



# California Wild Sheep

## IN THIS ISSUE

From The Editor's Desk.....	3
President's Letter .....	5
2026 CDFW Fundraising Permits .....	6
My First Big Game Harvest .....	7
Annual Fundraiser – For The Kids Too .....	8
A Memory Thirty Years In The Making .....	9
New People On The Team! .....	10
BC Moose Hunt .....	12
Spain Beceite Ibex Hunt.....	14
CA WSF Board Elections Coming Up In June – Nominees Sought.....	22
One Lucky Family! .....	22
How Hunting Makes Me A Better Businessman .....	23
The Katie Martin Drinker In The Cady's.....	23
Six Day Slam .....	24
Continued Galad Success: SI82 Flat Top .....	29
California Fish And Game Commission Meeting Update ..	31
CDFW Update Region 6 Spring 2026 .....	32
Governmental Affairs Update ..	35
The Southern Bristol Mountains: A Brief History Of California's Ninth Bighorn Sheep Hunt Zone.....	36
The Politics Of Conservation .....	40
2026 CA WSF Fundraiser Sponsorship Opportunities! .....	43



**Justin Fox**  
**Hunting with Dry Creek Outfitters**  
**2025-26 Season**  
**184" Ram from San Geronio's**



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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This is the first issue following the 2025-2026 Desert Bighorn Season in California and the last one before our Annual Banquet and Fundraiser. It includes lots of CA DBH Pictures from the season just completed, great hunting stories from California and elsewhere by members, more on our 2026 Party & Fundraiser, interesting history on CA DBH hunting, fun humor, AND MORE!

Good luck in the various state tag draws and raffles for 2026. I suggest you have a base plan for the year that doesn't rely on those draws. I also hope you participated in the WSF Sheep Week in Reno – it was incredibly well done and made major money for wild sheep. I so appreciate time with our Sheep Fraternity from around the world!

Thanks to each of you who have contributed to the board, a committee, the fundraiser, a drinker installation, the sheep hunter orientation, a wild sheep summit, donated money, or recruited a new member. It is the collective of all those activities by MANY that enables us to accomplish so much and be the envy of other species focused conservation & hunting groups.

Feedback, ideas, articles & requests are always welcome. Best way to reach me is email: [mike.borel@kearney.com](mailto:mike.borel@kearney.com). **The date for input to the 2Q26 issue is May 10.**



## Chicken Tinga (Tinga de Pollo) from Tony Gigilotti

### INGREDIENTS

- 3-4lbs of skin on and bone in chicken thighs
- 2 onions
- 1 28oz can of peeled tomatoes or ~1.5lb of fresh tomatoes
- 1 7oz can of chipotle peppers in adobo sauce
- 3 cloves of garlic
- 1 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon oregano
- 1/4 teaspoon thyme
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 2 bay leaves

### DIRECTIONS

- 1) Place the chicken thighs, bay leaves, one onion cut in half, and 1/2 teaspoon of salt in a pot, and cover with water then bring to a boil until the chicken is cooked (~45 min) and able to be shredded
- 2) Remove the chicken and onion from the water, and shred the chicken. Place the bones and skin back in the water and reduce significantly to create a stock
- 3) While the chicken is cooking dice the other onion and saute with the garlic and set aside
- 4) Add the tomatoes to the onions and garlic and simmer with some stock from step 2
- 5) In a blender combine the can of peppers (don't use the entire can if you are spice sensitive), the halved onion, remaining spices, and the tomatoes from step 4. Pulse until you have a smooth consistency
- 6) Combine all ingredients, including the chicken, into a pot and simmer for 10-15 minutes or until the consistency is what you'd like
- 7) Serve as tacos or with rice



For those times you just don't want to come home with the smallest of the season!



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**California Wild Sheep** is published quarterly.

Please email all articles and photos to

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Vince Bloom, freedomtek@yahoo.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 to include name, location, outfitter.

Content editing by John Ware

Humorous outtakes provided by Tammy Scott

Published by Beverly Valdez, Gaiatec Associates

# Events

2026

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

2027

January 9-11	TBD, GALAD RWWS Installation
January 20-23	SCI International Convention, Nashville
January 24	GSCO Convention, Nashville
February 3-6	WSF 50th International Sheep Show, Reno
February 20	Due date for articles for 1Q2027 CA WSF Newsletter
February	TBD, GALAD RWWS Installation

# PRESIDENT'S LETTER

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Greetings CA WSF members,

Happy New Year!

I'm glad to report that our GALAD projects are coming along well, and our final project of the season took place February 20–21. Please keep an eye out for the upcoming schedule of future installations, and I challenge each of you to make plans to attend. I'm confident you'll not only have a great time, but also feel a real sense of pride seeing firsthand where your hard-earned dollars and generous donations are making a difference.



We also have at least two emergency installations planned—hopefully by the end of April—in the Jacumba Mountains along the U.S.–Mexico border.

These projects directly support the endangered Peninsular desert bighorn herd in that region. Please take a moment to review the recent article and the call for assistance from Paige Prentice, Statewide Bighorn Sheep Coordinator with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Our annual fundraising banquet is also fast approaching, and your Board and Fundraising Committee are working hard to make it a memorable event. Mark your calendars for April 25 at the DoubleTree by Hilton for a truly “Wild Sheep” evening! There will be plenty of excitement, including a special drawing for a Stone’s sheep hunt with our outstanding sponsor, Yukon Stone Outfitters.

In addition, our Life Membership drawing will feature a Desert Bighorn sheep hunt with Rancho la Guarida—but you must be present in the room to win! In my opinion, you won't find better draw odds anywhere. Visit the CA WSF website online store and secure your tickets early so you can plan ahead for the celebration. Be sure to read Fundraising Chair Don Martin's write-up for additional details.

We're now entering what I consider one of the most exciting times of the year—Application Season. Best of luck to all of you. I hope to see you at a guzzler installation or on a water haul sometime this summer!

Take it easy,

Jim Fitzgerald

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## THANK YOUR OUTFITTER! \$250 Per Ad

A perfect way to thank a great outfitter/guide! You'll get

- One 3.75x2.5 ad in the event program
- One 3.75x2.5 ad in one one newsletter
- Help with your special design

Help your guide or outfitter become better known, get more clients, and, most importantly, says you had a great time! A bonus is that you'll be supporting our mission of PUTTING AND KEEPING SHEEP ON THE MOUNTAINS!

## SAMPLE

A sample advertisement for European Hunting Adventures. It features the headline "We had a great hunt!" in a stylized font. Below the headline, there are two small photos of hunters with their trophies. The text reads "European Hunting Adventures with Sasha and Stefan Belancic" and "info@safari-eha.com". At the bottom, it says "You will too! John & Bev".

*We had a great hunt!*

European Hunting Adventures  
with Sasha and Stefan Belancic

info@safari-eha.com

*You will too! John & Bev*

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# 2026 CDFW FUNDRAISING PERMITS

California's fundraising permits are one of the most powerful conservation tools available to organizations like CA WSF.

Each year, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife authorizes a limited number of special fundraising permits to qualified conservation partners. These permits are auctioned at public fundraising events, and 100% of the proceeds are dedicated to wildlife conservation in California. 95% of the funds are dedicated by CDFW to wildlife conservation and 5% are retained by the organization for their conservation efforts.

Unlike standard draw tags, fundraising permits:

- Are valid in a specific designated hunt unit(s)
- Provide flexible season dates within that unit
- Allow the permit holder to plan strategically for weather and ram movement
- Generate significant funding for habitat improvement, water projects, and herd monitoring

Over the years, these permits have raised hundreds of thousands of dollars statewide — funding guzzlers, habitat restoration, disease monitoring, translocations, and long-term wildlife management.

For the sheep management plan, finalized in 2025, CDFW has submitted for approval three new zones:

Zone 11 – North Bristol / Granite Hunt Zone

Zone 12 – Providence Wood Hackberry Hunt Zone, and

Zone 13 – Castle Piute Hunt Zone

CA WSF is very pleased to announce that, if approved by the Fish and Game Commission, we will have Zone 12 for auction at our April 25 dinner! We will also have a special Multi-Zone elk fundraising tag!

More information is available on both tags below. Stay tuned as we will all be on pins and needles til April 16th!

## Zone 12 BIGHORN SHEEP PERMIT

Pending the adoption by the Fish and Game Commission on April 16, 2026, the Providence, Woods, and Hackberry Mountains (Zone 12) hunt unit will be a brand new never-before-hunted zone for California's 2026/2027 hunt season. This zone is located within the Mojave National Preserve, located between Interstates 15 & 40. While there is some vehicle access along the periphery of the ranges, wilderness boundaries will limit motorized access.

### General Tag information

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife has selected the California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation to auction its Single-Zone Fundraising Tag 2 (Zone 12). This

permit represents California's premier desert bighorn hunting opportunity and provides the lucky bidder the ability to be one of the first to hunt Zone 12: Providence, Woods, and Hackberry Mountains during the 2026-2027 season. This permit is subject to all existing conditions required for the take of bighorn sheep in California, including the requisite hunter orientation program identified in Section 362, Title 14, and California Code of Regulations. The tag holder will be able to hunt up to one month prior to the opening of the general bighorn season and over a period of up to three months (11/07/2026-02/07/2027).

## MULTI-ZONE ELK PERMIT

This tag lets you hunt in all listed zones under one tag without having to draw multiple individual zone tags. You must adhere to all standard regulations including season dates, reporting, weapon method, and public land access rules.

### General Tag information

The multi-zone elk tag is good for all general methods hunt dates (excludes archery, apprentice, or muzzleloader) in the Northwestern (Roosevelt), Northeastern (Rocky Mountain),

Siskiyou (Roosevelt), Marble Mountains (Roosevelt), and La Panza (tule) Elk Hunt Zones. This means that whoever purchases this tag would have their choice of going after a Roosevelt, Rocky Mountain, or tule elk.

**NOTE:** Nonprofit organizations auctioning or selling fund-raising license tags shall clearly indicate in all advertisements and to potential tag recipients that such tags are subject to approval of the Fish and Game Commission on April 16, 2026 and are subject to all existing conditions required for the take of the species, including any required hunting license and hunter orientation programs identified in Title 14, California Code of Regulations. Tags shall be nontransferable.

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# MY FIRST BIG GAME HARVEST

By Jules Baisinger, Member

***I said I wanted to go on a hunt this year, my husband Scott said sure. Then I drew a once in a lifetime desert big horn sheep tag.***

I didn't grow up hunting and didn't really learn what it was all about until I married my husband. He was raised hunting upland birds, waterfowl, and the occasional deer hunt with his dad. Over the years I've joined him on several bird hunts and on a few of his deer and elk hunts, which pushed me to try my own luck on an antelope hunt. Though I was unsuccessful on that trip, I genuinely enjoyed being outdoors, the sportsmanship of hunting, and the thrill of the experience, so it was still a success.

On my drive to work one morning in June 2025, I received a call from Scott excitedly joking that I had won the lottery. I knew that California tag results were due soon so I joked back, "what, did I win a sheep tag?" To my utter surprise, Scott told me that I had, in fact, drawn a sheep tag. When I realized he wasn't just yanking my chain, I was so overcome with excitement I almost wrecked my car! I won't say that excitement was short-lived by any means, but a few days after we found out I got the tag, the enormity of the situation hit me; I've never killed big game before, which meant a lot of learning, practicing, planning, and responsibility lie ahead if I wanted to be successful this time around.

The unit I drew for my hunt is primarily BLM land, and is in close proximity to where we live, so target practice was easily available to me, but I knew I needed to dedicate multiple weekends driving out to the desert for shooting practice all summer and fall if I was going to truly be ready; I tried shooting from different positions—at the table, prone, sitting, and off shooting sticks—to determine what worked best for me to consistently shoot my best. I was especially pleased with the results of these efforts after my final practice session the week before opening day, when I hit the bullseye at 300 yards with a cold rifle on my first shot. My husband looked at me and declared, "We can go home now," and we did.

Opening day of the season, we took some time to get our bearings and began glassing for sheep. Several spotters were out in the deep wilderness areas, while we focused on the non-wilderness areas first. Within five minutes, our guide, Matt with Dry Creek Outfitters, spotted several rams, and I got a glimpse of the magnificent animals we were after. We continued to glass and spotted over 30 sheep that morning, most of them high up on the mountain. Although we found a few average sized rams at lower elevations, I wasn't prepared to end my once in a lifetime hunt a few hours into a 30-day season. After deciding to continue on, our spotters reported a large ram deep in the wilderness. We decided to head back to camp for the evening, with a solid plan to go after him in the morning.



Jules Baisinger with her Newberry ram

On day two, we drove to our starting point and began a six-mile hike into the wilderness. We saw sheep everywhere along the way and had an idea of where the large target ram was from the previous day. At one point, we saw a beautiful mature ram at 200 yards but passed on the opportunity, hoping to find the larger ram we were already tracking; a decision that would become a valuable life lesson for me. We ran out of shooting hours while pursuing the big guy, but we hiked over 13 miles that day and were rewarded with a beautiful sunset on a peak in the Newberry Mountains, surrounded by dozens of sheep, before heading back to camp for the night.

Day three was a lighter load day after the long hike we tackled the day before; we drove to areas that hadn't yet been glassed this season and found several smaller rams, but nothing worth going after once we'd thought back on the large ram from the day before.

On day four, we hiked back into the wilderness, again looking for the large ram. We trekked across the entire wilderness area, seeing plenty of rams and even catching sight of the big guy at one point. Sadly we couldn't get close enough and he was moving away from us. Much to my dismay, we never saw him again, leading me to regret passing on the 200 yard ram from day two, but you live and you learn. Toward the end of that day, we made a play on two nice sized rams, but after a brutal climb for me, tagging out that evening proved to be unsuccessful. It did feel slightly defeating, but I tried to stay in the moment and sit with the fact that was the first time I have ever had a sheep in my scope, and it truly is a view I will never forget.

