



Santa Catalina Bighorn Sheep Reintroduction Project

December 17-30, 2015

BRIEFING

The following is a summary of bighorn sheep reintroduction activities on the Coronado National Forest from December 17 - 30, 2015.

BIGHORN SHEEP COLLARS

Battery life of the collars placed on bighorn sheep released in 2013 is dwindling. Based on what the collars were programmed to do, the anticipated battery life was approximately two years. The collars are expected to drop off the 2013 animals around Jan 8, 2016.

LAMBING SEASON

We are approaching the lambing season for bighorn sheep, and many of the ewes may be in the later stages of pregnancy. 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.

MORTALITIES

The GPS component of the collar on Ewe #39554 sent a mortality signal on several occasions beginning in the middle of December. Mortality signals are sent after a period of 10 hours of no movement up/down, forward/backward, or side to side. Numerous bighorn sheep collars began giving off GPS mortality alerts in October, and more so in November and December, which is typical for this time of year, likely due to decrease in daylight hours. Therefore, the timing of inactivity for Ewe #39554 was not cause for concern. Department biologists also took into consideration that this ewe might be pregnant and close to lambing, which would cause her to be less active. For these reasons, the decision was made not to risk disturbing Ewe #39554 by approaching her during this critical time. However, after four days of GPS mortality alerts, a field check on December 20 confirmed she was alive and substantiated the assumption that she was pregnant due to her large overall appearance and swollen mammary glands.

On December 22, the collar for Ewe #39554 gave off a VHF mortality signal. A number of other sheep were in the same area, so Department staff and volunteers continued to monitor her using her uploaded GPS locations and through VHF to avoid disturbing her and other nearby sheep. Project volunteers continued to get mortality VHF signals off and on for the following several days, but her collar continued to upload GPS locations over a small area. A Department biologist checked on her on December 28 and found her carcass. The subsequent necropsy revealed she had fallen and fractured her skull and broken the

radius and ulna on her left leg, most likely within the previous 48 hours. She was in an advanced state of pregnancy. Cause of death has not been determined, but predation has been ruled out. Samples were collected from the carcass for disease testing. Ewe #39554 was captured last month from the Imperial Hills near Yuma.

CURRENT POPULATION STATUS

As of December 30, 2015, 57 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 January 15, 2016.

CONTACT

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