail (Seeka Bay) and hiked up the trail to the saddle to glass. New growth cheatgrass was greening up on the open forest floor. We immediately found sheep, including

a large group of bedded rams. Eventually we split into three pairs. Kirk and Franz went high, Zack and I took the middle, and Sam and Cynthia took the lower route, closer to the 50 one acre round lots and cabins. They eventually saw the five horses that have inhabited the island for years. There have been as many as 50 to 100 in the mid-1900's. We traversed in and out of ravines, over ridges and maintained radio or phone contact to avoid double counting sheep. We converged at the southern ridge (nose of sunfish), ate lunch, and planned our routes back. Our routes were similar. The open areas are mostly on the southern third. The timber is old growth Ponderosa pine. Scattered old growth Douglas fir are diseased and dying, which is serving to open up the old growth somewhat. Understory grass gives way to browse in thicker northeast slopes. Sapling encroachment is on the edges of old growth, which would be amenable to MTWSF thinning crews. We did find bighorns and mule deer in timber. Franz theorized that some ewes may have been there preparing to give birth. The only carcasses I saw were mule deer in timber, winter kill in thermal cover with browse.

Sheep forage consists of abundant rough fescue and Idaho fescue, which the horses also like. Scattered



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Wild Horse Island Update continued

heads were eaten down to stubble, but the majority were full. Horse ground damage was minimal. Cheatgrass was green, new growth on the west side, open timber and large parks. Franz believed helicopter spraying on big open west flanks would be the main method of control, followed by reseeding with the native fescue. Wild fire on the island should be controlled as fast as possible to prevent further spread of cheatgrass and damage to native fescue and browse.

Eventually we slid and scrambled through blown down timber to a gravel beach where Amy waited with the boat. In all, we counted 133 sheep, 90 ewes, 7 yearlings, and 36 rams. Franz and Zack had counted sheep via helicopter in winter and Franz, on a solo kayak trip in March. I have included his chart (Table 1) for full details and history of past data collection. This is very interesting, and his full report is available on request. He believes the total population is 150, with a goal of 99-121, and 25 lambs per 100 ewes in spring. Habitat improvements would increase carrying capacity, and population control should continue to be by translocation, not predation or excess winter kill.

Montana Wild Sheep Foundation is enthusiastically offering our continued financial and physical assistance with translocations, collaring, habitat work, predator control, cell camera monitoring (a generous bighorn advocate has provided several cameras).

Note to Bennie from Franz Ingelfinger:

"Interestingly, I was out on the Island last Thursday [June 18] with Dave Landstrom (R1 Parks Manager) conducting a lamb count and retrieving cameras placed to monitor lamb production and potential predation. I am happy to report sheep were cooperative, lining out for us at the end of the day, providing a solid count as they descended a slope toward Seeko Bay. We had a minimum lamb count of 75 (recall my ewe count from our spring trip was 90). That, along with six cameras with nothing but sheep, lambs, mule deer and a few foxes, confirm that for now, predation does not appear to be limiting lamb recruitment. I anticipate another classification survey in December to get another count prior to winter translocations. This will also give me another look at lamb survival at that later date, with the proof in the pudding being spring recruitment. A lot can happen between now and then.





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Wild Horse Island Update continued

Also, at the end of June, FWP's range ecologist will be out on Wildhorse Island establishing monitoring plots for all plant communities and to look at cheatgrass management. I will say cheatgrass is well-established on the Island, I will say to the point of saturation, meaning we are well-past the invasion phase, and that it is established in all suitable habitats. In another few weeks, the seeds will harden and walking around out there will guarantee to ruin socks not protected by heavy gaiters. Management at this point will not be about eradication, but whether there are options to limit its abundance and cover without sterilizing the range.

Attached for your amusement are a few photos from our game cameras, three with cellular capabilities provided by a generous donor.

Again, nice article and thanks for your interest and support."

In conclusion, time brings changes in habitat, invasive plants, disease, weather and predation. Wildlife managers come and go, as do sheep advocates like ourselves. We must renew our commitment with every change of the guard. Past wild sheep disciples have spent considerable time, treasure and talent on Wild Horse Island bighorn sheep. We will not forget their efforts, or allow those efforts to be in vain. 🍷

References:

Almberg, et al. Jan.6, 2022. FWP web site. Table 1, Wild Horse Island bighorn census surveys since 1939. Figure 2. Map of our 4/17/26 WHI ground survey.
Flathead Living 2021 WHI History.
Franz Inglefinger, personal communication and lamb photos.





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