



Santa Catalina Bighorn Sheep Reintroduction Project

October 27, 2016 – November 30, 2016

BRIEFING

The following is a summary of bighorn sheep reintroduction activities on the Coronado National Forest from October 27 through November 30, 2016.

FOURTH TRANSLOCATION

On November 22, the Arizona Game and Fish Department (Department) accomplished the fourth translocation of this reintroduction effort when 20 bighorn sheep were released into the Santa Catalina Mountains. The group included 15 ewes and five rams that were captured the previous day in the Plomosa Mountains near Quartzsite, Arizona. The animals ranged in age from one to older than five years. Six of the animals, one ram and five ewes, were fitted with GPS collars. This is different from the previous three releases in the Catalinas in which nearly every animal was collared. There is no longer a need to have this population of bighorn sheep collared because the field research is coming to an end. It is standard practice for the Department to collar 30 percent of translocated animals.



*Bighorn sheep jump from their transport trailer and bound off into their new home.
Photo by Mark Hart/
AZGFD*

END OF ACTIVE MANAGEMENT

The goal of this reintroduction project was to establish a self-sustaining population of bighorn sheep in the Catalina Mountains that coexists with an equally healthy native predator population in a naturally functioning ecosystem. Predation by mountain lions has been shown to be a limiting factor in restoration efforts of bighorn sheep, so until now, mountain lions that have preyed on bighorn sheep have been pursued, and on some occasions removed. With the population of desert bighorn sheep in the Catalinas now at a level that has historically been sustainable, active predator management has ended. While the predator management plan was originally conceived to be a four-year undertaking, the success of the reintroduction program overall has allowed the curtailment of predator management early.

RESEARCH NOTES

Research biologists observed a lot of mixed groups (rams and ewes) over the last month. The groups were fairly large with an average of six individuals, and the largest observed was 12 animals. At least one lamb was seen in four different groups, and at least one uncollared/untagged sheep was observed in four different groups. Biologists will continue to collect behavioral observations through January and will conduct habitat measurements through June 2017. Project data will then be analyzed to examine the various factors that increase risk of mortality to sheep. Some factors considered will be lion predation, habitat characteristics, and sheep group dynamics. Additional detailed analyses should help to identify important habitat characteristics and inform habitat requirements for bighorn sheep in the Catalinas and across their desert range.

*Four ewes
observed last week
in stair-step
formation,
including two born
in the Catalinas.
Photo by Andrew
Jones/AZGFD*



MORTALITIES

There have been no mortalities of collared sheep since October 21, 2016.

CURRENT POPULATION STATUS

As of November 30, 2016, 39 collared sheep are known to be alive, and there are approximately 85 animals that make up this population in the 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.

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

The Department’s initial objectives have been met, and there is a healthy population of bighorn sheep in the Catalinas. The diminishing number of collars makes it impractical to closely track this population. The Department will no longer be sending monthly updates or posting recent events related to this project. All past updates can still be found online by following the link to the Arizona Game and Fish website above.

CONTACT

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