

The Status of Mountain Sheep and Mountain Goats in British Columbia

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Abstract: Approximately 2000-2500 Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis canadensis*) occur primarily in the Rocky Mountains of south eastern British Columbia (BC) and 2400-3300 California bighorn sheep (*O. c. californica*) in south-central BC. There are 10,000-14,500 Stone's sheep (*Ovis dalli stonei*) in northwest and northeast BC and 300-400 Dall's (*O. d. dalli*) in the northwest corner of the province. Between 39,000-67,000 mountain goats (*Oreamnos americanus*) occur throughout the coastal, interior mountain ranges and the Rocky Mountains in BC. The harvest of bighorn sheep is limited to mature (8 years old or greater, or horn tips pass the bridge of the nose when viewed squarely from the side) or $\frac{3}{4}$ curl rams. One southern BC region has a limited entry lottery draw for any bighorn ram. Thinhorn sheep are regulated by a full curl restriction and this is generally managed by open season with limited entry draws primarily occurring in parks protected areas. The harvest of either-sex mountain goats is allowed, but the taking of females is discouraged. Public education, including an instructional video, is used to improve the success of male-only harvest. Mountain Goats are a highly sought-after trophy species in BC and harvest allocation between resident and non-resident hunters is a point of contention. Current management concerns for mountain goats include removal of forested winter range habitat, unregulated female harvest, increased backcountry access, and the unknown impacts associated with expanding helicopter recreation. Research is needed to determine survival rates, age structure and sustainable harvest levels for small (<100 animals) hunted populations of mountain goats. Mountain goat herds are declining in south-central BC from unknown causes while they appear to be stable in most of their range. The translocation of bighorns within the province is minimal with less than 100 animals moved for management reasons into historic habitat or to supplement herds in the past 5 years. Management of all wild sheep and to some degree mountain goats includes consideration for maintaining separation of wild and domestic sheep and goats. Local programs underway in 3 regions of British Columbia focus on collaborative efforts with livestock producers and private land owners. Research efforts are underway to assess the medium-long term effect of helicopter disturbance on mountain goats and the demographics and habitat use of a population of Stone's sheep as a prelude to planning for industrial activity.

Key words: bighorn, British Columbia, disease, harvest, thinhorn, mountain goat, *Ovis*, *Oreamnos*.

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