On day five, we returned to the same mountain as day one and found the same group of sheep high up. There were a few nicer rams among them, so we started hiking again,

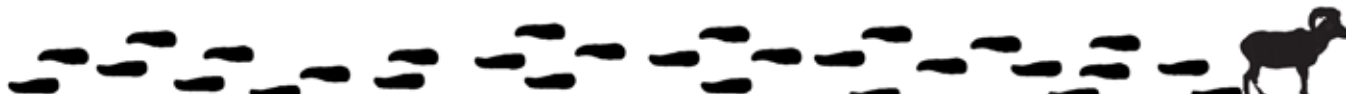
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however, as we climbed, so did the sheep. I'll admit, I had a minor mental breakdown half way up the mountain that morning. I realized the experience had truly caught up with me, and I needed a break. We decided to trek back down, glassed more, and took some time to get my head back in the mental space I knew I needed to occupy to continue the hunt.

Day six we again went back to the same place as day one, and again spotted the same group of sheep. With my adversity of the prior day behind us, a major internal drive to harvest my first big game clicked into place, and we began the climb. After about our fifth hour climbing, we were finally close enough to make a play. As we slowly moved into position, a larger ram I set my sights on wandered farther off beyond my comfortable shooting distance, but another ram seemingly appeared out of nowhere at 300 yards. Matt asked if I wanted to take the shot, and I knew I did. Once I told him I was going to take it, I collected myself, I got comfortable, I aimed, took a few breaths, and with Matt's calm encouragement, I fired. The ram immediately ran about 40 yards and we lost visual; unfortunately none of us were sure if I had a hit or

not. Thankfully, Matt had set his phone to record through a phonescope, and confirmed it was a hit, although we were not sure if it was fatal. My gut immediately sank, thinking I wounded the ram, and there was a chance he was still out there alive and injured. We grabbed our gear and started hiking in his direction when thankfully, Scott spotted the ram, and Matt was able to confirm it... we had ourselves a dead sheep!

In the moment, I was completely overwhelmed by the range of emotions and physical challenges I'd faced in such a short time. Scott stuck by me every step of the way and the team at Dry Creek Outfitters made this experience one that can never be topped. At the root of it all was the deep gratitude of getting to experience a once-in-a-lifetime hunt firsthand, and the success I felt after working so hard to obtain my first big game animal... Epic is the only word that comes close to describing this experience.



## ANNUAL FUNDRAISER -- FOR THE KIDS TOO

*by Glen Pyne, Distinguished Life Member, Youth Chair*

Each year at our Annual Fundraiser, we're proud to welcome families with kids of all ages. From games and prizes to hands-on activities, there's always plenty of excitement and laughter. Every child is special to us, and we hope they grow up with a love for conservation, hunting, and fishing that lasts a lifetime.

One of our members recently shared their family's experience after their son Bennett won a trip to Safari West at the 2025 Annual Fundraiser. Here's Sydney Aboltin in her own words:

*"At the 2025 Annual Fundraiser, our son Bennett (9) won the trip to Safari West. We had a great experience visiting there as a family.*

*Bennett used his wheelchair for the ground tour which was easy to navigate and it was fun to walk around the grounds.*

*The jeep tour was so neat. Going into the enclosures was exciting and very fun for Bennett and again they accommodated him and his disabilities.*

*He especially loved the zebras, they are his favorite animal. We had a fun and knowledgeable tour guide and are very grateful to have had this experience. Thank you!"*

Stories like this are exactly why we do what we do.

This year, we'll once again have fun games, activities, and prizes just for the young ones. Bring the kids — we can't wait to see you there!

Brad, Sydney, and Bennet during the jeep tour.



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## A MEMORY THIRTY YEARS IN THE MAKING

By Dave Shadoan, Member

*Almost thirty years ago, while I was in college in San Diego, I hunted the San Gorgonio Mountains with two of my closest friends. A father and son who helped shape my early years in the outdoors, and much more. At the time, I knew nothing about bighorn sheep. I knew big mule deer lived in the Wilderness area. Not that I ever saw one, much less harvested one there. But that trip changed something.*

At just above tree line, outside our camp, I saw my first bighorn. Then another. And more throughout the day. True masters of the mountain, moving with an ease that stopped me in my tracks. Like most of my early years hunting public land, I was unsuccessful for mule deer. But standing there, watching those rams move through the San Gorgonio Wilderness, something was permanently burned into my memory.

Over the years, I hunted all over California. I'll be honest, I'm a mediocre hunter at best. I never thought of myself as a sheep hunter, and applying for one of the most coveted tags in the state seemed almost laughable. Work eventually took me out of California for a while, but when I returned in 2015, I began hunting here again and started applying for the San Gorgonio sheep tag. Not seriously, just building points. In what world would I ever actually draw? Then came the disease outbreak in 2019 that hit the herd hard. I continued applying for preference points but never truly believed I would one day hunt sheep. Most of my time was spent hunting D3-5. I love those mountains. I'm rarely successful, but every trip is worth it. Time away, time in wild places, and time with close friends.

In 2025, that changed. For the first time in years, Zone 5 reopened. Instead of applying for a preference point, I put in for the unit. When the results were posted, I logged in and saw that I had drawn the tag. Oddly, I wasn't excited. I wasn't shocked! It didn't feel real. That realization came later, slowly. Through research, conversations, and the growing weight of what that opportunity truly meant the excitement set in.

With that realization came pressure. So many hunters apply year after year for this tag. I felt a responsibility to do it justice, to give it the time and effort anyone else would have if they'd drawn it. I've always been independent and never imagined hiring a guide. But the more I researched, the more I understood how little I knew about Southern California bighorns.



Dave Shadoan with his San Gorgonio ram

After weeks of digging, one name kept coming up: Josh Schulgen of Sierra Crest Outfitters. The night before I planned to call him, one of his videos appeared on my YouTube feed. Coincidence or not, I took it as a sign. When we spoke, I quickly realized how unprepared I would have been on my own. I was getting a crash course in sheep behavior, terrain, and access, of the San Gorgonio herd.

I began preparing. Training, planning, E scouting. As the season approached, I had a back injury and found myself heading into the hunt in the worst physical shape I'd been in for awhile. I also switched rifles, settling on a Weatherby Alpine CT in 7mm PRC, and spent the time behind the gun. Fortunately, long-range shooting is part of my profession, and I was confident when it came to marksmanship.

Opening week arrived, and two of my closest friends, Tom and Nicholas, joined me for the hunt. Having them there meant more than I can fully express. Sharing it with people who know you well adds depth to every decision and every moment. Josh and his crew: Brad, Brian, and Terry Anderson had already been putting in the time. Terry had spent eleven straight days glassing and located a strong group of rams the day before the opener in the Whitewater country of San Gorgonio.

Opening morning, we glassed over thirty sheep moving across a steep hillside, nearly fourteen rams scattered throughout the group. I had never seen that many bighorns in one place. Seeing that many sheep together was emotional in a way I hadn't expected. For the last years, the San Gorgonio herd had been unstable to the point there was no hunting. Disease, loss, and uncertainty about the future.

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To watch a hillside alive with movement, to count mature rams among ewes and lambs, felt like witnessing a quiet recovery. It was proof that recovery is possible when habitat, management, and time are given room to work.

The rams were over a thousand yards away. We dropped into a draw and climbed into a better vantage point, eventually closing the distance to roughly 600 yards. From there, we identified a mature ram that any hunter would want to take. It was never my intention to shoot that far. But our position was solid. The wind was nonexistent. We built a stable shooting platform, and as the ram crested a small spur, he stopped perfectly broadside. If any one variable had been off, I wouldn't have taken the shot. I went through my process. Breathing, position, a few dry fires. Calm. Focused. It felt like another training rep. I asked Josh to allow me to shoot and all I heard was, if you are comfortable "Send it."

The shot broke clean, and the recoil pushed me off target. For a moment, all I could see was dust cascading down a steep chute, and I thought I'd watched him tumble wounded. Then we realized the dust came from a rock kicked loose by another ram. Josh had been filming and the video showed a perfect shot! Moments later, we saw him down, just a few feet from where he had stood. A clean, perfect shot.

Only later did it truly sink in what that moment represented. Decades of training, repetition, discipline, and accountability

had quietly accumulated into that single trigger press. The calm behind the rifle wasn't accidental. It was built over years of respecting the responsibility that comes with taking a shot. Of all the shots I've ever taken, that one stands apart, not because of the distance, but because everything I am professionally and personally came together in that moment.

The emotion came in waves during the long hike to him. Standing over that ram, running my hand across his horns, I thought back to that college kid who first saw sheep in these same mountains thirty years earlier. Then the real work began photos, quartering, heavy packs, and the long grind back to the trucks.

I'm deeply grateful to Josh and Sierra Crest Outfitters, and to Brad, Brian, and Terry, for their professionalism and relentless effort. I'm thankful to Tom and Nicholas for standing beside me on a hunt I'll never forget. And I owe a special thanks to my family. They listened patiently for months as I talked through plans, gear decisions, contingencies, and seemingly endless hunting YouTube's. They supported the time away and understood what this opportunity meant to me.

Some memories take thirty years to come full circle. This was one of them.



## **NEW PEOPLE ON THE TEAM!**

*By Mike Borel, VP Operations*

After more than 20 years of dedicated service, our longtime administrator and event manager, Beverly Valdez, is transitioning out of her administrative role with CA WSF.

For two decades, Beverly has been a steady presence behind the scenes — coordinating events, managing communications, answering member questions, and helping to keep the many moving parts of our organization running smoothly. If you've registered for a banquet, received an event reminder, or gotten a quick response to a question, you've likely experienced her work firsthand.

As part of this transition, you'll begin seeing emails coming from two new addresses this year. Please be sure to add the updated contact information below to your address book so you don't miss important announcements:

John Ware – [forthesheep2@gaiatec.com](mailto:forthesheep2@gaiatec.com)

John, who most of you already know as a 20+ volunteer himself, will be providing support including membership, website updates, and overall support for the group.

Shannon Artherton – [3forthesheep@gmail.com](mailto:3forthesheep@gmail.com)

Shannon, new to the group, will focus on the annual fundraiser event support. Shannon has been active with the CDA EI Dorado chapter so you may have met her at that event in the past.

The good news? Beverly isn't going anywhere.

She will remain involved throughout the year to assist with a smooth transition and knowledge transfer. And as always, she can still be reached at [forthesheep@gmail.com](mailto:forthesheep@gmail.com).

Even better, she will continue in a role she truly enjoys — serving as our newsletter publisher. Her commitment to wild sheep conservation remains strong, and we're happy that her voice and passion will continue to help shape this publication.

Please join us in welcoming the new team members helping as we move forward. The mission continues as always — **PUTTING AND KEEPING SHEEP ON THE MOUNTAIN!**

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# RECAP OF THE 37TH CA WILD SHEEP SUMMIT

*By Mike Borel, VP Operations CA WSF*

CA WSF hosted Sheep Summit XXXVII as an “all virtual” event on December 16, 2025. The purpose of these summits is “to accomplish more collectively for Bighorn sheep in CA through sharing and collaboration, than the sum of what each organization can accomplish individually. Following is a summary of Summit XXXVII (37).

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS: CDFW, USBLM, CAWSF, NPS, DOD, SCBS, key independents, and others). 45 persons participated.

Information reviewed:

1.	Welcome, Review Meeting Purpose & Agenda, Introduction of new persons	Mike Borel
2.	CDFW Big Picture Update	Mario Klip
3.	CDFW Statewide and NCD BCU Update	Paige Prentice
4.	CDFW Desert Bighorn Sheep Update	Danielle Glass
5.	CDFW Peninsular Bighorn Update	Chris Fust
6.	CDFW Sierra Bighorn Update	Tom Stephenson
7.	Next Steps with the Desert Bighorn Council	Steve Torres
8.	I-8 Overpass & Border Wall Status and Funding	Christina Aiello
9.	Updated priorities for connectivity by CDFW	Juan Torres
10.	What Drives Bighorn Ram Movement Forays	Rick Ianniello
11.	Update on Brightline and Overpasses for Mitigation with Cal Trans and other State Issues Impacting DBH	Don Priest
12.	Observations on Mineral Impact on DBH, and Suggestion for a Scientific Study to Confirm or Correct this Hypothesis	Carlos Gallinger
13.	SCBS New Drinker (RWWS) Installations, Guzzler (BGG) Repairs and plan for 2026	Debbie Miller-Marschke
14.	GALAD (Give a Lamb a Drink) progress, funding	Mike Borel
15.	“Report on Recent Activities that are of value and interest for CA wild sheep -- e.g. WAFWA, Wild Sheep & Goat Council, Desert Bighorn Council, Boone & Crockett Club, WHBAB, etc.	Vern Bleich
16.	Chapter 1 of Ph.D. Thesis - Continuous Biologging of Body Temperature in a desert ungulate reveals water use, sex specific thermal regulation, and heterothermy associated mortality	Paige Prentice
17.	Open Q & A Session	Mike Borel

Particularly notable sharing:

1. North Central BCU in Review now.
2. CDFW proposing three new hunt zones for 2026-27 from the N. Central BCU!
  - a. Granite/N Bristols,
  - b. Providence/Wood/Hackberry,
  - c. Castle / Piutes
3. The Northern BCU is next. It includes the Panamints, Inyo, Funeral, Grapevine and Argus. Plan is to complete 1 BCU/ year.
4. Hunting opportunity is a priority for CDFW Region 6.

Our previously committed COLLECTIVE VISION FOR WILD SHEEP IN CALIFORNIA:

- Ensure the persistence and restoration of healthy and sustainable metapopulations of bighorn sheep throughout their historical distribution in California.
- Develop and use science as the basis for conservation and management.
- Provide for recreational uses of bighorn sheep wherever appropriate.
- 

Summit XXXVIII is scheduled for April 24, 2026. It will be a combined “In-Person and Virtual” format.

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# BC MOOSE HUNT

By Eric Govan, Distinguished Life Member

*I arrived in Tatla Lake, British Columbia in the evening on September 30th. The seven day moose hunt I booked nearly two years earlier was set to start the next morning. I selected these dates because the rut is normally in full swing during this time. My outfitter for the hunt was Smokey Lake Outfitters. They are a great family-owned and run operation. I learned I would be hunting with Max, the son of the outfitter and part owner in the business.*

My station wagon was too small for the hunt, so I rented a 10-year-old Cadillac Escalade for the 3200 mile round trip. I divided up the northward drive over 3 days with a rest day in Harrison Hot Springs. Upon arrival, I got settled into their comfortable lodge. I was their only hunter at the lodge during my time. We had a hearty dinner, went over safety concerns and discussed the presence of bears.

