

## Santa Catalina Bighorn Sheep Reintroduction Project

January 15 through 28, 2015

### **BRIEFING**

The following is a summary of Catalina Bighorn Sheep Reintroduction activities on the Coronado National Forest. This project status update covers the period from January 15 through 28, 2015.



### **LAMBS**

On January 17, 2015, a Catalina Bighorn Sheep Reintroduction Project Volunteer who is also an Advisory Committee member, captured photos of ewe ID #454 with a week old lamb using a large telephoto lens. This lamb is the fourth new lamb observed this year. Ewe #454 was relocated to the Catalinas from the Plomosa Mountains in November 2014. (Photo courtesy of Joe Sheehey).

On January 28, 2015, an Arizona Game and Fish biologist observed two ewes and a new born lamb. The ewes were ID # 445 and 435. Using a spotting scope the biologist observed the lamb nursing from ewe #445. This is the fifth new lamb observed this year. This is a good reminder for hikers and recreationists to stay on designated trails, maintain

a good distance away from sheep, and to never take dogs into the Bighorn Sheep Management Area. The addition of lambs is critical to the establishment of the herd and their survival could be jeopardized by human-caused disturbance. You can also see some extensive footage of three of this year's lambs with a group of ewes (#439, 449, 444, 443 and 441 were all observed during the time of filming) by clicking [here](#).

### **MORTALITIES**

There were no known mortalities of collared sheep during this reporting period.

### **CURRENT POPULATION STATUS**

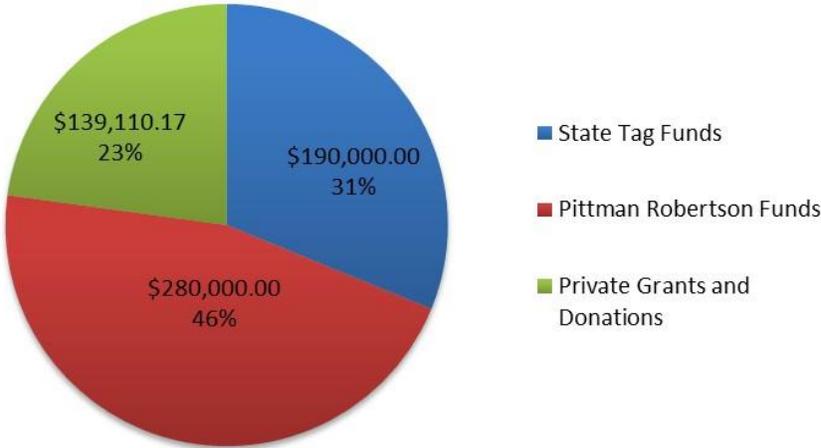
As of January 28, 2015, 40 collared sheep are known to be alive.

## **THE URBAN INTERFACE**

On January 21, 2015, the Arizona Game and Fish Department received calls from interested residents in reference to three bighorn sheep near the intersection of Ina Road and 1st Avenue. Arizona Game and Fish Biologists responded and confirmed the presence of sheep ID #656 and #662 along with an un-collared yearling ewe. The three sheep were carefully hazed in an effort to get them to leave the urban area and after approximately two hours biologists lost visual and radio contact with the sheep. On January 22, 2015 biologists reviewed the GPS data downloaded from the two collared sheep and it indicated the sheep had returned to the Pusch Ridge Wilderness Area. The biologists hope that the sheep will remain in the wildland habitat and avoid returning to the urban area.

