

### **Santa Catalina Bighorn Sheep Reintroduction Meeting Minutes January 22,2013**

Joe Sacco went over notes from last meeting, and ground rules

Discussion on Media releases: does Advisory Committee want to take on media relations?

Brian Dolan, Mike Quigley, and Mark Hart will work on media releases.

Ben Brochu provided handouts on Firescape/ Habitat and Adaptive Mountain Lion Management plan limiting factors.

The committee went over handouts, each committee member is responsible to read them before the meeting on Jan. 24<sup>th</sup>.

Jim Heffelfinger, Regional Game Specialist estimates that Whitetail populations in Unit 33 are highest in state, increased dramatically due to Aspen and Bullock fires impact. Lion populations also increase along with the deer.

The number of lions taken out of unit 33 has risen each year, this may be due to new reporting requirements, within the last 5 yrs., (hunters must call in within 48 hrs. and physically check in within 10 days of kill). Also easier to spot with understory burned off.

In 1996 the Forest Service issued closure orders on Pusch Ridge for dogs, and campsite restrictions during lambing periods that are still in place

Historical lambing areas: Buster Spring above Romero Canyon and Finger Rock

Incidental sightings: bighorn sheep – no sightings in 2000-2010.

Long term movement-there are no barriers to movement between the Galiuros, Aravaipas, and Mineral Mountain ranges.

Sheep will move to areas they think have good forage and will move to find mates

No grazing permits within Pusch Ridge Wilderness, and no goats or domestic sheep allowed in Catalinas or Rincons.

The scores are an average of all of the blocks

Ideally the score will remain the same or increase with the relocation efforts

Is there a way to predict how the score would change with the two scenarios of doing nothing or using firescape? This became an action item for the next meeting.

How will the habitat look with and without firescape?

Concern that the margin of error is too narrow in determining when the bighorn sheep release is a success or not.

Forest Service- No provisions in the Wilderness Act to improve habitat. Activities need to be geared toward fuel reductions.

Bighorn sheep in mountains relates to the health of mountains. There is concern that the ecosystem needs to be healthy and that is the basis for when sheep are released or not.

**Questions:**

What can the committee do to promote that the restoration holds the equal weight as mountain lion management plan?

Why did sheep disappear from Pusch Ridge?

What role has climate change & invasive vegetation played?

Would like raw data for the habitat evaluation to show the criteria on a block by block basis for the water, vegetation, and human encroachment and the change that fire would produce for each block where prescribed fire could be utilized.

How much or the viable threshold will project be considered a success, 100 + sheep

Populations below 100 are more susceptible to predation

Would like to see historical numbers and previous scores both pre and post fire.

Mountain Lion Management Plan:

Adaptive management flexible

Address mountain lions if they are a limiting factor

Multiple bag limit is on table to remove problem lions, gets sportsman involved, is proactive instead of reactive.

Current tradition mountain lion hunting is limited to 1 lion per calendar year per hunter

Active removal- hiring a houndsman to go to sheep kill site and then track and kill offending lion, would need to go to kill site within days of mortality signal. If past 3 days the lion can be difficult to trail.

What makes lion eat sheep over other prey?

It is believed that lions will eat what is available in their area.

There was an assertion that lions have an 80% mortality rate due to cannibalism or starvation

New Mexico Model: Sheep have low deer and sportsman densities- total removal approach

All sheep in first and second releases would be collared: 30 sheep each release

2 collar types: VHS- fly over, GPS: continual data uploaded from satellite

**Action Items:**

Map Overlay-Ben

Power Point-Joe

Read hand outs for meeting on Jan. 24<sup>th</sup>.

Firescape meeting

Raw Data on blocks on burn or treatment

Historical sheep, lion data

Overlay old core sheep habitat on score map