I learned it had been late night at the lodge because the hunter before me got his moose the evening before in the final hours of his hunt. BC doesn't allow the hunting of grizzly bears. And I was told this area of BC has lots of grizzly bears. I was too excited to get much sleep that first night. After breakfast, we headed to the range to confirm my gun was accurate and that I could shoot. We then headed to the field to start our hunt.

After parking the truck, we hunted a very promising swamp chain. We spent the next few hours following a trail and calling for moose. The routine was walk, wait, call, wait and repeat. The hike in was quiet. We didn't get a single response all morning. Then as we turned a corner there was a moose standing in the middle of a creek. It didn't have any noticeable antlers. However, with binoculars you could make out the buttons forming. We waited for him to move on. We continued down the trail and there was another moose standing in a different finger of the creek. This one had noticeable antlers, but each side just a spike. I took the opportunity to test hold my rifle on the moose's vitals before he wandered off into the dark brush.

We were near the end of trail and with all the moose activity nearby, we decided this was a good place for lunch. We found a comfortable place on a hillside overlooking this section of creek. Max would periodically call over the creek valley. Max spotted a large brown animal on the opposite hillside. It turned out to be a grizzly. We ranged him at about 1200 yards. A nice



Eric with Max before starting out (L); Grizzly's been here (R)

comfortable distance considering he was moving away from us. Max called a few more times and a cow moose came out of the brush into the open. Still no vocal response from any moose.

We were getting ready to move to another area when Max spotted a large grizzly at the brush line on the opposite side of the creek system. I ranged him at 400 yards.

He disappeared into some bushes, but the moving brush was getting closer to us. He was visible again, but this time he was at 300 yards. At this time, we stood up and started yelling at the bear to spook him off. He was not the least bit concerned about our yelling and continued angling in our direction. We tried our best to watch him closely, but the brush was quite dense. After another few minutes, he came back into full view. He was on his hind legs staring at us from the edge of the creek now only 130 yards from where we were standing. Our yelling is clearly not causing this bear to move along. The bear drops to all fours and continues angling in our direction.

It is at this point that Max tells me a grizzly can cover 50 yards in brush in under 5 seconds. Due to the curvature of the creek and hillside, we must move towards the bear to keep him in sight. We both have our rifles up in case the bear turns directly towards us and charges. After a couple minutes, he angles slightly away from us and into very dense cover. We spent the next 30 minutes on our feet scanning the brush line and hillsides in every direction. We decided it was a good time to find a new hunting ground. Our hike out was made more exciting since it was in the same direction that the bear had disappeared. We decided to go fast and loud, trying not to sneak up on anything. Thankfully, we didn't see another sign of the bear.

We hunted a different section of the swamp chain in the afternoon with no responses to the calling. For the evening

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hunt, we set up in a different area overlooking a nice creek system. Max let out a few cow calls, but still no response. Then a few minutes later, we heard an animal call in the distance. Unfortunately, it was the howl of a wolf. With the evening hunt blown, we headed back to the lodge for dinner and to recap the day. It was quite the first day of moose hunting. I was hoping the calling on day 2 would be productive.

After a large hot breakfast at the lodge, we headed back to hunt the area from the prior evening. We had settled in and Max started calling. We got a response on the third call. It was a grizzly bear roaring. It sounded like it was inside of a half mile. A minute later the bear roared again and it sounded closer. We sat quietly and listened to try to determine where it was coming from. The bear roared again after a few minutes, but this time it was much fainter. Any prey animals in the area would be on alert and wouldn't be responding to calls. It was time to try different areas for the rest of the day. We walked and called, but still no response. For the evening hunt, we set up on the hillside well above the creek system where we had seen the moose and bear the prior morning. The calling continued unsuccessfully. Less than an hour before dark, we saw something large moving in the brush. It was acting like a bull, but we couldn't tell for sure until it stepped into a clearing. Its large paddles were visible at 1200 yards. This was a bull to pursue. It was raking the brush and trees. In the right wind, we could hear the breaking branches. We watched him right up until it was too dark to see.

Day 3 started earlier. We wanted to be close to where we had last seen the large bull at first light. We got into position and started calling. It was a very quiet morning. The large bull never appeared and no moose responded to the morning calling. We hunted the same general area all day. Never heard a response to our calls or saw any additional moose. I was looking forward to a hot homecooked meal and shower back at the lodge.

Days 4 and 5 were rather uneventful. The full days were spent in the field. We hunted hard, covered many miles on our feet and even more with our eyes. Max continued to call, but nothing responded. We saw a cow calf pair each day, but that was it. A couple of storms came through BC in the week before I arrived and the weather was warmer than normal during my trip. It was clear that the rut wasn't happening yet. The enthusiasm and optimism I had after day 2 was starting to wane.

Day 6, we went back to where we had seen all the bulls. We wanted to give that area one last chance on this hunting trip. There was more warm weather and still no responses to the calls. However, it was one of my best days of hunting. I have always found time spent hunting to be cathartic. The slow movement, the beautiful scenery and peace and quiet allow me to mentally process the stressors of life. By lunchtime on day 6, I had a new sense of appreciation about my life. We had lunch on the same hillside as day 1 in almost the same place we had the visit from the bear.

That afternoon we went to the alpine above a major river system. Max spotted multiple cow calf pairs along the river far below. The evening hunt was uneventful. On the drive back to

the lodge we discussed our plan for the next day. At dinner, we got some good news related to the weather. There was a small storm expected. It was going to be colder with a decent chance for some rain and snow.

The last day of the hunt started much like the other mornings. A full hot breakfast in the lodge and a Rueben sandwich for lunch in my backpack. We were in the field at first light. We hunted and called with no response. The storm started coming up the valley when we were on a small hill covered in standing dead timber from past forest fire. It got darker and windy. There was small flurry of drizzle rain / snow falling. The creaking of the dead trees was concerning and we could hear thunder in the distance. It was time to try a new area and eat lunch.

There was another guide working with the outfit. He was very new to the area and had spent the previous days glassing different areas. He was in the same area today, so we all met for lunch. After lunch, the other guide went up to the alpine to glass the large river valley and we headed in another direction. Very soon he called us on the radio to tell us he had seen bull with a cow down in the valley below. He described the general location to Max. It was in an area they didn't hunt because it was very dense and quite far from any active road. However, Max was willing to try given the amount of ground we covered in the last six and a half days. This was our last chance and time was running out. It turned out to be a little further than we first thought.

We followed a trail overgrown with willows for nearly 2 miles. In our haste to pursue the moose, we left both our backpacks and my extendable shooting stick in the truck. I found a nice shooting stick on the hike in. Max mentioned the moose was going to be smaller than the large bull we spotted on day 2. We went quiet as we got closer to where the moose was expected to be. Max was ahead of me and spotted them first. He raked his rifle against a small tree. I got even with Max but couldn't see anything through the trees. Then I saw the large shape between some trees, but I couldn't see its head.

Max assured me the cow spooked off before I was able to spot them. He raked the tree to stop the bull. Quickly I took a seat and steadied my rifle on the makeshift shooting stick on a small opening in front of the moose. It felt like forever, but it probably happened quickly. I was able to make out the antlers as the moose stepped forward. I squeezed the trigger as the moose's vital area was visible in the opening between trees and branches. I saw the moose go down, but Max couldn't see it when I fired my shot. That is a testament to how dense the trees and brush are since we were standing less than 5 feet apart.

It was a young bull, but I wouldn't ask for more out of a 7 day hunt. We spent a few minutes taking pictures and started breaking down my moose as it got dark. Thankfully, our headlamps were not in the backpacks. We kept our rifles nearby and I played some Marty Robbins and then Billy Walker on my phone as we broke down the moose. We didn't have any gamebags with us so we could only get so far. I found out that Max had sent a message to his sister and wife when we started our hunt for this moose. They needed to be ready in case we were successful. And he sent them our GPS coordinates

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once the moose was on the ground. It turned out that I killed the moose less than 400 yards from a fire trail that had been deactivated a few years earlier. The assistant guide arrived first on his ATV along with some gamebags, a powerful flashlight and a chainsaw.

It took Max less than 10 minutes to clear the fallen trees and branches for an easier path from the moose to the trail. Max's wife and sister arrived about 45 minutes later on another ATV with more gamebags and backpack. We shuttled all the components up to the ATVs. The other guide and girls drove the meat and gear back to the trucks while Max and I hiked out and reminisced the past 7 days. I got all that I wanted on my moose hunt in British Columbia. I want to thank Smokey Creek Outfitters for the great experience. Christianna, Max and Anna have a great operation. I look forward to more hunts with them in the future.



## SPAIN BECEITE IBEX HUNT

*by Eric Govan, Distinguished Life Member*

***I wanted to visit Spain after hearing great things from friends and family. I found this three day hunt in a SCI New Mexico chapter auction.***

The outfitter, Salvo Monforte SMC Spain Hunting Ibex, has an amazing reputation and ibex hunting has been dream experience of mine.

My girlfriend and I built a vacation around my hunt with nights in Lisbon and Barcelona before the hunt and Valencia and Madrid afterwards.

My main guide for the hunt was Salvo's son Salvo Jr. Another local guide named Lucas helped on the hunt too. We saw multiple ibex each day. After looking over multiple ibex, we decided to make a play on a nice mature billy in a herd.

We were able to hike to within 250 yards of the herd. I got prone, using my backpack as a rest. I squeezed off a shot when the animal was clear of all the other animals in the herd. He was a 12-year-old fighter with the horns and scars to prove it.

I want to thank Salvo, Natalia, Salvo Jr. and rest of the folks at SMC Spain Hunting Ibex for the amazing experience. The hospitality and food at their hunting lodge are top notch. Salvo even made his famous paella for dinner our last night there.



Eric with his ibex

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# ANNUAL FUNDRAISING BANQUET UPDATE

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

If you haven't bought your ticket(s) or table yet, NOW IS THE TIME! Purchase your tickets now for our 2026 Annual Fundraising Banquet coming up on April 25 in Sacramento at the Doubletree by Hilton, 2001 Point West Way across from the Arden Fair Mall. This will be our last event at the Doubletree. Please make plans to attend. Visit: [www.cawsf.org/store.html](http://www.cawsf.org/store.html) to buy your tickets.

Our random drawing grand prize this year, once again, is a 14 day stone sheep hunt for 2026 with our longtime friend and supporter Aaron Florian of Yukon Stone Outfitters. **YOU DO NOT NEED TO BE PRESENT TO WIN.** Winner will arrange hunt dates with the outfitter. This is a spectacular hunting opportunity in the Pelly Mountains of the Yukon and last year's winner, Jerome G. of New Mexico harvested a beautiful ram. This is one of the best stone sheep hunts in Canada, so don't miss your chance. Tickets are available now for \$200/each and can be purchased online at: [www.cawsf.org/store](http://www.cawsf.org/store). These opportunities are very expensive to provide to our members and we would certainly appreciate it if you would buy a ticket today and the night of the event in person. In the past there has been a ticket limit on the General Random Drawing, however there is no limit on the number of tickets you may purchase this year. Up to 100 tickets will be reserved for sale to attendees the night of the event.

Our Life Member random drawing prize this year is a 10-day desert bighorn sheep (*mexicana*) hunt with our friends at Rancho La Guarida. **YOU MUST BE IN THE ROOM TO WIN!** This is a tremendous opportunity that many of our members have enjoyed and we are proud to offer this unique "Horseback" desert sheep hunt in Chihuahua, Mexico once again. This hunt has a history of 100% success and is bowhunter friendly. All life members and youth life members are automatically entered to win. Distinguished Life Members are automatically entered three times to win. **AND NEW THIS YEAR**, all levels of life membership may purchase additional chances to win in person at \$100/each with a maximum purchase of 25 additional chances, **but you must be in the room!** So make your plans to attend now.

This year's Spotlight auction item will be a California State unit-specific desert bighorn sheep fundraising permit. Last year, we auctioned off the Newberry/Rodman/Ords permit, a great permit. Our 2026 tag will be Unit #12, one of the newly proposed units -- the Providence/Hackberry/Wood unit. These new units are pending formal adoption by the Fish and Game Commission on April 16. See page xx for more details on the three new proposed units. What makes unit #12 especially exciting? It has never been hunted before and has tremendous potential to produce a very special ram.



April 25, 2026

**DoubleTree  
Sacramento**



The Special permit season will likely open a full month earlier than the general season. So please don't miss an opportunity to be a part of this CA WSF history in the making.

In addition, just in the last few days, **and for the first time**, we will be auctioning the **California State Multi-zone elk fundraising permit**. It is a huge win for our organization to have the opportunity to offer this rare elk hunting opportunity to our members. Again, please watch your emails as we will be providing additional information in more detail in the near future.

This is our only fundraiser for the year and we are getting more work done for desert bighorns and desert wildlife than ever before. We'll give you an update on our Give a Lamb a Drink (GALAD) program as well as all the new news regarding changes for the 2026/27 desert bighorn sheep season. Please make plans to attend today and buy your tickets now. If you wish to donate to our silent auction, random drawings or wish to volunteer, please reach out to me at: [don-martin@earthlink.net](mailto:don-martin@earthlink.net)

I look forward to seeing all of you in Sacramento.



Desert ram photo taken at Rancho La Guarida

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# PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD



Jeff Watts  
Newberry Mountains  
Sierra Crest Outfitters



Jim Widby  
Kelso / Old Dads  
Sierra Crest Outfitters



Craig Cattell  
Newberry Mountains  
Sierra Crest Outfitters



Sara Potter  
Kelso / Old Dads  
Sierra Crest Outfitters



Mike Torres  
New Mexico Coues Deer



Brenton Scott  
Wyoming Unit 60 Antelope  
It took 17 points to draw the tag in 2025!

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# PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD



Jerry Hensen  
Newberry / Rodman  
Dry Creek Outfitters



Nhat Phong Tran  
Cady Mountains  
Dry Creek Outfitters



Richard Limi  
Cady Mountains  
Dry Creek Outfitters



Tom Willoughby  
Clark/Kingston  
Dry Creek Outfitters



Todd Pavlik  
Newberry / Rodman  
Dry Creek Outfitters



Rick Parker  
Clark / Kingston  
Dry Creek Outfitters

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# MEMORABLE SHEEP SHOW



Darryl Williams  
F.N.A.W.S. Award  
Distinguished Life Member CA WSF



Jim Fitzgerald  
F.N.A.W.S. Award  
Distinguished Life Member CA WSF



See Page 3 for the perfect solution!



