



California Wild Sheep

IN THIS ISSUE

From The Editor's Desk.....	3
President's Letter	5
California Dreamin'	6
What A Journey, What A Hunter	14
Waiting On The Bull	15
What A Croc! Zambia Hunt	17
Where The Northern Lights Are South - A True Arctic Adventure	19
Mountain Goats, Brown Bears And Meat Care	20
Two Members Reach Milestone	22
Current Status Of California Desert Bighorn	23
Water Development In The Desert	24
An Historical Account Of Opening California's 8th Bighorn Sheep Hunt Zone: The White Mountains.....	26
GALAD - State Lands Installation Success - Confirmed	29
The Politics Of Conservation	30
California's Ab 1127: A Backdoor Striker-Fired Handgun Ban	33
Wolf In Sheep's Clothing? California Bill Carries Potential Consequences For Dog Breeders, Owners	34



Cody Darling
Hunting with Sierra Crest Outfitters
2024-25 Season
7+ Year Old Ram from Whites



WORK HARD



PLAY HARDER



FolsomLakeDodge.com

(916) 221-7911

12545 Folsom Blvd, Folsom, CA 95630



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Happy "Transition to Winter"! Hunting season is in all stages – some in full swing, some just starting and some behind us. We've received sufficient rain in CA to turn our hills green again.

This issue includes some great hunting stories, drinker work, history, important information you want to know, humor, AND MORE! We are on track to install 4, or more, new GALAD installations each year – and we'll continue to do needed repairs of BGGs and water hauls. Next issue will feature DBH hunts from CA in the 25-26 season.

Your feedback, ideas, articles, pictures & requests are always welcome. Best way to reach me is email: mike.borel@kearney.com. Due date for input to the 1Q26 issue is February 10.

Wishing you and yours, wonderful Christmas & New Year Holidays and a healthy and productive new year.



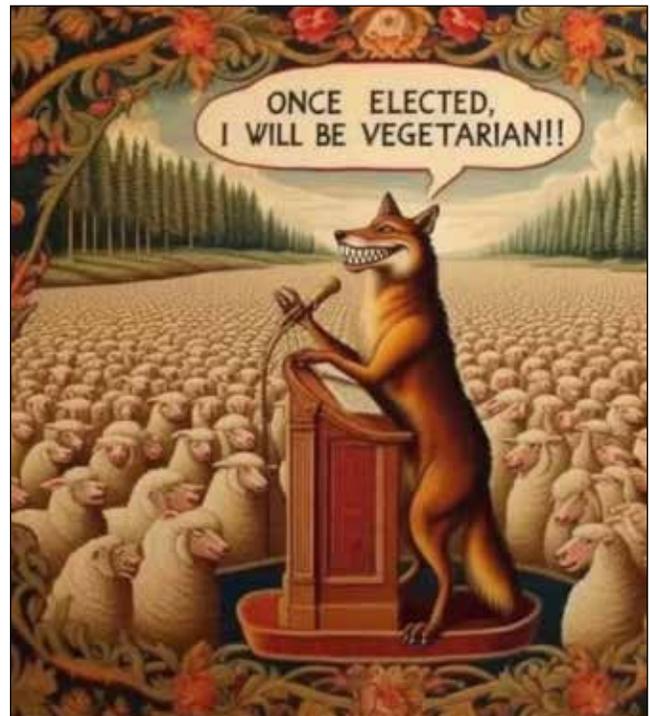
Artichoke Stuffed Meatballs from Tony Gigilotti

INGREDIENTS

- 2lbs of hot italian sausage (can be substituted for ground meat, but then season with salt/pepper)
- 8oz of cream cheese
- 4 oz of shredded mozzarella
- 3 jalapenos
- 2 bell peppers
- 1 jar of artichoke hearts

DIRECTIONS

- 1) Drain and dry the artichoke hearts and set them aside
- 2) Dice the jalapenos and bell peppers let the cream cheese warm up in a mixing bowl
- 3) Mix the jalapenos and bell peppers into the cream cheese
- 4) Form a patty with the ground meat and spread ~1TbLs of the cream cheese mixture in the middle
- 5) Place 1-2 artichoke hearts depending on the size of your meatballs. You want to curl the top of the artichoke heart onto the body so it takes up less space
- 6) Sprinkle the mozzarella on top
- 7) Close/roll the meat into a ball
- 9) Place the meatballs onto a cookie sheet lined with foil. If you have a rack that fits on a cookie sheet utilize the rack to lift the meatballs and create airflow on the bottom
- 10) Set the oven to 375 and bake for 25-35 minutes. Optionally smoke at 225 for ~50 min.



Hunter Conservation Update

The bontebok has officially been removed from CITES Appendix II, accepted by full consensus without any objection from any Party. This milestone reflects decades of commitment from private landowners, professional hunters, and conservation partners who have invested in responsible wildlife management. Once facing extinction, the bontebok now stands as a powerful example of how sustainable use and science-based stewardship on private land can drive genuine species recovery. PHASA celebrates this achievement as proof that our conservation model works — protecting biodiversity, strengthening rural economies, and ensuring that South Africa's wildlife heritage continues to thrive.

Board of Directors

Officers

President

Jim Fitzgerald (2026)

Northern California Vice President

Donald C Martin (2027)

Southern California Vice President

Glen Pyne (2027)

Vice President, Operations

Mike J. Borel (2026)

Secretary

Scott Gibson (2026)

Treasurer

Matt Burke (2027)

Board of Directors

Brad Aboltin (2027)

John Oldenkamp (2027)

Vince Bloom (2027)

Don Priest (2026)

Jake Bricker (2027)

Brenton Scott (2026)

Tony Gigliotti (2027)

Greg Tooley (2026)

Ben Gordon (2026)

Steve Torres (2026)

California Wild Sheep is published quarterly.

Please email all articles and photos to

Mike.Borel@kearney.com

Photos should be high resolution and in color.

It is recommended that digital photos be sent by email.

Please include photo credits and captions.

Content editing by John Ware

Humorous outtakes provided by Tammy Scott

Published by Beverly Valdez, ORC-KF1 LLC

Events

2026

January 9-11	New GALAD Installation Location SL82
January 22-24	WSF International Sheep Show Reno, NV
February 10	Due date for articles for 1Q2026 CA WSF Newsletter
February 18-21 February 21-22	SCI Convention, Nashville GSCO Convention, Nashville
February 20-22	New GALAD Installation Location SL61
April 24	Sheep Summit XXXVIII DoubleTree by Hilton, Sacramento
April 25	CA WSF Fundraiser/Banquet 2026 DoubleTree by Hilton, Sacramento
May 10	Due date for articles for 2Q2026 CA WSF Newsletter
June 1	2026 Election ballots sent to members
June	TBD, WSF Chapter and Affiliates Meeting
June 28	2026 Election ballots must be completed and sent to CA WSF
August 10	Due date for articles for 3Q2026 CA WSF Newsletter
October	TBD, GALAD RWWS Installation
November 10	Due date for articles for 4Q2026 CA WSF Newsletter
December 11	Sheep Summit XXXIX "All Virtual"
December	TBD, GALAD RWWS Installation

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Greetings CA WSF members,

I hope this issue finds everyone home safe from their fall hunting adventures. It's now time to get the dogs dusted off and start focusing on the birds. If you still have a late season hunt or two left congratulations and good luck!

I'm happy to announce that another state land drinker went in a couple of weeks ago. This drinker was sponsored by the Iowa Chapter WSF and named the SL13 "Hawkeye" drinker in their honor.

The partnerships that the WSF chapters build are a great advantage to getting these projects done and focusing resources where they are needed. I'd like to personally thank the Iowa Chapter for their involvement with our desert sheep and the efforts to put and keep wild sheep on the mountain! It was not without its troubles and difficulties but everyone pulled together and got it done. We were back out to the road after dark on Sunday night, very tired and broke off, but satisfied in a way that only hard work and perseverance can produce. Also, a big thank you to SCBS and every volunteer that showed up to make it happen. Check out the story further in this issue (page 29) and plan on attending the next construction on December 5-7 for the PP04 Casebier, Watson Wash guzzler and/or January 9-11, 2026 for the SL82 Baxter Wash guzzler.



A shout-out to everyone who supported our first fall on-line auction last month. It was a successful effort and will help with another project down the line. And speaking of fundraising, check out the report from our fundraising Banquet Chair Donald C. Martin. He will lay out the Yukon Stone Stone's sheep special drawing and the Life Member's Rancho La Gaurida Desert sheep drawing that will be happening at our annual banquet on April 25, 2026.

On behalf of your Board of Directors, a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

May all your shots be straight!

Good hunting and be safe.
Jim Fitzgerald

The California Wild Sheep Foundation (CA WSF) is thrilled to announce that we have secured a highly sought-after bighorn sheep tag for one of California's exclusive hunting zones in 2026, courtesy of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Although the specific zone has been determined yet, this rare opportunity promises an unparalleled adventure for the successful bidder. Join us on April 25, 2026, for our exciting auction, where this once-in-a-lifetime experience will be up for grabs. This is your chance to embark on an unforgettable journey into the heart of California's rugged wilderness. Don't miss out on the opportunity to make lasting memories and support conservation efforts for bighorn sheep.



CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'

By Cody Darling, Member

To us hunters, a once in a lifetime tag is a dream. A dream of an opportunity that will likely never seem to happen. The odds of drawing one of these tags is slim to none, even with max points. You hear all the time that it's basically pointless to apply, but somebody has to get lucky, right? Somebody must draw THAT tag. Somehow, this was my year. I drew that once in a lifetime bighorn sheep tag in my home state of California!

Back in June, I got a message from my hunting partner Tyler telling me draw results were out. I drew my second-choice deer tag but struck out on elk and Antelope. I almost didn't even check my sheep application. When I looked at the results, it showed the same thing as my deer tag did. These were unofficial results, so of course I was skeptical. It had a notification of "successful draw letter", as well as an orientation letter to the mandatory meeting. I sent Tyler, my best friend, a screenshot thinking this must be an error shown to everyone. He said, "No dude, you drew a sheep tag!" I still didn't believe it. I had to wait over an hour for the Fish and Game office to open so I could call and confirm. To my surprise, I did indeed draw the tag! I immediately started calling all my family and friends. After the celebration calls, I started reaching out to anyone and everyone who I thought could help me.

During my research, I decided that I wanted to try and go D-I-Y on this hunt. I'm an avid hunter and I wanted to test myself if I could do it or not. I had a lot of learning to do so I got started. I also decided there could be a chance I may need to hire a guide in case this is more difficult than I thought. I mean it is the Whites, and I had heard of how difficult the previous years had been. If I did go guided, I would be using Josh Schulgen of Sierra Crest Outfitters. I talked to Josh a few times and he was more than helpful on sharing past information about the unit. I found out these sheep live around the 12,000ft elevation mark or higher! A desert sheep living at 12,000 feet? Really? Yeah...really. I learned there was a significant die-off in the unit during the winter of 2022/2023 due to severe weather. Given this information, I set my goal. I wanted to find a mature ram that scored 150+.

The next two months flew by. I had put a lot of miles on my truck from attending the mandatory orientation, several scouting trips, and before I knew it the season was here. While scouting, I found a couple of legal rams, with one of them being one that caught my attention. Just before the season started, I touched base with Josh about where we would be hunting on opening day with one of his clients. He had planned on going south so I decided to go north to keep



Cody Darling with his White Mountain ram

the distance, even though I truly wanted to go south.

We hiked in the day before opener and started glassing. We weren't turning anything up, but we were hopeful. I got word from Josh's crew that they found a decent ram and would be on him for opener. Opening morning came and as I was glassing, I got a play by play of them moving in and getting a ram down. I was stoked for Josh and his client, but in my mind, I was honestly crushed. I felt like it had blown my chance at a big ram. Not that I wanted THAT ram, but I knew there were other rams over there and I chose not to go. I told myself before my hunt that there would be ZERO mistakes. In that moment, I felt like I made a mistake. Looking back, it sounds a bit ridiculous, but I felt like I let down not just myself, but Tyler who was there to help me out. It was one of the lowest moments I had ever had on the mountain. This is where I realized how much the stress of having a once in a lifetime tag was weighing on me. It is another level of pressure I have never felt before in my life.

