

**The Desert Bighorn Council--have we made a difference?**

**Keynote address, Desert Bighorn Council**

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Ray Lee asked me to prepare a brief history of the Council for presentation here. How many of you in the audience were born after 1957? (show of hands--about half) That is the year the Council was formed--so about half of you are younger than the Council!

Organizational History. The Council was formed in 1957 by interested biologists from several fish and game agencies. A constitution was developed by 1959. In 1962, a Technical Staff was formed to start work on a comprehensive, up-to-date book on desert bighorns. The Tech Staff currently functions by providing input to land use and management agency proposed actions, legislative proposals, and hot issues such as embryo transfers, preparation of the Guidelines For Management of Domestic Sheep in Desert Bighorn Habitat. It is made up of biologists from land management and game and fish agencies and the private sector. The Council was incorporated in Nevada in 1980, with help from Wayne Capurro, a Reno lawyer who was also a hunter and conservationist. The Technical Staff became the Council's Board of Directors. With help from the father of then-Secretary Treasurer, Bill Dunn, the Council was granted tax exemption by the Internal Revenue Service under section 501c3, in 1988. In 1993, Brigham prepared an Operations Manual, which outlines the duties of each officer and committee in the Council except the Awards Committee. This was done to provide for a smooth transition between officers and committee chairs, since they change frequently, and this is an all-volunteer organization. At the urging of Kevin Hurley of the Northern Wild Sheep and Goat Council, this Council applied for and was granted membership in the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) in 1999. By having WAFWA sanction, Council members who work for game and fish agencies should be able to get travel funds and authorization more easily. The annual meeting of the Council rotates between Arizona, Nevada, California, Utah, Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, and occasionally old Mexico, to give local biologists an opportunity to attend and participate in the meetings.

Getting the Word Out. This is done in two ways: the first was publication of the book *The Desert Bighorn-Its Life History, Ecology, and Management*, which was published in 1980 by the University of Arizona Press at Tucson. The second way is that the Council prepares and distributes annual Transactions. A Transactions Editor was established in the 1960's, and is a volunteer position. There are three types of papers presented in the Transactions: individual state reports, which follow a standard format; opinion pieces/discussion of new untried methodology; and peer reviewed/refereed technical papers. Indices have been prepared twice for the transactions: a stand-alone version for the years 1957-1971; and one covering the years 1957-1983, which was published in the Transactions (vol. 33, 1989).

Awards. There are three types: the Ram Award; Honor Plaque; and Award of Excellence. There are also Certificates of Appreciation, which are presented occasionally. Dick Weaver will have more to say about these later in this meeting.

Brochures were prepared, updated, and disseminated in the 1960's, in 1983 by Warren Kelly and Brigham, and in 1998 by Darren Divine, the current Secretary-Treasurer.

Hansen-Welles Memorial Fund. Dr. Charles G. Hansen was an early stalwart in the Council, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist in charge of the Desert National Wildlife Range. He met an untimely demise in an aircraft accident while looking for desert bighorns in Utah. In 1984, the Council established the Hansen Fund, which is comprised of federally insured certificates of deposit. The original funds used to purchase the C.D.'s were from individual donations, royalties from the sale of the Council's book, contributions from the Desert Bighorn Council Ewes (a group of biologists' wives, headed by Doris Weaver. The Ewes have sold T-shirts, mugs, prints by Pat Hansen, carvings by Warren Kelly, etc. for decades.) Accrued interest from the C.D.'s is used for stipends for students and researchers working with desert bighorns and their habitats. An application form is found in one of the late transactions, and the Technical Staff makes the actual grant.

HAS THE COUNCIL MADE A DIFFERENCE? Following are many of the Council's accomplishments:

- Rendezvous. The annual meeting provides a formal and informal venue where members share ideas, concepts, new methodology, etc. including the benefit of cross-fertilization of ideas.
- Annual Meeting: Rotation has allowed many biologists and managers to attend, who would not be able to do so otherwise.
- Guidelines for Capture of Desert Bighorns were published in the 1973 Transactions and updated in the 1982 Transactions.
- Preparation of the chapter on Desert Bighorn Sheep by individual Council members, as presented in the 1975 *The Wild Sheep in Modern North America*, sponsored and published by the Boone & Crockett Club.
- Guidelines on Habitat Requirements published in the 1980 Transactions.
- Guidelines for the Management of Domestic Sheep in Bighorn Habitat published in the 1990 Transactions. These guidelines were prepared at the request of the Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management (BLM). They were adopted as guidelines following a 1992 meeting attended by representatives of the Council, the BLM, the U.S. Forest Service, several wildlife veterinarians, and the American Sheep Council, and issued as an information bulletin. In 1998, following a second similar meeting, they were issued as BLM policy for all BLM managed public lands, under a formal

Instruction Memo.