CA WSF  
Celebrating 25 Years Supporting Sheep Show  
Represented by Don Martin, Beverly Valdez and  
Jim Fitzgerald



# 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. **Meet our Distinguished Life Members:**

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  
MATT ST MARTIN  
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 Kuiu emblazoned with the CA WSF logo.

# 🐐 IT'S BAAAAACK! 🐐

**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.



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# AN EYE OPENING TRIP

By Jim Fitzgerald, Distinguished Life Member

*I had the privilege to accompany new Life Member and friend Lincoln Laughlin to Tajikistan in December of 2025. This would be Lincoln's first international and Asia hunt. It was mostly a seamless hunt with Antonio Teruel and Iberhunting Spain.*

The VIP pickup off the steps of the plane was very convenient. It was a two day flight to get there and two days driving to hunting camp. The first day was along the Afghanistan border but no issues were encountered. Military guards were present on the road all along the border and I never felt unsafe. We made it to camp on day four at 13,500 ft elevation.

Although logistics were long and difficult and the weather very cold, animals were very plentiful. I ended up shooting my Pamir ibex on day two, having passed a very large billy on the first day because of the shot distance of almost 800 yards. It was a very traditional Land Cruiser race off-road and down a valley to cut off a herd of ibex that was crossing from one range of hills to another. With a Starsky & Hutch slide we came to rest about 240 yards from the target. All done. Since I couldn't hardly breath at the 15,000 ft elevation, I wasn't too shook up about it. Note to self: I was comfortable out to 500 yards but this country is big. Time for a new scope.

Meanwhile Lincoln was turning Marco Polos down left and right to the dismay of his guides. He's from Colorado and works and hunts at 12-13,000 feet all the time so by day three he was keeping up with the locals. On day three he finally found a ram that met his requirements and took him. Somewhere in there two wolves crossed his path and he connected on a nice pair. Surprisingly, they were about the size of our coyotes. They were also plentiful around the herds and not too concerned with people. On day four Lincoln shot his Pamir ibex about mid-day without very much hassle.

Trip notes:

1. Be careful of the water. This includes hot water for coffee or tea. Make sure that it boils. And the ice, DON'T DO THE ICE! Fresh washed salads are also suspect. Two Spanish hunters we met from another camp got sick and were sick for 20 days. We heard that they went straight to emergency when they got home.
2. \$100 USD bills are the only money accepted once you're out of the big city but only new and perfect! Not a tear, rough edge, deep crease, stamp or mark. By the end of the trip we had plenty of money left by our standards but they wouldn't take it due to the above reasons. Credit cards were generally not taken, even at the hotels. Antonio helped us out of a tight spot.



Jim Fitzgerald with his Pamir ibex



Lincoln Laughlin and his Marco Polo



Lincoln and his Pamir ibex

3. Be prepared for unsanitary conditions at many spots along the way to hunting camp. Toilets are holes or gaps in the flooring. Your imagination can figure that one out. Camp had all of the amenities and were very clean and warm. Coal and dung was the main heating fuel.

All in all it was a good trip and I recommend it to anyone. It'll open their eyes to how good we really have it here in the good'ol USA!

*(See Lincoln's wolves in Photos from the Field!)*

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## CA WSF BOARD ELECTIONS COMING UP IN JUNE – NOMINEES SOUGHT

CA WSF has 16 Board of Director positions, and the term is two years. Eight of the positions expire each year, which enables continuity year to year. Here is the status of that election:

Board Members whose Terms expire June 2026: Mike Borel, Jim Fitzgerald, Scott Gibson, Ben Gordon, Don Priest, Brenton Scott, Greg Tooley, and Steve Torres.

Board Members whose Terms expire June 2027: Brad Aboltin, Vince Bloom, Jake Bricker, Matt Burke, Tony Gigliotti, Don Martin, John Oldenkamp, and Glen Pyne.

If you would be interested in committing some of your time and talent to CA WSF please let President Jim Fitzgerald or VP Operations and Newsletter Editor Mike Borel know! We are seeking Board candidates and Fundraiser / Committee volunteers.

As a member you will receive a ballot, with candidate information, in June.

We also have multiple committees, which are appointed by the President each year, and he appreciates volunteers! Committees include:

- Fundraising Committee
- Membership Committee
- GALAD & Water Projects Committee
- Projects Other than Water Committee
- Youth Outreach Committee
- Governmental Affairs Committee
- Communications Committee
- Newsletter Committee

You do not need to be a Board member to volunteer for a committee. Any level of membership is welcome and it's a great way to get to know more of the members, share great stories and info, and generally have fun!



### ONE LUCKY FAMILY!



Jim McIssac  
Free range bison, Tetons, Wy  
Won through the Wyoming Super Raffle  
Shoot with .300 won at the CA WSF Annual Fundraiser  
Welcome to the Bison Club!



Robbie Johnson (Jim's son-in-law)  
Winner of the CA WSF Life Member Hunt 2025  
Baja California Sur with Bo Morgan  
Hunted seven days and said it was the hardest hunt he's done

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# HOW HUNTING MAKES ME A BETTER BUSINESSMAN

by Vince Bloom, Distinguished Life Member

Hunting builds the same mental muscles you need to win in business: clear decision-making under pressure, long-term focus, and a “hunter mindset” for going after opportunities instead of waiting for them.

A hunter is wired to search, pursue, and close, not sit back and wait, which is exactly what top “hunter” salespeople do when they penetrate new markets and bring in fresh revenue. That instinct to constantly scan for sign—tracks, wind, movement—maps directly to scanning your market for new customer segments, better inventory angles, or arbitrage deals.

You get comfortable with rejection and dry spells in the field, which hardens you for slow months, missed deals, and any curveball business throws at you. Safe, successful hunts force you to assess risk (terrain, weather, shots, other people) and choose when to take or pass on a shot, mirroring how good operators weigh risk, probability, and upside on business moves. You learn to plan (gear, maps, logistics), create contingencies, and adjust in real time, which is the same skill set behind solid business planning, cash management, and pivoting when the plan breaks.

Over time, you internalize a process: identify risk, reduce or accept it, execute, then review, which is how professional risk systems in outdoor and sports organizations are built.

Success in hunting comes from disciplined preparation and patience, not hype—a direct parallel to sticking to your sales system or business model instead of chasing every shiny idea.

Sitting still, glassing, and waiting for a high-probability shot trains you to tolerate boredom and stay locked in on your “one thing” in business (core product, key metric, specific customer profile).

When you miss or bump an animal, you’re forced to analyze what you did wrong and go back out, which is the same resilience loop you need after a bad month, a downturn in the economy, or a failed launch.

In summary upon reflecting how hunting influenced me. The state point system literally requires years, even decades of goal setting, deadlines and commitment! I am proud to be a hunter and am even more proud of the priceless lessons I have learned from my Dad, friends and fellow hunters.

Be a mentor and pay it forward. You might finally get drawn for that sheep tag or they might even!

Thoughts are Things



## THE KATIE MARTIN DRINKER IN THE CADY'S

By John Ware and Mike Borel, Distinguished Life Members

In remembrance of Katie Martin, Don Martin’s wife, a special memorial fund has been established in support of CA WSF’s Give A Lamb A Drink (**GALAD**) program.

Katie loved wild places and the wildlife that depend on them. In her honor, we are working to fund a Raincatcher Wildlife Water System — what will be known as the “**Katie Drinker in the Cady’s**.” Our goal is to install this life-saving water source in the Cady Mountains, where it will directly support desert bighorn sheep and other wildlife for generations to come.

To date, we have raised \$12,900 — and the total continues to grow.

The equipment cost for one RWWS system is \$35,000. As with all GALAD projects, the San Gorgonio Chapter and other dedicated volunteers will donate the approximately 488 hours of labor required to site, haul, assemble, and install the system.

### How You Can Help

You can participate in honoring Katie’s legacy by:

- Making a direct donation toward the Katie Drinker
- Sponsoring a specific component of the RWWS system
- Contributing in memory of a loved one
- Sharing this project with friends and fellow conservationists
- Every contribution — large or small — moves us closer to completing this memorial and putting life-saving water on the mountain.

Donations are tax-deductible and will be applied directly to this dedicated project.

Donate at our web site store ([www.cawsf.org](http://www.cawsf.org)).

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# SIX DAY SLAM

*By Darryl Williams, Distinguished Life Member*

## **Alaska Dall's Sheep**

***Thirty years after graduating from high school I finally completed my college education and my wife suggested I go on a 'big hunt' to celebrate. I was set on a Canadian Moose hunt and never even considered sheep hunting until I was looking through a hunting magazine over the Christmas holidays and saw a photo of a Dall's ram. After reading that article, I decided to start my sheep hunting career while I was young enough.***

I immediately starting researching Alaska Dall's Sheep guides and booked a hunt with R&R Guide Service for August of 2008. I spent months training for the hunt – many hours on the elliptical trainer, hiking with a weighted vest and backpack, and many trips to the desert to get comfortable with long range shots.

The flight to the lodge from Anchorage to R&R's lodge was spectacular – some mountains covered with snow, others with the lush green grass of summer. We saw nearly 30 sheep during the 200-mile, 1.5-hour flight. After dinner I checked zero on my rifle, completed the paperwork for licenses and tags, and tried to sleep.

The next day my guide Jason Vogle and I flew to our hunting area. We were glassing sheep as soon as we exited the Super Cub! We hiked about two-hours to our spike camp, had lunch, and started glassing sheep. The next morning, we began our ascent to the rams we spotted the day before. I came on this hunt thinking I was in "Sheep Shape" – after all I'd been hiking almost daily with a 50-pound vest and, for the last 3 months, with my pack loaded to 78 pounds. I couldn't believe how out of shape I felt. We eventually reached the summit and were pinned down by eight rams for most of the day. Unfortunately, none were shooters. After I saw that first wild ram I was hooked on sheep hunting!

The next morning, we hiked back up the mountain and found four of the rams from the day before. We continued hiking and glassing and Jason spotted five rams on a bench that appeared to be impossible to approach. One of the rams was a definite shooter so Jason decided to find a way to get to them. After 2 hours he returned with a plan – we'd side hill to the ridge directly above the five bedded rams.

After two hours of the steepest, rockiest, scariest stuff I've ever been on we finally reached our destination. As I started up the last chute Jason told me to be as quiet as possible because there were some rams just over the ridge top. Again, no shooters. Jason moved up to the top of the peak and...



Darryl with his Dall's sheep

a good ram moving up the ridge. He ranged him at 403 yards and asked if I was comfortable shooting that far – I emphatically said yes!

Just as I chambered a round, the Ram moved uphill and was obscured by rocks. As I lay there waiting for him to give me a clear shot, it started raining. After a few minutes I got cold and started shivering and was forced to don my rain gear which I had been using for a rifle rest. I finally got into position and waited for the ram to get in the clear. I ranged him again at 342 yards – as I shot I felt the scope hit my forehead – and I joined "The 300 Club" and was now officially a Sheep Hunter!

## **British Columbia Stone's Sheep**

***This odyssey started in 2012 when I booked a Stone's Sheep hunt with an outfitter who sold his area without notifying me. I did get my deposit back, but it took two years and many phone calls and letters. In 2015, I started looking for another outfitter and I eventually booked a hunt for 2018.***

My outfitter's brother had a 'special' adventure planned based on the FaceBook posts of my "Sheep Shape" training regimen. He knew where there was a great ram in an area that hadn't been hunted in 20 years. He said it would "be a bit of a grind" to get there – a phrase that became all too familiar over the next five days, but I felt a ram of this caliber would be worth the sacrifice. After checking zero on my rifle, a delicious meal of Stone's Sheep steaks graciously donated by another



Darryl with his Stone's sheep

hunter, and one last check of my gear, I hit the bed for a fitful night of 'sleep'. The anticipation of six years of waiting had me much too excited!

On August 13th we loaded our gear, horses and enough food for ten days and started for the trailhead. After an hour plus drive we unloaded and started the four-hour ride to the drop off point and beginning of the hike. We paired our food down to seven days and hiked about two hours to our first camp – Grind #1. After a very satisfying Mountain House dinner my guide Chad, August (packer, wrangler, and chief water gatherer), and I hit the sack.

Before I knew it, it was day four. We left camp at 10:00am and started up the connecting ridge to reach the mountain where we spotted the rams the day before. When we reached the top, Chad belly crawled to the edge to see if the rams were there. He immediately came back and told us there were six rams feeding in a basin on the east side and one of them was the big ram he had seen during the goat survey. We quickly moved north along the west side of the mountain to get to a location that would put us in shooting position.

Chad crawled to the edge to check on the rams and returned to tell us they were now mostly bedded and the big ram was 433 yards (angle corrected to 400) away. He asked if I was comfortable with a 400-yard shot and I said I was if I could get a steady rest. I dialed my scope to 400 yards and crawled behind Chad to get into position. The big ram was bedded and his gray coat blended into the rocks so well, I had a difficult time finding him in my scope. While I was trying to get comfortable, he stood up and we thought I'd have a broadside, standing shot. Not so fast...he bedded again... facing me this time. The angel on one shoulder kept saying don't look at those horns while the devil on the other kept reminding me how big they were!

I was able to get a rock-solid rest and told Chad I was going to take the shot. I believe Chad and August were surprised that I shot so quickly, but I heard the thwack of the 180-grain Barnes Tipped TSX hit the ram and he never moved! All the excitement, the months of preparation, the exhausting hike into the area, and the realization that I had just shot the ram of a lifetime overcame me and I started crying. It was an incredibly emotional moment for sure.

## 2023 Desert Bighorn

*In 2020 I decided that I might die before I drew a Desert Bighorn tag so I booked a hunt with La Palmosa for December of 2023. I had heard what a magical place it was and wanted my wife to join me on a sheep hunt.*

We landed in Monterrey and drove about 3 ½ hours to the beautiful La Palmosa lodge in the Chihuahuan Desert. We settled into our room and went to the large dining room for a late dinner. There we met our translator/guide Rafael and a successful Danish hunter who was traveling home the next day.

