
THE DESERT BIGHORN COUNCIL- THE FIRST 25 YEARS

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Abstract. The Desert Bighorn Council has been in existence for 25 years. The first meeting of the Council was held in Las Vegas. Three years later, we had developed a Constitution and Bylaws. In our 25 years we have published 25 transactions containing about 500 technical papers. The Council has presented several awards for outstanding accomplishments and it has memorialized its members who have died. The Council has prepared a book about the life history of the desert bighorn and contributed to a book about the wild sheep in North America, published by the Wildlife Management Institute. Two attempts have been made to force the Council to merge with the Western Association of Game and Fish Commissioners. Other proposals have been made to merge the Council with other bighorn groups. So far the Council has maintained its own autonomy.

The Desert Bighorn Council (DBC) had its beginning in Las Vegas in the spring of 1957 when biologists from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service and the Nevada Fish and Game Commission met to discuss the existing knowledge of the desert bighorn sheep. Clair Aldous, Gordon Fredine, Wally Wallace, Al Ray Jonez, and Warren Kelly attended this meeting. The review of existing literature didn't take long. About the only publication of a scientific nature on desert bighorn in existence at that time was the results of John Russo's work in southwestern Arizona during the early 1950s.

Gordon Fredine made the comment that most of the information on desert bighorn was still unpublished and stored in the minds and diaries of the people that were working on sheep at that time. He suggested we have a meeting of all persons currently working with the desert bighorn. The states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, and to a lesser extent, California, were active in bighorn programs. Also personnel at the San Andres, Kofa, Cabeza Prieta and Desert Game Ranges and at Death Valley National Monument were conducting bighorn investigations. The first meeting of biologists doing research and gathering management data on desert bighorn was held in September of 1957. Twenty-seven people attended that meeting. The meeting was given the name of the Desert Bighorn Sheep Council. The agenda consisted of status reports from each state, refuge and park or monument. Unstructured discussions were conducted on such topics as water requirements, breeding and lambing periods, lamb survival, herd composition, seasonal food requirements, territory of individuals and bands, burro-bighorn competition, hunting, censusing techniques, and sign reading. Each discussion was recorded and the tape was transcribed and printed in the Transactions. After papers and discussions we had our first business meeting. Two questions were asked the group: was the meeting a success and shall the meetings become an annual affair? The answers were a unanimous "yes!"

The second meeting was held in Yuma during the first week in April. Again, that year we had a small group and nearly everyone at the meeting presented a paper. The program

chairman had requested papers on specific subjects such as water developments, trapping and tagging, lungworm infections, water requirements and daily movements. Our field trip was an overnight affair to the Kofa Game Range.

In 1959 we met in California's Death Valley National Monument. This is where the Desert Bighorn Council actually came into being. At our business meeting we formally adopted the name Desert Bighorn Council as our official title. At this meeting a committee was appointed to prepare a Constitution and Bylaws for approval at the next meeting of the Council.

The Constitution and Bylaws were approved at the 1960 meeting in Las Cruces, New Mexico. In this governing document there are four objectives:

1. To provide for the exchange of information...through meetings and published transaction.
2. To stimulate and coordinate studies in all phases related to desert bighorn.
3. To provide a clearing house of information among all agencies, organizations and individuals...through the appointment of work committees.
4. To function in a professional advisory capacity, where appropriate, on local, national and international questions involving the management and protections of the desert bighorn, and to adopt such measures as shall tend to promote the advancement of knowledge concerning bighorn and the long-range welfare of these animals.

In the last objective you may have recognized the origin of the words on our letterhead, which reads "Established to promote the advancement of knowledge concerning bighorn and long-range welfare of these animals."

During these first 25 years, have we satisfied any of these objectives? Let's take a look. At our first meeting we decided that we would hold our meetings in different places each year. We would then have an opportunity to visit other bighorn areas, visit with other biologists and observe their problems first hand, observe existing and proposed trapping and transplanting sites and generally make the Desert Bighorn Council Meeting a well-rounded annual training session. Since 1957 we have met in 22 different places and have had outstanding field trips. Our membership has been between 100-150 people since our first 3 or 4 meetings. We have published 25 transactions of our meetings and there has been an average of 20 papers in each transactions. The Council has prepared 2 management guidelines, one on trapping and transplanting and the other on habitat requirements of desert bighorn. The Council has prepared several resolutions relative to the introduction of exotic ungulates, the San Gorgonio Wilderness, the regulation and control of public use on public land, feral burros, and to permanently mark legally taken bighorn trophy heads.

In 1960 the Council presented its first Trophy Award to Ralph and Buddy Welles for their work at Death Valley National Monument. Since then Trophy Awards have been presented to Oscar Demming, John Russo, Charles Hansen, Steve James, Clair Aldous, the Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society, the Mexico Forestry and Wildlife Department, and to Bob McQuivey. Honor plaques have been presented to the Nevada Operations Office of the Atomic Energy Commission, Pat Hansen, the Inyo National Forest, Lydia Berry, Jim Blaisdell, and the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep. In 1975 the Council presented an Award of Excellence to Gale Monson and Lowell Sumner, editors of The Desert Bighorn.

In 1964 the Mexican Forest and Wildlife Department presented the Silver Ram to the Council at the 8th Annual Meeting in Mexicali-San Felipe, Baja California, Mexico. The Mexicans intended this trophy to be given as an award. Since there was no way we could duplicate the Silver Ram for all future awards recipients, the Council voted to keep the Silver Ram as a sym-

bol of the Council. It would be passed from chairman to chair. man and would be on the podium at each meeting.

