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## VICTOR L. COGGINS - OREGON'S CORRAL TYPE BIGHORN TRAP

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Victor L. Coggins, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Enterprise, OR 97828

**Abstract:** A total of 170 Rocky Mountain bighorns were captured and translocated using a permanent corral type trap from the Lostine, Oregon sheep herd from 1977 through 1999 with no known serious injuries. Trap design, location, attractants and handling techniques are discussed.

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**Background:** The Lostine Rocky Mountain bighorn herd was established in 1971 and increased to an estimated 70 bighorns by 1977. Since the winter range was very limited and this was Oregon's only Rocky Mountain bighorn herd, a trapping and transplanting program to establish other herds was initiated in 1977. The program continued through 1986, but was soon terminated because of a pneumonia die-off the winter of 1986-87. Herd recovery allowed trapping and transplanting to resume in 1999. In addition, sheep were captured for disease treatment and testing continued during the pneumonia outbreak and recovery period.

**Methods:** A corral trap was constructed on the Lostine Wildlife Area, Northeast Oregon to capture bighorn sheep on winter range. The trappingsite was accessible by vehicle on a primitive road although heavy snow during the winter frequently blocked access and made plowing snow with heavy equipment a necessity. The trap was constructed on an open grass covered ridgetop at 6,200' elevation in an area heavily used by wintering sheep.

**Baits**—A number of baits were tested including apple pumice, hay, alfalfa pellets and salt. Alfalfa pellets and salt worked the best and both were readily available locally. Acceptance of pellets by sheep as a food item takes time. Animals have to learn to eat pellets so pre-baiting time is needed. Salt is left in the trap yearlong and is heavily used by bighorns from November through May when they move on to the winter range.

**Location Of Trap**—A corral trap should be located in an area heavily used by bighorns and accessible by vehicle or other means of transportation. Materials needed for trapping and baits also require good access.

**Trap Construction**—The Lostine trap is constructed of 8x8 foot wooden panels with swinging gates in each end providing access into pens. Gates have hanging weights to speed closure. A swinging gate between the two pens allows bighorns to be sorted for handling. A variety of gate tripping mechanisms have been used including electronic blasting caps, rat traps and hand tripping.

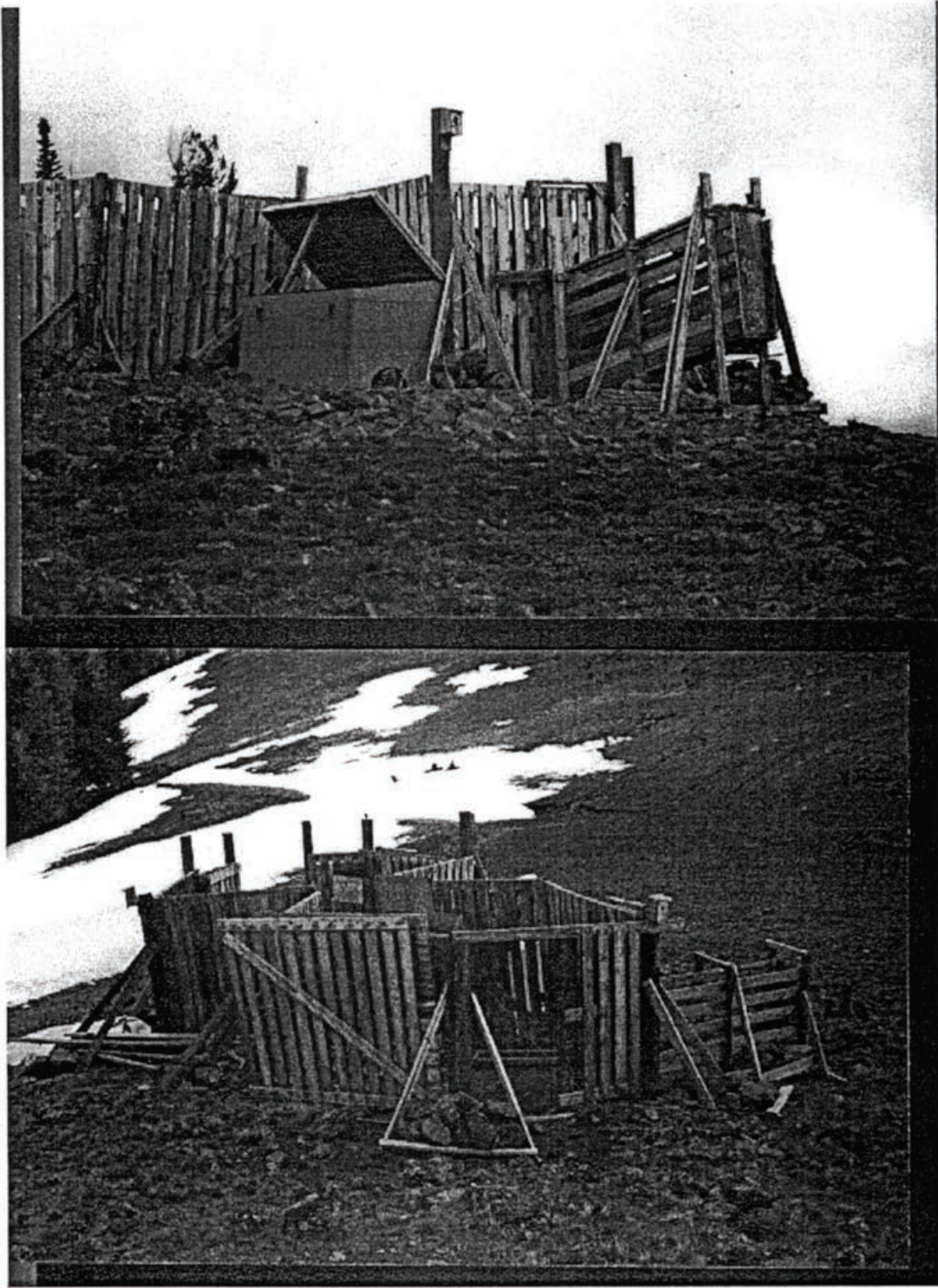
**Handling Chute**—The handling chute is attached to the primary holding corral and has a drop gate on each end. A swinging crowder gate inside the corral aids in getting reluctant animals to enter the trap. The chute is narrow by design so adult animals can not turn around. Following capture one animal is allowed at a time into the primary corral. The crowder and chute gates are opened and when the sheep sees an escape hole it enters the chute (reluctant ones are pushed in by the crowder gate). The handler enters the chute behind the bighorn and puts a blind fold on it. The animal is then ear tagged, sampled and loaded into the transport vehicle. Never approach the bighorn from the front because occasionally they will butt the handler. Because of the width of their horns, large rams cannot enter the chute so they must be handled in a different manner.

**Results and Discussion**—From 1977 through 1999, 170 bighorns were captured, handled and

transported to release sites with no known mortalities. In addition, Lostine animals were frequently captured, sampled or treated and released on many occasions without any known serious injuries.

This is a very low cost capture technique suitable for accessible herds habituated to humans. The Lostine handling crew generally consists of four people keeping personnel costs low. The biggest expense encountered is plowing snow off the access road to get transport vehicles to the trap site. For pre-baiting and captures when animals are not moved, snow machines are used which further reduces costs.

**Summary:** Corral trapping offers a low cost method of bighorn sheep capture with a very low mortality rate. Sheep must be habituated to the trap and baits over a long period. This technique is not suitable for remote herds not habituated to humans.



Corral Type Bighorn Trap, Lostine Wildlife Area, Northeast Oregon