

Oregon Bighorn Transport

Fifty-two bighorn sheep from Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge in Oregon are now in residence at new sites in Southeastern Oregon after the Fish and Wildlife Department's most successful sheep live-trapping effort ever. Success was largely due to a contracted helicopter pilot with "extreme flying agility and a sixth sense that tells him when to push the sheep and when to back off," according to a F&W Department press release.

The transplant is part of long-term department efforts to reestablish bighorn sheep in much of its historical range. The California subspecies of bighorn once inhabited most of the open rimrock desert, river canyons, and rugged mountains of southeastern Oregon. Their disappearance from the state by 1915 is believed by biologists to have been caused by early over-hunting, competition with domestic livestock for food, and diseases brought in by domestic sheep.

The transport operation was held during the fall "rut." The sheep were hauled in pickup trucks or horse trailers to three release sites after being herded by helicopter into previously established traps. The animals all were in good condition, "hauled well," and quickly dispersed upon release. Some of the animals were medicated to help them past the stress of transport.