After reviewing the GPS data for the two collared sheep, there was evidence that these same animals had ventured into the periphery of the urban area on two occasions during the preceding two weeks and that this foray was the farthest. In addition there are a few other documented instances when the Catalina bighorn sheep have traveled into the urban interface. Last year one of the reintroduced rams was observed by residents in the outskirts of Oro Valley a handful of times. This year two ewes were documented in the Ventana Canyon and Finger Rock Estates areas. In each of these cases the sheep retreated back to the Wilderness Area. It is unknown why sheep exhibit this behavior but it could be linked to the natural instinct to explore and expand territories. This phenomena is responsible for sheep locating appropriate habitat and can promote growth of the herd. It also facilitates genetic exchange between herds to prevent genetic “bottle-necking” which can be detrimental to the long term survival of isolated herds. There are examples of where bighorn sheep have adapted to the urban interface such as in Hemenway Park in Boulder City, Nevada and the Peninsular sheep in the Santa Rosa Mountains in Southern California. Although the sheep are present and appear to be doing well the long term effects are uncertain. One observation suggest that the exposure to parasites is higher amongst sheep in an urban environment. There is also the potential for the loss of sheep due to unnatural factors including collisions with vehicles. Our intent is to encourage the Catalina bighorn sheep to use appropriate habitat removed from the urban interface and hope that incursions into urban areas will be rare if at all. We will continue to monitor the bighorn sheep’s habitat selection in an effort to determine possible impacts. It is best that watchable wildlife is observed in its natural habitat with minimal disturbance. Human habituation of wildlife is invariably detrimental to the animals and often results in unnecessary mortalities. We hope that people have an awareness of and appreciation for the bighorn sheep now living in their back yard and will do their part to help keep wildlife wild.

## Funding Breakdown for the Catalina BHS Restoration Project as of Jan. 15'



## FUNDING THE PROJECT

The Santa Catalina Bighorn Sheep Reintroduction Project is employing state of the art technology to learn as much as possible about sheep and how they interact with their environment. The information comes with a cost and funding is an incredibly important aspect of the project. We are often asked where the funding comes from. The answer is that there are three main funding sources; sportsman dollars, private donations and excise tax funds. Sportsman dollars are generated from the sale of raffle and auction tags (hunting opportunity) for each of

the big game species. Often the auction tag for Arizona big horn sheep can exceed \$200,000. These funds are allocated to improve sheep habitat and to assist with trans-location efforts. Private donations are an important funding source as well. Thanks to generous grants we are able to stretch funding so that other worthy projects can be accomplished. Most of the donations come from sportsmen oriented groups and individuals who are interested in seeing the sheep herd reestablished in the Santa Catalina Mountains. Several large donations were recently received form the Arizona Chapter of Safari Club International, the Wild Sheep Foundation, the Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society and Safari Club International Foundation. The last source is funding from the Pittman-Robertson fund (PR). PR funds are gathered as an excise tax for those who purchase guns and ammo. These monies go into a fund that is then distributed to the states based upon license sales and population. Over the past few years this fund has grown due to the interest in shooting sports.

## PROJECT SPONSORS: A Special Thank You to Our Major Funding Partners

We would like to recognize the following groups as major funding partners for the project:

Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society, Wild Sheep Foundation, Safari Club International Foundation, and the Arizona Chapter of Safari Club International



## **LINKS**

For project background and previously-reported information on project events, including photos and videos, as well as meeting notes and minutes please visit [www.azgfd.gov/catalinabighorn](http://www.azgfd.gov/catalinabighorn).

Additional project information can be obtained by visiting the Arizona Game and Fish Department Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/CatalinaBighorns](http://www.facebook.com/CatalinaBighorns), the Arizona Game and Fish Department webpage at [www.azgfd.gov/catalinabighorn](http://www.azgfd.gov/catalinabighorn), the Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society webpage at [www.adbss.org](http://www.adbss.org) or by visiting the Catalina Bighorn Advisory Committee webpage at [www.catalinabighornrestoration.org](http://www.catalinabighornrestoration.org). This update is a public document and information in it can be used for any purpose.

## **TO SUBSCRIBE**

If you would like to receive project updates as they are published please send your email address to [jsacco@azgfd.gov](mailto:jsacco@azgfd.gov).

## **COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION**

The next written briefing will be provided on February 13, 2015.

## **CONTACT**

Mark Hart is the Public Information Officer for this project and can be reached at (520) 628-5376.

## **RESEARCH FIELD NOTES**

There are no new notes for this reporting period.