In 1962, Winn Banko, using the same argument that Gordon Fredine used in 1957, proposed that the Council members compile a book on the life history, ecology and management of the desert bighorn. This idea was approved and the Technical Staff was appointed and charged with the task of overseeing the completion of the book. Gale Monson and Lowell Sumner took on the task as editors. The editors worked with the sixteen authors to prepare 22 chapters and the book **The Desert Bighorn** was finally published in 1980.

In June of 1974, 17 Desert Bighorn Council members met with 61 other biologists and administrations at a workshop about North American Wild Sheep in Missoula, Montana. The workshop was sponsored by the Wildlife Management Institute. The proceedings were published in a book titled **The Wild Sheep in Modern North America**. Approximately one-half of the book relates to reports and management recommendations for the desert bighorn.

In 1964 the Desert Bighorn Council began a practice of dedicating transactions to members who had died. The first was Sr. Luis Macias, Director of the Mexican Forestry and Wildlife Department. Others were John Reed, Cecil Kennedy, Bun Morgan, Jake Metherell, Bill Graf and Bill Cooper, John Ebersole and Dick Smith who died in an airplane accident with Chuck Hansen. Chuck, Bill, John and Dick were doing an aerial bighorn survey when their accident happened. All of these people were dedicated to their profession and to the protection and preservation of the desert bighorn.

On 2 occasions efforts were made to force the Desert Bighorn Council to become integrated into the Western Association of State Game and Fish Commissioners. On each occasion the Council resisted these efforts. The reasons for opposing this proposal were (1) only administrators and a favored few would attend the meetings; (2) biologists actually working on bighorn would lose the opportunity to visit other bighorn areas; (3) possibly the greatest loss would be to the local Fish and Game Biologist-Conservation Officer-Game Warden in such places as Bishop, Monticello, Kingman, Las Cruces or Kerrville; these communities aren't on the Western Association's meeting list; (4) we would have to gain permission from the parent organization prior to taking any action. I believe the Council exhibited its maturity in dealing with pressures brought on by a relatively few members of the Western Association.

We have had proposals to merge with other bighorn groups either permanently or on a one year in five basis. On each occasion the Council has voted to maintain its own integrity. During the first 5 years of the Council we heard comments such as: We will soon exhaust the amount of data for papers; or, due to lack of data we will have to meet every two years or so; or, we should merge with other bighorn groups so we won't run out of data for papers; or, no new studies of desert bighorn will be initiated. So far none of these dire predictions have occurred. The number of papers has remained consistent with past years and the quality and diversity of the subject matter has gotten better. The Council has encouraged research and the Technical Staff has reviewed study plans; the most recent was Jim DeForge's project. Sometime soon the Council may be financially able to sponsor research through the Charles Hansen Memorial Fund.

The Desert Bighorn Council has been a leader, pusher, counselor and even occasionally an activist to meet and exceed the objectives as set forth in the Constitution and Bylaws.

You all know that Las Vegas is a gambling town. Five people took a chance back in 1957 and the desert bighorn came out the winner. I hope they can be winners during the next 25 years.

REPORT OF THE FERAL BURRO COMMITTEE

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Abstract. Activities concerning feral burros by such agencies as the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), National Park Service (NPS), U.S. Navy, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are reviewed.

NEVADA

Both the BLM and Nevada Department of Wildlife agree that there are no major feral burro problems in or adjacent to desert bighorn ranges. This does not imply that there are not problems, particularly around water sources.

NEW MEXICO

The court fight continues between animal protection groups and the NPS over feral burro removal operations at Bandelier National Monument. The appeal by protection groups is still in court.

ARIZONA

During Fiscal Year (FY) 1981, the BLM removed 899 burros. The majority of these came from the Yuma area. During the FY 1982 most burro removal activity has occurred in the Black Mountains outside Kingman. By April 1982 a total of 300 burros had been removed. The goal is 600 animals. Up until January helicopters and cowboys were used to herd burros into corral traps. The next phase will utilize water traps. The feral burro population within the Black Mountain area is 1800 animals (estimated). The BLM's management plan for the Black Mountains calls for leaving 400 burros as a managed herd. Plans for FY 1983 include continuing the efforts in the Black Mountains, plus removal of some animals from the Hualapai and Aquarius Mountains. At Grand Canyon National Park, no burros have been sighted recently.

CALIFORNIA

The BLM has continued its burro removal program within the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA). The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the CDCA called for all feral horse and burro removal to be completed by FY 1985. During FY 1981, 1,500 burros were removed from the Saline Valley area. During FY 1982 (through April) 500 more burros were removed from the same area. The goal for FY 1982 is 1620 animals to be removed from the CDCA area.

In the Inyo Mountains, Dr. John Wehausen's surveys indicated no burro activity. More importantly, bighorn sheep were found to be occupying areas previously used by burros. Dick Weaver, California Department of Fish and Game Bighorn Project Leader, suggested that the BLM's extensive burro removals from Saline Valley created a void which was filled by the burros in the Inyo Mountains.

There has been much confusion over the events at China Lake concerning control of feral burros: here is a brief review. In early 1980 the Navy and BLM entered into a Memorandum of Understanding which allowed the BLM to live-capture burros from the airfield operations area. The removals were conducted like other BLM roundups except that the Navy paid for the whole operation. From March 1980 through January 1981, 258 burros were removed. During this time period numbers of burros occupying the area actually increased, however--not decreased. Due to the safety requirements for aircraft and per-