Fast forward, we moved on and at midday I got a message from Josh. He got wind of another nice ram that morning and told us the area he was in! I was thankful for Josh telling me this because he didn't have to. So, we packed up camp and headed south! We got over there and hunted hard for a day and a half before Tyler had to leave. We saw some ewes and lambs, but no rams. As the miles kept ticking away, I felt like the mountain was slowly getting the best of me. I lost my phone on the hillside, the battery in my truck died. I had to head back to town to get it checked. I got back on the mountain and hunted for 3/4 of a day then got chased out by gnarly lightning storms, which lasted for four days. At this point, I just felt like I was losing the battle.

Looking back, not being able to hunt in lightning was a blessing. It allowed me to step away and clear my head for a few days and get refocused. I realized this country is almost impossible to cover by yourself and I needed more eyes. I called Josh and asked if he could find 3-4 days to come and help me out. He found four days when he and his cousin Nicolas could come to give me a hand. They got there Friday morning, and we hit the ground running!

Saturday morning, as I was hiking in, Josh got a hold of me and said that they found a ram! Once I got to them, we decided to move down the mountain and get a little closer look. As soon as we got into position and picked the rams up, a group of coyotes rolled in and started chasing them! Thankfully, they didn't run them far, but it hindered our view of them. In the quick look we got, the ram did not seem very impressive. We elected to keep hunting as it was early, and we thought we had a good game plan to turn up some other rams in the upcoming days.

The next morning, we woke up to see the wind was in our favor, allowing us to go check some country where we needed the wind to be just right to go into. As we were glassing, I could not stop thinking about the ram from the day before. After a conversation with Josh, I decided after we thoroughly covered our area, I wanted to go get a better look at the ram. Josh sent Nicholas to try and turn him up while we were working on our side of the mountain. As soon as he got to the glassing knob, Nicholas got a hold of us that he had found the ram. After glassing everything we could that morning, we came up empty-handed. We headed up to camp, had lunch, then headed off to the other side of the mountain to find the ram.

We created a game plan that Josh and I would go down the same ridge the rams were last seen, and Nicholas would go down the ridge across the canyon from us and the rams. This would allow him to walk us into them. Our plan was to use our InReach's to communicate with each other. They are reliable but there was a pretty good delay from when a message was sent until it was received, but it was the best we had at the time.

We worked our way down the mountain and got into position on the knob above where the rams were last seen. We wanted Nicholas to turn them up before we moved in. After a while neither of us locating them, Josh moved up the knob to look deeper in the canyon where Nicholas could not see. After a couple of minutes he turned them up! I got to him, and he said, "He's bigger than I thought!" I looked through his Swarovski and decided I'd be more than happy with him. Now it was game time! It was time to start our stalk.

We'd be hidden most of the way, but we'd have to be on high alert once we crested the roll of the hill above the rams. As we neared the rams, we dropped our packs and kept moving. We eased down until we could see where they had been bedded and of course, no sheep! We moved to the edge of the ridge before it dropped to the creek bottom and still saw nothing. We knew we hadn't blown them out, but where were they?

We had a couple blind spots due to the cliffy nature of the country. Nicholas grabbed his InReach and then motioned to us to check ours. One more problem... I left it with my bino



Cody, Josh, and Nicolas

harness up the hill! Josh and he started using hand signals to communicate. After around thirty minutes of intense hand signaling, we got to the point we needed to move down the ridge towards the creek bottom because the rams were feeding up the creek now. We made our move, and I waited while lying in a prone position with my rifle ready to put my sights on him. Then, I saw him! He popped up on a rock at the very bottom! Slight problem though...from my angle, the barrel wouldn't clear the last rock out cropping below us. The ram fed closer out of our sight. He was under the cliff we were on so that allowed us to move down to the last rock outcropping overlooking the valley they were in. As we got into position he appeared just below us. He was so close below that I couldn't get my gun down at that steep of an angle and keep it on my shoulder. The ram started feeding away and to our left. He finally got out far enough that I could get on him and be steady. He stopped quartering away and I let him have it. One shot and he was down. Insane!

The yells came from across the canyon and the celebration began. I couldn't believe it. To be honest, I am still in disbelief. I had just harvested a desert bighorn! My dream hunt. A dream I never thought would be possible, yet there I was. I soaked the moment up best I could, and then the fun started. Photos, caping, quartering, and getting packs loaded. We didn't get back to camp until 12:30 AM and in our sleeping bags until 1:00 AM. Talk about a long night!

The next day we broke down camp and headed for the trail head. I took the ram to town to get him checked in and plugged. They aged my ram at 7 years old and scored the ram at just over 155 inches. I met my goal! A ram over 150. I was ecstatic...to be honest, I still am. I made good on my tag. My dream tag. We earned every bit of it.

There are so many people I couldn't have done this without, and you all know who you are, but I do want to name a few. Thanks to my best friend Tyler who did endless miles before the season and during. Thanks to Josh and Nicolas for hitting the hills with me and helping me get the ram. A very special thanks to my wife and my daughter for allowing me to be gone so much these last couple months and being nothing but supportive. I love you girls. Thank you for your support and for your help to make this hunter's dream come true.

NORTH DAKOTA HUNTER TAGS PENDING RECORD BIGHORN WITH THE CURRENT RECORD-HOLDER BY HIS SIDE

From: www.outdoorlife.com; submitted by Vern Bleich

Nick Schmitz killed a bighorn ram with a green score of 190 6/8 inches on Oct. 31. If that number holds, it will replace the current state record held by David Suda, who was with Schmitz on the opening-day hunt

Nick Schmitz has hunted North Dakota for two decades, and he was lucky enough to draw a bighorn sheep tag this fall after putting in for eight years. Schmitz punched that tag opening day on what looks like a state-record ram. The green score of 190 6/8 inches is pending as the horns undergo a 60-day drying period.

One of the hunters alongside Schmitz for the achievement was his buddy David Suda, who happens to hold the current North Dakota record for bighorn sheep — a 186 3/8-inch ram he killed in 2020. The two went to rival high schools in Fargo, where Suda played hockey and Schmitz played football. Now, they have even more in common.

"He's a super nice guy," Schmitz says of his former school-rival-turned-hunting-buddy. "I owe him a ton of credit for this."

Schmitz, a civil engineer in Grand Forks, had scouted for five days before the Halloween opener on Oct. 31. He focused on an area several miles into the Missouri National Grasslands, and was joined on the hunt by Suda, along with his dad, Jeff Schmitz, and his brother-in-law, Tim Spicer.

"We noticed it was looking very sheepy. The ridges were getting steep with 200- to 300-foot drop offs," Schmitz tells Outdoor Life. "There was good vegetation, shrubs, and sagebrush. It just looked like sheep habitat. They had great cover and plenty to eat there, but it's super aggressive terrain. It's very hard to access. You need to be in shape and ready to climb."

He says they first saw the sheep from 380 yards, while he was surrounded by ewes. The light-brown ram stood out with symmetrical full curls, which were every bit of 40 inches with massive bases around 17 3/8 inches. It was also a big-bodied sheep, which hadn't been the case earlier this year, according to the North Dakota Game and Fish wildlife biologist who's kept an eye on the ram over the last few years.

"[Biologist] Brett Wiedmann had photos of the ram from five or six months ago, when it was unhealthy looking and skinny," Schmitz explains. "Brett was concerned he wasn't going to make it to this fall, but he'd put all his weight back on over the summer. He'd been eating healthy and recovered completely. Whatever that ram had in the winter, he turned it around."



Photo Courtesy Nick Schmitz (R) with David Suda

After looking over the 10-year-old Badlands bighorn, there was no doubt in Suda's mind about what their next move should be.

"David looked in his scope then looked at me and said, 'This is our guy. This is the one we're after,'" Schmitz says. "I just about fell over. I put my hands on my knees and took some really deep breaths because I was getting lightheaded."

The herd of sheep were content and in no hurry to move, and it took Schmitz around 20 minutes to collect himself for the shot. He dry-fired to help ease his nerves.

"I have a problem of flinching when I pull the trigger, and that's the last thing I wanted to do," he says. "I had the time, so I did a dry fire, but it was a pretty loud click because it was very still. There was no wind."

The herd now seemed aware of the movement on the hill where the hunters were, but they stayed put as Schmitz got into prone position, his rifle resting on a pack. His first shot with the .270 went between the ram's horns. The second shot made contact, and when the ram stopped broadside, a third put him down.

"I knew if I hit him anywhere in the vitals he wouldn't go far. But they're tough animals," says Schmitz, who was simultaneously relieved and ecstatic to see his ram on the ground.

ANNUAL FUNDRAISING BANQUET UPDATE

By Donald C. Martin, Fundraising Committee Chair, Distinguished Life Member

I hope all of you are enjoying a successful Fall hunting season. As we approach the Holidays, I want to wish each and every one of you a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

It's never too soon to start planning to attend, so please make sure you mark your calendars for **April 25th, 2026** to attend our annual fundraiser in Sacramento. It is our only in-person event and we would love to get the "family" back together and celebrate all the positive work this organization has accomplished in the last year.

Our grand prize, once again, is a 14 day fully guided Stone Sheep hunt with our friend Aaron Florian of Yukon Stone Outfitters. Opportunities to win this random drawing are available now on our website at www.cawsf.org/store.html You do not need to be present to win the Stone sheep. Don't wait, buy your tickets today. Visit the website and see the photo of our 2024 Winner, Jerome G. of New Mexico, with his beautiful stone sheep ram taken recently. Congratulations Jerome and thank you for supporting California Wild Sheep Foundation.

I'm proud to announce that thanks to the efforts of your Board of Directors, CA WSF has secured a desert bighorn hunt in Chihuahua, Mexico with our friends at Rancho La Guarida for our life-member random drawing. We thank the Vallina family for their continued support of California Wild Sheep Foundation and for their continued dedication to the restoration of desert bighorn sheep across the Mexican State of Chihuahua. This is an exclusive drawing and only junior life members, life members, and distinguished life members are eligible and **YOU MUST BE IN THE ROOM TO WIN!** All junior life members and life members are automatically entered to win one time. All distinguished life members are automatically entered three times. Your odds of winning this incredible hunting opportunity will never be better. It pays to attend, plan to attend NOW!



2025 Annual Fundraiser

After much discussion and given the cost of these sheep hunts, the Board has decided to provide additional opportunities to those life members who wish to sponsor this hunt. Additional opportunities to win will be awarded to life members who attend at \$250/each with a maximum of 10 additional sponsor opportunities. These will be available soon on our website, so that our members may plan and budget accordingly. We will notify all of you via email once the website has been updated. These sponsorship opportunities may also be purchased the night of the event.

If you have any suggestions or wish to make a donation to our live or silent auctions, please reach out to me at: don-martin@earthlink.net

I look forward to seeing many of you in Reno and I can't wait to see you next Spring in Sacramento. Thank you.



Images from Rancho La Guarida-- where you could be hunting next year! Become a Life member and attend the banquet on April 25, 2026.

PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD



*Mike Borel, November 2025
Left Bukharan Markhor
Above Bukhara Urial
Hunting with Wild Hunting Turkey & Asia*



*California Desert Ram
Photo courtesy of Rick Halter, SCBS
"Some days are just better than others
out in the desert".*



*Mike Torres, Spain, 2025
Beceite Ibex*

PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD



LADIES HUNT! Vern Bleich's 14-year-old twin granddaughters, Aaliyah (L) and Aasha (R), each bagged their first deer a few kilometers south of the Canadian border near Kenmare, and in the Badlands near Dickinson, ND on opening day of the youth deer season and midway through the general season, respectively.



*Tur-moose
Courtesy of AI*



Are YOU a CA Wild Sheep Foundation Distinguished Life Member? NOW is the time to join or upgrade!

SHOW YOUR TRUE COMMITMENT TO THE WILD SHEEP OF CALIFORNIA AND THE WORLD! JOIN OR UPGRADE YOUR MEMBERSHIP TODAY.