My first day of hunting started with a delicious breakfast and a quick trip to the rifle range to check zero. We then rode in a jeep to the base of a steep mountain to start our ascent into sheep country.

We had a long climb up to the top of the mountain and glassed at numerous spots along the way. We saw about 20 sheep – no shooters, and one 5-point bull elk. I never thought I'd see elk in the desert! At the end of the day, we started the long descent back to the jeep and returned to the lodge. I enjoyed a long hot shower, a relaxing massage, a delicious dinner prepared by a 4-star Chef, and slept in a comfortable bed next to my wife – man, this was living!

The next morning, we drove into a different part of the ranch. We stopped at three locations and glassed bands of sheep but again, no shooters. As we drove along Rafael asked how far I felt comfortable shooting. I told him 500 yards and he replied, "It's too bad you can't shoot a bit further". I said a good guide would get me closer and we both laughed. We saw a nice mule deer buck and a small herd of antelope as we continued our drive. Just as we turned a corner into a narrow canyon the guides spotted a lone ram at the top of a ridge to our right. We stopped and glassed him and, although nice, not quite up to La Palmosa standards. A little further down the road the guides excitedly asked Rafael to stop. They spotted a lone ram about 1500 yards away near the top of a ridge.

As they set up the spotting scope, I looked at him through my 10X binoculars and could tell he was impressive. He was quartering away uphill to his right and I could see his right horn was very long and heavy. After a closer look through the spotting scope, we all agreed he was the one and started the stalk up a dry creek bed out of the ram's view. We closed the distance to about 550 yards and I asked if we could get closer. The conditions and cover were perfect so we continued up the creek bed and got to about 350 yards. Although this was well within my comfort zone, I couldn't see the ram as he was bedded below my line of sight. The guides tried everything to help but I just couldn't find him. After a few tense moments the ram casually stood up and walked over the ridge. We'd have to continue up the drainage to the top and circle around to the other side of the ridge and attempt to locate the ram.



Darryl with his Desert sheep

When we reached the top, the lead guide Juan continued alone to attempt to locate the ram. He returned in a few minutes and spoke to Rafael in Spanish who told me, "He found him but you can't shoot prone. You'll have to shoot off hand or off the tripod." I asked why? "He's bedded at 70 yards!"

Juan motioned for me to follow him up to the top of the ridge and attempted to guide me into the ram's location. I could not find him in my binos. He put the spotter on the ram and motioned for me to look. I found him – about 4" of the top of his horns is all I could see in the thick brush. I have no idea how Juan found this ram – his eyesight was incredible.

I setup my rifle on the tripod and waited for the ram to stand for what seemed like an eternity. He stood up facing us and I immediately put the cross hairs below his chin and pressed the trigger. He went down and Juan spoke the only English I heard from him all week – "Good shot" as he slapped my back. I had my desert ram!

We spent the next couple of days enjoying the hospitality that only La Palmosa could provide. Excellent meals, daily massages, a jeep ride to view petroglyphs, and lots of wildlife viewing including more sheep, white-tailed deer and mule deer. An experience of a lifetime in a truly magical place in the Chihuahuan Desert.

## 2025 Rocky Mountain Bighorn

***After I took my Desert bighorn in 2023, I really expected my sheep hunting career was over. The very long draw odds in the U.S., and the cost of bighorn hunts in Canada, left me feeling that winning a raffle might be the only way I'd ever get to hunt bighorns.***

After hearing a couple of friends drew Idaho tags, I checked my results. I suspect my neighbors heard me yell when I saw

"SUCCESSFUL"! My friends know I complain about my lack of luck, but I drew an Idaho Rocky Mountain Bighorn tag and would be hunting in September in the famous Frank Church Wilderness!

I immediately started looking for a guide and booked with Max Lohmeyer of Pungo Mountain Outfitters. I told Max this would be my "Slam Ram" and wanted to make sure we could extend past the 9-day hunt if necessary. Now the training and waiting started.

I repeated my normal "Sheep Shape" routine, made several trips to the range to practice long-range shooting, and packed and re-packed my gear. I booked my flight into Thomas Creek with Middlefork Aviation and anxiously waited to drive to Challis, ID on September 8th.

On September 9th, I met Max at the Challis Airport and flew into Thomas Creek. The short flight was beautiful and uneventful – just the way I like small airplane travel! Max's main camp was next to the airstrip and we quickly unloaded my gear and supplies for the camp. After sorting my gear and packing the mules, we left camp for sheep country. We rode about 8 miles into the wilderness and unpacked/cached all our excess gear and water. Max and I loaded 2-days of food and water into our packs and hiked down to a good vantage point in the first drainage.

We glassed two locations with no joy and moved up the drainage to our third stop. I dropped my pack, sat down, put my binoculars up to my eyes, and said "Ram" - I couldn't believe my eyes! While Max quickly set up the spotting scope, I lost sight of the ram. As it turned out he bedded almost immediately after I saw him. Max had him in the spotter and offered me a look. He asked, "What do you think?" He looked good to me and I said, "Let's go get him!". I told Max that if we got this ram, I had a story for him. The ram was four ridges away so we started out right away in hopes we'd get there while we still had shooting light.

We stopped just below the top of the last ridge and Max crawled up to see if the ram was still there. He motioned me to join him and told me the ram was on his feet and moving toward us. There was a convenient rock pile at the top of the ridge that would provide cover and a good rest so we moved there.

We had about 10 minutes of legal shooting light, so things happened very quickly. Before I could get set up for a shot, the ram moved down hill below our line of sight. We didn't know if the ram would move further downhill, move uphill, or move over the ridge toward us. After a couple of minutes, the ram walked over the ridge and continued downhill toward us. Max ranged him at 135 yards and I immediately took the shot. The ram continued a few yards downhill into heavy cover but I was confident I hadn't missed. Max heard him crash into the brush!

Max started down the steep slope to find my ram while I scooted on my butt behind him. As he neared the bottom of the drainage, he saw the ram's white belly and let out a yell. When I caught up to Max, he congratulated me and we shook hands and hugged. I couldn't believe I completed my Grand Slam on day one! He asked me to tell him the story.

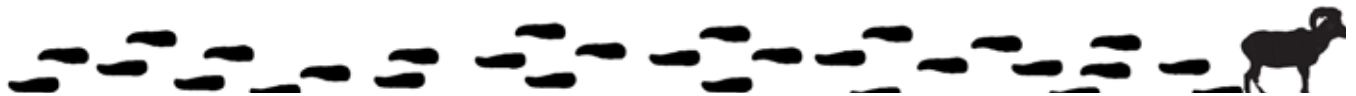


Darryl with his Rocky Mountain sheep

Well...not including travel time into the hunting area I took all four rams in six days of hunting. I took my Dall's on Day 2, my Stones on Day 2, my Desert on Day 2, and my Rocky on Day 1!

Guides are the enabler for most of us to realize our hunting dreams. They spend countless hours scouting for animals, encourage us to summit one more ridge, cook our meals, care for our animals if we're successful, and massage our egos if we miss. It's a low paying, extremely physically demanding job and they wouldn't dream of doing anything else...thanks to my guides for making my dream come true!

I want to thank my beautiful wife Cassie of 45 years for indulging my Sheep Hunting sickness. She's listened to hours of stories, she's been a hunting season widow, and watched me spend lots of money that could have been used for non-hunting vacations. Finally, I'd like to thank Idaho Fish and Game Department for managing this precious resource so guys like me have chance to hunt these majestic animals.



### Pozole Verde from Tony Gigilotti

#### INGREDIENTS

- 3 ounces pumpkin seeds
- 1lb tomatillos
- 2.5lbs bone in chicken thighs
- 1 onion
- 1 jalapeno
- 2 poblano
- 1 serrano
- 6 cups low sodium (or home made) chicken stock
- 2 tbsp dried oregano
- 1 clove garlic
- 1/2 bunch of cilantro
- 28 oz white hominy

Substitute wild turkey, pheasant, or grouse for a more "wild" experience.



#### DIRECTIONS

1. Heat the pumpkin seeds on medium in a skillet until they start to pop and set aside
2. Dice the tomatillos, onion, peppers, and garlic then add to a pot with the chicken and chicken stock bringing to a boil and then reduce to a simmer for ~40 min
3. Remove the chicken and set aside letting both cool
4. Strain the remaining solids into a blender, adding the pumpkin seeds, and the half bunch of cilantro
5. Utilize the fat off the top of the chicken stock and being browning in a pot before adding the blender contents and chicken stock
6. Add the drained hominy (if utilizing non canned, add some of the liquid from cooking) and simmer on low
7. Add the chicken to the pot, warm, and then serve in a bowl with tortillas on the side

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# ECOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT OF UNGULATES IN A CHANGING WORLD

*Dr. Kelley Stewart*

*Editor's Note: This is our first year supporting the Western Section of The Wildlife Society.*

Thank you to the California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation for your support of our symposium on “Ecology and Management of Ungulates in a Changing World”. The symposium was held as a pre-conference symposium at the Annual Conference of the Western Section of The Wildlife Society, which was held in Monterey California. The symposium was hosted by Dr. Kelley Stewart and Dr. Nathan Jackson from the University of Nevada, Reno and Janine Payne, the chair of the professional development committee for the Western Section of The Wildlife Society. We had an impressive lineup of ungulate biologists and ecologists speaking at the event, with multiple talks on bighorn sheep. We had 53 people that attended the symposium. In addition to those addressing



**Symposium Hosts: Nathan Jackson, Kelley Stewart, Janine**

bighorn sheep, talks were presented on other species of ungulates including mule and black-tailed deer, Roosevelt and Rocky Mountain elk, moose, and pronghorn.

Dr. Joshua Jahner (New Mexico Tech University) gave an excellent talk about “Resolving the evolutionary history of bighorn sheep to inform future management: an answer to the California bighorn lineage question”. Results of Dr. Jahner’s research confirm the genetic identity of the no longer putative lineage of California bighorn, answering a question that puzzled geneticists and managers for decades; California bighorn sheep is indeed a distinct subspecies. Following Dr. Jahner’s talk, Dr. Clinton Epps (Oregon State University) spoke about “Insights from DNA past and present on restoration of bighorn sheep”. In his talk, Dr. Epps described how they used historical DNA to inform ongoing restoration and management of bighorn sheep in the northern Great Basin. They located specimens of bighorn sheep that were aged prior to extirpation from eastern Oregon and northern Nevada. Indeed, one of his specimens was over 12,000 years old! Dr. Marcus Blum (Texas A&M

University) spoke about movements and timing of parturition of a newly translocated population of bighorn sheep in Nevada. Dr. Blum’s results indicated that females in a translocated population exhibited a two-month shift in timing of parturition during the second-year following translocation. Their findings highlighted the importance of examining habitat and other site-specific factors prior to translocation and how this method can enhance the efficacy of translocations, which are a critical conservation tool across the range of bighorn sheep. Dr. Jeff Villepique (California Dept. Fish and Wildlife) gave another excellent presentation on “Desert bighorn sheep in warming world: challenges in an era of hydroclimatic volatility”. Dr. Christian John (UC Davis) spoke about Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep in a talk titled “Connecting the dots: multiscale landscape monitoring lends context to ungulate movement”. Dr. John reported on his findings where he used time-lapse cameras to



**Joshua Jahner giving a presentation on evolutionary history of bighorn sheep.**

document changes in forage availability during multiple seasons of the year and on seasonal ranges of Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep.

Our symposium was a huge success, and we are very grateful to the California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation for their generous donation and support of our symposium.

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# CONTINUED GALAD SUCCESS: SL82 FLAT TOP

*by Scott Gibson, CA WSF Life Member*

The Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep (SCBS) completed another water project in the Cady Mountains. The SL82 Flat Top wildlife water development is the 5th State Lands project completed by the Society since the State Lands Commission approved SCBS's lease of 90 "State School Lands" sections back in October 2022.

This project was wholly funded by the California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation's "Give a Lamb a Drink" (GALAD) program. The project involved the installation of 6,500 square feet of rain collection mat, 3x2300-gallons of "Raincatcher" water storage, three SCBS style walk-in drinkers with faux shade rocks. We also included the new Gallagher Satellite Water Monitor System so we can monitor the water level in case of problems or if we need to haul supplemental water.

"Flat Top" is in the Cady Mountains Hunt Unit #9. It's location is key to promoting bighorn connectivity with the South Soda Mountains and the proposed new taxpayer funded Bighorn Sheep Overcrossing, over the I-15 Freeway and Brightline High Speed Rail project.

We want to give a shout out to the 30+ volunteers who showed up to help build this project. Volunteers drive hundreds of miles to participate in these projects, then camp out and work multiple days. We also want to thank our California Department of Fish & Wildlife (CDFW) folks for reviewing and approving these projects. Several folks for the CDFW sheep crew are among the volunteers helping with construction. Before projects like this ever take place, there are many scouting trips and planning sessions necessary. Once a location is found and designed, a biological and archaeological assessment must be completed and submitted to the CDFW for approval. We also need to recognize contributions from our own CA WSF family; CA WSF President Jim Fitzgerald was on site as a volunteer for this entire build. Distinguished Life Member, Justin Akins, donated and delivered our Saturday night dinner of Oggie's gourmet pizza for the entire volunteer crew.

By the time you read this article, SCBS should have another CA WSF funded State Lands wildlife water development completed in the North Soda mountains. More to come on that project in the next newsletter.



# CDFW PENINSULAR BIGHORN SHEEP UPDATE

By Paige Prentice, Statewide Bighorn Sheep Coordinator

*The Jacumba ewe group (herd) of federally endangered Peninsular bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni*; bighorn sheep) have historically occupied the section of mountains between Interstate-8 in southern California and Highway 2 in Baja California, Mexico.*

The geographic home-range for this herd is roughly 60% in the United States and 40% in Mexico. Of the individuals with GPS collars, approximately 55% of their time is spent in Mexico, particularly during the months April-October when temperatures are high and surface water is scarce. There are no reliable water sources for the herd when they are within the Jacumba Mountains of their home-range as all reliable water sources are in Mexico, roughly 2.5 miles south of the border (Figure 1). Conversely, the bighorn sheep females (ewes) rely on the rugged terrain located in the U.S. between November and March for lambing habitat and winter forage.

