



## Catalina Bighorn Sheep Reintroduction Project May 26, 2014 – June 8, 2014

### **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 May 26, to June 8, 2014. For project background and previously-reported information on project events, including photos and videos 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 <https://www.facebook.com/azgafd#!/CatalinaBighorns>, the Arizona Game and Fish Department webpage at <http://www.azgfd.gov/catalinabighorn>, the Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society webpage at <http://www.adbss.org> or by visiting the Catalina Bighorn Advisory Committee webpage at <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).

### **CURRENT POPULATION STATUS**

No mortalities occurred during this reporting period. The original release of 31 sheep consisted of 21 adult females or ewes, three yearling/juvenile ewes, five adult males or rams, and two yearling/juvenile rams. Thirty of the released sheep were outfitted with satellite GPS collars to provide managers with up-to-date information to help make adaptive, data-driven decisions. As of June 8, 2014, 13 of the remaining 14 collared sheep are known to be alive; one of the collars maybe malfunctioning.

To date there have been 16 bighorn sheep mortalities. Fourteen of the sheep were killed by mountain lions, one died as the result of predation by an unidentified cat such as a small mountain lion or a bobcat, and another died from myopathy. To date, three lions associated with bighorn sheep kills have been removed, and the most recent of these lions was believed to have killed multiple sheep.

### **LAMBS**

Biologists continue to monitor the population for new additions and to check on the lambs born earlier this year. To date five lambs have been observed during this season. As the lambing season draws to a close it is encouraging to note that the survivability of the known lambs has exceeded expectations. Seeing the continued development of the lambs is a source of cautious optimism as the project moves forward. Because females with new lambs are especially sensitive to disturbance, there are trail restrictions in place inside the Bighorn Sheep Management Area to minimize any negative impacts from

human disturbance on the sheep. Both trailhead notices and volunteers on the trail have been reminding hikers of the potential adverse impacts to the sheep caused by dogs or by people hiking more than 400 feet off-trail within the bighorn sheep recovery area during lambing season. There is video of two of the lambs interacting available on the website. For additional information, please visit the U.S. Forest Service webpage at [www.fs.usda.gov/coronado/](http://www.fs.usda.gov/coronado/).

## **COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION**

The next written briefing will be provided on June 27, 2014.

## **CONTACT**

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

## **RESEARCH PROJECT FIELD NOTES**

Research biologists have been compiling location data on all Catalina sheep and constructing databases to house the data. Now with almost 6 months of location data collected, it is exciting that we can start looking for patterns and marking out sheep use areas so that we can refine our habitat suitability sampling strategies and measurements for model construction. These data will help to characterize the attributes of vegetation structure, density and composition where sheep are found, and together with variables like topography (e.g., slope and ruggedness) and sheep group composition, will help define what factors place a sheep at risk of mortality. As well, we continue to monitor both individuals and small bands of sheep to observe and document ewes with lambs and observe the changes in group dynamics, sheep movements and behaviors.

## **OTHER REMARKS**

Prior to 1960, there were fewer than 1,000 sheep in Arizona in approximately 12 herds, most of which were in decline. Thanks to work by Department biologists, university researchers and conservationists, and with support from sportsmen and the public, today there are nearly 6,000 sheep in 32 herds across the mountains and canyons of Arizona.