You will be joining a hard working, and hard hunting, group of CA WSF Distinguished Life members when you join or upgrade.

BRAD ABOLTIN
JUSTIN AKINS
PEGGY MAY BLOOM
VINCE BLOOM
MIKE BOREL
JAKE BRICKER
JIM BRICKER
JED BRUSSEAU
ADAM CASAGRANDE
KEVIN CHENG
DAVID COMBS
KEN CROTHER
WILLIAM CULLINS
JOSHUA DARNELL
CLIFF DAVIS
BRET DISMUKES
JIM DISMUKES
NOAH DISMUKES
DAN EVENSON
SCOTT FINLEY
JIM FITZGERALD

RANDY FORTUNE,
DISTINGUISHED LIFE #7
RICK GARZOLI JR
JACOB GARRETT
SCOTT GIBSON
ANTHONY GIGLIOTTI
STEVE GINGRAS
BEN GORDON
TINA GORDON
CASEY HADDOX
JESSICA HADDOX
JUSTIN HALLOCK
DAVID HARTWIG,
DISTINGUISHED LIFE #6
STEEN HENRIKSEN
CORY HIGGINS
TYLER W. HIGGINS
GARY HILL
ERNEST HOLLOWAY
PATTY HOLLOWAY
SHAD HULSE
BRETT JEFFERSON

TRAVIS JESSOP
BOB KEAGY
BRYN KERN
MAK KERN
RANDY LASKOWSKY
PEGGY BARNETT LEE
CHASEN MARLER
MAKENA MARLER
DONALD C MARTIN
JEFF F. MARTIN
JOSEPH MASSOLO
ROGER MCCOSKER
RICHARD M. MCDREW
KYLE MEINTZER
NICK METTA
ANDY MOECKEL
ROBERT "BO"
MORGAN
PATRICK OILAR
JOHN OLDENKAMP
NATHAN OLDENKAMP

CHRISTOPHER
PEATRESS
JEREMY PECHTEL
JEFF PERACCHI
DON PERRIEN
JOHN PESTORICH
DON POWERS
DON PRIEST
CAROLINE PYNE,
DVM,
DISTINGUISHED LIFE #1
CONNOR PYNE, DVM,
DISTINGUISHED LIFE #2
GLEN PYNE, DVM,
DISTINGUISHED LIFE #5
MADISON PYNE,
DISTINGUISHED LIFE #4
TRAVIS PYNE,
DISTINGUISHED LIFE #3
TOM REA
MASON ROGERS
DAVE ROWAN

PAUL SCHULTHEIS
RICH SELLERS
ALAN SHULTZ
DAN SMITH, JR.
DAN SMITH, III
DANIEL SMITH, IV
RENEE SNIDER
ADAM STARR
BROOKS STILTZ
BILL TITTLE
MICHAEL TORRES
GREG TOOLEY
NATHAN TREADWELL
REUBEN VALLES
ZACK WALTON
JOHN WARE
JIM WARNER
SHAINA WARNER
SIMON WHETZEL
DARRYL WILLIAMS
SHAWN WOOD

Join as a Life Member (\$500)

Make a commitment now to continue PUTTING AND KEEPING WILD SHEEP ON THE MOUNTAINS of California! Join CA WSF as a Life Member or a Junior Life Member and receive ONE chance to WIN the special Life Members item/hunt.

Upgrade your CA WSF Life Membership (\$1,000)

Upgrade your CA WSF Life Membership to DISTINGUISHED Life Membership (\$1,000) to receive THREE chances to WIN the special Life Members item/hunt.

You may also join at the Distinguished Life Member level for \$1,500.

All Distinguished Life Members receive a PELOTON 240 VEST from Kuui emblazoned with the CA WSF logo.

IT'S BAAAACK!

This could be your chance!

Make your dreams come true while you can still climb mountains.



**YUKON STONE
OUTFITTERS**

Mail checks to:
CA Wild Sheep Foundation
1630 Williams Hwy #151
Grants Pass, OR 97527

ONLY 750 tickets
\$200 PER TICKET
2026 STONE SHEEP
Special Drawing

HUNT INFORMATION

What a remarkable 14-day guided hunt FOR YOU! One-on-one with a great guide, in the breathtaking Pelly Mountains of Yukon, Canada. Does not include costs of commercial or charter flights, tag and preservation fees, government harvest fees, 5% GST, or tips.



Saffron Snickerdoodle from BlueBottle from Tony Gigilotti

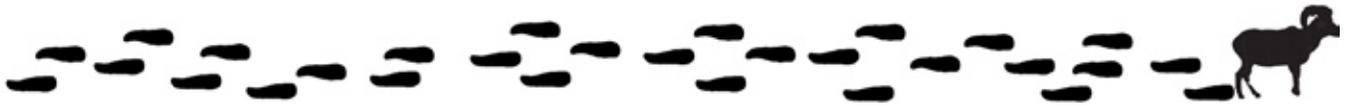
INGREDIENTS

- 1/8 tsp ground saffron ~
- 1/2 vanilla bean
- 2 Tbsp milk
- 2 cups of flour
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1/2 cup unsalted butter (room temperature)
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 egg (room temperature)
- 1/2 tsp vanilla extract



DIRECTIONS

1. Split the vanilla bean in half and scrape the pulp into a small saucepan. Add the vanilla pod, milk, and saffron. (Otherwise, add ½ teaspoon vanilla extract to milk.) Cook over very low heat, just until bubbles begin to form at the edge. Cover and let steep for ~10 minutes
2. Combine the baking soda and flour in a bowl
3. In a mixing bowl, beat the butter until smooth
4. Add both sugars and salt to the butter and mix slowly until well combined. Increase the speed and mix until fluffy
5. Remove the vanilla pod from the milk and combine/mix the milk mixture, egg, and vanilla extract
6. Add the egg mixture slowly to the butter/egg and mix until smooth
7. Add the flour to the mixing bowl and mix until a uniform texture
8. Place the dough into an airtight container or onto a piece of plastic wrap, cover, and refrigerate for at least three hours
9. Bake at 350 for 15-18 minutes, until golden brown



WHAT A JOURNEY, WHAT A HUNTER

In the remote mountains of Uzbekistan, another dream became reality. Legendary hunter R.S. has now added the elusive Kugitang markhor to her list—her 48th Capra species. At 33", this handsome billy is a classic high-average trophy for the smallest of all markhor subspecies, absolutely perfect in every way.

Only two months ago she claimed her 47th Ovis, the North Altai argali with Caprinae. Renee continues to push the boundaries of mountain hunting.

Riza Gozluk, Caprinae Safaris



From GSCO/OVIS:

Renee Snider is one of the most accomplished big game hunters of all time. She holds Grand Slam #927, she has taken 42 Ovis species and 40 Capra species, she won the OVIS in 2013, she was the first woman to win the Weatherby Award, She won the Diana Award and is one of 17 hunters to be inducted into the Pantheon Award.



WAITING ON THE BULL

By Susan Fitzgerald, Life Member

“Have you checked your application results?” Jim, my husband asked. And that was the beginning of a long awaited dream. I had been drawn for a Manti Utah bull elk hunt! We had already been preparing for this since I had 24 years worth of points.

We contacted Allout Outfitters who connected us with our guide Jordan Lee. We called Jordan with the good news and he told me that I would need to be able to make a long shot so get a lot of practice. It took a few trips to the range, but I was finally feeling comfortable with some 500-yard shots.

We had a wonderful drive to Utah discussing the upcoming hunt and all the scenarios that we could encounter. I was excited and a bit nervous too.

When we got to Jordan’s house we went to the range and did some shooting to make sure everything was sighted in correctly.

The next morning we were up and off early driving up the mountain to start the hunt. We parked the truck and climbed into the side by side. Thank goodness it had a heater because it was freezing. Our first spot was a steep hike up a mountain where we could sit and glass across the canyon to see if we could spot a bull. We saw some cows and a spike but no big bulls. Some of Jordan’s family were hunting nearby and had a spike tag so we had a fun time watching them celebrate their success.

After lunch, we explored a few more places that Jordan had checked out previously, but only saw some spikes and cows.

It felt wonderful to be out there in that beautiful mountain country with streams and fall colors.

We decided to hike out to a canyon overlook where Jordan had spotted a big bull earlier in the season. Unfortunately, the weather moved in. I had never been in an ice storm before and we had to move into the trees to block the stinging needles of ice that were blowing at us. It was so cold! We checked the forecast and it was supposed to clear up after a few hours so we decided to hunker down in the trees and wait the storm out.

Several hours later, we decided to get back to the side by side, as the storm wasn’t letting up and we couldn’t feel our faces. We checked out some other locations and then called it a day coming out to the truck after dark and heading down for a fine supper that Jordan’s wife had made. We fell straight to sleep and morning came quick! We headed back up the mountain and looked in different locations, scanning across canyons and up draws and mountainsides but not having any luck. We did see a nice bull with his cows 1000 yards away on top of a mountain but it was too far of a shot and they were



Susan Fitzgerald and her elk

moving out. We ended up driving up a logging road to check the previous days area from a different vantage point, but didn’t spot the bull that had been hanging out there. On our way back down, we saw some guys with spotting scopes out and stopped to see what they were hunting and in the course of our visit they had seen a nice 6 x 5 bull and it was bedded in some trees about 400 yards across the canyon. They didn’t have a bull tag but when they heard I did they were super excited for me and wanted to see me shoot that bull!

I got in position and the cold, long wait began. We watched his cows as they grazed, bedded down, and then grazed some more. I went through every scenario in my mind that I thought could happen with the bull in those 4 hours of waiting. It was pretty crazy but I felt confident in my shooting if given the opportunity. And when that opportunity came it happened so fast! One second I was staring at the empty hillside and the next second, there he was coming out of the trees. He looked massive! What a beautiful bull elk! I knew I wanted this elk. I lost him in my scope for a minute; he had stopped behind a dead tree. I found him again as he cut across the mountain to head to his cows that had moved further out and up the mountain. I had a good position on him and I waited. Jordan called, the bull stopped, and I made my perfect shot!

Relief, prayers of gratitude, and celebration hugs followed. The guys who had waited with us were so nice and offered to help pack him out which had to happen fast, as it was already getting dark. So, with headlamps and the extra help, three

hours later they were headed off the mountain with my bull. Unfortunately, with two knee replacements scheduled, that Utah canyon wouldn't allow me to make it to the bull.

It was a wonderful hunt and I am so grateful to my husband and best friend Jim for helping me get there.

I want to thank my guide Jordan, the calm voice that guided me through the hunt and harvest and all that he did to make this possible and successful for me.



Jim Fitzgerald with Susan's elk on the mountain



HELP CALIFORNIA'S WILD SHEEP THIS SEASON — FOR EVEN BETTER RESULTS NEXT YEAR!

There are many ways you can help ensure California's wild sheep thrive for generations to come. Together, we can strengthen herd health, expand habitat and preserve the phenomenal beauty of these incredible animals.

Our mission is to increase the number and quality of California's wild sheep through conservation, education, and the promotion of professional wildlife management.

1. Join a Water Crew!

The next Raincatcher Wildlife Water System (RWWS) build will be early January. Come join us!

Contact Jim Fitzgerald at ramhunter34@yahoo.com now!

2. Experience a Yukon Stone Sheep Hunt

Here's your chance at a **14-day guided Stone sheep hunt** with Yukon Stone Outfitters in the breathtaking Pelly Mountains of Canada.

- Includes: one-on-one guiding
- Excludes: commercial/charter flights, tags, preservation fees, government harvest fees, 5% GST, and gratuities.

3. Get a challenge coin

These collectible GALAD coins make great keepsakes, trading pieces, and gifts!

Andrew Pontious Memorial Coins are also available, supporting a RWWS dedicated to one of California's great firemen.

4. Honor Katie Garrison-Martin

Katie passed away on September 14, 2025, after more than 15 years of devoted service to CA WSF. To celebrate her passion for wild sheep, a new RWWS in the Cady Mountains will be dedicated in her memory.

