

A photograph of two bighorn sheep standing in a rocky, mountainous landscape. The sheep on the left is a female with small, curved horns, and the sheep on the right is a male with large, thick, spiraling horns. They are both looking towards the left. The background is a steep, rocky cliff face.

# *The* Bighorn

FALL 2016

>>> PUBLICATION OF THE TEXAS BIGHORN SOCIETY

Restoring Bighorn Sheep to their Native Ranges in Texas, and Ensuring the Viability of their Habitat

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# BIGHORN

The official magazine of the Texas Bighorn Society  
Advertising Rates Effective 1-1-2009  
Bighorn is published 3 times annually

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# BIGHORN

Fall 2016

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 bighorns don't live in Texas  
 bighorns don't matter



bighorns don't need the internet. bighorns need you.



Texas Bighorn Society

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4

M. Jones



# Texas Bighorn Society

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SUMMER 2016

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# Howdy, New Members!

On behalf of the current members, the TBS Officers & Directors, and all the Texas Bighorn Sheep your patronage will go to support, we'd like to welcome you to our organization! We appreciate your support and look forward to seeing you at the next TBS event!

## individual

Warren Conway  
Randy Wells

## family

Chris and Felicia Cammack  
Carter Kacal

## life

Caleb Cox  
Eric B. Darnell  
Tyler Mansell

## student

Hunter Hopkins  
Kyle Roach

Don't forget - Student Memberships are only \$25/year!  
Encourage students you know to join today!

## \* please,

Help us stay current with your address and email information! Contact Diane Gregson if you have moved, changed email addresses, or have questions about your membership. She can be reached at:

*dgregson@texasbighornsociety.org*  
806-745-7783

# This & That

## Bull Roar

If I had a dollar for every girl that found me unattractive, they'd eventually find me attractive.

I find it ironic that the colors red, white, and blue stand for freedom, until they're flashing behind you.

Today a man knocked on my door and asked for a small donation towards the local swimming pool, so I gave him a glass of water.

I changed my password to "incorrect," so whenever I forget it the computer will say, "Your password is incorrect."

Artificial intelligence is no match for natural stupidity.

I hate it when people use big words just to make themselves sound perspicacious.

Hospitality is the art of making guests feel like they're at home when you wish they were.

Behind every great man is a woman rolling her eyes.

Ever stop to think and forget to start again?

When I married Miss Right, I had no idea her first name was Always.

There may be no excuse for laziness, but I'm still looking for it.

Women spend more time wondering what men are thinking than men spend thinking.

Is it wrong that only one company makes the game Monopoly?

Change is inevitable, except from a vending machine.

The grass may be greener on the other side, but at least you don't have to mow it.

I like long walks, especially when they're taken by people who annoy me.

If at first you don't succeed, skydiving is not for you.

Sometimes I wake up grumpy; other times I let her sleep.

Money is the root of all wealth.



Check [facebook.com/texasbighornsociety](https://facebook.com/texasbighornsociety) for more news, info, photos and videos!

## June 2016 Board Meeting Summary

JUNE 2016

The June Texas Bighorn Society Board Meeting was held just before TBS' Roundup in Fort Worth, Texas. Twenty-five people attended the meeting. The minutes of the April 2016 Board meeting, which was held during the Work Project, were reviewed and approved. Kathy Boone gave the treasurer's report, which was reviewed and approved. There was a discussion about the April Work Project including its relatively low expense and the successful auction. Thank you all for your continued generosity and hard work! Kathy's membership report indicated

that TBS now has 787 members. The majority of the Board's discussions were centered around the upcoming Roundup activities. Jim Payne suggested that we explore whether we should ask a clothing supplier to sell TBS branded clothing directly to members and other customers. Jim and Booner offered to explore the idea and find out what options are available to TBS. Tommy reported that the contract was signed for the 2017 Roundup at Tapatio Springs. The Board discussed and recommended that an outline should be drafted detailing the roles and responsibilities of Officers and Directors. I was asked to put together

an initial draft for discussion at the next Board meeting. The next Board meeting will be held on September 23, 2016. I hope you all had a great summer, and I know you all are looking forward to the fall and the beginning of hunting season. It's a great time of the year to be outdoors!

## *President's Letter*



Jim Payne  
TBS President

Heat, dust and aviation gasoline all have their own smells, don't they? As I write this I am imagining those smells bearing in on a wind from far West Texas. You see, as I type, TPWD is conducting the annual sheep survey utilizing two helicopters and many sets of eyeballs.

While it is now early in that two-week exercise, and we pray for good sheep herd numbers, one small observation has been relayed. Sheep are being spotted in Black Gap WMA as usual, but also in one specific area of "the Gap" where not spotted in real numbers previously. That happened to be the Bourland Canyon area where a TBS water guzzler was built in the last two years. Water makes a difference, as does all our work! So as we await the overall survey results, which we will certainly share with our membership, I hope that every TBS member takes pride in that one early observation as your time, sweat and money are working magic, as always, in Texas sheep country.

My name is Jim Payne and I just began my term as President of the Texas Bighorn Society. Kathy Boone just completed her term and has graciously agreed to stay on the Board and once again serve as Treasurer. I can't thank Kathy enough for training me as her Vice-President.

