



Santa Catalina Bighorn Sheep Reintroduction Project

March 24 – April 27, 2016

BRIEFING

The following is a summary of bighorn sheep reintroduction activities on the Coronado National Forest from March 24 through April 27, 2016.

LAMBING SEASON

We are nearing the end of the lambing season for bighorn sheep, and most of the ewes will already have given birth. Ewes with new lambs are particularly sensitive to disturbance, and recreationists are being asked to help minimize human-caused disturbance by adhering to the trail restrictions within the Pusch Ridge Wilderness Bighorn Sheep Management Area. From January 1 through April 30, travel more than 400 feet off designated Forest Service trails is prohibited. Dogs are prohibited year-round.

Twenty-three lambs have been observed this year, including one born to a ewe that was the only surviving lamb in 2014. This population of bighorn sheep will be surveyed by helicopter in October, and the results will provide a better estimate of the population and lamb recruitment.

MORTALITIES

On March 29, the GPS collar for Ewe #39550 sent a mortality alert. The carcass was found later that day, and it was determined that a mountain lion had killed this bighorn sheep late on the night of March 28. Upon closer observation of the carcass on March 31, a lamb was found buried underneath Ewe #39550. It appeared that the lamb had been killed one or two days prior to the ewe. Pursuit of the lion responsible for the kill was initiated on March 31 but was unsuccessful. Ewe #39550 was captured in the Imperial Hills in 2015.

On April 3, a resident near Pusch Ridge reported a bighorn sheep (Ewe #39544) in her yard that was limping and disoriented. It died later that afternoon. Necropsy revealed this animal did not currently have pneumonia, but scar tissue in the lungs indicated that there had been a previous infection. The kidneys appeared small, and the ewe was emaciated. Lab results later confirmed the ewe was not suffering from pneumonia, and no bacteria associated with pneumonia were present. The cause of death was determined to be a combination of infection and exposure to a toxic plant. Ewe #39544 was captured in the Imperial Hills in 2015, and she had a lamb earlier this year.

On April 15, the collar for Ewe #37449 transmitted a VHF mortality alert. The carcass was located on April 16, and the cause of death was determined to be mountain lion predation. The mountain lion returned to the carcass to feed that night. On April 17, pursuit of the mountain lion was initiated, and the lion responsible for the death of Ewe #37449 was lethally removed. The lion was an adult male, and was

the fifth mountain lion removed as part of this bighorn sheep reintroduction effort. Ewe #37449 was captured in the Tonto National Forest in 2014, and she had a lamb earlier this year.

On April 24, after volunteer monitors had received sporadic VHF signals on the collar for Ewe #39558 for a week, a field investigation was initiated. The carcass of Ewe #39558 was found, and the cause of death was determined to be mountain lion predation. The sheep was likely killed on April 15, and the carcass had already been consumed. Therefore, it would be unlikely that the lion responsible for the kill could be located, so the lion was not pursued. Ewe #39558 was captured in the Imperial Hills in 2015.

On April 25, the GPS collar for Ewe #39541 sent a mortality alert. A site visit was conducted later in the day, and field personnel discovered the fresh carcass of Ewe #39541 that had been killed on the evening of April 24. Pursuit of the lion responsible for this sheep mortality was initiated on April 26, and the lion was lethally removed on April 27. The lion was an adult male, and is the sixth mountain lion removed as part of this bighorn sheep reintroduction effort. Two lions were removed in 2013, one in 2014, one was removed last month, and two were removed this month. Ewe #39541 was captured in the Middle Mountains in 2015. She had a lamb earlier this year.

CURRENT POPULATION STATUS

As of April 27, 2016, 38 collared sheep are known to be alive. There could be as many as 45 uncollared sheep in this population as well, bringing the total potential population to 83 bighorn sheep. Uncollared bighorn sheep include those released without collars, those from the 2013 release whose collars have dropped off, and those born in the Santa Catalina Mountains.

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 and click on “Wildlife”, then “Catalina Bighorn Sheep” under the heading “Additional Wildlife Information”.

Additional project information can be obtained by visiting the Arizona Game and Fish Department Facebook page at www.facebook.com/CatalinaBighorns, the Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society webpage at www.adbss.org, or by visiting the Catalina Bighorn Advisory Committee webpage at 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 ldesouza@azgfd.gov.

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

The next written briefing will be provided on May 27, 2016.

CONTACT

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