- BLM Interim Management Guidelines for Wilderness Study Areas. The Council sent several letters to the BLM acting Director in 1993 and 1994, identifying major disparities in interpretation of the BLM guidelines between BLM wilderness specialists and wildlife biologists, among BLM wilderness specialists at various levels within the BLM, BLM managers on adjacent management units, and BLM management between states. The Council's comments and constructive criticisms caused the BLM Wilderness Management Staff to revamp the Guidelines, making them much more restrictive for on-the-ground management than prior versions. The BLM Wilderness Management staff deleted entirely the U.S. Department of the Interior policy on management of resident wildlife by state game and fish agencies. No BLM biologists were consulted during preparation of the 1995 guidelines. Following a chorus of protest from state agencies, WAFWA, and BLM non-wilderness personnel, the guidelines were revised, resulting in a more pro-management document (vs. a more preservationist document).
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listing of California Bighorns as a category 2 candidate species. The Council was stonewalled by USFWS after 3 Freedom of Information Act requests in 1994 and 1995 to find out why the California bighorns were even considered as a Candidate species. The Council offered to share its knowledge, but was never contacted by USFWS.
- Embrvo Transfer Position Statement published in the 1996 Transactions. This proposal was developed by Texas A& M University researchers. Under the proposal, fertilized desert bighorn eggs would be carried to term in domestic ewes. The Council noted among other things that bighorn behavior could be modified to remove wariness to hunters, and that "designer sheep" (big horns = big trophies) would be a probable result.
- 1999 North American Wild Sheep Conference. Held at Reno, it was a joint venture between the Council and the Northern Wild Sheep and Goat Council. Transactions should be printed and distributed in 2000. Kevin Hurley of the Northern Wild Sheep and Goat Council deserves much credit for the idea, and being a prime motivator.

Resolutions. The Council in:

- 1963 opposed introduction of exotic ungulates with a thorough environmental analysis, several years before the passage of the National Environmental Policy Act-NEPA;
- 1964 requested the U.S. Secretary of the Interior to delegate management authority to regulate and control public use to the land managing agencies;
- 1967 endorsed retention of desert bighorn habitat in public domain (=public lands) under the Classification & Multiple-Use Act;
- 1967 requested the land managing agencies to control feral burros;
- 1967 endorsed development of water for desert bighorns in a bighorn habitat management proposal;

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- 1972 urged permanent identification of legally taken bighorn heads and horns, to aid wildlife law enforcement;
- 1980 supported the state of New Mexico listing of desert bighorns as endangered, but did not support federal listing;
- ~~1981~~ encourage the state of Texas to re-initiate the Texas Desert Bighorn re-establishment program;
- 1982 recommended to California that the California Department of Fish and Game develop a goal-oriented management program for desert bighorns;
- 1982 recommended to California that desert bighorn management be transferred from the California State Legislature (!) to the Department of Fish and Game;
- 1982 supported reclassification of 11 roadless areas within Anza Borrego State Park to California State Wilderness status.

Has the Council made a difference? Yes! Through the annual rotating meeting; The Technical Staff comments, position statements and guidelines; The book--best of its kind when it was published; the North American Wild Sheep Conference; The Transactions--getting the word out; Help to Mexico in the form of expertise on surveys, plus financial assistance; and YES to motivating people-- participants come away from these annual meetings charged up and revitalized, to fight battles for bighorns for another year.

I have talked with you about the Council's history, what it has done that it *has* made a difference in the grand scheme of wild sheep management. Here are several things I would like to see for the future:

- Consider a Council website or tier off some other wildlife or wild sheep organization, keeping in mind that this Council is an all-volunteer organization and it takes time to maintain web sites once they are established.
- E-mail is a meat tool! We are starting to use it for distributing the Council's newsletter *Bleats and Blats*. I used it extensively when working with several other folks to prepare for the North American Wild Sheep Conference. It can mean faster responses to hot issues. And it is cheaper than the telephone and fax.
- The Technical Staff should continue to provide input to land use plans/planning documents, as needed, such as the North and East Colorado Desert plans. It should actively provide input to federal wilderness legislation, which may be upcoming for Nevada, and should continue to provide input to wilderness management plans as these are developed by land management agencies following wilderness designation, especially in the southern California desert. Legislative proposals for Nevada's Black Rock Desert are also in the works, and should be commented upon.
- The Council should revisit the 1967 (Transactions) Research Needs paper presented by Dr. Charles Hansen, compare it with information developed since then, including that presented during the North American Wild Sheep Conference and see where we are and what is left to do.

More active participation in the Council by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would be appreciated, since USFWS has the lead in preparing recovery plans for the peninsular bighorn sheep, and since USFWS stonewalled the Council in the mid 1990's, for reasons as yet unexplained.

- Revise the 1980 Habitat Management Guidelines and publish in upcoming transactions.
- Publish Ramev and Wehausen's mountain sheep (re) classifications in the Council Transactions, so members will have easy access to them, and to get the word out to all Council members.
- Continue to make more financial grants through the Hansen-Welles fund.

Last, I leave you with these thoughts: Always keep in mind the following question posed many times by Dick Weaver: "What is best for the sheep?" and a statement from the late Bill Graf (an early Council member): "We know enough to manage sheep-we must have the ***will.***"

We, the Desert Bighorn Council members, individually and collectively-you and I, ARE **THE WILL!** Never forget that!

Thank you.