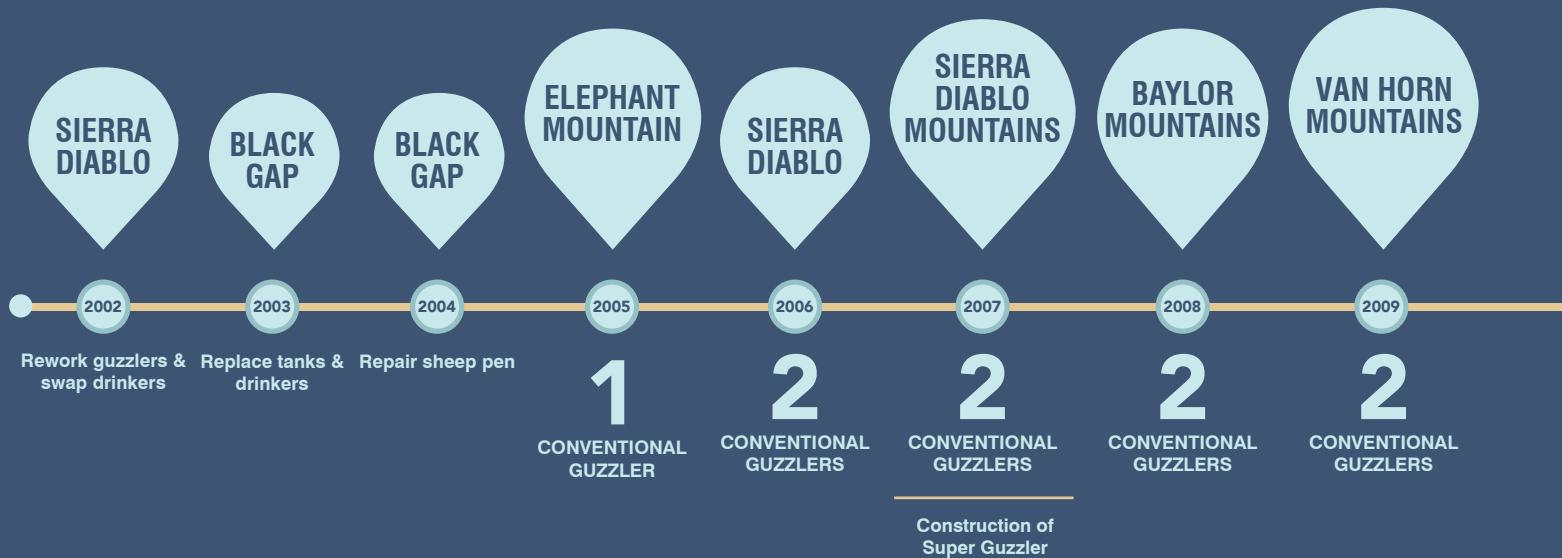
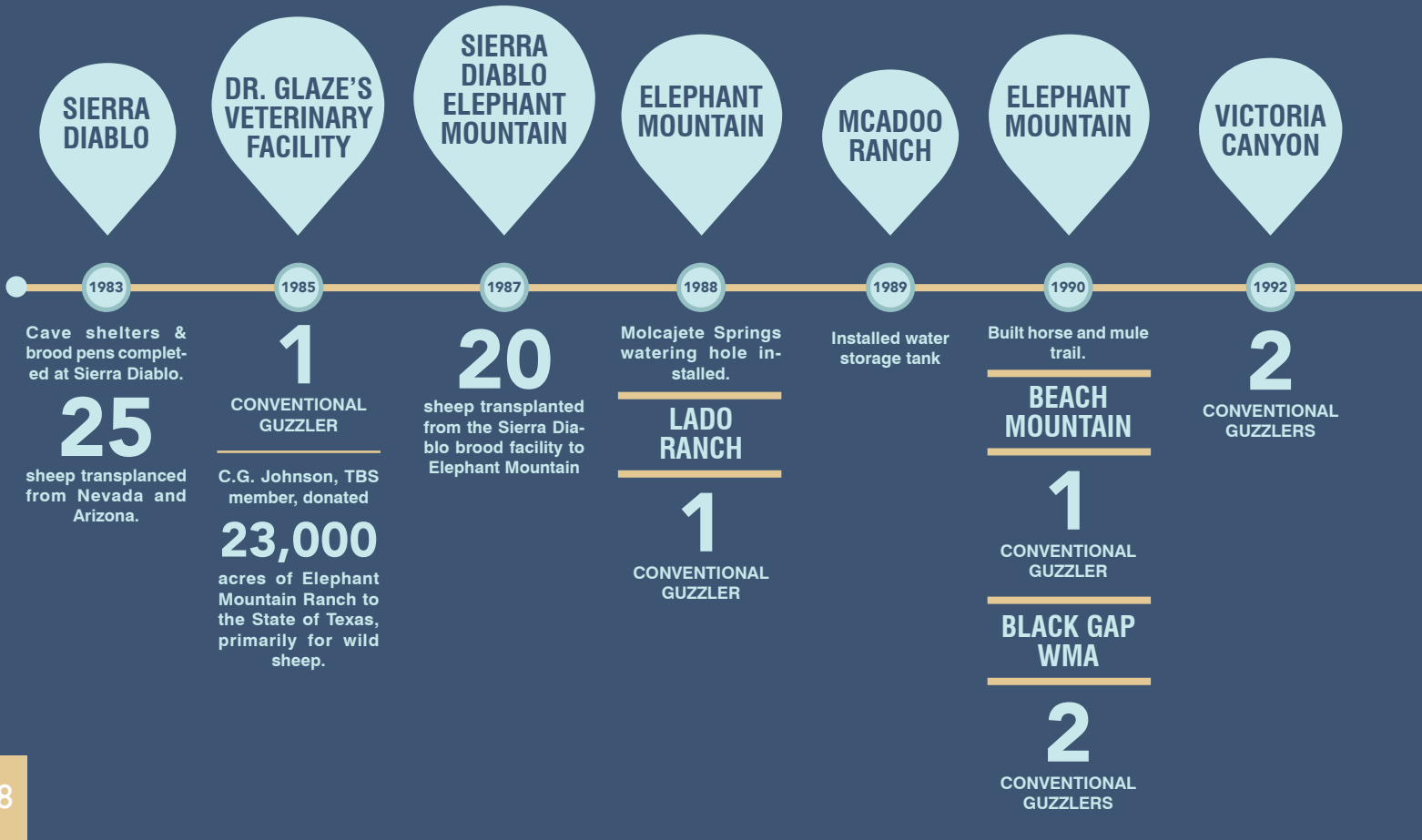
I've been an active member of TBS for a few simple reasons. I am infatuated with desert bighorn sheep and the rugged Trans-Pecos region of Texas in which they live. And I love the people that make up TBS, both our membership and our friends and partners at Texas Parks & Wildlife. The folks in this group will always give their efforts, their time and their resources to the cause of sheep conservation, no matter how high the mountain. That keeps me a member and I hope that pride keeps you a member as well. I dare say there are some sheep right now in Bourland Canyon that appreciate you.

