

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Biological Survey

DIVISION OF INFORMATION

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Move 23 Bighorn Sheep 800 Miles  
To Former Home in Oregon Mountains

After traveling more than 800 miles in two large trucks, a herd of 23 Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep was released on the Hart Mountain Antelope Refuge, Klamath Falls, Oregon, where mountain bighorns once were abundant, the Bureau of Biological Survey reported today.

The new herd, transferred from the Survey's National Bison Range, Moiese, Montana, brings the total mountain bighorn population in Oregon to 53. A herd of 30 animals is located in the Wallowa Mountains in the northeastern part of the State.

The transfer was made, the report explained, because the habitat on the National Bison Range did not appear to be entirely suitable for the mountain bighorn. The 7 rams, 13 ewes, and 3 lambs were transported in nine special compartments of two large trucks. Tarpaulins covered the tops and sides of the trucks to protect the animals from wind and rain. Water troughs were installed, and the floors were well-bedded with alfalfa hay before the long journey began.

About 10 bighorns still remain on the National Bison Range, Survey officials stated.

With the transfer of the animals to Hart Mountain, the Biological Survey now has bighorn sheep on five national wildlife refuges. Three sanctuaries

were established to protect desert bighorn sheep--the Cabeza Prieta Game Range and the Kofa Game Range, in southwestern Arizona, and the Desert Game Range, in southeastern Nevada. Rocky Mountain bighorns now are on the National Bison Range, in southwestern Montana, and the Hart Mountain Antelope Refuge, in southeastern Oregon.

The new herd was turned loose at Potters Canyon, on the western side of Hart Mountain, which rises above Warner Valley. Boys from a nearby C.C.C. camp lined up on both sides of the canyon to assist in driving the animals up towards the summit of the mountain.

Led by a 150 pound ram, the herd clambered up the mountainside and soon made itself at home on a range that formerly abounded with mountain bighorns until the species was exterminated 35 years ago by constant shooting, the ravages of disease, or other causes.

Although the Rocky Mountain bighorn is not in immediate danger of extermination in North America, since there is a large population of these animals in Canada, the report pointed out that precautions must be taken to prevent the species from being wiped out in the United States. The greatest danger is extermination in local areas where the mountain bighorn formerly was abundant.

Local extinction in many sections was due to unrestricted or illegal hunting--often for meat to supply mining camps, prospectors, herders, and others. Sportsmen seeking the massive horns of the sheep as trophies also took their toll.

In some areas, the animals are restricted to the summer range the year round, because the winter ranges were usurped for agricultural development and livestock grazing, the report explained.

One factor enabling mountain bighorns to escape complete extinction, however, is that the ewes commonly bear twins and under favorable conditions the animals multiply rapidly. In eluding people and predators the bighorns climb precipitous parts of the mountains. Sure-footed climbers, they travel with surprising speed.

Many of the old rams have fine horns, larger in proportion to the weight of their bodies than the horns of bigger species. Predatory animals that attack these mountain bighorns usually make a hasty retreat after one or two well-directed rushes.

The second nation-wide inventory of big-game animals, a compilation of estimates received from various sources by the Biological Survey last winter, indicated a total population of about 11,000 Rocky Mountain bighorns in the country. The species was reported in California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

The report stated that in the United States the species is found in the Rocky Mountains from Colorado north to the Canadian line, in portions of the mountains in central Idaho, and parts of the northern Cascade Range. A few individuals are found in Washington, in addition to the small herd in the Wallowa Mountains of Oregon.

Wild sheep of many species occupy mountains in most of Asia, in southern Europe, and northern Africa. Asia still has by far the greatest number of existing species and individuals.