

Ram Ranger Talking Points on Bighorn Sheep *Updated 8/13/2018*

Arizona Game and Fish reminds hikers of the importance of staying on designated trails, maintaining a good distance away from sheep, and not taking dogs into the Bighorn Sheep Management Area. The addition of lambs is critical and their survival could be jeopardized by human disturbance. Forest Service regulations prohibit dogs in the Bighorn Sheep Management Area year round. During the lambing season, from Jan.1 to April 30, hikers are prohibited from going more than 400 feet from designated Forest Service trails in the BSMA or from using “social trails.” The use of social trails, those not designate or created by the Forest Service, is discouraged at all times. Hiking groups are limited to 15 persons for day use and 6 for overnight.

All canines urinate to mark their territory and to cover previous animal scents. The urine scent left behind from a dog may last up to a month and to a Bighorn Ewe, that scent represents an A-1 predator as in a wolf or Coyote. She will then immediately move to another location. Unfortunately, the meadows and grasslands necessary to provide proper nutrients to the lamb may have been lost due to the natural urge to move-away from the scents of predators. The consequences are many times sever and the newborn lamb dies of malnutrition.

With the releases completed; the last being November 22, 2016, the reintroduction project’s goal has been to establish a herd that can maintain itself at a sustainable level. Monitoring the sheep and detecting mortalities has depended on signals from GPS collars on the released sheep. However, lambs born in the Catalinas have no collars, only 6 of the last twenty released last year were collared, and the existing collars already deployed have a useful life of about two years. So the sheep in the original 2013 release can, for the most part, no longer be monitored with GPS, also those in subsequent and this last release will drop off after two years. Increasingly, Game and Fish will have to rely on annual census counts done each October in determining the size of the herd.

Hunts of lions responsible for predation usually followed mortalities detected by GPS signals in the early stages of relocation. The signals enabled biologists to quickly locate the carcass and determine the cause of death. Hunts of lions responsible for predation have ceased and in the event lions are responsible for Bighorn deaths, policy now dictates that it has become a natural occurrence.

Past lion hunts have triggered public reaction, and it’s important for patrollers to handle these opinionated reactions appropriately. Our role is to educate the public on the rules relating to the Bighorn management area. That precludes our serving as apologists for or critics of the reintroduction program. We are neutral educators. Viewpoints on the program are divided. Feelings on the issues sometimes run high and we want, above all, to avoid unpleasant exchanges with hikers and neighbors that approach us no matter what position they may take. We educate with a smile, particularly when it comes to the “why” interjected from dog restrictions.

Officials point out that mountain lions breed year around and usually have multiple kittens whereas sheep breed only once a year with successful breeding producing only one lamb. The survival rate of lambs varies, according to author Mark Jergensen. It ranges from only 25-40% in some herds up to 50% or more in thriving ones. In declining herds, the rate can drop to zero. That makes the balance between lions and sheep a delicate one.

The goal of the Santa Catalina reintroduction program is to create a herd of about 100 sheep. The progress toward that goal will be determined through the annual census counts. If the goal is reached, Game and Fish intends to monitor to see if the 100 level can be maintained naturally. If it can be, there will be no need for Game & Fish to use contract lion hunts. Experience elsewhere has shown that some lions may have to be taken to maintain a herd. The hunts target only lions linked to specific instances of predation.

If you want to go into more depth on this, the Sabino Visitors Center carries a couple of books on the Bighorns. The most informative is “Desert Bighorn Sheep Wilderness Icon” by Mark Jorgenson with excellent photos by Jeff Young. See the section on predation on page 112.

For the latest bulletins on the Bighorn project, see the Arizona Game & Fish website on the Catalina project: [AZG&F Catalina Bighorn site](#) .

The following photos were taken by Ron Yee, a member of the Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society and member of the Catalina Daily Monitoring Committee:



See the video at http://www.azgfd.gov/w_c/bighornSheep.shtml. The page contains links to regular updates and a concise history of the project.

A good YouTube video shows what's involved in a bighorn sheep roundup and transplant. It can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpA4ZtsAe3Q> .

[Lambs and bighorns observed on March 29. Photo by Mike Cross/AZGFD]

MORTALITIES

Since the first release in 2013, there have been a number of mortalities—some due to predation and others to illness. For current information on mortalities and census counts, make sure you are on our address list for Game and Fish's bi-weekly updates. If you're not receiving those updates already, e-mail Bob Turcotte at: bob_turcotte@msn.com .

CURRENT POPULATION

The 2016 helicopter and ground survey census estimated a total population of 66 sheep. An additional November 2016 brought that number to about 86. The 2018 estimates are more encouraging closing in on the target number of 100+/- . In fact, as late as August 2018, there have been a few foothills neighborhood sightings of the Bighorn Sheep practically in back yards. The sheep follow the 'green', and the productive monsoon season may have influenced these sightings.