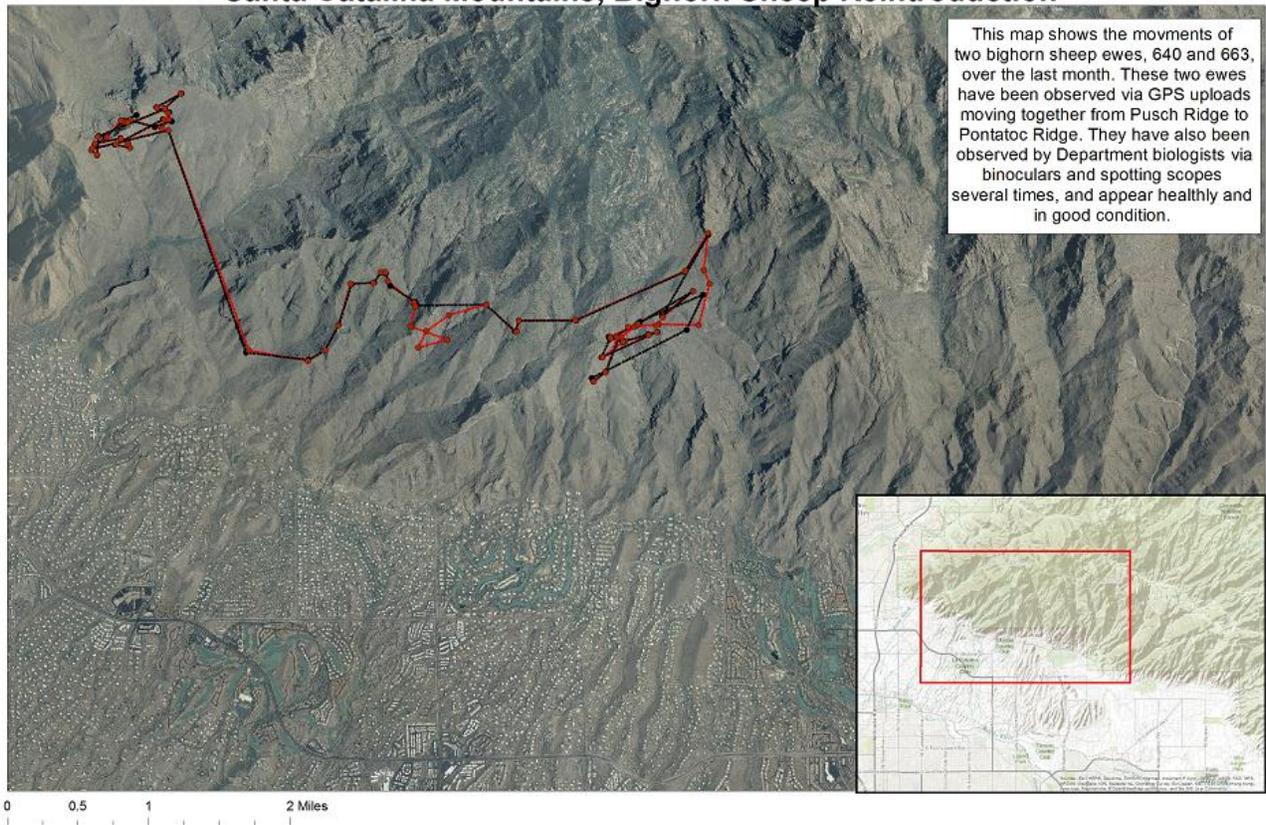
The rebound of desert bighorn in Arizona is a success story that has been unfolding for more than six decades. The Santa Catalina Bighorn Sheep Project is the sixth sheep repatriation in recent times, the previous five noteworthy successes in conserving native species and restoring Arizona's wildlife diversity. Individuals from Arizona's many healthy bighorn sheep populations have even been transplanted by the Department to support bighorn repatriation efforts in other states. The Santa Catalina repatriation program is based on scientific experience and practical lessons learned in repatriations throughout the Southwest.

The Santa Catalina Mountains were home to bighorn sheep for all of recorded history until the 1990s, when the herd was extirpated due to several contributing factors. That important niche in the ecosystem was vacant until last November. Translocations are carefully planned and source populations are carefully monitored to determine when a removal can be accomplished without affecting population sustainability. Department surveys of source bighorn sheep populations show each source population is

