

DALL SHEEP HARVEST REGULATIONS IN NORTHWEST TERRITORIES, 1990.

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Abstract: Non-native Dall sheep harvest is limited to 3/4-curl or larger rams to minimize impact on populations. Natives may harvest sheep with no restrictions. Native harvest is for food and is thought to be 20-30 ewes and lambs per year.

BACKGROUND

Dall sheep (*Ovis dalli dalli*) occupy the Mackenzie and Richardson Mountain ranges in the westernmost part of the Northwest Territories. There are thought to be approximately 7,000 sheep in these areas (Poole and Graf 1985), however, recent population data are available for only the most southerly and northerly parts of the Mackenzie Mountains and for the Richardson Mountains.

CURRENT REGULATIONS

In the Mackenzie Mountains, all non-native harvesting is restricted to 1 "male adult Dall sheep", having horns which are 3/4-curl or larger, per year. Non-native harvesting is currently not permitted in the Richardson Mountains. The definition of a legal sheep under the NWT Wildlife Act is: "male adult Dall sheep", meaning a male Dall sheep bearing at least one horn that is 3/4-curl or larger, determined on the basis of a straight line drawn from the anterior aspect of the base of the horn to the tip of the horn, and when viewed from the side:

- (i) if such straight line passes in front of the posterior aspect of the eye socket, that horn shall be deemed to be a 3/4-curl horn, and;
- (ii) where the horn is a broken, worn, or incomplete horn, it shall be deemed to be a 3/4-curl horn if such straight line, when drawn to the logical projected tip of the horn, would pass in front of the posterior aspect of the eye socket",

In order that curl can be assessed after the animal is processed in the field, the regulations require that "the horns (be) attached to the head with the eye sockets intact".

In addition, the regulations state that "No person shall possess or export, or receive for export, to a place outside of the Territories, Dall sheep horns unless the horns have a numbered metal plug inserted by an officer, in the form and manner approved by the Superintendent", and

"No holder of a taxidermist license shall receive or have in his or her possession, Dall sheep horns unless the horns have a numbered metal plug inserted by an officer, in the form and manner approved by the Superintendent".

Native hunters may harvest, for food, sheep of any age or sex throughout the year in both the Mackenzie and Richardson Mountains.

BIOLOGICAL/GEOMETRIC RATIONALE

The management goals for Dall sheep are; 1) to maintain abundant and productive populations of Dall sheep in their natural habitat, and 2) to encourage the wise use of Dall sheep within the limits of sustainable yield. Decisions on whether to manage populations for harvesting opportunity or trophy quality have not been made.

Harvesting restrictions on rams, whether they be quotas or horn size, are basically to ensure sufficient mature rams for maximal productivity. Quotas or more restrictive horn size regulations do not appear to be necessary at the current time as recent surveys in 2 of the most heavily hunted ranges revealed ram:ewe ratios of 40 rams per 100 nursery sheep (includes juvenile males) and 83 rams per 100 nursery sheep (Case 1989). With no restrictions on the number harvested in these areas, over 95% of the sheep taken have been greater than full-curl. The reasons for this could be many: lack of demand, inability of the outfitter to handle additional clients, or a decision by the outfitter to maintain low volume, high quality hunts.

Harvest pressure on Dall sheep is considered to be light throughout the Mackenzie Mountains. There are a few convenient access points where pressure is higher, however, hunter and outfitter reports suggest there has been no change in hunter success or trophy quality in these areas.

ENFORCEMENT/PROSECUTION

There have been no arrests made under the 3/4-curl regulation during the past 10 years.

INTERPRETATION TO HUNTERS IN THE FIELD

The 3/4-curl regulation is interpreted to hunters using a line drawing in the annual summary of the regulations. The regulation has generally been considered straightforward, although accurate assessment depends on obtaining the appropriate view of the animal.

PRAGMATIC CONSIDERATIONS

Under the Northwest Territories Act, natives in the Northwest Territories are permitted to hunt sheep for food without restriction. The harvest by natives for food is not monitored, however, discussions with Department of Renewable Resources staff suggest the harvest is in the order of 20-30 sheep, most of which are ewes or lambs.

Natives land claims are approaching settlement in the western Northwest Territories. Under the Wildlife Provisions of this agreement, a Wildlife Management Board will be established to ensure user involvement in all regulation changes and management decisions. The priorities of this board and of the Government of the Northwest Territories are likely to remain with other more highly utilized species for the near future. As a result, Dall sheep research and management programs in the Northwest Territories are likely to remain at a small scale for the foreseeable future.

LITERATURE CITED

- R. L. Case. 1989. Distribution and abundance of Dall sheep in the southern Mackenzie Mountains, NWT. NWT Department of Renewable Resources, File Rep. No. 81.
- K. G. Poole and R. P. Graf. 1985. Status for Dall sheep in the Northwest Territories, Canada. In M. Hoefs (Ed.). Distribution, abundance, management, and conservation of the sheep of the world and closely-related mountain ungulates. North. Wild Sheep and Goat Council.