WHAT A CROC! ZAMBIA HUNT

By John Ware, Distinguished Life Member

Africa may be written off by hunters as high fences, over commercialized, or otherwise not worthy of true North American hunters. But at its root hunting in many countries in Africa is the key component of conservation of biodiversity, perhaps more so than the North American model.

If you are a hunter conservationist, you should be hunting in Africa, with nearly 200 huntable species, there is a huge opportunity to make an impact on the future of wildlife on our planet. If you don't get what you want out of a hunt in Africa, you just aren't finding the right outfitter, or asking the right questions.

Since we had been going to Africa for many years, Beverly had already said "this is our last trip to Africa" when I booked another one. For our "second 'last trip' to Africa" Beverly and I asked for something different, and boy did we get it. "How about Zambia" our outfitter asked. He had a new concession on a lake we could hunt. The more basic camp was on an island in the middle of the lake. There were *no fences*. This sounded great to us.

After a week in RSA to get acclimated to the time zone and chase some frustrating springbuck we took a quick flight north to Livingstone, Zambia near Victoria Falls. After a very pleasant overnight we took an all day journey into the bush, quickly transitioning from paved highway to rough gravel and dirt roads, often under construction. We encountered many mining trucks as this area's natural resources are being exploited by Chinese companies. On the all-day trip we learned a lot about the local indigenous population, Zambia's economy, and other factors effecting the local ecosystem.

It was apparent that farmers would denude small plots of land, then grow crops on it "until the soil ran out" then move onto other areas. Individual entrepreneurs would also harvest trees,



John Ware with Lake Karib crocodile

and then go through a process to convert them to charcoal using primitive methods. There was an entire economic system around selling bundles of char-coaled wood onto whatever truck was passing by that would take them, cheaper closer to the source, and progressively more expensive as the char-coal approached more populous areas where there was a bigger market for it. We learned that land use was governed by favors and designations from local chieftains. It sounded far from fair but enabled most to at least scratch out a living in small dirt huts with little to no infrastructure. Generally the natives were slim, but not starving, and seemed happy and industrious. Many small roadside shops with names like "Shaka Reasonable Shop" indicated a very entrepreneurial spirit. Many wore brightly colored clothing, which we later learned was made from cloth provided in the form of wraps or large scarves, brightly colored and decorated with photos of candidates for upcoming elections. These were literally dropped in villages by helicopter to give the candidates name recognition.

We arrived at Lake Kariba. The hunting property was owned by an industrious multi-generational family which had several businesses beyond hunting, including a large banana plantation, and a large number of crocodile breeding cement tanks. The land, including the hunting Islands on the lake, was purchased from a native chieftain generations ago.

They provided crocodile skins to Louis Vuitton. Apparently the ideal produce was the belly skin from a 5-6' crocodile, which could be grown fairly quickly. Of course no part of the animals was wasted, and table fare was sold to markets primarily in more northern African countries. The family was employing 3-400 locals, and there was a lot of activity. They also provided large, comfortable looking dormitories for workers to stay at.

Below John (L) and Beverly (R) with Chobe bushbuck



We had dinner and learned more about the operation with family and our outfitter and PH on the mainland, then set out in a boat to get to our hunting lodge on one of the Islands on the lake before sunset. Along the way we learned that Lake Kariba was the largest man-made lake in the world, created by damming the Zambezi River in the 1950s to generate hydroelectric power for Zambia and Zimbabwe. As the Kariba Gorge was dammed, many local animals were displaced to higher ground, including concentrating game on the high points that remained as Islands. This also created a vast habitat for Nile Crocodiles and Hippos — providing a unique hunting opportunity.

The camp was comfortable, centered around an open air common area and dining room, with a bar, and a few couches and chairs. The individual huts had indoor plumbing, and canvas upper walls under permanent roofs.

We started hunting the next morning. The main tactics were to cruise offshore from the islands in the lake looking for target game species, and then formulate a plan for a stalk or approach, checking adequate trophy quality along the way. In some ways this was much like a typical spot and stalk hunt, with a boat in lieu of a Land Cruiser. The islands were many square miles, and the terrain was basically the hilltops from the gorge before it was filled, so there was a ton of areas to search, and impenetrable bush for game to hide in.

We were targeting Hippo, Nile Crocodile, Chobe Bushbuck, and Livingstone Eland, the later two species being unique to Zambia. We were able to take all of the targets except the hippo during the ensuing weeks' hunt, with both of us getting Bushbuck and also a stellar quality old Common Reedbuck as a bonus. The Eland was shockingly huge, and both Bushbucks were ancient bucks with very mass-heavy horns and teeth worn down below the gum line. The crocodile taped out at a little over 13' with an estimated weight of 1,500 to 1,750 lbs. As they age crocodiles continue to grow, but at about 10' their growth is primarily in girth not length. They go from growing a foot or more a year to mere inches in length, but slowly increase their body size and weight. We also learned that a fair percentage of the crocodiles taken on the lake were found with remains or other indications of consuming humans such as metal bracelets in their stomachs.



John with bonus Common reedbuck

The hunting was carried out accompanied by a government representative to monitor and ensure rules were followed. He carried an AK-47, his unofficial badge of office. Additionally, we often met up with an anti-poaching squad while in the field, who were based out of a nearby camp and fully supported by the hunting operation.



Beverly Valdez with Livingstone eland

Our PH also made a point of reminding natives as they were encountered of poaching restrictions, and inspected their fishing nets and warned of violations where the net spacing was too small (which would cause inordinate catch of small, undersized fish). They would also pass this information on to the anti-poaching squad. There were also rewards paid in local currency, Kwacha, for information on hot-spots for hippo and crocodile, and other information. And promises of a share if any animals were taken.

After a large animal like the Eland or Crocodile was taken, we learned the meat was distributed to 15 or more individuals, who in turn would dry some to take back to their families when they had time off when there were no hunters in camp. A hind quarter from the eland was staked out on a likely crocodile feeding spot for two days, in weather that was over 80 F mid-day. After the crocodile was bagged, the tracker indicated they would retrieve the hind quarter and it would still be fine to eat. As it turned out the bait site didn't yield the crocodile taken.

Our return trip was arduous, taking several days to get back home, from Zambia to RSA, connecting through the east coast, to SFO, to OR. The more time we spend in Africa, the more we learned what a small part of the full experiences available we've had there.

So, yes, we've already booked our "third 'last trip' to Africa" for summer 2026.

WHERE THE NORTHERN LIGHTS ARE SOUTH - A TRUE ARCTIC ADVENTURE

by Peggy Barnett Lee, Distinguished Life Member



Peggy with her polar bear

Peggy Barnett Lee entered the Women Go Hunting Awards Challenge with a polar bear she hunted in Nunavut, Canada this past April. She reports traveling so far north of the Arctic Circle that the Northern Lights were only visible when looking to the south!

The Women Go Hunting program is one of the SCI Foundation's programs to celebrate women's contributions and accomplishments in hunting.

Peggy hunted with Inuit guides using a traditional sled pulled by a team of 12 dogs, and a skidoo that pulled a spike camp cabin on sleds. She writes, "We rode across the frozen sea looking for possible seal kills by bears. We saw a mother polar bear with two cubs and a juvenile male that stood up to get a better look at us. He sniffed the air, trying to figure out what the heck we were from 800 yards away! Eventually, he lost interest in us and trotted away.

"I rode mostly in the sled cabin, which was a 'comfortable' 30 degrees Fahrenheit. When riding on the dog sled, I had to make sure 100% of my skin was covered to avoid instant frostbite. My goggles froze on the inside due to the warmth of my face, and I couldn't see much when that happened.

"We stopped one night at the base of an iceberg where there was obvious seal activity and polar bear tracks. The seals had made a little pond in the middle of the ice, so they could pop out for a while to rest and breath. That's where the bears would hunt the seals. Polar bears are very patient and will wait a long time for a seal to emerge.

"My guides, David and Clyde, climbed the iceberg and glassed all around but did not see any bears in the vicinity. We

decided to call it a night, got the dogs situated, and we settled into our sled cabin. We were just about to start dinner when the dogs started barking. That meant there was a polar bear. David quickly put on his jacket and boots and went outside where he verified it was indeed a polar bear heading for the sled dogs.

"We jumped into our arctic clothing as quickly as possible and grabbed the rifle. David let one of the dogs loose to engage the bear while I set up and got the vision of field in the scope. It was hard to do under pressure and because the borrowed rifle was actually too big for me. The bear was running all over after the dog, which stayed out of its reach and kept it busy. Finally, calm came over me. I saw the bear in my scope. He stopped and quartered slightly. I squeezed the trigger. Bam! I fell back on my butt! The huge scope had hit me right in the forehead. But my aim was true, and the bear had fallen dead with one shot.

"The boar was almost nine feet. Since the United States will not allow the importation of a polar bear, I gave the whole thing to the Inuit community. They eat polar bears and can legally sell the hide to certain markets. Fortunately, the Canadian taxidermist my outfitter recommended has perfected an imitation polar bear hide, making it possible for me to have a full-size replica mounted.

"This hunt was an incredible experience that exceeded my expectations. I highly recommend this adventure to anyone who wants to experience hunting with the Inuit, using the 'old ways' to travel across the frozen sea."

MOUNTAIN GOATS, BROWN BEARS AND MEAT CARE

by Craig Van Arsdale, CA WSF Life Member

The pilot circled the lake downwind as he observed the landing area for any rocks, shallow areas, beaver dam building materials etc. Meanwhile my eyes were glued to the windshield of the DeHavilland Beaver Float Plane as I searched for white dots on the mountain sides.

Loaded in the plane was enough food and gear for 24 days of solo Mountain Goat and Sitka Blacktail Deer hunting. The plan was to hunt Goats first and then move to an area that I had hunted deer a few seasons prior. 24 days may sound like a long time but my experience in Alaska has taught me mother nature often takes 50% or more of your hunting days in coastal areas.

Four days later I unzipped the tent fly to my first day of good weather. On the climb into the alpine, I had seen what looked like a good Billy in an area I was optimistic about an archery stalk. Several days in the tent and I was chomping at the bit to say the least, and I knew exactly where I wanted to go in search of him.

I have learned from Bowhunting legend Frank Noska, a fellow Alaskan resident, who at last count has arrowed 16 DIY Alaska Mountain Goats that wearing a pair of "Whites" can be a key piece of gear for a bowhunter stalking into archery range of a Mountain Goat. I personally use a set of Dupont Tyvek painters coveralls on my goat and sheep bow hunts. They are cheap, lightweight and I don't leave home without them.

I now lay in a small depression on the top of the ridge with an arrow nocked, the Billy is bedded 52 yards below. He has already seen my white profile a few times as I slowly close the distance for a shot. Although he is in range the wind is ripping over the top of the ridge, and I know I need to be inside 30 yards in these conditions for a shot. The Billy is also making his way to me about 10 yards every 30 minutes at this point, and I suspect he will close the remaining distance for me. After all, is he wondering who this other goat is that has now appeared in his bedroom?

About an hour later the Billy gets up, looks right at me and walks directly to where I suspected the terrain would lead him. He disappeared for a moment then reappeared at 26 yards looking directly at me face on! The wind has died down now and a stare down between the Billy and I begins. After what seems like an eternity, I decide I should



Craig Van Arsdale with Alaska goat

draw my bow. If he remains in this position, I will shoot him frontal and if he turns I'll have a broadside shot.

The Billy remains in his face on position, and my pin is locked on his chest. I decide to shoot him frontal but at the shot the Billy turns and the arrow strikes and breaks the front leg. Despite having a broken leg, he makes it down to a tundra bench 200 yards below and beds. After 5 failed stalking approaches to get a fatal arrow into the goat I was finally able to exploit the terrain in a new direction and get another arrow into the goat at 15 yards. As goats often do he headed for escape terrain and took a 600' fall to the bottom of the drainage.

When I got my hands on him just after darkness had set in, I was surprised to see that both horns were still intact!

It was now 3 am and I was loading the last of the meat into my pack. It had started raining just as I made the first cuts on the goat and everything was now wet. I was exhausted and decided I would shuttle the goat meat 200 yards away from the gut pile and put it under a tarp until I could return the following morning.