Keep coming to our events and bring your family too! If I don't know you yet, it's my fault and I'll fix that! Please contact me if you ever have a question or comment. I love to talk about TBS!

God bless Texas and God bless Texas bighorns!

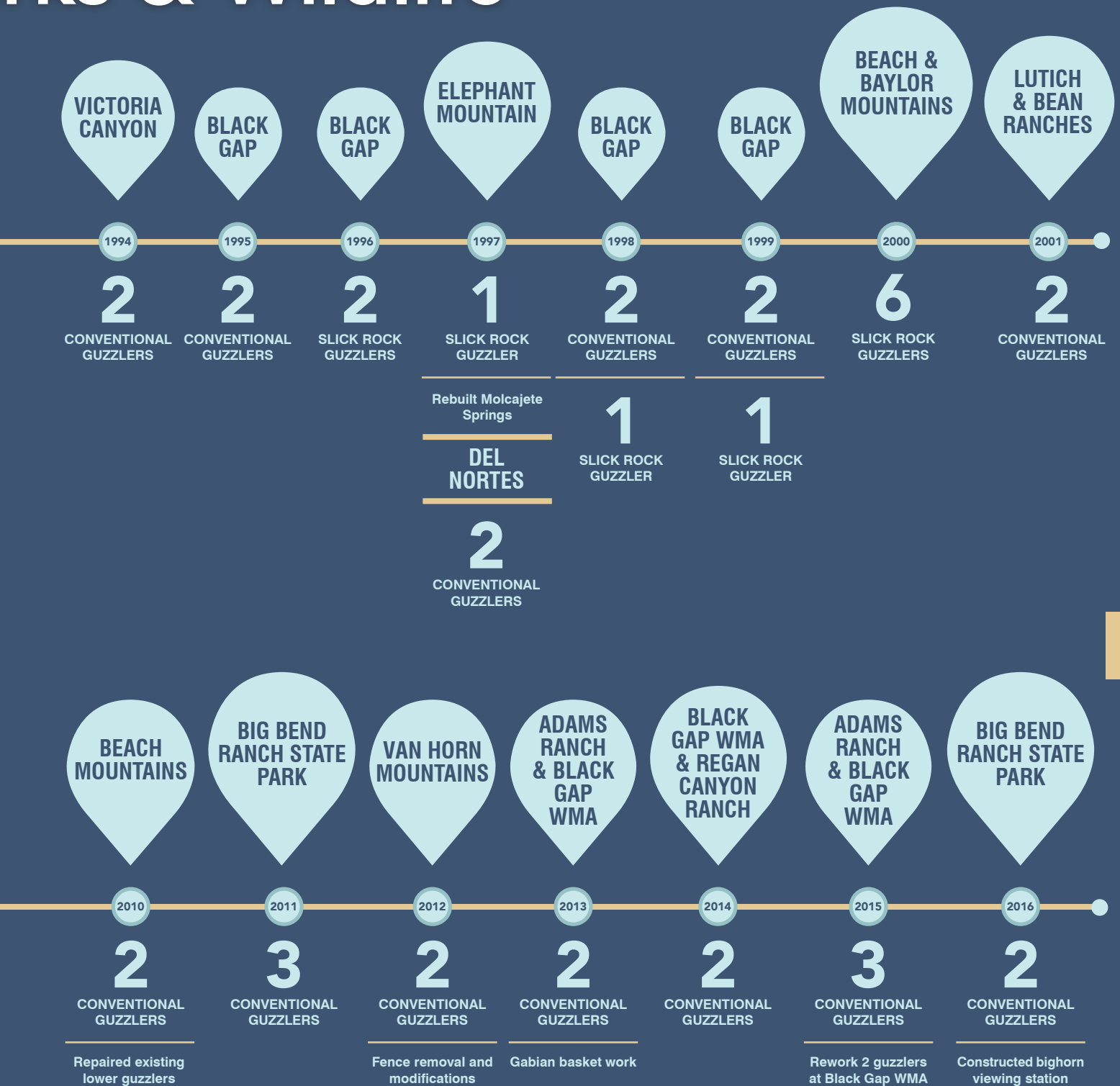
*Jim Payne*  
President

# History Guzzler Co with Texas Pa





# Construction for TBS Parks & Wildlife



**TOTAL 44 CONVENTIONAL GUZZLERS 11 SLICK ROCK GUZZLERS**

## Past President's Letter



Kathy Boone  
Past TBS President

Our Annual Roundup in June at the Fort Worth Stockyards was very exciting culminating with the sale of our Desert Bighorn Sheep Tag for \$100,000. These funds are extremely important to the continuing success of our bighorn program in Texas. It allows us to fund projects in cooperation with Texas Parks and Wildlife, public universities, as well as to enhance habitat on public and private lands in Texas.

