

RESUME OF MONTANA'S BIGHORN MANAGEMENT

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Years back we put out a little book some of you, I am sure, have seen, and we have a section in there on bighorns, and it is only a few pages long. I think in general that gives the basic management program for Montana.

I think in Montana we consider animals, including the bighorn, as products of and dependent upon the range. Now everybody knows that, and that's not a very profound statement, but in the travels through management which includes the setting of seasons, it appears that from time to time we forget that statement. But we consider the range as quite important. As a matter of fact, we consider the bighorn, the elk, whatever, nothing more than the range baled up in that particular hide, so what we are probably doing is trying to manage the baler and sometimes we forget about what we are baling.

Mr. Atcheson made a statement that sometimes biologists are swayed by opinion. That's right, we are. I heard a term the other day by a lady giving a talk at the North American, and I sort of got the drift that she was sort of upset with the Department of Interior and I don't think she would mind if I sort of quoted her. She was talking about the hierarchy in the Department of the Interior and she finally concluded her little rundown about the hierarchy by making the statement that she was appalled that they didn't even have a biostitute on their roster. That probably doesn't even fit here, but I thought you would be interested.

All of the discussion, I think, relating to both range and management is as I have stated before, toward the range. Now we have always had some difficulty in Montana determining numbers of animals, and I don't know whether we're backward or what, but we seem to have a great deal of problem in trying to come up with estimates and this sort of thing. Since we do have this problem, we make every effort to steer clear of it, and when people ask us we have sort of a pat answer that we give them when they ask how many sheep or whatever we have. We simply say we don't know.

So if you're wondering about that, don't, because we don't know so let's not spend any time talking about it.

Now we also recognize there is an intense interest in the trophy aspect of bighorns and again I don't think it's a matter of apologizing, but there are a lot of things we have to admit we don't completely and fully understand. Now we understand, I think like everybody else does, I guess we call it the crude principles of standard biology that a nice big three-quarter or full curl ram at some point in time was a lamb. And that at some point in time he had a mother - again, everybody knows these things, but sometimes it appears like when we're discussing seasons we forget some of these basic things and it appears to us that in order to have X number of nice trophy rams, someplace along the line you have to have more younger males and some place you have to have mother sheep. And another thing we stumbled onto is that all of these animals eat, and so again we keep coming back to the same basic thing, the plant.

Now maybe we understand this crude biology, but we can't always work out the solutions like maybe we think they ought to be worked out, but we try. This year we have nine areas that are going to be open to sheep hunting, and this is about what we've had in the past. On one of the tables I think there is a map of these areas, and it tells you about permits, but I thought maybe I would go over them very quickly.

Among these nine areas there will be 20 permits for three-quarter curl and 25 permits for ewes. I think you'll notice, if you look on that map, there's one place where it says "adult ewes" and another place that says "ewes." I think that's pretty damn fine management, wouldn't you say? We also have 57 either-sex permits and then you'll notice we have two areas in the southcentral part of the state that we call unlimited. Now we have had those for quite some time and we've caught hell on them for quite some time. I expect we'll continue to catch hell over them and one of these days we'll do something different. The permit sheep, for those areas, are on a drawing basis.

In Montana we limit the nonresident. Our locals buy a 25 cent conservation license which is a prerequisite to the \$25 sheep permit. However, it costs the nonresident \$1 for the conservation permit and \$150 for what we call the big game license plus another \$50 for the sheep.

There is a 7 year waiting period - that is, killing period - if you get a permit and don't kill a sheep you can turn in your permit and try for another permit the following year. If you kill a sheep it is 7 years before you can try again.

One of our seasons opens the first of September and the other the 15th of September. Now that rather briefly is the basics of our management, and we're going to hear a couple of papers today that talk about range. We feel in general that management constitutes trying to balance populations with the range.

I have stated we don't always accomplish this, but we try. Removal of animals from the range, we feel is a reasonable way to seek this balance. We do this by sport hunting and we do this by trapping, and you are going to hear a paper today about this trapping.

I think one of the problems, and Montana does not have a corner on it, is that both as people and as biologists we have trouble communicating and trying to understand what the other fellow is doing. Again there are some things you know and you probably have forgotten, but it's sort of like the sheep hunter that was going to go sheep hunting and first took a physical. He went in to see how good his pump and everything was and the doctor said, "Why don't you strip to the waist?" He did. He took off his pants.