The weather had now deteriorated, and I awoke to pouring rain, low visibility and high winds. The temperature was low, and the meat was dry under the tarp, so I was not concerned with spoilage. The weather continued all day through the night and into the next afternoon before clearing. At the first opportunity I hiked up to the saddle and glassed the meat tarp below to verify that the tarp had survived the storm. I was relieved to see that the tarp was still standing. While walking back to the tent to get my pack and head for the goat meat I spotted a nice 3x3 Blacktail buck with eye guards just 200 yards behind camp! I quickly grabbed my bow from

the tent and crawled into 50 yards of the buck. He stood from his bed, and I was able to connect on the buck and watch him crash in sight!



Craig with his blacktail -- beautiful day!

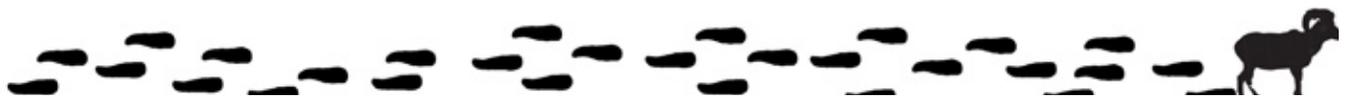
Just as I was preparing my camera and tripod for self-timed field photos, I looked up to see a Brown Bear 100 yards below me walking up the creek bed that leads to my camp. The bear fed by me uneventfully and I quickly took the photos and butchered the buck. I was now worried the bear may be heading in the direction of my goat meat and quickly headed up to the saddle to take a look. I was not surprised to see the big bear sitting on the carcass of my goat when I got to the saddle. Thankfully the meat tarp had served its purpose as the bear undoubtedly walked right past the meat tarp on his way to the carcass. Now I just wished I had separated the two by more than 200 yards!

The mountains are full of lessons and after 25 years of bowhunting I continued my education on this hunt. The goat meat was fully recovered but I continued to have bear encounters on this hunt and unfortunately lost the deer to a bear towards the end of the hunt which was a first for me.

While there are no hard and fast rules and certainly no guarantees on how a bear will act, here are a few lessons

I've learned about meat care in bear country, Or should I say Goat country...

- Work quickly to butcher your kill. I prefer to use the gutless method to keep scent down as much as possible during the process.
- Carry a meat tarp that pitches all the way to the ground. Bears will generally see the tarp as a human structure and although they can smell the meat inside the tarp the human scent and structure will deter them most of the time. If they can see the meat under the tarp, consider it gone! I like the *KUIU 1P* tent for this and I pull the inner bug net out and carry just the tarp. It works well as a multiple use piece of gear as it's also an emergency shelter or glassing tarp as well. It may seem counterintuitive but inside the vestibule of your tent is also a good place.
- Using a bear fence when weight is not an issue.
- Sinking meat in a lake using submersible dry bags or contractor trash bags and duct tape. *Watershed* makes dry bags that are fully submersible as well. Put rocks in the dry bags to help them sink and tie them off to something on the shoreline with paracord to make sure a storm doesn't push them out into the center of the lake.
- Burying meat in snowbanks can also work well but once again if the wind direction finds a bear it will be his if unattended or uncovered.
- Clean the skull as good as possible. Remove the eyes and brains. Clean and cool meat will not stink like brains and eyes will.
- Try not to stash meat in areas that could be natural travel corridors for bears. Strategically stash your meat away from any natural terrain features that bears will be traveling.
- If a bear finds your meat it is HIS now. Move away and don't try to defend the meat from the bear.



FEDERAL APPEALS COURT UPDATE

As of now, a federal appeals court has indeed temporarily revived California's requirement for background checks for buyers of firearms ammunition. This decision blocks an earlier ruling that deemed the 2019 law unconstitutional. The law mandates that individuals purchasing ammunition in California undergo background checks, similar to those required for purchasing firearms. This development means that the state can continue enforcing these regulations while the legal process continues. However, this is subject to change based on future court rulings or legislative actions.

TWO MEMBERS REACH MILESTONE

Two CA WSF members recently reached a milestone we can all aspire to! We're proud to share that Darryl Williams and Jim Fitzgerald have each completed their "FNAWS/Grand Slam" — a remarkable achievement in the mountain hunting world.

This accomplishment means they have successfully hunted the four North American wild sheep: Stone Sheep, Dall Sheep, Rocky Mountain Bighorn, and Desert Bighorn. Since each of these species inhabits vastly different—and often extremely challenging—terrain, you can bet these hunters have put countless miles on their boots and are wearing some well-earned smiles.

DARRYL WILLIAMS

Rocky Mountain Bighorn in Idaho



JIM FITZGERALD

Stone sheep in British Columbia

CURRENT STATUS OF CALIFORNIA DESERT BIGHORN

By Rick Ianniello, CDFW Environmental Scientist and CA WSF Life Member

Desert bighorn sheep in California show generally stable survival and variable recruitment (lamb survival). While factors like disease and population density affect recruitment, the biggest driver is forage availability, a direct result of rainfall.

In 2023, California saw one of the wettest years on record. The rain eased years of drought that had reduced lamb recruitment and caused declines in many desert bighorn populations in 2021 and 2022.

The 2024 water year started dry, but strong February and March storms brought another burst of green-up. Summer surveys showed high lamb and yearling numbers across most desert ranges, enough for population growth in nearly every area.

The 2025 water year has been drier. Southeastern California stayed dry through winter and spring, with some basins recording one of the driest Oct–Jan periods ever. While desert bighorn typically meet their water needs through moisture in forage during winter months, some relied on surface water throughout the winter. Throughout the winter, Volunteers with the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep worked hard hauling water to the Newberry Guzzler. Winter Pacific storms were weak, and the summer monsoon was not much better. Some relief came in September, when the remnants of Tropical Storm Mario brought one to three inches of rain in some areas.

Even so, our 2025 surveys show strong yearling numbers, indicating population growth from the slightly dry 2024 water year. Lamb numbers are moderate, suggesting more stable populations for 2025. This resilience may trace back to the exceptional vegetation pulse following 2023. That year’s rainfall fueled widespread green-up, restoring shrubs and forbs that likely carried desert bighorn through 2024 and helped sustain them through the dry conditions of 2025.

In other California Department of Fish and Wildlife news, we are finishing up our fall captures, with desert bighorn successfully collared in the Iron, Old Woman, Turtle, Whipple, Chemehuevi, and Bullion Mountains. Tracking these collared animals will provide new information on habitat use, connectivity, and population dynamics in mountain ranges that have not been monitored or studied for many years.

The North-Central Bighorn Conservation Unit Management Plan is under final review by upper management, with three proposed new hunt zones: the Granite and North Bristol Mountains; the Providence, Woods, and Hackberry Mountains; and the Castle Mountains and Piute Range.

Next week, we have helicopter surveys planned in the Chuckwalla, Palen, Granite, Big Maria, Riverside, McCoy, Woods, and Hackberry Mountains. These are all ranges where, despite a dry summer, collared desert bighorn showed little use of surface water and instead foraged on succulents

to meet their moisture needs. This limits our preferred method of using cameras at water sources and requires us to survey by air instead.



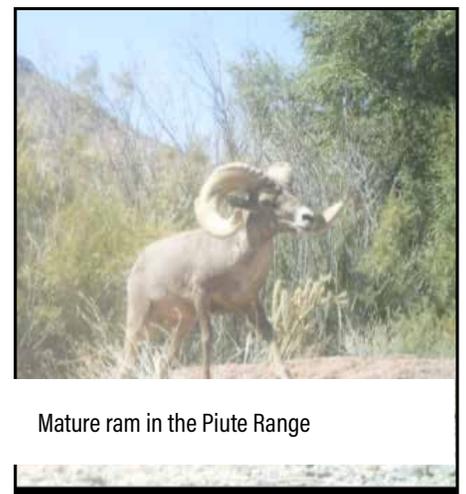
Rick Ianniello



2 yearlings, 2 lambs, and 1 ewe in the Clipper Mountains



11-year-old collared ram in the Granite Mountains



Mature ram in the Piute Range

WATER DEVELOPMENT IN THE DESERT

by Steve Marschke and Debbie Miller Marschke, SCBS Board of Directors

When constructing new guzzlers, some jobs are more difficult than others. Months of calculations and planning are not enough to foresee some of the obstacles that come up on the date of the project. The construction of SL13 was one of those difficult installations.

Chuck and Tina Thomas of Diversified Excavating is SCBS's secret weapon. Armed with his excavator, Chuck can literally move mountains for us; that is, if he is present at the project. A phone call coming in at 5:30 AM usually does not mean something good. On Saturday October 25, 2025, the Thomas's were on their way to the project, traveling along Interstate 40, when their trailer encountered some very rough road damage. The gooseneck broke off their heavy-duty trailer, leaving them lame aside the road and on the phone to me. "I'm sorry," lamented Tina "We won't be making it this morning".

SCBS had a full team of volunteers that were just waking up in camp. It was decided that we would carry on and perform as much as possible without the excavator. Knowing that we would probably not complete the project over the weekend was a tough pill to swallow. Over breakfast, the volunteers were briefed about the setback. Though it was disappointing knowing that we would need to return a second time, the team still cheerfully assembled and caravanned to the work site. We had a full crew that could be successful in installing the rain collection mat.

Upon arrival, work commenced immediately and the footprint for the rain mat took shape. The Hypalon rain mat is extremely heavy. Normally SCBS has the excavator move it into place so the volunteers can manipulate it. Luckily, Steve



Installation team

Marschke had his Jeep CJ and a military trailer that could be used to move the mat into place. The mat was shoved off the bed of the SCBS Ford truck into the military trailer; ineloquent, but it got the job done. It takes about 15 – 20 people to pull the Hypalon mat into position, and we did have more than enough volunteers present to achieve this.

Meanwhile, back at base camp, our Chief Cook Scott Gibson got to work in finding a rental mini excavator for us. The



SL13 "Hawkeye" installation
Diversified Excavating moves mountains for sheep



rental mini excavator arrived at the project around 3:00 PM. It was immediately active, attacking the huge rocks that hampered progress. The crew discovered that the soils on this project site were much rockier than anticipated. In fact, it was like digging up gravel aggregate with some huge rock bombs that seemed almost immovable. Part of the soil had the consistency of cement or caliche, welded together solid with conglomerate. It was clear that the rental excavator would not make up for lost time because the progress was so slow. The volunteers kept working anyway, fighting the obstacles, because no one was ready to call it quits. The day was hot, much hotter than we had expected, so everyone was ready to caravan back to camp at the end of the day.

Scott Gibson welcomed the crew back to camp with a fabulous dinner. There was so much food, and such a tasty variety of entrees, that the volunteers were cheered up after that long day. After what had transpired at the project site, it was expected that everyone would go to bed after dinner. Not so! With full bellies and warm hearts, the volunteers enjoyed a huge bonfire. There were beverages and camaraderie, laughter and the telling of stories. It was a beautiful night. A phone call to Chuck and Tina Thomas brought good news; they had the trailer repaired and would come out Sunday morning! Hooray! So everyone was eager to see what the dawn would bring.

Chuck and Tina were mobilized before dawn on Sunday. Chuck's heavy excavator had been crawled to the work

site ahead of the volunteer caravan. The volunteers put the finishing touches on the rainmat while the pit for the Raincatcher tanks was excavated. While Chuck performed his professional artistry, the volunteers had some idle time and found shade. Some even caught a catnap, and a few "snores" were heard. Once the pit was completed, no time was wasted setting the tanks into place. The volunteers were racing with time and the setting sun. It was abundantly clear we would run out of daylight. Some volunteers needed to hit the road and go home, but those who could stay at the project site remained. It was a consensus amongst those who persevered that the final job, the plumbing, would be completed no matter what. The volunteers did not relent, and the guzzler was completed in the dark on Sunday evening. Victory!