I would like to thank the auction committee – Kathy and Steve Bolner for putting together another great auction. And many thanks to you, our membership, for all your wonderful donations and contributions.

My sincere thanks go to you, our membership, for allowing me to serve another two years as your President. It was an honor to have done so and I appreciate the support that was given to me.

I would encourage each of you to get to know your new President, Jim Payne. Jim's enthusiasm and excitement will usher in a new era for TBS.

See you at Tapatio Springs June 9th and 10th, 2017,

*Kathy Boone*

Past President

# A Week in the Field at Sierra Diablo WMA

by Clay Roberts



A WEEK IN THE FIELD AT SIERRA DIABLO

Clay Roberts grew up on a cattle ranch in central Texas where he and his brother, Travis, are the fourth generation to run cattle on the property. He graduated from Texas A&M University in 1996 with a Bachelor's Degree in Wildlife and Fisheries Science and obtained a Master's Degree in WFSC from A&M in 2005. He worked with Ducks Unlimited, Inc. on the Texas Prairie Wetland Project and the East Texas Wetland Projects between his times at A&M. Clay served in the United States Army during the Kosovo conflict with the 3/504 PIR 82nd Airborne Division. His Master's project took him to the Florida Keys to work with endangered Florida Key Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus clavium*). After graduate school he worked in Washington State with the US Fish and Wildlife Service on the Julia Butler Hansen Refuge assisting with the protection and translocation of the endangered Columbian White tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus leucurus*). After which he came to work for Texas Parks and Wildlife and has been the Wildlife Biologist on Sierra Diablo WMA since May 2006. Where he is tasked with the management of the Desert Bighorn Sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni/mexicana*) herd in those mountains as a part of the Trans-Pecos Bighorn Sheep Project in

Texas. He has been married to his wife, Jessica, for 3 years.

I often get asked what I do on an average day at work. The problem with answering that question is there is no typical day on the WMAs. The tasks that we as Trans-Pecos WMA biologist perform are so varied it's almost impossible to give a concise answer: guzzler repairs and maintenance, fencing repair, road work, bighorn sheep/mule deer surveys and harvest recommendations, browse surveys, and on and on. Therefore, I thought I'd give an "amalgamated" overview of a week on Sierra Diablo WMA.

Heading up to Diablo is usually not just a day trip. Typically, I give myself at least three days (sometimes more) to get things done. The drive alone takes about 3.5-5 hours to get to the HQ depending on road conditions; making a minimum of 7 hours' drive time for the round trip. Ergo, I usually make a weeklong trip of it. I have made some

day trips up to the area before and let me tell you I could've be an extra on the "Walking Dead" afterwards.

Monday morning I load up Cruzan (aka "the dingo"), gear, and ice chest and start the pilgrimage to the area. I stop at the grocery store and stock up for the week. Then, start heading west across the desert. Arriving at the HQ around lunch time; I unpack and get situated for the week ahead. Typically, there is about an hour or so of cleaning in the bunkhouse to combat the year round resident's the Cactus Mouse (*Peromyscus eremicus*) and Ring-tailed Cats (*Bassariscus astutus*) effects since my last visit. Then, I go fire up the Jeep Scrambler and start making my rounds to the guzzlers and drinkers that I can drive to. A total of 3 guzzlers, 2 troughs and 10 drinkers are accessible by road on the area. The remaining 10 guzzlers and 20 drinkers are in remote locales and have to be walked to. One, the Victorio Peak guzzler takes about 16 hours (round trip) to walk to and

check; “praying” the whole way up that you have the right parts in your pack to make any repairs that may arise.

Upon arriving at the “super guzzler” I find out the tanks are dry. Tracing the line back I find a “green” spot on the ground and discover a rupture in the fast line. I return to the shop and grab up the hot head, some couplings, the generator, as well as, assorted other tools and head back to the break. In an average year this break would be bad but, considering the extended drought conditions we’ve been in... it’s devastating. The super guzzler is composed of 2 aprons and over 2 miles of fast line which feeds 3 drinkers; it’s really a guzzler on steroids!! All the other guzzlers have a single apron and 2 drinkers within a couple of hundred yards of the aprons. More crucially, it also provides all the water for the southern fifth of the WMA. Looks like I’m going to be hauling water this week on top of the vegetation transects I had planned to do. Luckily, the water buffalo is parked in the shop.