Dealing with the public:

- Our mission is to educate the public about rules designed to make the reintroduction project successful. These include keeping dogs off trails within the Bighorn management area, discouraging use of social trails (those not designated as official Forest Service trails) at all times and particularly during the lambing season and reminding hikers not to venture more than 400 feet off of trails during the lambing period.
- Educate the public with a smile rather than with confrontation or enforcement. We are not law enforcement officers. Report serious violations or continued noncompliance after informing the public. See section below on contacting the Forest Service.
- Background:
 - As of November, 2016, four releases totaling approximately 100 sheep will have been made.

- Birthrate: Bighorn sheep populations are constrained by their low reproductive success. Unlike other ungulates (large mammals that usually use the tips of their hooves to sustain their body weight while moving), which regularly give birth to twins, female sheep only have one lamb per year. The lambing season, January 1 through April 30, is an important time when bighorns are most vulnerable to disturbances. Biologists observe the lambs from afar and capture photos using high magnification spotting scopes and handheld cameras.
- Breeding Season: The breeding season for desert bighorn sheep extends from early June through October, with peak rutting activity occurring in August. Rams as young as six months may be capable of breeding, but they often don't due to the dominance of older rams. Breeding hierarchy is often determined when rams face off and crash their horns into one another. The impact can sound like a rifle shot and be heard for quite a distance. Ewes probably do not breed until they are 2.5 years old and rams don't breed until 3.5. The gestation period is approximately 179 days.
- Web Page Links:
 - Hyperlinks to online information are given in blue below. Just click on the blue link.

[Arizona Game & Fish Updates](#)

[Catalina Bighorn Advisory Committee Website.](#)

Our Purpose:

- We are trying to prevent dogs from entering the Bighorn Sheep Management Area. The sheep react to dogs as predators. We also urge the public to refrain from using social trails and from straying more than 400 feet off of designated trails during the lambing season.
- We inform the public that the goal of the project is to achieve an equilibrium in which lambing success offsets losses to predation and disease.
- We explain that the herd's survival depends on finding defensible habitat with good sight lines to detect approaching lions.

Catalina State Park:

- Although some trails into the BHS Management Area begin from Catalina State Park, SCVP has no jurisdiction within the state park boundaries.
- Dogs are allowed in the park on a leash.
- Our jurisdiction begins at the boundary of the park and the BHS Management Area. Patrollers must know the park boundaries and where the Bighorn management area begins. See the Catalina State Park postcard map. The two most well known trails that begin within the park are: Romero Canyon and Sutherland. Both of these trails have no dog signs at the appropriate locations along the trail. Alamo trail also begins in the park and has no signs. Alamo trail is a social trail, not recognized by the US Forest Service. The use of the Alamo trail beyond the park

boundary (about one mile in from the start of the trail) by the public is restricted during the closure order. SCVP patrollers may enter the park for free in their US Forest Service uniform.

- Hiking Camping Restrictions per US Forest Service Closure Order:

- No going beyond 400 feet of designated US Forest Service trails in the restricted area from 1 January to April 30. (the lambing season)
- No dogs, except for seeing eye dogs/service dogs in the restricted area any time during the year.
- No campsite or other use in the restricted area for more than maximum day use size of 15 individuals and a maximum overnight group size of six individuals at any time during the year.
- Note: Trails other than officially designated US Forest service trails are known as social trails. The closure order prohibits use of social trails (beyond Catalina State Park boundaries) during the Jan. 1 to April 30 lambing season. The Forest Service discourages the use of those trails at other times of year because of resulting habitat damage.
However, Ram Ranger patrollers may patrol the social trails at any time of year to look for violators during lambing season and educate hikers at other times of year.
- Dogs are not allowed in the BHS Management Area at any time of the year. While we don't have any jurisdiction within the boundaries of Catalina State Park where dogs on leashes are allowed, we can however monitor the park area to watch and hopefully deter dogs from going beyond park boundaries into the BHS management area.