As of December 2025, concertina wire has closed the “lower crossing zone” and is partially across the eastern side of the “pinto crossing zone” (Figure 1). It is anticipated that the entire “Jacumba” and “Pinto” crossing zones will be closed with concertina wire by March 2026. The closure of the Jacumba Mountains border gap, currently with concertina wire and later with the border barrier or “wall”, will isolate and restrict bighorn sheep on either side of the border from critical resources. Bighorn sheep that become confined on the U.S. side of the border will die of dehydration if they are unable to move into Mexico for water or alternative water sources are not supplemented to aid their survival. To avoid losing individual sheep or the entire herd, the Wildlife Agencies (CDFW and US Fish and Wildlife Service) have requested the installation of permanent and temporary water sources along the U.S. side of the border, along with several wildlife crossing/gate locations (Figure 1).

On February 3rd and 4th, representatives from the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Naval Air Facility El Centro, Customs and Border Protection, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife participated in a scouting field trip to assess permanent and temporary drinker locations in Davies Valley and Skull Valley. We assessed four locations along the western side of Davies Valley and two locations within Skull Valley. Each location was initially selected using GPS data from collared individuals and models assessing factors generally associated with successful water developments (i.e. distance to escape terrain,

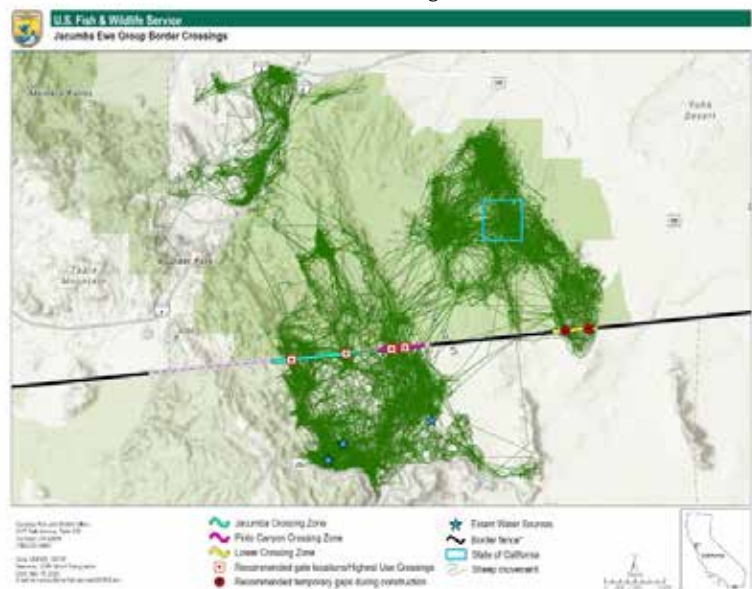


Paige Prentice

visibility, habitat use, heat load, etc.). During the site visit, we assessed each location’s feasibility of being able to construct a permanent water development system while also minimizing impact to the landscape.

Based on our surveys we recommend the installation of two permanent wildlife water development systems (i.e., “drinkers”) and four temporary water tanks on the U.S. side of the border in the Jacumba Mountains wilderness by April 30, 2026. Each permanent system will have 9,200 gallons of water storage capacity and a 6,700 square foot rain mat capable of replenishing each system with rainwater. We recommend that one system be built in Davies Valley near the border and the other in Skull Valley to maximize

Figure 1



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distribution and availability. Once built, these systems will be largely self-sustaining with remote cameras and satellite water monitors that will allow managers to monitor water



levels and usage. Furthermore, we recommend that each temporary tank has a 2,300-gallon storage capacity and is placed along known high use areas for up to one-year post-border barrier construction to allow bighorn sheep time to adjust and locate the permanent water sources.

As of mid-February, CDFW and its partner agencies are still awaiting authorization to move forward with this project proposal. Once authorized, we aim to move rapidly to get both permanent systems and the 4 temporary tanks installed by April 30th. We will likely need a substantive volunteer force to pull this off. If you are interested in volunteering and have done so before, please reach out to your contacts at CA Wild Sheep Foundation, the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep, or Desert Wildlife Unlimited. If this is your first time volunteering, please feel free to email me directly ([paige.prentice@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:paige.prentice@wildlife.ca.gov)) and I will gladly put you in contact with one of our volunteer teams.



## California Fish and Game Commission Meeting Feb 11-12 Update

### **Listing of Mountain Lion (CESA)**

The California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) at its Feb. 11-12 meeting voted to list mountain lion populations in parts of southern California and the central coast as a threatened species under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA).

In a unanimous vote, the Commission determined that listing a distinct population segment of mountain lions in southern California and the central coast is warranted due to threats such as habitat loss, habitat fragmentation and isolation of small populations as a result of expanding human infrastructure, among others. The Commission considered presentations from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) on its species status review and from the listing petitioner the Center for Biological Diversity, as well as public comment. The Commission will adopt its findings at a future meeting.

"This segment of the mountain lion population is clearly at risk from distinct threats," said President Eric Sklar. "Habitat loss, habitat fragmentation by roads, freeways and housing, and mortality from vehicle strikes, rodenticides and risks of isolation and inbreeding would lead to the extinction of these mountain lions if we remained on the same trajectory."

Following the 1974 ban on hunting mountain lions in California, in 1990 voters approved Proposition 117, which designated mountain lion a specially protected mammal in the state and established some exemptions for lethal removal of mountain lions to preserve public safety and to protect private property and livestock. The Commission noted that those statutory provisions remain intact and that this listing is focused specifically on preventing the potential loss of the identified population segment through science-based management and conservation action.

### **Donation of Sport-Caught Fish**

The Commission adopted regulatory amendments related to processing and donating sport-caught fish. Sport fishing license holders who exchange fish for processing will be able to donate their fish to charities directly through fish processors rather than having to deliver the fish themselves as presently allowed. The adopted amendments streamline the donation of sport-caught fish to nonprofit organizations, California Native American tribes, public schools within a California unified school district and California city or county government programs. The changes will provide sport fishing license holders the opportunity to support nonprofit, community, school and tribal initiatives addressing food insecurity, access and distribution.

# CDFW UPDATE REGION 6 SPRING 2026

By Danielle Glass, CDFW Environmental Scientist

California Department of Fish & Wildlife's Desert Bighorn Program remains as busy as ever. In November, we captured 59 bighorn across 11 mountain ranges. These captures focused on hunt zones, along the Interstate 15 corridor where the wildlife crossings will be built, and areas near the Colorado River where CDFW had never collared bighorn using modern GPS technology. Not one of the 59 bighorn tested positive for an active *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* infection, providing a positive note to the disease status of the metapopulation.

After captures, CDFW conducted helicopter surveys in the Chuckwalla Mountains, Palen/McCoy/Granite/Little Maria/Big Maria/Riverside Mountain complex, and the Wood Hackberry Mountains. Only 12 bighorn were observed in 2 days of flying in the Chuckwalla Mountains, and a follow-up survey is planned for April. 54 bighorn were observed in the Palen/McCoy/Granite/Little Maria/Big Maria/Riverside Mountain complex, with a mark/resight population estimate of 26 adult ewes and a simultaneous double-count population estimate of 16 adult rams. Notably, multiple ewe groups were observed in the Riverside Mountains where the population was previously formally listed as extirpated. 74 bighorn were observed in 1 day of flying in the Wood Hackberry Mountains. The adult ram population was 22 using a mark-resight estimate.

We are also in the midst of going through millions of photos to complete camera population estimates in 19 mountain ranges. These photos will provide us with insight into the size of the northern section of the metapopulation, including in the Inyo, Tin, Last Chance, Dry, Panamint Butte, Grapevine, Argus, and western Panamint Mountains. We are also estimating population size of many of the hunt zones using cameras, which we will then use to make recommendations for the tag numbers for the 2026-2027 hunt season.

In other news, CDFW's North-Central Bighorn Conservation Unit Plan, covering populations between Interstates 15



Danielle Glass

and 40, is finished and available on the CDFW website. This Conservation Unit Plan provides information on (1) the numbers, age, sex ratios, and distribution of bighorn sheep within the conservation unit; (2) range conditions and a report on the competition that may exist as a result of human, livestock, wild burro, or any other mammal encroachment; (3) the need to relocate or reestablish bighorn populations; (4) the prevalence of disease or parasites within the population; and (5) recommendations for managing and maintaining sound population levels. With the publication of this Plan, we are moving forward with the hunt zone regulation package proposing three new hunt zones in the 1) Granite and North Bristol Mountains, 2) the Providence, Woods, and Hackberry Mountains, and 3) the Castle Mountains and Piute Range. The adoption hearing for this regulation package will be held in April.

Desert Bighorn captured in November 2025 in California.

Population	Ewes	Rams
South Bristol	6	4
Marble	2	0
Cady	2	7
Clark Mtn	3	1
Soda	3	1
Bullion	0	2
Iron	2	3
Turtle	4	5
Chemehuevi	2	0
Whipple	5	4
Old Woman	2	1 (not collared)
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>28</b>

Mountain ranges where desert bighorn were captured in Fall 2025.



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# CA WSF-FUNDED SATELLITE WATER MONITORS DELIVER

*By Scott Gibson, Distinguished Life Member*



New Gallagher Satellite Water Level Monitor (foreground) replaces aging McCrometer Satellite System (background) @ 29-Palm Marine Base

The Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep (SCBS) pioneered the use of Low Earth Orbit Satellite (LEOS) water monitors in the 1990's.

Unfortunately, the older satellite water monitors were aging, becoming difficult to maintain and expensive.

In August, 2025, the CA WSF Water Committee and Board of Directors voted to approve funding of twelve (12) new Gallagher Satellite Water Monitors. Six (6) of these new water monitors were to be dedicated to the SCBS State Lands RWWDs installed during the 2024/25 fall and winter season. An additional six (6) units were dedicated to CDFW/SCBS legacy guzzler sites.

In addition to the twelve monitors funded by CA WSF; the Society purchased six (6) new Gallagher monitors, the Mojave National Preserve purchased eight (8) monitors and the Marine Corps purchased nine (9) monitors. "Track Tag, LLC.", a competitor to Gallagher, has also generously donated one of their new technology satellite water monitors for the SL13 Hawkeye guzzler for evaluation.

New water monitors are also being included with all new State Lands projects. With the previous two SCBS monitors in service and CDFW's monitors deployed at Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, the total monitors installed or pending is now at 46. This is by far the most water we have been able to remotely monitor since inception of the program.




Track Tag, LLC. satellite transmitter with built in solar panel, it's the size of a pack of gum. SL13 Hawkeye



Track Tag, LLC. Water level transducer and Bluetooth transmitter, SL13 Hawkeye tank #1

# Current Status of Wildlife Water Developments with new Satellite Water Level Monitors

Current RWWD Water Levels for installed Gallagher



Location	Water Level (%)	Last Update
R05-2 Chickwalla Ship Creek	87.6%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
R10 Fay Dee	86.98%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
R12 Little Fargo	77.69%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
SB08 Plute	11.25%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
SB10 Old Dad Peak	40.74%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
SB12 Kingston Peak	0%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
SB16 Vermain	2.46%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
SB17 Sudshole	100%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
SB18 Marble Mountain	66.48%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
SB23 Kerr	83.25%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
SB25 Newberry	59.85%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
SB31 Bearclaw	84.89%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
SB35 Cleghorn	0%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
SB53 Argos	98.16%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
SB57 Rainbow 1	96.46%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
SB58 Rainbow 5	0%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
SB59 Sunshine Peak 2	97.44%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
SB64 Catalaw-Acacia	100%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
SD02 Limestone	100%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
SL03 Lady Lu Tank 1	93.47%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
SL03 Lady Lu Tank 2	88.88%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
SL15 Aurora Tank 1	100%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
SL15 Aurora Tank 2	100%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
SL61 Blue Bell Tank 1	0%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
SL61 Blue Bell Tank 2	2.95%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
SL82 Flat Top #1	25.89%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
SL82 Flat Top #2	32.48%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
Nolina Wash	67.31%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM
Sunset Guzzler	65.96%	2/24/2026, 5:00:00 PM

SL13 Hawkeye RWWD



010-006-079-049  
Track Tag, LLC: Track Tag King

Source: Satellite  
Extra: 33-38-03

Event	Details
Enhanced Track	Battery: 75% - 87.5% Charge: ChargeSlow ASIC Temp: 36.5° C Orientation: Z Positive VeDBA: 0.00 g Low Power?: No
Sensor Data	Index: 0 Type: Water Level Found: Yes <b>Full</b> Fluid Level: 32.6 in Battery: 100%
Sensor Data	Index: 1 Type: Water Level Found: Yes <b>Full</b> Fluid Level: 32.28 in Battery: 100%

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# GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS UPDATE

*by Don Priest, Distinguished Life Member*

## PROPOSED NEW DESERT BIGHORN SHEEP HUNT ZONES FOR THE 2026-2027 SEASON

At the December 2025 Fish and Game Commission (FGC) meeting, CDFW presented their Initial Statement of Reasons (ISOR) for the addition of three new Desert Bighorn Sheep (DBS) Hunt Zones. All three of the proposed new Hunt Zones would lie within the Mojave National Preserve. The proposed new Zones are:

Zone 11 – North Bristol / Granite Hunt Zone

Zone 12 – Providence Wood Hackberry Hunt Zone, and

Zone 13 – Castle Piute Hunt Zone

As for the current ten Hunt Zones, no indication was given at the December 2025 meeting as to how many tags will be allocated, though CA WSF does not expect any material changes to the total number of tags that will be made available. The proposal would also allow for three Fundraising Tags, one Open Zone tag, one tag for Zone 10-Newberry Rodman Ords, and one tag with the Zone to be determined.

The final decision on both the New Hunt Zones and tag numbers for all Zones, including current Zones, will be made at the mid-April 2026 FGC meeting.

## OPPOSITION TO THE SODA MOUNTAIN SOLAR PROJECT

The California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation (CA WSF) continues to work in opposing the Soda Mountain Solar Project (Project). The California Energy Commission (CEC) held an open forum for public comment on February 5th. Board members Don Priest and Scott Gibson attended the meeting, virtually and in person respectively, to give our reasons for the opposition to the Project. We emphasized that the Project would inhibit habitat use by the Desert Bighorn Sheep (DBS) within the Project area, block the movement of sheep between mountain ranges south and along I-15, and lastly, potentially interfere with DBS use of the wildlife overcrossing that is to be built in conjunction with the Brightline highspeed rail line construction within the median of I-15.

