

Colorado Status Report

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Abstract: From 1944-2007, at least 2,592 bighorn sheep have been translocated from Colorado herds and 2,492 bighorns have been released in Colorado. In 2007, approximately half of the Rocky Mountain bighorn herds were considered to be native or native with some supplementation whereas the remaining herds resulted directly from translocations. The estimated 2007 statewide, posthunt Rocky Mountain and desert bighorn sheep population estimates was 7,040 in 78 herds and 325 in 4 herds, respectively.

From 1990-2007, an average of 126 rams (range 110-145) and 31 ewes (range 18-56) have been harvested on an annual basis. 2007 statewide harvest was 117 Rocky Mountain bighorn rams, 14 Rocky Mountain bighorn ewes and 4 desert bighorn rams. Sheep licenses in Colorado are issued as either archery or rifle. To be legal for harvest rams must be at least ½ curl. In 2007, 76 ram archery licenses and 11 ewe archery licenses were issued. One hundred fifty five rifle ram licenses and 47 ewe rifle licenses were also issued. The average annual harvest rate for Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep from 1990-2007 was 2.5% (2% for rams, 0.5% for ewes) of the posthunt population available for hunting. Hunter success rates for Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep have varied since 1990 from as low as 39% to 58%. 2007 overall Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep hunter harvest per license was 46%.

Disease continues to be a major limiting factor of bighorn herds across Colorado, with predation, habitat quality/quantity, and reduced genetic diversity and other issues impacting some individual herds. Few suitable areas are left in Colorado where new bighorn sheep herds could be introduced without the likelihood of interactions with domestic sheep. To maintain Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep numbers in the future, emphasis will need to be placed on managing existing populations rather than attempting to establish new herds. The considerable amount of unused desert bighorn sheep habitat may offer the best opportunity to increase the number of bighorn herds in Colorado.

The 2007 Colorado post-hunt mountain goat population estimate was 1,800 animals. Mountain goats are distributed in 18 herd units, with 16 open to public hunting. Nineteen archery and 200 rifle licenses were issued in 2007. All mountain goat licenses are either-sex, with a legal goat being at least 1 year old. Harvest rates across management units vary widely but average between 8-10%, as a proportion of the post-hunt population. The statewide harvest in 2007 was 102 billies and 72 nannies.

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