Reasons for the restrictions and the SCVP's role:

- Dogs have been documented to disturb bighorn sheep by causing undue stress. Dogs are descendants of wolves and the sheep react to them as predators. Excessive visitation by large groups can also cause them stress.
- If people ignore you and walk into the BHS Management Area with their dogs you can't do anything to stop them. Just try to get a good description, including the dog, and report it to the Forest Service Law Enforcement. Contact information provided at the below.
- Our main objective is to educate. Taking down information, such as descriptions of violators and vehicles is a great idea, but we are not allowed to ask anyone for ID or personal information.
- Leashed dogs are allowed within Catalina State Park. This includes all the trails within the Park, such as the Canyon Loop Trail, Birding Trail, Romero Ruins Trail, Nature Trail, portions of the Sutherland Trail, and the first segment of the Romero Canyon trail from the trailhead to the wilderness boundary (about 1.1 miles), and all other trails in the Park.
- Dogs are not allowed beyond the Park boundaries in the BHS Management Area. The Sutherland trail is tricky, because one portion enters the management area (a sign marks the spot) and then exits but re-enters further on. The simplest advice for hikers with dogs is to turn back at the first "No Dogs" sign.
- The BHS Management Area access from Catalina State Park includes the Romero Canyon, portions of the Sutherland Trail and the unofficial Alamo trail which has access points off the Birding Trail and the Romero Ruins trail. The boundary on the Alamo trail is marked by a "No Dogs" sign.

- Catalina State Park is state jurisdiction. We are guests within the State Park. In the State Park, leashed dogs are permitted. They may take the leashed dog all the way up to the boundary of the State Park and the Coronado National Forest BHS Management Area.

- Other trails in the BHS Management Area outside Catalina State Park include, Pima Canyon, Finger Rock, Ventana Canyon. No dogs are allowed in the Sabino Canyon Recreation Area.

Contacting Forest Service Law Enforcement:

- The Forest Service has only one law enforcement officer and he is off every Tuesday and Wednesday. He probably will not be able to respond in a timely manner unless, by coincidence, he is near your location.

- Because of cell phone limitations, it may be best to call the Forest Service Dispatch to pass on the information. The FS Dispatch is: 520-202-2710.

- Mark Sanburn is the Forest Service law enforcement officer. He can be reached 24/7 on his cell: 520-760-2317. You can always call the Sabino Canyon Visitor Center for advice as well 520-749-8700.

- Call 911 if it is an extreme emergency.

Hunting in the BHS Management Area:

It is legal to hunt within the BHS management area. Hunters are not allowed to bring dogs with them (and obviously cannot hunt bighorn!)

Horses vs. Dogs:

Horses do not affect sheep as much as dogs and often are affected by dogs the same way the bighorns are. Within the BHS Management area, horses are allowed on many of the hiking trails but are restricted on others, such as Finger Rock, due to rugged terrain. Check the Trail Info Summary on our website to determine which restrictions apply on individual trails.

Where dogs are allowed:

Dogs, *if leashed*, are allowed within most areas of the Coronado National Forest except for the BHS Management Area. Dogs are not allowed in the Sabino Canyon Recreation Area. Service dogs are not restricted. Call for specific information regarding other areas of the Coronado National Forest. (520) 670-4552 or (520) 749-8700.

Dog Friendly Trails: Agua Caliente Hill Trail, Cienega Creek Trail, Feliz Paseos Park, Robles Pass, Sweetwater Preserve, and Wild Burro Trail.

Dog friendly trails in other nearby areas:

—Upper Ramsey Canyon in the Huachuca Mountains. This is a wonderful three hour hike. Your dog can join you on leash. It is a great way to escape the summer heat, because of its shade and high elevation. It is approximately 4.6 miles in length, and is moderate in difficulty.

—Aspen Loop from Marshall Gulch. This hike is within the Santa Catalina Mountains, and is about 3.7 miles long. It is a shorter hike of only 1.5 hours. Dogs can join you on leash, and it is moderate in difficulty. If you go on weekends, you should wake up early to grab a parking spot. It is a good spot for escaping summer heat, and you can get good exercise within the shade of the pine and fir forest.

—Green Mountain Trail is a moderate hike in the Santa Catalina Mountains that can be done in any season, but it is recommended to go in the spring or fall. You are able to hike 3.9 miles through many different types of forest, and get stunning views. This particular trail is 2.2 miles, but there are also some side trails along the way. Dogs can join you on leash.

—Wilderness Rocks, from the Summit of Mt Lemmon. This is a more advanced hike in the Santa Catalina Mountains, which you should plan in ahead. It is a five hour adventure through 8.6 miles of trail. It is best to do this hike in the spring, summer and fall. Dogs can accompany you on leash. This area has fantastic rock formations among the pine trees, and it does not get too crowded.

—Bog Spring is a trail in the Santa Rita Mountains, which is moderate in difficulty. It is recommended to go in the Spring, Fall and Winter. It takes about three hours to complete this hike, which is approximately 5.4 miles long. Dogs are allowed on leash.

Dog Parks:

Brandi Fenton (link: [Brandi Fenton Dog Park](#), Flowing Wells Park, George Mehl Family Foothills Park, McDonald District Park, Northwest Community Neighborhood Park, and Star Valley Park. Additional Pima County information: [Pima County Dog Park Information](#))