

State of New Mexico

File: Wildlife mgmt

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DEPARTMENT OF GAME AND FISH

STATE CAPITOL
SANTA FE
87503

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November 22, 1982

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Mr. E. Leon Fisher
Forest Wildlife Biologist
Santa Fe National Forest
P. O. Box 1689
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

Dear Leon:

Enclosed please find our proposed action regarding the reintroduction of Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep in White Rock Canyon of the Rio Grande. This transplant will consist of a minimum of 20 sheep from the San Francisco River Canyon in southwestern New Mexico.

Baiting and trapping activities are scheduled to begin during January 1983. Nevertheless, we feel that we should proceed with the necessary paperwork with a tentative release date of winter 1983.

If you have any questions regarding this proposal, do not hesitate to call.

Sincerely,

Harold F. Olson, Director

By: Andrew V. Sandoval
Bighorn Sheep Project Leader

Enc.

cc: Harold Olson
Bill Montoya
Wain Evans
Byron Donaldson

Bob Stewart
Wally Haussamen
Ted Burt
Randy Isler

ROCKY MOUNTAIN BIGHORN SHEEP REINTRODUCTION
WHITE ROCK CANYON, NEW MEXICO
DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF GAME AND FISH

Prepared by
Andrew V. Sandoval
Bighorn Sheep Project Leader
November 1982

Radio telemetry will be utilized to locate and observe the sheep after their release. Radio-collared sheep will be located and observed from the ground when time permits, and from fixed-wing aircraft, incidental to scheduled flights made from the Santa Fe airport. Fresh fecal pellets will be collected in conjunction with ^{when?} routine field observations. Fecal pellets will be stored until ^{nebulous?} funds become available for analysis, and/or until project personnel determine that food habit data is needed. U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service plant collections will be used to reference plant fragments found in the analysis.

Breeding age rams from a different population, but of the same sub-species of bighorn sheep, may be released into the introduced population. Introducing breeding rams from a different genetic stock will reduce the possibility of inbreeding. Crossing bighorn from two different genetic stocks may result in more vigorous populations which could produce more thrifty lambs. Pending the outcome of this initial release, it may be necessary to supplement additional sheep during the critical establishment phase of the population, thus maintaining the population at its highest qualitative and quantitative levels.

An active predator control program will not be initiated unless radio-telemetry monitoring reveals unacceptable losses attributed to predation. Predator control at that time will focus on the individual target species responsible for killing bighorn sheep. If short-term, species specific predator control is deemed necessary, it will be accomplished by use of trained dogs, or by traps set in strategic locations by qualified Department of Game and Fish animal control specialists.

Competition between bighorn, cattle, feral horses and burros should be alleviated by the inability of cattle, horses and burros to negotiate the steepest and roughest portions of the potential bighorn habitat. Currently, domestic sheep and goats are not grazed in White Rock Canyon. Domestic sheep and goats have similar habitat preferences, feeding habits, and harbour parasites and diseases detrimental to bighorn. Of any domestic livestock, domestic sheep and goats are believed to have created the most severe competition for bighorn.

The consensus of the Department of Game and Fish is that domestic sheep and/or goats are not compatible with the Departments efforts to re-establish bighorn on historic range, and would oppose any future introduction of domestic sheep and/or goats on public lands in the White Rock Canyon area.

Since the bighorn population in the San Francisco River is habituated to people, and is relatively tolerant to human disturbance, the Department of Game and Fish realizes that the transplanted population will have to prosper under existing ecological conditions, and will have to compete with other land uses, e.g., current levels of cattle grazing and recreational use.

incompatibility between bighorn sheep and domestic sheep on shared ranges. Therefore, the consensus of the Department of Game and Fish is that no additional transplants of bighorn sheep will be initiated in the Latirs, or other suitable habitats, until the responsible land management agency establishes written policies against the grazing of domestic sheep on currently occupied or potential bighorn ranges.

LITERATURE CITED

- Grunigen, R. E., R. Valdez, and S. D. Schemnitz, 1978. Evaluation of potential bighorn sheep release sites in the Santa Fe National Forest, New Mexico. Dept. Fishery and Wildl. Sci., N. Mex. St. Univ. 130 pp.
- Grunigen, R. E., D. T. Hodder, C. W. Whittaker, and P. J. O'Callaghan, 1980. Evaluation of potential bighorn sheep release sites in the Santa Fe National Forest, New Mexico. Geosc. Sys. and Consult., Playa del Rey, Ca. 164 pp.

Burro - Bighorn Competition

> Pete Sanchez

ATTACKS by burros on sheep?

Human impacts

Bighorn need good grass cover

Weaver -

Wildlife numbers declined where competition exists

Poaching Potential high

Monitoring —

Forage Production 220 #/acre.
Herbaceous 150 "

Carrying Capacity 109 4.2 mi²

Concerns

1. ~~Let~~ Bandelier habitat = Added stress on Veg. productivity; See marginal sustainability
2. Protection - added responsibilities
3. Bighorn - Burro Competition (+ deer + elk in winter)
4. What is NPS responsibility(s) after herd establishment?

PJ assoc.

67% shrubs + trees

31% grasses graminas Blue, Side, Black
Sand dunes