Next morning, I start by hooking up

the water buffalo and hauling it up to the HQ water storage tanks. I hook up the hoses and let the water gravity feed into the 400 gallon buffalo. On average it takes about 4 hours to fill the buffalo so I have time to do some transects close by. I have 16 transects spread out over WMA. The plan for this week was to get the four transects in the bottom of Victorio Canyon knocked out for sure. Each transect takes about 1 hour to complete. These last couple of years, veg transects have been a challenge because of the lack of rain resulting in limited vegetative growth and regrowth; making plant identification in some cases nearly impossible. We use a Daubenmire frame to identify herbaceous species and percent cover and, the line intercept method to classify canopy cover and occurrence of woody species along each transect. Keeping an eye on my watch I head back to the buffalo to start hauling water. Now begins the slow haul to the super guzzler, a trip that takes about 45 minutes to keep sloshing and water lose to a minimum. Pumping into the

guzzler tank is a breeze and fifteen minutes later I’m heading back to the HQ to start the process over again. I can make about 2 trips a day for a total of 800 gallons. It’s a slow but critical process.

Wednesday finds me preparing for my trip into the canyon to complete the veg transects located there. This will be an overnight trip for sure. My camping spot in the bottom of the canyon is at the guzzler located there. The dearth of free standing water in area makes camping at guzzlers a must. Guzzlers are strategically placed on the landscape every 3 miles or so as the crow flies. However, since these guzzlers are placed in areas to be of the most benefit for wildlife, specifically desert bighorn sheep; often times the actual travel distance on the ground is much further. Located approximately 7 miles from the end of the road the hike to the guzzler takes about 2-3 hours. Cruzan is excited to walk...he’s been “helping” me haul water and riding in his “spot” in the jeep but, he’s getting a bit hyper at not getting to stretch his

*The Super Guzzler located on SDWMA. Photo by: TBS.*





*After the Rains on Diablo. C. Roberts Photo*

legs. Once at the guzzler I hang up my hammock and get camp set up under the apron. Learning from experience (spider bite to the face) it's easier and safer to sleep off the ground up at Diablo and the apron provides a ready-made roof. The veg transects are miles a part in the bottom of the canyon and it takes longer to walk to each one than it does to actually "run" each transect. As evening approaches clouds start to build in the west and it looks like rain but, I'm not getting my hopes up. We retire to the "Diablo Waldorf Astoria" and eat supper and do a little reading by head lamp until exhaustion over takes me and I drift off to sleep to the gentle sway of the hammock. Sometime in the middle of the night thunder crashes close by and I awake with a start....short minutes later a down pour like I haven't seen in years rolls into the canyon. Water pours off the apron in sheets during the flashes of lightening. Cruzan and I sit under the apron and watch the rain. It doesn't last long...maybe an hour and it's all over but, the smell of ozone and creosote after the rain are

like a sleeping tonic and I drift back off to sleep in no time. The next morning I pack up camp and head off to finish up the last of the veg transects before heading back to the HQ. The thunder storm has left standing pools of water all along the return trip. Cruzan makes ample use of them splashing, playing and drinking to his heart's delight.

I check the rain gauge at the HQ we got almost 1.5 inches of rain!!! I drive down to the super guzzler and on top of the water I've hauled earlier this week another couple of thousand gallons have been collected. I got the break in the line fixed "just in the nick of time!" This should provide enough water for at least five months with normal usage. Feeling pretty good about what I've gotten accomplished this week and the rain; I walk to the rim to sit and take in the grandeur of my surroundings. On a clear day like this one, I can see Mt. Livermore in the Davis Mountains, the Eagle Mountains, over to Sierra Blanca and as far north as El Capitan in the Guadalupe's from my perch. While glassing the rim I see I'm not the

only one that is enjoying the euphoria caused by the recent rains...mule deer does are foraging on the hills behind me while fawns chase each other around in circles. Then, I see movement out of the corner of my eye and turn...a small group of desert bighorn sheep pop up over the rim and start to wander along the edge. They work their way to a prominent shelf along the rim and start to settle in for the night, surveying their domain from their lofty bedding grounds. As the sun sets in the west, I head back to the Scrambler, with the "dingo" racing me to the Jeep; we head back to the bunkhouse for a hot meal, a shower, and a goodnight's rest.

Friday morning means packing up the bunkhouse, cleaning up, storing all the tools and Scrambler back in the barn and the long road trip back to Alpine. It saddens me to have to leave my high desert retreat. Then, I remember.... next week is a whole new week!!!!!!

# Thoughts on Bighorn Sheep Population Viability and Conservation, Circa 1992

*by Vernon C. Bleich, Ph.D.*

—Dr. Vern Bleich is an independent wildlife biologist who worked for the California Department of Fish and Game for 34 years. He currently resides in Bismarck, ND but remains active in the conservation and management of bighorn sheep and other large mammals inhabiting arid landscapes throughout the western United States. Vern is a member of the Texas Bighorn Society and serves on the TBS Advisory Board; he also serves as a Science Advisor to the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep, and Chairs the Wild Sheep Foundation's Professional Resource Advisory Board. Those that are interested in reading the complete panel discussion can obtain a copy by contacting Vern (vcbleich@gmail.com), or from the Desert Bighorn Council's website (<http://www.desertbighorncouncil.com/transactions/>).

During April 1992 at the 36th meeting of the Desert Bighorn Council in Bullhead City, Arizona, I participated in a panel discussion entitled, "What constitutes a viable population of bighorn sheep?" Other participants included Paul R. Krausman—who moderated the discussion, James A. Bailey, Rob R. Ramey, and Donald Armentrout, each of whom had long-term and extensive involvement in the conservation of bighorn sheep. Part of the stimulus for that panel was the suggestion in a then current publication that the value of bighorn sheep habitat on public lands be established on its probability of maintaining a "viable" population, defined as "one that is self-sustaining with minimal demographic or genetic intervention over the long term."