In addition, the CA WSF continues to push our opposition to the Project at the Federal level with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), where we are requesting that BLM deny the required right of way permitting.



## JACUMBA HERD – US-MEXICO BORDER

The Jacumba herd of Peninsular DBS are a unique herd that travels between the US and Mexico, spending their time in Mexico during summer given the greater availability of water resources. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) will be completing the Border Wall in the near future through the Jacumba Wilderness where this DBS herd live. In January, CA WSF sent CBP a letter in opposition to the construction of a complete border wall, and that a wildlife gap be made available in the rough and steep terrain of the Jacumba Wilderness that may be utilized by DBS.

In the meantime, razor wire as been completely strewn across the open gap in the wall. This wire could easily endanger DBS with injury or death should a sheep become entangled with this unfamiliar fencing. CA WSF also indicated in the letter to CBP our opposition to the use of this razor wire given the obvious harms of potentially endangering DBS.

Given the acuteness this blockage to the migration route this causes, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) is working with CBP on mitigation. CDFW is looking to have to two large drinker systems built within the Jacumba Wilderness near the border wall where the DBS are known to cross between the US and Mexico. Given the urgency as summer approaches, CA WSF anticipates that these systems will be built within the next couple of months.

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# THE SOUTHERN BRISTOL MOUNTAINS: A BRIEF HISTORY OF CALIFORNIA'S NINTH BIGHORN SHEEP HUNT ZONE

by Vernon C. Bleich

***Following the openings of eight bighorn sheep hunt zones and as efforts to better understand the distribution and population dynamics of desert bighorn sheep in California expanded, it became apparent that additional populations were doing very well. One such population occupied the southern Bristol Mountains in San Bernardino County, approximately 100 km east of Barstow, and just west of the Marble Mountains which, in 1987, had become the first bighorn sheep hunt zone to be established in California since 1883 (Bleich 2006).***

That year, the state legislature had established a 4-year moratorium on the take of any elk, pronghorn, female deer, or bighorn sheep, and in 1887 the moratorium on the taking of bighorn sheep was extended indefinitely (Bleich 2006). And, in 1933, bighorn sheep became the first species to be granted "full protection" by the California Legislature (California Department of Fish and Game [CDFG] 2005). Readers will note that the formal name of this hunt zone is the "South Bristol Mountains", but that I refer to the area as the "southern Bristol Mountains" throughout this article. That is because there has been no formal recognition of either the 'north' or 'south' Bristol Mountains (Schoffstall 2014) despite that mountain range having been divided by the construction of Interstate Highway 40.

Until the early 1990s little was known about bighorn sheep occupying the southern Bristol Mountains (Bleich and Torres 2010). Although it has not been ascertained, it is probable that bighorn sheep historically inhabited the southern Bristol Mountains, at least on a seasonal or transient basis (Weaver et al. 1969). According to a map in Weaver et al. (1969), those investigators did not ascribe any population of bighorn sheep specifically to the southern Bristol Mountains; instead, Weaver et al. (1969) indicated that the southern Bristol Mountains were within the potential seasonal distribution of bighorn sheep that comprised several nearby populations in the eastern Mojave Desert. The proximity of the management unit to the Bullion Mountains to the south, the Granite Mountains on the north, and the Marble Mountains to the east is consistent with the potential for seasonal movement by bighorn sheep into, out of, or throughout the southern Bristol Mountains and the mountainous area to the north. Prior to

the construction of Interstate Highway 40 the southern Bristol Mountains included the south terminus of the mountain range known formally as the Bristol Mountains (Schoffstall 2014) and were contiguous with the mountains north of Interstate Highway 40 (now referred to be



some as the North Bristol Mountains). Evidence of bighorn sheep in the Bristol Mountains is present in the form of well-worn trails, indicating that bighorn sheep at one time were widespread in that range (Bleich and Torres 2010).

The population of bighorn sheep currently occupying the southern Bristol Mountains could be the result of a colonization event that occurred during the early 1990s (Bleich et al. 1996). As recently as 1994, no bighorn sheep were thought to occupy the southern Bristol Mountains on a permanent basis (Torres et al. 1994, 1996), but that situation changed rapidly and the population was thought to number between 100 and 150 by 2010 (Abella et al. 2011). Three females are known to have traveled to the southern Bristol Mountains from the nearby Marble Mountains beginning in 1993; initially only a single female was known to remain year-round, where she bore a lamb (Bleich et al. 1996) and was later joined by a second telemetered female and possibly other uncollared females (Epps et al. 2010) because such movements would not have been detected. It also is possible that the population of bighorn sheep inhabiting the South Bristol Mountains represents the offspring of these few females (Epps et al. 2010).

Additional observations suggest that male bighorn sheep occupied the South Bristol Mountains prior to 1993, at least on a seasonal basis. Indeed, bighorn sheep move between the Brown Buttes, immediately west of the Marble Mountains, and the Marble Mountains proper. Additionally, unmarked bighorn sheep also may move between the southern Bristol Mountains and the Marble Mountains. Further, at least two collared, but unidentified, bighorn sheep have been recorded in the Bullion Mountains, and there is informed speculation that those animals emigrated southward from the southern Bristol Mountains. Additionally, an aerial observation of a collared, albeit unidentifiable, male bighorn sheep on 26 May 1994 suggested movement from either the Bullion Mountains or the Sheephole Mountains to the southern Bristol Mountains. Moreover, in 1982 Mr. Buster Burris (a life-long resident of

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Amboy, now deceased) described to V. C. Bleich his personal observations of bighorn sheep "...moving northward from the Sheephole Mountains across Bristol Dry Lake toward the South (sic) Bristol Mountains ...many decades ago..." (Bleich and Torres 2010). Such intermountain movements are critically important to maintaining metapopulation function and, hence, to the persistence of bighorn sheep in those mountain ranges (Schwartz et al. 1986; Bleich et al. 1990, 1996; Epps et al. 2007).

An effort to detect movements by bighorn sheep across Interstate Highway 40, either to or from the northern Bristol Mountains through existing culverts or bridges, were initiated more than 15 years ago by personnel affiliated with the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep (SCBS), but no such movements were detected. More in-depth efforts to detect such movements recently have yielded a similar result (Aiello et al. 2023, 2024), consistent with the notion that movement by bighorn sheep in either direction across Interstate Highway 40 is, at best, limited and infrequent (Epps et al. 2005). Regardless, movements between the southern Bristol Mountains and the Marble Mountains, the Marble Mountains and the Clipper Mountains, evidence of movement between the southern Bristol Mountains and the Sheephole Mountains and similar evidence of movements between the southern Bristol Mountains and the Bullion Mountains suggest population connectivity is well-established south of Interstate Highway 40. Moreover, the apparent extirpation and eventual colonization of the southern Bristol Mountains by female bighorn sheep from the Marble Mountains is consistent with the a fully functioning metapopulation.

With the realization that bighorn sheep had potentially recolonized the southern Bristol Mountains, CDFG personnel initiated a regular program to survey that population and to investigate other aspects of its status. From 1994 to 2010 a total of 12 surveys were organized and overseen by Andy Pauli—then the CDFG Unit Manager—using a standardized survey methodology and protocol similar to that later described by Wehausen and Bleich (2007). Information obtained during those surveys and summarized by Bleich and Torres (2010) indicated a highly significant upward trend ( $r_s = 0.92$ ,  $P_2 < 0.001$ ) in the population during that period, and no relationship between survey hours expended and the number of animals recorded ( $r_s = 0.29$ ,  $P_2 = 0.39$ ). These data and the relationships derived therefrom strongly supported the notion of an increasing population in the southern Bristol Mountains. Consistent with the upward trend was the result obtained in 2007 using the double-count methodology of Graham and Bell (1989), which yielded an estimate of 68 bighorn sheep in the southern Bristol Mountains (Bleich and Torres 2010). Aerial surveys conducted during 2009 and 2010 yielded observations of 83 and 72 bighorn sheep, respectively. The application of a very conservative visibility correction factor (0.80) indicated that a minimum of 104 and 90 adult and recruited young were present in the southern Bristol Mountains during each of those years, respectively (Bleich and Torres 2010). Additionally, adult male to female ratios from 1999 to 2010 ranged from 0.59 to 0.92 ( $\bar{x} = 0.79 \pm 0.12$  [SD]; Bleich and Torres 2010).

Upon completion of the management plan for the southern Bristol Mountains, CDFG submitted a proposal to the California Fish and Game Commission to open that area to the harvest of bighorn sheep. The proposal was consistent with legislation, the statewide management plan and objectives for bighorn sheep (CDFG 1983), and the management plan developed specifically for the southern Bristol Mountains (Bleich and Torres 2010). Following appropriate reviews and discussion, public input, and preparation of the requisite environmental documents, the Fish and Game Commission approved the proposal in April 2011; California's ninth bighorn sheep hunt zone became a reality later that year. Since the hunt zone opened and through the 2025-2026 season, the 23 lucky hunters that drew tags have harvested 23 mature male bighorn sheep in the southern Bristol Mountains—a 100% success rate!

The most recent published information places the number of bighorn sheep inhabiting the South Bristol Mountains Hunt Zone at 150–200 individuals (Vu et al. 2021). The ongoing success of the hunting program in that zone, however, is dependent upon a number of factors, among them the continued availability of healthy and productive habitat and the absence or near-absence of limiting factors, such as diseases. Permanent surface water is extremely limited within this management unit, and historically had been at Miller's Cabin Spring in the eastern portion of the hunt zone. That source was developed by unknown parties long ago, but has been maintained on a regular basis for decades by personnel affiliated with SCBS, CA WSF, or both.

In 2008, an additional water development was constructed at the Amboy Limestone Quarry in cooperation with and on property owned by the Omya Corporation in the southern portion of the hunt zone. This development—a SCBS Raincatcher—is named for Nancy Andrew (CDFG retired, and the former Unit Manager for much of the Sonoran Desert in southeastern California) in recognition of her important roles in the conservation of bighorn sheep and desert mule deer, her academic endeavors (Andrew 1994; Andrew et al. 1997a, 1997b, 1999, 2001) that resulted in the opening of California's third bighorn sheep hunt zone in the Chocolate Mountains, and her prominent roles in the development of water sources and acquisition of demographic information that contributed to opening of the Sheephole Mountains and the Orocopia Mountains to the harvest of bighorn sheep.

In January 2025, SCBS and CA WSF collaborated on the installation of an additional water source on a state land parcel in the southern Bristol Mountains. This SCBS Raincatcher was christened "Lady Lu" in recognition of a gold mine of the same name (Schoffstall 2014) located nearby; the Raincatcher is full of water and functional, and is located in the northern portion of the hunt zone. These sources are utilized heavily by bighorn sheep, are the only permanent surface water in the hunt zone, and are maintained by volunteers representing SCBS, CA WSF, or both. Locations for the installation of several additional Raincatcher units have been approved for installation on state parcels, and will be constructed in the future.

It is essential that all current and future water sources are inspected on a regular basis and that maintenance

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is performed as needed to help ensure the availability of surface water at those locations (Bleich 2009). An important step toward ensuring those objectives are met will necessitate that the California Department of Fish and wildlife (CDFw) reestablish a program similar to the wildlife habitat enhancement project (formerly identified as Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Project W-26-D) that was so successful in the past. With new leadership at CDFw maybe that is possible, and I strongly suggest this be pursued by all concerned parties, both within the agency and by those advocating for the conservation of California's wild sheep.

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—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. Portions of this account were extracted directly from the management plan for the southern Bristol Mountains.

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. Vern thanks Rick Ianniello and Danielle Glass for providing the bighorn sheep harvest data included in this article. Parties desiring additional information can contact Vern directly (vbleich@gmail.com).*



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# THE POLITICS OF CONSERVATION

## KEEPING SHEEP ON THE MOUNTAIN AND YOU IN THE FIELD

*2026 State Legislative Session Up and Running*  
*A New Day Dawns at CDFW: Bonham Resigns as Director*  
*By Bill Gaines, Gaines and Associates*

### 2026 STATE LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Legislators returned to our State Capitol from their “Interim Study Recess” on January 5th to begin the 2026 Session – the second year of the two-year 2025/2026 California State Legislative Session. As we now enter the second month of the 2026 Session, with some key deadlines for “two-year” bills having passed and the February 20th deadline for introducing new legislation approaching, activity at our State House is quickly getting up to full speed.

Below is a latest status of “two-year” bills of interest lingering from the 2025 Session, followed by a summary of just some of the legislation the California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation (CA WSF) will be tackling on behalf of our members in 2026.

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

### 2026 State Legislative Session – “Two Year” Bills

Most bills of concern to CA WSF introduced during the 2025 Session have long since realized their fate, but a few remained in play as we entered the 2026 Session. Below is the status of “two-year” bills of interest highlighted in our Winter 2025 Issue of California Wild Sheep.

#### AB 902 (Schultz) – Transportation Planning: Barriers to Wildlife Movement

AB 902 by Assembly Member Nick Schultz (D–Burbank) proposes to address wildlife connectivity impacts associated with transportation infrastructure projects. As amended, AB 902 would require a lead agency to incorporate wildlife passage features into certain transportation projects where feasible, to avoid, minimize, or mitigate impacts to wildlife movement and habitat connectivity. Projects on the state highway system would be exempt where Caltrans is the lead agency, and the requirements would apply only to projects initiated on or after January 1, 2028.

During the 2025 Session, AB 902 passed through the Assembly and off the Assembly Floor by early June. Once in the Senate, AB 902 passed through two Senate policy committees, but was held in the Senate fiscal committee in late August.

Having passed out of its house of origin and through policy committee in the second house, AB 902 technically has until August 2026 to be heard in Senate fiscal committee and passed to the Senate Floor. However, conversations with the author’s office have confirmed the bill will not be considered in 2026 and is dead.

#### AB 1169 (GONZALEZ) – WILDLIFE GRANTS: SHARE PROGRAM

AB 1169 by Assembly Member Jeff Gonzalez (R–Coachella) seeks to strengthen the Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (DFW) Shared Habitat Alliance for Recreational Enhancement (SHARE) program – a voluntary program that partners with private



landowners willing to provide public hunting access on their lands.

