

RANGE USE AND FOOD HABITS OF BIGHORN SHEEP
IN THE SUN RIVER AREA, MONTANA

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The 800 square mile study area lies within the Sawtooth Mountain range approximately 65 miles west of Great Falls, Montana. Seven major vegetation types and five subtypes have been recognized. The most commonly occurring vegetation types were bunchgrass, Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) and rocky reef, while quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloidea*), lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*), lodgepole-aspen and beargrass (*Xerophyllum tenax*) were less commonly found.

During summer the percent distribution of bighorn sheep was 55, 24, and 17 for the rocky reef, bunchgrass and old burn habitat types, respectively.

During fall 64 percent of the bighorn sheep observations were made on the rocky reef type and 34 percent were on the bunchgrass type.

In winter, the percent distribution of bighorn sheep was 44, 26 and 29 for the bunchgrass, rocky reef and old burn habitat types, respectively.

During spring, 59 percent of the bighorn sheep observations were made on the bunchgrass types.

During both fall and spring those subtypes related to past fires received greatest use by bighorns. Grasses, and grasslike plants, forbs and browse made up 92, 5 and 1 percent of the diet during fall and 94, 3 and 2 percent of the diet during spring, respectively.

These data were combined with those of earlier studies to summarize the year-round food habits of bighorn sheep in the Sun River area.