



Santa Catalina Bighorn Sheep Reintroduction Project

November 5-18, 2015

BRIEFING

The following is a summary of bighorn sheep reintroduction activities on the Coronado National Forest from November 5-18, 2015.

RELEASE

On the morning of November 16, 2015, the Arizona Game and Fish Department (Department) released 29 bighorn sheep below Pusch Ridge in the Catalina Mountains. This group was comprised of 6 rams and 23 ewes captured from the Yuma region on November 15. Four rams and 14 ewes were taken from the Imperial Hills, 2 rams and 7 ewes were taken from the Middle Mountains, and 2 ewes were captured from the Chocolate Mountains. An additional ram was captured, but was unable to be released due to an injury sustained in capture. Twenty-six of these animals were fitted with GPS collars so they may be tracked for management and research purposes. Three young animals were deemed too small to wear a GPS collar, and they were marked with ear tags only. GPS locations reveal that the newly-released animals are already utilizing the same areas as the resident animals.

MORTALITIES

On November 7, a hiker found the remains of Ram #34641 near a mountain peak in the Catalinas. The cause of death is currently unknown and may be indeterminable due to the age of the remains. More may become known once the collar is recovered and the bones are examined. The collar for this animal has been on recovery mode since April of this year, indicating that the main battery power was failing on the collar. While in recovery mode, a collar gives off a unique VHF signal (different from a mortality signal) and does not upload GPS locations in order to conserve battery life.

One ram was injured during the November 15 capture efforts, but the injury was not identified at the time. Bighorn sheep are captured using a specialized gun that shoots a net over an animal to entrap it. Once they are captured, sheep are untangled from the net(s) and held on a stretcher with holes for their legs to dangle while they are processed. During processing, their vital signs are monitored, they are cooled if necessary, medications (antibiotics, anti-inflammatories/analgesics, parasiticides) are administered, samples (e.g., blood, tissue, fecal) are collected, they are ear-tagged for visual identification, and they are fitted with GPS collars. After processing, they are placed in a trailer compartment for transport. This particular ram did not scramble to his feet once in the trailer, as other animals typically do, and a decision was made to allow the animal to rest from the stress of the capture. When it became apparent that the ram could not exit the trailer at the release site on November 16, he was transported to the Department's Adobe Mountain Wildlife Center where he was examined by the Department's wildlife health specialist. He was sedated and administered pain medication and fluids to help with stress and muscle damage. He experienced

difficulty standing on both back legs, which could have been caused by muscle damage that sometimes occurs when wildlife are captured. The Department considered the option of placing him in a captive home if his injuries could be repaired. On November 17, however, swelling appeared in the left rear leg below the stifle, and the wildlife health specialist determined that he had a femoral fracture close to the hip. After consultation with veterinarians at the Phoenix Zoo, a decision was made to euthanize this animal. Even if the bone could have been perfectly aligned, the animal would have had to have been confined for 8 weeks to allow the bone to heal. The Phoenix Zoo concurred that this approach would be neither realistic nor recommended for a captive zoo animal, much less for a wild bighorn sheep. Mortalities occur, on average, with two percent of bighorn sheep in capture operations.

CURRENT POPULATION STATUS

As of November 18, 2015, 60 collared sheep are known to be alive.

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 December 4, 2015.

CONTACT

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