



**ARIZONA**  
**BLM**  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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**News Release**

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

## DESERT BIGHORN SHEEP RESTORATION

### ON THE ARIZONA STRIP

With the release of 24 desert bighorn sheep into Hack Canyon last week, desert bighorn sheep have now been reintroduced into the Arizona Strip in the four areas historically supporting the native sheep species.

The restoration is the result of long-term planning and cooperation by the Bureau of Land Management and the Arizona Game and Fish Department. BLM manages the habitat and AG&FD has wildlife management responsibility.

Introduction of bighorn sheep was initiated in 1979 in the Virgin Mountains. Thus far, 180 have been released on the Arizona Strip where they roam 300,000 acres of suitable habitat.

Bighorn sheep habitat occurs in or near wilderness areas established through the Arizona Wilderness Act of 1984, which will provide undisturbed habitat essential for bighorn survival.

All bighorns released on the Arizona Strip were captured and transported by the Arizona Game and Fish Department from the south shore of Lake Mead in the Black Mountains of Arizona. In recent years the only native sheep have been small transient bands that wander northward from the Grand Canyon.

Most sheep were caught using the apple mash bait technique and a large drop net. With this method, a large net is suspended over a site baited with dried apple mash to lure the sheep. When sufficient numbers arrive, electronically detonated blasts cut the support ropes and the animals are trapped.

Other sheep were captured with the use of helicopters and tranquilizer guns.

Sheep were transplanted to the Grand Wash Cliffs in 1983, with a supplemental release the following year. The Paria Canyon-Vermillion Cliffs transplant of 1984 was supplemented in 1985. The Virgin Mountains herd was added to in 1981 and 1982.

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Additional supplemental transplants will be planned if needed, to offset loss by disease or predation. Once populations are self-supporting, further releases will no longer be necessary.

The four sheep habitat areas were identified as suitable for bighorns in planning documents referred to as habitat management plans. They are coordinated with other resource uses of the public lands.

The plans identify time frames and actions required to establish the sheep into their historic habitat. This includes the construction by BLM and AG&FD crews of several water developments to augment natural waters. These developments help to hold the herds close to specific geographical areas, preferred habitat of extremely rough and remote terrain.

Construction and maintenance are sometimes accomplished by volunteer groups or individuals. Funding is provided by AG&FD, BLM and other conservation organizations, notably the Desert Bighorn Sheep Society.

Cooperation by ranchers and energy developers has been a factor in the success of the sheep restoration program.

The habitat and herd populations will continue to be monitored by BLM and AG&FD. The long range goal is to manage for approximately 400 bighorns on the Arizona Strip. Eventually the state plans to issue hunting permits when populations are well established.

Encroachment by man and his associated activities, combined with climatic changes, have been responsible for the past decline of the sheep throughout its range.

Successful reestablishment of desert bighorn sheep on the Arizona Strip will help reverse this downward trend of populations in the southwest and likely enhance resource values of the public lands.