In that publication, a viable population was defined as one consisting of "approximately 100 sheep, plus or minus 20%, with normal sex and age structure." There has been substantial progress made in the fields of genetics and ecology since 1992, but some basic principles remain inviolate. The stimulus for reviewing that discussion has been the recent emphasis on development of massive solar power facilities in the Mojave and Sonoran deserts, and the implications of those facilities for the conservation of bighorn sheep. Below is a summary of the points I emphasized nearly 25 years ago and are—I am proud to say—positions from which I have not waived.

Beginning in about 1980, conservation strategies have been increasingly linked to an evolutionary approach. Consequently, much thought has focused on the relatively new field referred to as conservation genetics. Certainly, most of us are familiar with the northern elephant seal and the cheetah, both of which are species with extremely low levels of genetic variation that is thought to be the result of historical population "bottlenecks." There is some speculation that low genetic variation is contributing to the decline of mountain sheep in North America.

Conservation geneticists are concerned with the short- and long-term fitness of species. A central focus of the discipline has been inbreeding, and a subsequent loss of genetic variation.

Some conservation genetics models are insular in their development, due either to (1) the biology of the species, which may exhibit low vagility, or (2) the limited preserve size that a species may inhabit. Certainly, the concept of insularity has been applied to the distribution of mountain sheep, but I would emphasize that this thinking has centered primarily on perceptions about the biology of desert-dwelling subspecies of mountain sheep.

In the past, mountain sheep managers have emphasized the perception that mountain sheep now number <2% of their historical population levels, the perception that sheep are restricted in distribution to the rugged habitats of desert mountain ranges, that only a small percentage of males breed during a particular mating season, and the perception that anthropogenic barriers now preclude any opportunity for gene migration among insular populations. Additionally, population genetics theory suggests that a minimum effective population size is necessary for the long-term viability of populations. If that is true and we are, in fact, dealing with truly isolated populations, I cannot be optimistic about the conservation of mountain sheep in an evolutionary sense.

When one examines the distribution of mountain sheep in California, it is quite apparent that the distribution of their primary habitat is insular. However, if one examines juxtaposition

of these insular distributions, in combination with the absence of barriers to potential movement by sheep between inhabited ranges and the heretofore unrecognized vagility of this species, it becomes apparent that the potential for long-term persistence of these populations remains intact. Indeed, movements between mountain ranges are being documented with increasing frequency, and conservation strategies are beginning to emphasize a metapopulation approach to the management of mountain sheep habitat.

In efforts to calculate persistence rates and viability of populations, two schools of thought predominate: one emphasizes genetic problems due, in part, to the deleterious effects of inbreeding, and the other emphasizes losses of populations due to stochastic events, such as drought or disease. I do not wish to dwell on population genetics theory here [remember, this is 1992], except to note that an “acceptable” equilibrium inbreeding coefficient of 0.2 is thought to occur when a population effectively is panmictic. Investigators recently used estimates of effective population sizes for mountain sheep demes in the eastern Mojave Desert of California to calculate that intermountain migration rates ranging from 0.005 to 0.19 migrants per generation were necessary to maintain equilibrium inbreeding coefficients of 0.1, depending on the size of the population comprising each deme. When these values were recalculated to maintain an equilibrium inbreeding coefficient of 0.2, the estimated rates of migration decreased, and ranged from 0.003 to 0.08 migrants per generation. I have no reason to believe that such rates of genetic migration are not feasible, and I conclude that it is premature to dismiss any populations (demes) of mountain sheep as nonviable, if it is not known that they are completely isolated from other demes of this species.

A second concern over population viability revolves around stochastic extinction events, such as those resulting from drought or disease. Recently, an investigator analyzed a number of localized extirpations of mountain sheep, and concluded that populations of less than 50 become extinct in a short time when compared

to larger populations. A point I’d like to make here is that many of the forces that were operating to limit mountain sheep populations 100—or even 50—years ago are no longer important decimating factors. As a result, I am optimistic that persistence rates for these smaller populations are far greater than they were for the periods included in the aforementioned analysis. Consistent with the current tenet that stochastic events probably are of greater immediate concern than are genetic problems (even in small populations) it is my opinion that such factors may well have been primary causes of the high rate of extinction noted previously. Such factors likely included disease epizootics, unregulated meat hunting, usurpation of water sources, habitat destruction, and drought, among others.

This brings us back to the original question, “What is a minimum viable population?” I view all non-isolated populations of mountain sheep potentially as viable [and continue to do so] and argue, from the standpoint of one charged with the conservation of wildlife resources, that we cannot afford to assume otherwise. I believe there is a real danger that political and economic forces will attempt to misuse the scientific literature, and to argue that perceived population viability should be considered when land-use decisions that affect mountain sheep habitat are made. For example, if a deme numbers only 20 animals, some might question its viability, and suggest that the habitat used by those animals could be put to more “constructive” uses. However, if an argument is made that the deme is part of a larger metapopulation, its potential for long-term survival becomes more apparent, and the conservation of its habitat becomes more defensible. Moreover, the potential importance of that particular deme—or the habitat it occupies—to the viability of the metapopulation as a whole suddenly can be emphasized.