The bill would modernize the SHARE program by increasing outdated landowner compensation caps, indexing those caps to inflation, and expanding the program’s ability to contract with nonprofit conservation organizations. These changes are intended to make participation more attractive to landowners and significantly expand public hunting opportunities across the state.

During the 2025 Session, AB 1169 sailed through the Assembly without opposition and continued that momentum in the Senate, passing out of Senate policy committee on a unanimous vote. Despite that broad bipartisan support, the bill was held in the Senate fiscal committee in August and became a “two-year” bill.

Following discussions with the author’s office and the sponsors of the bill, AB 1169 will not be heard this Session and is dead.

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.

#### AB 1038 (Hadwick) – Bears: Pursuit and Hunting: Use of Dogs

The most significant wildlife management bill to carry into the 2026 Session was AB 1038 by Assembly Member Heather Hadwick (R–Redding). Unfortunately, still in its house of origin and failing to be heard and passed out of policy committee by the January 2026 deadline, AB 1038 is dead.

AB 1038 was intended to provide wildlife managers and public safety officials with additional, science-based tools to address California’s rapidly expanding black bear population – a population DFW now characterizes as robust, growing, and, in some regions, overabundant.

As documented in DFW’s 2025 Bear Conservation and Management Plan, black bears are no longer confined to remote mountain regions but are increasingly occupying areas where they were historically rare or absent, including urban and semi-

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developed communities. The result has been a sharp increase in human–bear conflicts, along with mounting concerns of the impact unchecked bear populations are having on California’s dwindling deer herds.

AB 1038 offered a measured approach to these challenges by proposing to direct the Fish and Game Commission to designate specific seasons during which permitted private houndsmen could utilize trained hounds as a non-lethal management tool to reestablish bears’ natural wariness of humans near populated areas. Further, if deemed necessary by DFW, the bill would have restored the Commission’s authority to establish a regulated hunting framework utilizing hounds as a method of take to help bring black bear populations back into balance with their habitat and prey base.

In 2025, AB 1038 was heard in Assembly policy committee in late April, where - despite heavy opposition from animal-rights organizations - it fell just one vote short of passage. Following its narrow defeat, Assembly Member Hadwick successfully secured reconsideration, making AB 1038 a “two-year” bill eligible for further consideration in January 2026.

Unfortunately, early last month we were informed that the chair of the Assembly policy committee would not hear AB 1038 this Session, effectively killing this critically needed legislation.

With AB 902, AB 1169, and AB 1038 now all dead, CA WSF can turn its full attention to the 2026 legislative cycle and do all possible to ensure that any future policy advanced embraces science-based wildlife management, promotes our hunting traditions, and preserves our Second Amendment rights.

#### **2026 STATE LEGISLATIVE SESSION – INTRODUCED LEGISLATION**

With the late February deadline for introducing new bills in the 2026 Session still nearly two weeks away, the overwhelming majority of legislation CA WSF will be working on this year has yet to surface. As of early February, only a handful of bills of potential concern have been introduced, along with a few “placeholder” (a.k.a. “spot”) bills introduced to meet the introduction deadline while substantive language is still being developed.

While we await the bulk of new legislation, the wildlife conservation community is not sitting idle. We are actively working to bring forward proactive, conservation-focused measures of our own later this month.

Below is a summary of bills of concern that have already been introduced, some “spot” bills expected to be amended with more substantive language in the near future, followed by an overview of our own positive wildlife conservation legislation currently pending introduction.

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

#### **AB 1624 (Zbur) - Public Lands Protection Act**

AB 1624 by Assembly Member Rick Chavez Zbur (D–Los Angeles) would require that, upon transfer of a parcel of land located within the state that is owned by the United States government on or after January 1, 2025, and that has not been designated in an adopted general plan or zoning ordinance at the time of transfer to a private or nonfederal entity, the parcel would automatically be subject to the most restrictive conservation-oriented zoning designation then applied within the jurisdiction.

AB 1624 would prohibit a parcel of land governed by these provisions from being rezoned, subdivided, or granted any development entitlement that is inconsistent with a

conservation-oriented zoning designation, unless certain requirements are satisfied, including that a full environmental impact report is completed in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Coined the “Public Lands Protection Act,” AB 1624 contains an urgency statute requiring the bill to take effect immediately upon the Governor’s signature. Because of this urgency provision, the bill would require a two-thirds vote of both houses of the Legislature for passage.

AB 1624 is pending referral to Assembly policy committee.

#### **AB 1673 (Hadwick) - Fish and Wildlife: Dates**

AB 1673 by Assembly Member Heather Hadwick (R–Redding) is a “spot” bill in the Fish and Game code. Gaines & Associates is coordinating with Assembly Member Hadwick and her staff on possible uses for AB 1673 once we have had the opportunity to evaluate any wildlife related legislation that may be introduced later this month.

AB 1673 has until early March to take on more substantive language and be referred to Assembly policy committee.

#### **AB 1722 (Hadwick) - Wildlife**

AB 1722 is another “spot” bill by Assembly Member Heather Hadwick (R–Redding) that she is holding for possible subsequent legislation relating to wildlife.

AB 1722 has until early March to take on more substantive language and be referred to Assembly policy committee.

#### **SB 948 (Arreguín) - Firearms: Safety Certificates.**

Current California law requires any person who purchases or receives a firearm to possess a firearm safety certificate and prohibits a person from selling or transferring a firearm to any person who does not possess a firearm safety certificate. Existing law also requires an applicant for a firearm safety certificate to pass a test developed by the Department of Justice covering laws applicable to carrying and handling firearms and the responsibilities of ownership of firearms.

Among other things, SB 948 by Senator Jesse Arreguín (D–Oakland) would require an applicant for a firearm safety certificate, on or after July 1, 2028, to complete a training course no less than 8 hours in length that, among other things, includes instruction on firearm safety and handling and live-fire shooting exercises on a firing range. SB 948 would also prohibit a person from bringing a firearm into this state without obtaining a valid firearm safety certificate within 60 days.

SB 984 is a re-do of last year’s AB 1187 – legislation by Assembly Member Celeste Rodriguez (D– Los Angeles) that failed to pass out of Assembly fiscal committee.

SB 984 is pending referral to Senate policy committee.

#### **SB 1021 (Choi) - Fishing and Hunting: Youth Program**

SB 1021 by Senator Steven Choi (R–Irvine) would require the Fish and Game Commission to establish a program to increase opportunities to fish and hunt for youth with life-threatening illnesses and youth who have lost a parent in service to the state or country. The bill would require the Commission, in developing the program, to consult with DFW and interested nonprofit organizations that have goals and objectives directly related to the management and conservation of fish, big game, upland game, and migratory game species and who primarily represent licensed hunters.

SB 1021 is pending referral to Senate policy committee.

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**2026 STATE LEGISLATIVE SESSION – LEGISLATION PENDING**  
**INTRODUCTION**

The following bills are pending introduction. Bill numbers will be assigned at that time.

**Mountain Lions: Human-Mountain Lion Conflicts Program**

To be introduced by Senator Marie Alvarado-Gil (R–El Dorado Hills), this legislation is intended to promote public health and enhance the safety of livestock and domestic pets by requiring DFW to maintain and expand its human-mountain lion conflicts program by, among other things, exercising its authority pursuant to Fish and Game Code Section 4801.5, which authorizes the use of a variety of “nonlethal procedures,” including the pursuit and hazing of problem animals by qualified individuals, educational institutions, governmental agencies, or non-governmental organizations. The bill would also require DFW to continue and expand its scientific research efforts to develop and evaluate methods to deter mountain lions from entering communities and to prevent habituation to humans.

Because this legislation proposes to amend Proposition 117 it would require a 4/5th vote of the membership of both houses of the Legislature.

**Deer: Archery Season: Concealed Firearms**

Existing law prohibits a person hunting deer during archery season from carrying, or having under their immediate control, a firearm of any kind - except for an active or honorably retired peace officer.

Legislation to be introduced by Assembly Member Heather Hadwick (R–Redding) would authorize any CCW permit holder to carry a firearm capable of being concealed while hunting deer during archery season.

Existing law allows hunters pursuing other big game species to carry a concealable firearm during archery season but does not extend the same allowance to those archery hunting deer. This bill would correct that disparity by allowing deer archery hunters to carry a concealable firearm for personal safety in the event they encounter an illegal marijuana cultivation site, an aggressive mountain lion, or other large predatory species.

**A LEADERSHIP CHANGE AT CDFW: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR WILDLIFE AND HUNTERS?****BONHAM RESIGNS AS DIRECTOR**

After 15 years as Director of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), Chuck Bonham resigned his position effective January 26, 2026, to become the California Executive Director for The Nature Conservancy.

Bonham’s tenure spanned the administrations of Governors Jerry Brown and Gavin Newsom. Appointed in 2011, he became one of the longest-serving directors in department history. During those 15 years, CDFW operated in an increasingly complex - and often contentious - policy environment, with mounting political pressure surrounding predator management, land use, endangered species, public access, and the role of science and hunting in modern wildlife conservation.

Sportsmen witnessed significant changes during Bonham’s tenure – some positive, many deeply frustrating. Under his leadership, the department navigated prolonged drought, catastrophic wildfires, evolving wildlife management mandates, and growing political involvement in what were once largely

science-driven decisions. Often, hunters and anglers felt their voices were being sidelined as Sacramento politics increasingly shaped wildlife policy.

Now, a new chapter begins.

**GOVERNOR NEWSOM APPOINTS MEGHAN HERTEL**

In late January, Governor Gavin Newsom appointed Meghan Hertel as the next Director of CDFW. Hertel will be seated on February 17.

Hertel most recently served as Deputy Secretary of Biodiversity and Habitat at the California Natural Resources Agency since 2024. She previously served as North American Director of the Land Life Company from 2022 to 2024. From 2010 to 2022, she held multiple senior roles at Audubon California, including Director of Land and Water Conservation, Interim State Co-Director, Director of Working Lands, Associate Director of Public Policy, and San Joaquin River Project Manager. Earlier in her career, she was a Conservation Program Administrator at the Resources Legacy Fund from 2007 to 2010.

Hertel holds a Master of Arts degree in Environmental Science and Policy from Clark University and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from the University of Florida.

Notably, Hertel does not come from a hunting or fishing background. While that is not uncommon in Sacramento, it is significant to California’s sporting community. The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation - funded primarily by hunters and anglers - depends on leadership that understands both science-based wildlife management and the cultural importance of our outdoor traditions.

We have had opportunities to work with Hertel during her time at the California Natural Resources Agency. In those interactions, she proved to be accessible, willing to listen, and open to substantive discussion. That willingness to engage will be critical in leading a department whose conservation model is built upon the financial support, field expertise, and long-standing stewardship of California’s hunters and anglers.

As she steps into the Director’s role, sportsmen across the state will be paying close attention. Wildlife policy in California is increasingly shaped not just by biology, but by politics. Predator management, expanding human-wildlife conflict, habitat fragmentation, declining access to hunttable lands, and mounting legislative pressure on lawful hunting and firearm ownership all demand steady, science-based leadership.

CDFW does more than manage wildlife - it manages a public trust resource sustained largely by those who purchase licenses, tags, and stamps. The agency’s direction under new leadership will signal whether it intends to fully recognize and defend the role of hunters and anglers as the backbone of conservation in this state.

The early decisions of this new administration will speak volumes.

We have already begun working to schedule a meeting with Director Hertel to discuss our concerns regarding wildlife management policy and the future of our outdoor traditions in California. Constructive engagement will be important, and we intend to ensure that the voice of CA WSF and our partners in wildlife conservation is clearly heard.

We look forward to engaging directly with the new Director to reinforce the importance of science-based wildlife management, responsible access, and the preservation of our outdoor heritage.

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# 2026 CA WSF FUNDRAISER SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES!

## Help Putting & Keeping More Sheep on the Mountain

We are excited to introduce new sponsorship opportunities for our upcoming fundraiser — designed to give your business strong visibility while directly supporting our mission of putting and keeping more water on the mountains for California’s wild sheep.

Every dollar raised helps fund critical projects like our GALAD (Give A Lamb A Drink) wildlife water systems. Take a look below and choose how you’d like to make an impact!

### **Sponsor the Program — \$4000**

#### **Premier Visibility + Maximum Impact**

##### **What you receive:**

- 👂 Full-page, full-color advertisement (2x) in the event program
- 👂 Full-screen slide during the event presentation (auction and pre-dinner)
- 👂 Your one-minute promotional video shown pre-dinner and at closing
- 👂 Full-page advertisement in 4 quarterly CA WSF newsletters
- 👂 Rotating website banner for one full year
- 👂 Email blast with your advertisement to members 4x per year

### **Sponsor the Dinner Wine — \$2000**

#### **A Unique & Memorable Presence**

##### **What you receive:**

- 👂 Your logo featured alongside the chapter logo on our special event wine
- 👂 Half-page advertisement in the fundraiser brochure
- 👂 Full-screen slide during the event presentation (pre-dinner)
- 👂 Quarter-page advertisement in 2 quarterly newsletters
- 👂 Rotating website banner for 6 months
- 👂 Email blast with your advertisement to members 2x per year

### **Sponsor Registration Gifts — \$1500**

#### **Put Your Brand in Every Hand**

##### **What you receive:**

- 👂 Your logo with GALAD text on a high quality grip gel pen
- 👂 One half page ad in the fundraiser brochure
- 👂 Partial slide in the presentation shown at the event (pre-dinner and closing)
- 👂 Quarter page advertisement in 2x quarterly newsletter
- 👂 Website rotating banner for 6 months

### **SUPPORT THE MISSION**

#### **Donate What You Wish**

Not every supporter needs a formal sponsorship package. Businesses and individuals may choose to contribute at any level in support of the fundraiser and our wildlife water projects.

##### **Options Include:**

- 👂 Direct monetary contribution
- 👂 Auction item donation
- 👂 Matching donation challenge
- 👂 Partial sponsorship contribution

All sponsors will be recognized in the event program and post-event newsletter.

Every dollar helps us in our goal of putting and keeping more water on the mountain for California’s wild sheep.



CA Wild Sheep Foundation  
1630 Williams Hwy #146  
Grants Pass, OR 97527

[www.cawsf.org](http://www.cawsf.org)

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**Join or renew today!  
Annual Fundraiser -  
Register today!**



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