This new SL13 wildlife water system will be named "Hawkeye". The funding for this was provided by Iowa Foundation For North American Wild Sheep. Their website is iowafnaws.org. Iowa has no habitat for bighorn sheep but they do have dedicated hunters and conservationists that are willing to fund this project in our area as a cooperative effort. The location is on land that we have leased from the California State Lands Commission and will be our 4th such installation. The Iowa Hawkeyes football program represents the University of Iowa in college football. The Hawkeyes compete in the Big Ten Conference and is a source of great pride for the great State of Iowa. The Hawkeye Wave has come to the Mojave Desert, and soon friends of "Herky the Hawk" will benefit and thrive from the addition of water in this arid space,

Please watch the calendar for project dates and volunteer to help us, we always need more support. Projects are formally announced on our Facebook page and by email blast. Project volunteers are notified and recruited by email, so if you are currently not on our volunteer email list, contact Debbie Miller Marschke at debmillermars@gmail.com so you can be a part of this exciting endeavor. Many hands make light work.

Next scheduled construction project dates and locations:

- January 9 – 12, 2026 Location SL282
- February 20 – 23, 2026 Location SL61



Thank
you



AN HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF OPENING CALIFORNIA'S 8TH BIGHORN SHEEP HUNT ZONE: THE WHITE MOUNTAINS

by Vernon C. Bleich

It was in the early Spring of 2004 that Kyle Meintzer, then President of the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep California Chapter (FNAWS CA) now the California Wild Sheep Foundation (CA WSF), and I discussed the desirability of conducting a survey to update information on the status of bighorn sheep in the White Mountains. At the same time, Cody Schroeder was working for me as a Scientific Aid on the Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep Recovery Program and the Round Valley Deer Project, and also was a graduate student at Idaho State University. Cody was investigating sexual segregation in Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep for his thesis research, but funding available to support his project was limited to nine months per calendar year, and his research centered on sexual segregation and foraging ecology during winter (Schroeder 2007). Thus, he needed additional employment to carry him through a few lean months in the absence of a summer income.

Kyle's inquiry about bighorn sheep in the White Mountains and Cody's financial situation arose independently, but the simultaneous timing was a serendipitous event. Given the interest in supporting an in-depth assessment of the population of bighorn sheep in the White Mountains and Cody's availability to conduct that survey during the upcoming summer, I worked with both parties to put together funding that would provide up-to-date information on the White Mountains population and keep Cody 'in the field'. To accomplish that, Cody agreed to conduct the survey under the direction of the California Department of Fish and Game and I submitted a request for funding to CA WSF. The goals of the proposed project were to (1) provide the best possible description of the distribution of bighorn sheep in the White Mountains; (2) provide the best possible count of bighorn sheep in the White Mountains; and (3) derive a "reasonable" population estimate of bighorn sheep in the White Mountains.

As explained in my application to CA WSF, "The primary impediment to achieving a distributional survey, minimum count, and reasonable population estimate of bighorn sheep in the White Mountains is the lack of funding for an individual to complete the field work and prepare the requisite reports."



CA WSF approved funding for the proposed work, and Schroeder assembled a group of individuals to carry out the 2004 survey. Fifty-two person-days were expended conducting ground surveys on multiple occasions at various locations in the White Mountains during July and August 2004. Although it would have no effect on the California Fish and Game Commission's approval of the new hunt zone, an additional ground survey was conducted in 2005 to estimate the minimum number of sheep and obtain additional information on age and sex ratios in the population. That survey was conducted over a highly contracted period of four days in late July (Schroeder 2005). As a result, it became increasingly clear that the White Mountains supported a large population of bighorn sheep, and had the potential to provide numerous hunting opportunities in the future.

Following the 2004 survey, Ellsworth et al. (2004) completed the requisite management plan for the White Mountains Bighorn Sheep Hunt Zone. The same year, a proposal to open the White Mountains to the harvest of bighorn sheep was submitted by CDFG to the California Fish and Game Commission. After preparation of the requisite environmental document, public hearings, and other necessary actions, the Commission approved the hunt zone, and the first bighorn sheep to be harvested in the White Mountains were taken during the 2005-2006 hunting season.

What follows is a brief chronology of past information on bighorn sheep in the White Mountains. The earliest estimate was obtained from Inyo National Forest Fish and Game reports in 1923, at which time 34 bighorn sheep were thought to occupy that range (Wehausen 1999:382). Ellsworth et al. (2004) summarized subsequent information on what was known about the population inhabiting that vast mountain range, and appears verbatim in the following four paragraphs.

"Reliable historical population estimates for bighorn sheep inhabiting the White Mountains Management Unit are

unavailable. In 1940, Donald McLean estimated that 80 sheep occupied the White Mountains exclusive of Wyman Canyon, and that 65 occurred there in 1946 (unpublished manuscript, California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento).

In 1957, Fred Jones (unpublished manuscript, California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento) estimated that 60 bighorn sheep inhabited the White Mountains, and Weaver and Mensch (1970) placed the number at 40.

“Reliable, yet likely incomplete, data on population size were provided by Wehausen (1983), who reported minimum numbers of bighorn sheep to be 48, 63, and 84 in 1978, 1980, and 1982, respectively. In 1983, a minimum of 115 bighorn sheep was tallied in the White Mountains, and the population exhibited a young age structure with high survivorship (Wehausen 1985). Intensive sampling during 1987–1990 yielded an estimated population of 117 adult females and 82 adult males, for a total of about 200 adults in the White Mountains (Wehausen 1990). Based on those data, Torres et al. (1994) estimated the number of bighorn sheep in the White Mountains at 201–300 individuals.

“Few demographic data were obtained during the 1990s. In 1988, 10 bighorn sheep were translocated to Silver Canyon from Lone Tree Canyon (Bleich et al. 1990) in an attempt to reestablish a population in that historically occupied area. Careful monitoring accounted for the loss of almost all of those animals to death, or returns to their native ranges. Only a single translocated female and her female young persisted in 1990, and they are the progenitors of the current population, which exist[s] because of breeding by males from elsewhere in the range. During the 1990s, this subpopulation increased at a rate of 20% per year (J. D. Wehausen, University of California, unpublished data), and a minimum of 44 bighorn sheep, composed largely of females and young animals, currently occupy Silver Canyon (J. Villepique, California Department of Fish and Game, unpublished data).

“During summer 2004, intensive ground surveys were conducted in Silver Canyon and in the northern White Mountains in an effort to establish a more current minimum population in that range. Schroeder (2004) tallied a total of 30 observations of bighorn sheep during his surveys and, after correcting for replicate sightings, placed the minimum number of individuals in the range at 277, of which 239 were classified as 136 females, 40 males, and 63 young-of-the-year. Schroeder’s (2004) results were obtained during a period of sexual segregation, when males and females largely occur in different habitats (Bleich et al. 1997) and, as a result, yield a sex ratio that is biased downward with respect to the number of males in the range. When that bias is controlled for (by assuming a conservative ratio of 70 males per 100 females in an un hunted population; Wehausen 1983), a minimum of 294 bighorn sheep are estimated to inhabit the White Mountains, not including 38 unclassified animals (Schroeder 2004). These data indicate in excess of 300 sheep inhabit the White Mountains.”

Population updates have been limited since the appearance of Ellsworth et al. (2004) and Schroeder (2004, 2005). In 2010, bighorn sheep in northern White Mountains were considered to number from 201 to 300, and in the southern part of the range from 25 to 50 (Abella et al. 2011). The number of

bighorn sheep in the northern White Mountains was placed at 301–400 individuals, and the population in Silver Canyon from 25 to 50 individuals by Prentice et al. (2019). Those numbers remained unchanged when the most recent status of bighorn sheep in California (Vu et al. 2021) appeared, but more recent published information is not available.

Despite the presence of pathogens that are precursors to, or are known causes of, respiratory disease in bighorn sheep (Tomassini et al. 2009, Prentice et al. 2019) and appear to have affected lamb survival rates (Vu et al. 2021), the White Mountains continue to provide one North America’s most challenging opportunities to hunt desert bighorn sheep. In the absence of more serious events that affect the population, such may continue to be the case.

In the past, many individuals have asked why a difference exists between the opening and closing dates of the bighorn sheep season in the White Mountains and other desert bighorn sheep seasons in California. The opening date originally proposed by the area biologists differed from that of the other zones because of the extreme weather that could be expected in December and January at the high elevations of the White Mountains. Thus, earlier opening and closing dates were proposed by the wildlife unit managers and the local game wardens. Those dates, however, overlapped with the X9-c general deer season (at that time, from the third Saturday in October to the First Sunday of November) and Bruce Kinney, then the supervisor responsible for approving the final recommendation, refused to allow an overlap with and potential conflict between the new bighorn sheep hunt zone and the general deer season. At Kinney’s insistence, the White Mountains bighorn sheep hunt was set to open the third Saturday in August and extend through the last Sunday in September. Ironically, those dates did overlap the X-9c archery deer season, which ran from the third Saturday of August to the second Sunday of September (California Department of Fish and Game 2005), although the sheep season continued for a short period thereafter. Substantial changes in hunt periods and season dates are in place for the 2025–2026 White Mountains zone, but that topic is beyond the scope of this historical perspective.

Literature Cited

- Abella, R. K., V. C. Bleich, R. A. Botta, B. J. Gonzales, T. R. Stephenson, S. G. Torres, and J. D. Wehausen. 2011. Status of bighorn sheep in California—2010. *Desert Bighorn Council Transactions* 51:54–68.
- Bleich, V. C., J. D. Wehausen, K. R. Jones, and R. A. Weaver. 1990. Status of bighorn sheep in California, 1989 and translocations from 1971 through 1989. *Desert Bighorn Council Transactions* 34:24–26.
- California Department of Fish and Game. 2005. California mammal hunting regulations—2005. California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California, USA.
- Ellsworth, A. B., T. R. Stephenson, T. J. Taylor, and V. C. Bleich. 2004. Mountain sheep management plan: White Mountains Management Unit. California Department of

Fish and Game, Long Beach, California, USA.

- Epps, C. W., V. C. Bleich, J. D. Wehausen, and S. G. Torres. 2003. Status of bighorn sheep in California. *Desert Bighorn Council Transactions* 47:20–35.
- Prentice, P. R., J. Colby, L. E. Greene, C. P. Massing, and T. R. Stephenson. 2019. Status of bighorn sheep in California, 2019. *Desert Bighorn Council Transactions* 55:70–84.
- Schroeder, C. A. 2004. Bighorn sheep in the White Mountains, California: 2004 survey results. Unpublished Contract Report, California Department of Fish and Game, Bishop, California, USA.
- Schroeder, C. A. 2005. Bighorn sheep in the White Mountains, California: 2005 survey results. Unpublished Contract Report, California Department of Fish and Game, Bishop, California, USA.
- Schroeder, C. A. 2007. Sexual segregation and foraging ecology of Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep during winter. M.S. Thesis, Idaho State University, Pocatello, Idaho, USA.
- Schroeder, C. A., R. T. Bowyer, V. C. Bleich, and T. R. Stephenson. 2010. Sexual segregation in Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep, *Ovis canadensis sierrae*: ramifications for conservation. *Arctic, Antarctic, and Alpine Research* 42:476–489.
- Tomassini, L., B. Gonzales, G. C. Weiser, and W. Sischo. 2009. An ecologic study comparing distribution of *Pasteurella trehalosi* and *Mannheimia haemolytica* between Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep, White Mountain bighorn sheep, and domestic sheep. *Journal of Wildlife Diseases* 45:930–940.
- Torres, S. G., V. C. Bleich, and J. D. Wehausen. 1994. Status of bighorn sheep in California, 1993. *Desert Bighorn Council Transactions* 37:47–52.
- Torres, S. G., V. C. Bleich, and J. D. Wehausen. 1996. Status of bighorn sheep in California, 1995. *Desert Bighorn Council Transactions* 40:27–34.
- Wehausen, J. D. 1983. White Mountain bighorn sheep: an analysis of current knowledge and management alternatives. Administrative Report, Inyo National Forest, Bishop, California, USA.
- Wehausen, J. D. 1985. Bighorn sheep in the White Mountains: past and recent history. Pages 180–182 in C. A. Hall, Jr., and D. J. Young, editors. *Natural history of the White-Inyo Range, eastern California and western Nevada and high altitude physiology*. University of California, White Mountain Research Station, Bishop, California, USA.
- Wehausen, J. D. 1990. Population, taxonomic, and habitat considerations of mountain sheep in the White and Inyo mountains. Unpublished Contract Report, California Department of Fish and Game, Bishop, California, USA.
- Wehausen, J. D. 1999. Rapid extinction of mountain sheep populations revisited. *Conservation Biology* 13:378–384.