Thus, I advocate an extremely conservative approach to addressing the ‘value’ of mountain sheep populations, and to assessing their potential viability. My suggestions center on the following two thoughts. First, each mountain range that is inhabited by mountain sheep should be

treated as one (or, in some cases >1) demographic unit, and its potential to be part of a larger metapopulation should be recognized. Second, all mountain sheep habitat should be managed from the standpoint of a metapopulation; that is, all demes potentially comprising the metapopulation, and potential movement between those demes, must be considered critically important to the persistence and function of the particular metapopulation.

By keeping these points in mind, conservationists have the potential to (1) maintain the long-term genetic health of existing populations; (2) reestablish additional subpopulations (demes) via natural recolonization of vacant habitat; and (3) maintain the likelihood of continued divergence and long-term evolutionary change. These three points represent the highest level of protection that can be afforded to populations, and it is only through the maintenance of those subpopulations that we will ensure metapopulation function and be successful in conserving mountain sheep as a species. Let us not assume that individual populations are nonviable just because they are small in size; instead, let’s assume that they are critically important to the long-term survival of the species, and afford them the protection warranted. Unless “protected areas” and surrounding areas are managed cooperatively to perpetuate the existence of functioning ecosystems across the landscape, the needs for most species of large mammals cannot be met. This situation dictates the need for cooperative, interagency efforts to insure that large tracts of intact ecosystems are maintained in perpetuity. Despite the confounding influences of interagency competition and bureaucratic inertia, no single agency can do this alone; it must be a well-planned, cooperative effort.

# Where Does it End?

*by Steve Price*

16

In 2000, our family residing in Hunt, Texas in the Hill Country decided that we would like to own a Ranch somewhere in the Great State of Texas with the primary emphasis on wildlife. Having been employed in the hunting industry in both Texas and Mexico since the mid-1970s, I basically knew what I was looking for – the question boiled down to: Where?

For the next couple of years we looked diligently around the Lone Star State, (we visited some fine ranches) but we kept coming back to the Trans-Pecos region. I guess in a nutshell, let me put it this way “Once your lungs breathe in the crisp mountain air, your eyes feast on a spring desert bloom while sunsets gently caress your soul with a deafening silence that almost hurts your ears – you’ll finally understand it.” During our negotiations to purchase our ranch a wise old woman from Pecos, Tx once told me “You can always leave west Texas, but it will never leave you.” She was right on – I know, I’ve tried many times.

Eventually in 2002, we purchased the 7 Hearts Ranch located northwest of Van Horn, Texas, in Culberson County. As new land owners we

did our best to improve the wildlife habitat. We developed a detailed game management program with the assistance of the Texas Parks & Wildlife biologist Misty Sumner. This program involved building seven water guzzlers, supplemental feeding, repairing tank dams to catch as much water as possible, limiting the deer harvest as well as increasing the age of harvestable bucks to 6 ½ yrs +. We assisted the

TP&WL in capturing and collaring mature mule deer bucks to study their natural range, taking tissue samples for laboratory analysis of Desert Mule Deer, as well as aging the deer to study antler growth in subsequent years. We also partnered up with the NRCS, the National Resources Conservation Service, under the direction of Gary Fuentes from the Van Horn, Texas field office to spike areas of the Ranch that





needed re-growth for a possible future cattle operation and reduce the effects of erosion. These areas after treatment and timely rains came back strong and proved to be excellent quail habitat and prime fawning cover for the does.

In five years you could see a definite improvement in the overall wildlife scenario. We were seeing muleys in the 180+ B&C class and the blue quail population had tripled. Everything was going fine and we certainly had no intention of selling the Ranch. HOWEVER, all that changed when our neighbor (owner of the Apache Ranch) made us a "once in a lifetime" offer. After several discussions with my family and after much thought and deliberation, we decided to sell. In 2011, after nine years we sold the 7 Hearts Ranch and I certainly thought this is it – we're out of the ranching business! UNTIL – my son Gabe said, "Dad, there's an old ranch that just came on the market in Hudspeth County that we ought to look at." As we were tying up loose ends on the 7 Hearts I figured it wouldn't hurt to look at some new country – southwest of Van

Horn, Texas, in the Eagle Mountains. Besides, I felt nothing could compare to the one we were leaving – so, why not? Well, that one "last trip" was the beginning of a new adventure for our family. We made arrangements with the owner to view the ranch on a frigid day in late January 2011. Within the first hour of bouncing around in his Jeep, both myself and my son knew this was a very special place – very much different than our old ranch and yet it was also similar in many ways. We loved the place and ended up doing a "1031" tax deferred land exchange and purchased the new ranch in February 2011, which we named the Diamond Eagle. Here's where things got very interesting.

My son, Gabe, trailered out some horses in March 2011 to do a "walk-about" on our new ranch so we could familiarize ourselves with the terrain. The elevation varied from 4100 ft. up to 5900 ft. with the topography varying from switchbacks to canyons, mountains and flats. We had just unloaded the horses, saddled up when out of nowhere an Airforce 130 military transport appeared flying about 500

ft. off the ground. The huge roaring propeller engines spooked the horses and after we gathered our gear it took about an hour to settle them down. Once up in the saddle, we had ridden about an hour when Gabe suddenly stopped, pointed up at a cavern in the mountain about 350 yards away and said, "Dad, look what's up there." I will never forget it. There, standing magnificently side-by-side, were four adult Big Horn rams staring at us. At that very moment I realized this was THEIR home too. The sheep looked intently at us as if they were saying "Welcome – please take care of it – we live here." We just stood there motionless looking at each other. Thankfully, I had brought along my Canon camera with 40x zoom and took some incredible pictures that accompany this article. After admiring the sheep and their surroundings, we slowly turned our horses and walked away. (The previous owner had stated that on rare occasions did they see sheep – I naturally assumed he was referring to Aoudad sheep.)