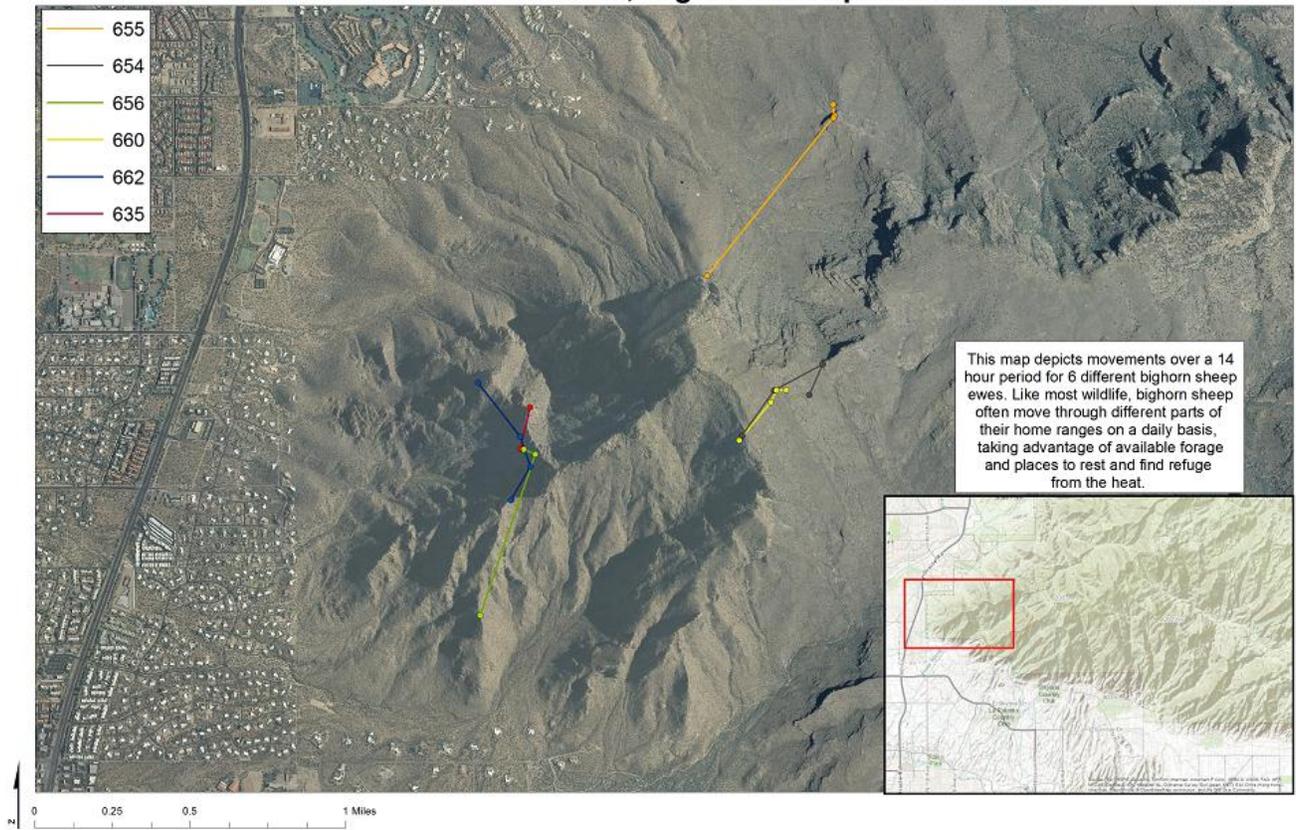
different and there are required intervals to replace the number of animals removed. A number of factors influence the productivity of a specific herd, but population demographics are influenced by the amount and timing of precipitation, predation, disease exposure, and habitat quality. We continue monitoring each herd to better inform our decisions for future action. Fire is an important tool to restore ecosystem health, and the Department is currently working with the U.S. Forest Service to encourage implementation of their Firescape Planning for prescribed burns and managed lightning-ignited fires in the Catalina Mountains. The Advisory Committee and the Department support restoring a natural fire regime to increase suitable habitat for wildlife.

## MAPS

### Santa Catalina Mountains, Bighorn Sheep Reintroduction



# Santa Catalina Mountains, Bighorn Sheep Reintroduction



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