—This article is part of a series by Dr. Vern Bleich, who increasingly is concerned that many aspects of the history and management of bighorn sheep in California are being lost. That history is long and complex, and at times has been misinterpreted, or even wrongly conveyed to others by those not having a direct connection to the past. Articles in the series are based on field experiences, monthly and annual reports, memoranda, past verbal discussions, and personal recollections. Vern was employed by the California Department of Fish and Game for 34 years, during which he worked extensively with large mammals occupying the Great Basin, Mojave, and Sonoran deserts of California and, in particular, desert bighorn sheep. He was fortunate to have joined the Department shortly after completion of a thorough inventory of bighorn sheep in California and has remained active in the conservation and management of that species since 1973. He currently is Research Professor at the University of Nevada Reno, serves on the Advisory Board of the Texas Bighorn Society, is Science Advisor for the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep, serves on two committees of the California Wild Sheep Foundation, is a member of the Wild Sheep Foundation's Professional Resource Advisory Board, and represented wildlife conservation and management interests on the National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board from 2019 to 2022. Individuals interested in material presented in this article can contact Vern directly (vcbleich@gmail.com).



Images of the recent aurora borealis from Kansas City and from Denver

GALAD – STATE LANDS INSTALLATION SUCCESS – CONFIRMED

By Scott Gibson, Distinguished Member and CA WSF/SCBS Board Member

On October 27th, 2024, the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep (SCBS) completed the first State Lands Wildlife Water System (aka guzzler), which has been nicknamed "Aurora". The system is in the Sleeping Beauty area of Hunt Zone 9, Cady Mountains. This new water source was wholly funded by the California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation (CA WSF) through the Give a Lamb a Drink (GALAD) program. The construction of this guzzler was covered in an article of the 2024 Winter publication and can be found here: <https://cawsf.org/ftp-assets/newsletters/2024/>

CAWSF-2024-Q4.pdf

Upon completion of the guzzler, volunteers from SCBS and CA WSF trucked in water and filled the tanks. I placed a trail camera at the "Aurora" site, to see what wildlife would take advantage of this new water source first. We were not disappointed; a momma ewe and a newborn lamb were the first arrivals at "Aurora."

Aurora continued providing life sustaining water for multiple lactating ewes before winter rains reached this area of the Mojave Desert.



First arrivals at "Aurora", photo by Scott Gibson



Pair of ewes and young lambs at Aurora, photo by Scott Gibson



Kenetrek
Boots
*FOR THE TRAIL LESS TRAVELED**



THE POLITICS OF CONSERVATION

*2025 State Legislative Session Wraps
What Looms Ahead in 2026?
By Bill Gaines, Gaines and Associates*

Late in the afternoon of Saturday, September 13th, the 2025 California State Legislative Session gavelled to a close. With lawmakers finally done with their share of the legislative load for the first year of the two-year 2025/2026 Session, all eyes turned to Governor Newsom who had until October 12th to act on those bills that made it to his desk.

Legislators will return to the State Capitol from their "Interim Study Recess" on Monday, January 5th, to begin the 2026 State Legislative Session.

Below is the final status for 2025 on just a few of the many bills the California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation (CA WSF) actively worked and/or tracked at our State Capitol in 2025, followed by what we can expect in 2026 – the second year of the two-year 2025/2026 California State Legislative Session.

Bills are covered in numerical order, not in order of priority or interest.

2025 STATE LEGISLATIVE SESSION FINAL UPDATE

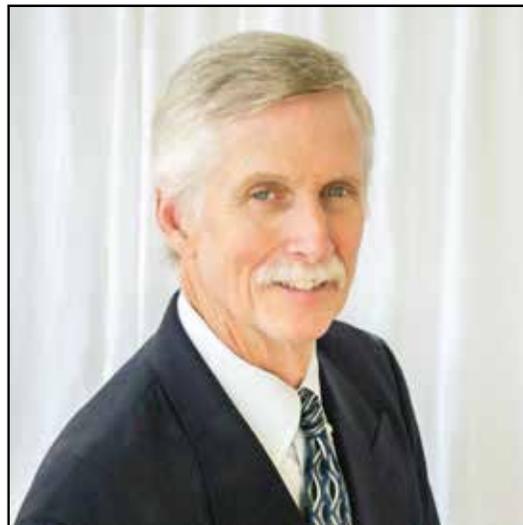
AB 519 (BERMAN) – PET BROKER SALES – SIGNED

As covered in the Fall 2025 issue of California Wild Sheep, Assembly Bill 519 by Assembly Member Marc Berman (D-Palo Alto) was introduced under the banner of combating "puppy mills" and irresponsible breeders contributing to California's shelter overpopulation crisis by eliminating the brokers that assist them. While that goal may sound commendable, AB 519 extended far beyond its stated intent - creating unintended future consequences for California's sporting dog enthusiasts.

Many hunters and field trial enthusiasts acquire their dogs directly from breeders, but others rely on trusted third parties to help locate the right dog - often because they lack connections, familiarity, or experience with reputable breeders, particularly those outside California. Unfortunately, the language of AB 519 defined a "broker" so loosely that it encompasses virtually anyone assisting in the sale or transfer of a dog bred by another for profit. As written, AB 519 could include an experienced professional helping a hunter find a well-bred pup or even a nonprofit auctioning a puppy to raise funds to help fuel their conservation efforts.

Recognizing the unintended consequences for responsible dog owners, trainers, and conservation organizations, Gaines & Associates provided lead opposition testimony in Senate policy committee hearings and worked with partner organizations to seek reasonable amendments that would protect legitimate brokers and sporting dog enthusiasts. Our advocacy did produce some results, with AB 519 being amended to apply only to brokers handling dogs "under one year of age" and to exempt dogs sold by "owners who do not sell or transfer an animal more than three instances per calendar."

While these changes were an improvement, they did not go far enough. As amended, AB 519 will still significantly hinder individuals seeking specialty sporting breeds - dogs



carefully bred over generations for hunting, field trials, and other outdoor pursuits. Buyers of these dogs typically purchase puppies around eight weeks old to begin the training of their pup with their trainer of choice long before they are one year old.

We were careful to emphasize that these dogs are not "puppy mill" animals. They are highly valued, purpose-bred companions, often costing well over \$1,000, and selected based on lineage, temperament, and performance - not mass production. The professionals who help connect buyers with these dogs are experts in their field, not the bad actors the bill purported to target.

We were also careful to point out that nonprofit conservation organizations often sell young sporting dog pups at their fundraisers - raising thousands of dollars to help fuel their conservation mission. Yet, under the language of AB 519, these nonprofits and their auctioneers will be considered "brokers" and limited in their ability to sell young dogs at these events.

AB 519 advanced through the Assembly and over to the Senate by early May. Although our opposition slowed the bill in the upper house, it passed through the Senate and off the Senate Floor by early September and was on its way to the Governor's desk.

AB 519 was signed into law by Governor Newsom on October 9 and will go into effect on January 1, 2026.

AB 902 (SCHULTZ) – TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING: BARRIERS TO WILDLIFE MOVEMENT

As reported in previous issues, AB 902 proposed changes to current law which requires transportation planning agencies to prepare and adopt regional transportation plans directed at achieving a coordinated and balanced regional transportation system.

As amended July 10, 2025, AB 902 by Assembly Member Nick Schultz (D-Burbank) would require a lead agency to incorporate

wildlife passage features into a transportation infrastructure project to feasibly avoid, minimize, and mitigate impairment to wildlife connectivity in an area that may significantly impact wildlife habitat connectivity. AB 902 would, however, exempt a project on the state highway system from this requirement if Caltrans is the lead agency. As amended, AB 902 would only apply to projects with a project initiation phase beginning on or after January 1, 2028.

AB 902 passed through the Assembly and off the Assembly Floor in early June. Once in the Senate, AB 902 passed through two Senate policy committees and to the Senate fiscal committee by early July.

In late August, AB 902 was held in the Senate fiscal committee. AB 902 is now a “two-year” bill which may receive further consideration early in the 2026 Legislative Session.

AB 1169 (GONZALEZ) – WILDLIFE GRANTS: SHARE PROGRAM

As reported in our previous issue, Assembly Bill 1169 by Assembly Member Jeff Gonzalez (R–Coachella) aims to strengthen the Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (DFW) Shared Habitat Alliance for Recreational Enhancement (SHARE) program. This voluntary program allows DFW to partner with private landowners willing to open their lands for public hunting and other wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities - a critical tool for improving access in a state where so much habitat is privately owned.

Under existing law, SHARE allows DFW to compensate participating private landowners no more than \$30 per acre or \$50 per participant per day - limits that have long made enrollment unattractive and prevented SHARE from growing to meet hunter demand. AB 1169 proposes to address this problem by raising those caps to \$52 per acre or \$87 per participant per day, with automatic annual adjustments for inflation to keep pace with real-world costs.

The bill also would require DFW to contract some program work to nonprofit conservation organizations and mandate that the Department submit a report to the Legislature by October 1, 2029, assessing the results of these updates. The program’s expanded provisions would sunset on January 1, 2031, unless reauthorized.

CA WSF strongly supported AB 1169, emphasizing that increasing compensation rates would make participation far more appealing to private landowners while ensuring that hunters and other outdoor enthusiasts gain access to new, high-quality opportunities. CA WSF also advocated for transparency and accountability in DFW’s contracting process with nonprofits to ensure program integrity and effectiveness.

AB 1169 effortlessly passed through the Assembly and over to the Senate without a single “no” vote by early June. Maintaining its momentum on the Senate side, AB 1169 easily passed out of Senate policy committee in mid-July via another unanimous vote.

However, AB 1169’s smooth progress came to a screeching halt in mid-August, when the bill was held in the Senate fiscal committee. AB 1169 is now a “two-year” bill which may receive further consideration early in the 2026 Legislative Session.

LOOKING AHEAD TO THE 2026 STATE LEGISLATIVE SESSION

As the Legislature prepares to reconvene in January, several key measures will carry over into the second year of the 2025/2026 State Legislative Session. As noted above, AB 902 and AB 1169 remain eligible for further consideration

as “two-year” bills. However, the most important “two-year” bill coming out of the recently concluded 2025 Session is Assembly **Bill 1038**.

As covered in earlier issues of California Wild Sheep, AB 1038 by Assembly Member Heather Hadwick (R–Redding), was one of two significant wildlife management bills considered during the 2025/2026 Legislative Session. This critically needed legislation seeks to provide wildlife managers and public safety officials with the scientifically supported tools necessary to responsibly manage California’s overabundant black bear population.

According to DFW’s updated 2025 Bear Management Plan, the state’s black bear population is now estimated to be at least 60,000 - more than double previous projections. The report concludes that California’s black bears are “robust and growing,” and in some regions, “overabundant.” Once confined primarily to remote mountain regions, bears now inhabit areas where they were historically rare or absent, including many urban and semi-developed communities. As a result, human–bear conflicts have risen dramatically - up 160% between 2021 and 2022 - and California suffered its first confirmed fatal bear attack in 2023.

Beyond public safety, the ecological impacts of unchecked bear populations are substantial. Studies show that bears displace mountain lions from their kills over 70% of the time, forcing lions to increase their kill rates and contributing to record-high deer predation. Bears also account for as much as 80–87% of neonatal deer deaths in some regions, directly driving the decline of deer herds across the state. As one DFW study put it, “the contribution of black bears to the decline of deer warrants special attention.”

AB 1038 proposes a measured and responsible approach to addressing the above concerns. The bill would direct the Fish and Game Commission to designate specific seasons during which permitted houndsmen could use trained dogs in the non-lethal pursuit of bears to reestablish a natural wariness of humans and reduce dangerous encounters near populated areas. It would also restore the Commission’s authority - if deemed necessary by DFW - to establish a regulated hunting season utilizing hounds to help bring overabundant black bear populations back into balance with their ecosystem and prey base.

AB 1038 was heard in Assembly policy committee in late April. Going into the hearing, animal-rights opposition was expecting yet another easy victory on the extremely uneven playing field of the California State Capitol. Yet, following intense lobbying by Gaines & Associates, CA WSF, the California Houndsmen for Conservation and other partners, the result was far from an easy victory.

After receiving testimony from both support and opposition, and a series of questions to both sides from the dais, the roll was called. Seven “aye” votes were needed for AB 1038 to pass out of the 13-member committee made up of 10 Democrats and 3 Republicans. With most expecting AB 1038 to suffer a quick and overwhelming defeat, the bill quickly racked up six “aye” votes against only three “no” votes. Unable to secure one final “aye” vote, AB 1038 failed to pass on a 6-4 vote count, with three members not voting. However, following

the vote, Assembly Member Hadwick successfully secured “reconsideration” of the bill, allowing it to be heard again in early 2026.

The other significant wildlife management bill considered during the 2025 Session was **SB 818**, legislation that failed in 2025. Introduced by Senator Marie Alvarado-Gil (R–El Dorado Hills) and known as “Taylen and Wyatt’s Law,” SB 818 sought to create a pilot program in El Dorado County allowing DFW–permitted houndsmen with properly trained dogs to humanely haze nuisance mountain lions from populated or problem areas. The measure was crafted in direct response to the tragic March 2023 attack on brothers Taylen and Wyatt Brooks - an incident that claimed the life of young Taylen and underscored the growing risks of unmanaged mountain lion populations in California.

Houndsmen have historically used dogs to pursue mountain lions throughout our nation. But since the passage of Proposition 117 in 1990, this practice has been prohibited in California. Having not been pursued by hounds for over 35 years, these once highly elusive animals have lost their fear of humans – leading to regular human encounters, the fatal attack on Taylen Brooks in 2023, and an unacceptable increase in domestic animal predation in El Dorado County.

Research shows that non-lethal pursuit of mountain lions with trained dogs is an effective way to restore their natural wariness of humans and encourage them to avoid populated areas. SB 818 would have authorized this proven practice to enhance public safety and mitigate the escalating loss of domestic animals by gently pushing nuisance lions out of areas they should not be, while also restoring their natural wariness of humans and dogs, before they get into real trouble and ultimately must be dealt with via lethal take. Further, SB 818 would have also helped gather valuable data to inform future mountain lion management strategies in El Dorado County and beyond.

The lion that attacked the Brooks brothers had been in trouble before but had never been hazed by dogs. Experts conclude

that, had the lion that attacked Taylen and Wyatt previously been hazed by hounds, he would never have approached them.

Although SB 818 is dead, Gaines & Associates is currently collaborating with Senator Alvarado-Gil to develop new, carefully crafted legislation in 2026 to address California’s mountain lion management crisis in a humane, responsible, and science-driven manner.

In addition to these above bills, Gaines & Associates is collaborating with CA WSF, and other conservation partners on other possible proactive proposals which promote healthy wildlife habitats, science-based wildlife management, and hunting opportunity throughout our state.

In the meantime, we must also remain vigilant in defending the ideals we care about. The coming year will undoubtedly bring new legislative proposals by animal-rights organizations that threaten our wildlife and the future of California’s rich hunting heritage.

In addition to advancing the important “two-year” bills and other measures of concern that will surely surface in the 2026 Legislative Session, we will continue our work to educate urban legislators on the importance of science-based wildlife management and the vital role that hunting plays in conservation. To that end, we will keep building the size and influence of the California Legislature Outdoor Sporting Caucus - a bipartisan, bicameral group of lawmakers dedicated to preserving and promoting California’s outdoor traditions.

Working in close coordination with our partner wildlife organizations, CA WSF will again join with Caucus leadership to host events and forums that inform, engage, and unite the Legislature in support of California’s fish and wildlife resources - and the outdoor pursuits that depend on them.

No matter the challenges that lie ahead, CA WSF remains steadfast in its mission - committed to keeping sheep on the mountain, and you in the field.

Don’t Miss Out on a World-Class Desert Sheep Hunt!



The CA WSF 2026 Life Member Special Drawing will feature an incredible opportunity – a Mexicana Desert Bighorn hunt at La Guarida Ranch in Mexico.

Mike Borel, Shawn Wood, and many others from CA WSF have hunted there... now it could be your turn!

Hunt Dates: July 2026 (or later, as arranged with the outfitter)

You are automatically entered if you are a Life, Youth Life, or Distinguished Life member!

Join or upgrade at www.cawsf.org today.

You must attend our annual fundraiser banquet on April 26, 2026 at the DoubleTree in Sacramento to be eligible.

Plan now, join us, and don’t miss your chance at the hunt of a lifetime!

CALIFORNIA'S AB 1127: A BACKDOOR STRIKER-FIRED HAND-GUN BAN

From Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation; Submitted by Tammy Scott

Why It Matters: The Second Amendment and sportsmen's issues are often very much intertwined. All types of firearms are in commonplace usage for hunting and recreational shooting sports; thus, anti-firearms legislation is often a trojan horse attack on our sporting heritage. Additionally, the American System of Conservation Funding (ASCF) relies on revenue from firearms and ammunition sales through the Pittman-Robertson excise tax, so nearly all anti-gun legislation hurts conservation funding.

Highlights:

- Last session, the California legislature passed Assembly Bill 1127 (AB 1127), which the Governor signed into law in early October.
- This bill reclassifies many types of striker-fired handguns as "machinegun-convertible pistols", thus outlawing their sale due to existing state law, on the basis that they can be illegally modified to be fully automatic.
- CSF continues to strengthen the bipartisan Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus, providing a forum for lawmakers to engage on complex firearm and sportsmen's policy matters.

Colloquially known as the "Glock Ban" bill, CA AB 1127 is set to take effect July 1, 2026. This bill specifically targets Federal Firearms Licensed (FFL's) dealers by banning the transfer of any "machinegun-convertible pistol," and punishing any FFL who engages in this with fines and potential revocation of their Federal Firearms License. In recent years, California has passed a myriad of anti-firearms legislation while remaining one of the largest firearm markets in the country. Recognizing this, it is important to understand the full breadth of consequences associated with firearm legislation, not the least of which is the impacts that such legislation can have on conservation funding through the American System of Conservation Funding. A key pillar of the ASCF is the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act (Pittman-Robertson Act), which is a self-imposed, manufacturer-level excise tax on firearms, ammunition, and hunting equipment, with revenues earmarked for wildlife conservation, recreational



shooting sports, and R3 purposes. Whenever laws prohibit or add bureaucratic friction to the sale of firearms, such as CA AB 1127 (especially in a state with such a large population and sporting heritage like California), they drive a wedge in conservation funding mechanisms.

In addition to the conservation funding challenges associated with AB 1127, this law sets a dangerous precedent for banning other sporting goods. The bill language outlines that pistols "readily converted by hand or with common household tools" are now classified as machinegun convertible-pistols, but this is extremely broad and subjective. In the case of CA AB 1127, these pistol modifications are already illegal, both under California and federal law, so this law is in many ways redundant and results only in the villainization and restriction of law-abiding sportsmen and women.

Firearm laws can be extremely complicated, and the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (CSF) recognizes this. This is why CSF works so hard to have a robust, bipartisan Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus in California, and every other state. CSF's goal for the Sportsmen's Caucus continues to be that it is a place for legislators and partners across the political spectrum to come together to discuss, learn about, and work through sportsmen-related policy items, including those impacting firearms.

Editor's Note: This article from CSF shows how important it is throughout the US when California implements laws that effect our constitutional rights.

Contact Kaylee Mortensen for comments kmortensen@congressionalsportsmen.org

WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING? CALIFORNIA BILL CARRIES POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES FOR DOG BREEDERS, OWNERS

From: Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation; submitted by Tammy Scott

Why It Matters: Seemingly innocuous bills can sometimes carry significant unexpected consequences for law-abiding sportsmen and women. Currently, California Assembly Bill 519, which has moved through both chambers with wide support, is one such example that has some members of the sporting-conservation community concerned. On the surface, the bill reads as an anti-puppy mill effort, but concerns persist among those in the legal, regulated business of breeding sporting dogs.

Highlights:

California Assembly Bill 519 has currently passed both chambers with unanimous support and only awaits concurrence in the Assembly before heading to the Governor's Desk.

As amended, AB 519 seeks to ban the brokering of dogs under one year of age, cats, and dogs.

While recent amendments to the bill to extinguish some concerns shared by legal, regulated dog breeders, other concerns persist regarding the bill's potential to inhibit the ability of breeders to assist in helping potential dog owners find a sporting dog that meets their needs.

Not every piece of legislation related to our sporting-conservation heritage is black and white. Some require a very nuanced, at times even skeptical, evaluation to determine the impact that legislation may have on opportunities for sportsmen and women. California Assembly Bill 519 represents a current example of such legislation. Seeking to end the practice of brokering the sale of dogs, cats, and rabbits, this legislation would make it illegal for a third-party "broker" to facilitate the sale of puppies, cats, and rabbits in exchange for a profit. AB 519 is claimed to target the practices of puppy mills in the state of California.

Despite receiving unanimous support as the bill has progressed through both chambers, partners within the sporting-conservation community have raised serious concerns about the bill's potential impact on otherwise legal, regulated dog breeders who supply many common sporting dogs to sportsmen and women. During a recent interview



with colleagues at the California Rifle and Pistol Association (CRPA), Legislative Director Rick Travis presented an anecdote in which he, as a licensed breeder, does not have a litter of puppies available but introduces a client to a breeder who does. While he would not directly profit from this interaction, he could receive future connections that would result in him selling a dog based on this reference. Given the bill's vague definitions, despite recent amendments, this is a concern amongst the often close-knit sporting dog breeder communities.

Other partners have also raised concerns about this legislation. However, the bill continues to progress through the legislative process having passed both chambers. At this time, the Assembly simply needs to concur with Senate amendments before the bill is finally passed and eligible to be sent to the Governor's desk for signature.

Editor's Note: This is another example from CSF showing the importance of implementing California laws and how they may influence other states.

Contact Kent Keene for comments kkeene@congressionalsportsmen.org



WINECUP GAMBLE RANCH NEVADA

ROCKY MOUNTAIN BULL ELK HUNT DRAWING

Trophy Rocky Mountain **6 Day Elk Hunt** on the Winecup Gamble Ranch, NE Nevada. Private ranch in Nevada Units 076, 077, 079, and 081 on 30,000 acres of private (locked off); and access to areas inaccessible by the public. Total ranch is 1.25 million acres. Hunt takes place in 2026.

THIS IS AN EXCEPTIONAL HUNTING OPPORTUNITY FOR A TROPHY BULL ELK. DRAWING TAKES PLACE JANUARY 31, 2026 AT THE REDDING CDA BANQUET.

500 TICKETS AVAILABLE

\$100/TICKET

FOR TICKETS VISIT:
[CALDEER.ORG/EVENT/REDDING-BANQUET-FUNDRAISER](https://caldeer.org/event/redding-banquet-fundraiser)

FOR QUESTIONS CONTACT:
TAYLOR KAVANAGH (530)999-8713

HUNT INFO:

- 6 day hunt with two guides from Western Wildlife Adventures
- Food and transportation included
- Lodging accommodations in 6,500 sq ft luxury lodge
- Animal field dressed & ready for butcher upon departure
- Hunt includes Landowner Elk Voucher (\$18,500) to exchange for an elk tag (winner is responsible for the \$1,200 tag and license)
- Winner may choose archery, muzzleloader, or rifle and will be hunting for 340-370+ BC bulls
- Archery hunter has the option of adding 4 additional hunting days for an additional fee (subject to availability)

DRAWING TAKES PLACE

JAN. 31, 2026





CA Wild Sheep Foundation
1630 Williams Hwy #151
Grants Pass, OR 97527

**Join or
renew
today!**



*WWW.CAWSF.ORG
CAWSF@CAWSF.ORG*