West Texas had just experienced 9 years of what is considered "wet





years." Tanks were full, hillsides were green, livestock and wildlife were in excellent condition. It's a time when "livestockman" are considered good ranchers. Then suddenly, as we all know nature has a way of doing things that are not always pleasant, we experienced a hard 3-year drought (2011-2014). Tanks dried up, springs stopped running, wells went dry and grass became parched. Devastating wildfires sprang up all over the State. Wildlife and livestock were stressed to the limit. It was a very serious situation.

The Diamond Eagle Ranch was not exempt from this catastrophe. The bottom line – LITTLE or NO WATER is a guaranteed recipe for disaster. Our deer numbers dropped by 50%. Quail were literally non-existent. Migratory birds were far and few in between. No rodents, rabbits and very few varmint were observed. Big Horn Sheep sightings had dropped significantly to only a few. I CAN TELL YOU THIS AND YOU CAN TAKE IT TO THE BANK: WATER IS THE SOURCE OF ALL LIFE ON A RANCH. Be prepared when hard times set in – because sooner or later, inevitably they will.

In June 2011, I met Mr. Philip Dickerson, Texas Parks & Wildlife Technical Guidance for West Texas out of the Midland office. As we drove around the Diamond Eagle, I remember him saying – "There's no doubt you know how to grow 'Big' deer, but my concern is what is best for the wildlife in the long term. What natural feed does your ranch produce annually to consistently support a healthy, thriving herd? What are you doing to control erosion? What are your plans for varmint/predator control? Most importantly, what is your plan to get the most benefit out of your annual rainfall? Does the wildlife have access to some form of water during dry conditions?"

Anyone can be a good manager when times are good – it's those

who prepare for the bad times that ultimately are ahead of the game. So, here's what we did:

With future livestock production and wildlife in mind, we dug 3 more large earthen tanks to catch precious run-off water. We put in 9 miles of water line to remote areas with 14 drinkers to cover designated radius of acreage. At each drinker we put "wildlife ladders" into and out of every trough to prevent smaller animals and birds from drowning in the troughs and contaminating the water as well as covering the floats so livestock, elk and deer wouldn't destroy

your waterings up and functioning properly. It takes a long-term personal commitment, but it is extremely rewarding when you see the results.

We still need to put a couple of guzzlers in remote areas in the higher elevations accessible only by rugged ATVs or helicopter. I can tell you first hand that these improvements to the water situation have had a huge impact in the overall well-being of the wildlife. The mule deer are returning in healthy numbers. Quail populations have literally exploded – and Big Horn Sheep sightings are definitely on the rise.



them. We upgraded the old windmills to solar pumps in an effort to prevent downtime. The older windmills were always breaking down (especially under high wind conditions) or needing maintenance to keep water flowing. On the other hand, if you can keep your windmills up – if the wind is blowing (which it usually does in west Texas) they are producing water day or night. We put in four 2,500 gallon poly tanks to store water for times when a mill went down or there was a problem with the water lines or troughs. Let me assure you that it is not an easy task to keep

I have come to the realization that although your name may be recorded at the County Courthouse as a property owner, the truth is, it's a privilege to be designated as a "steward" of the land, charged with the ultimate responsibility of taking care of the land and all who inhabit it. There have been others here before us and there definitely will be others after us. Maybe Robert Earl Keen said it best, "The Road Goes On Forever And The Party Never Ends" – not a bad path to follow – not bad at all. Besides, who really wants it to end anyway?

*have a story to share?*

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# West Texas Aoudad Hunt



As long as I can remember, it has been my dream to hunt a Free Range Aoudad in West Texas. So when this opportunity was presented to me, I knew I couldn't pass up the chance to fulfill my dream! My hunt actually began a month prior to the actual hunt. After talking to Jim Breck Bean, he explained I should be prepared to shoot up to 500 yards. "500 Yards!" I knew I would need to practice.

Valentine TX Post Office/ Gas Station. The drive out West was stunning. The West Texas Region, like most of the state, has seen phenomenal rainfall this year.

After a quick introduction and a few words, I followed Jim Breck and Tye out to the CE Miller Ranch. The ranch is several miles off of the highway. It was like stepping in a time capsule & heading back in time to the "Old West".

mountain goat nervous! The effort was worth the reward and the scenery was breathtaking. I believe people who live in Texas their entire life do not know that such beauty exists in their home state.

That first afternoon, we drove and glassed the ranch with no sightings of Aoudad. However, we did see more quail than I have seen in my entire life. The record rainfall allowed multiple hatches



*View from the Mountains*



*Looking back on Miller Headquarters from the Mountains*

I am used to shooting 150 yards and closer in the South Texas Brush country all my life. I already owned the rifle for the job chambered in 7mm Rem. Mag, but it needed an optic upgrade. I selected the proper scope with a custom ballistic turret and off to the range for practice. The custom ballistic turret performed as advertised and I felt confident about shooting longer than normal distances as Jim Breck had mentioned.

Jim Breck and I agreed on a date for the hunt, which would be late August 2015. Honestly, I was a bit apprehensive about hunting that time of year as the West Texas Heat can be brutal! We were in luck though, & an August Cool Front hit the area with Highs in the low 80's and night time temps in the high 50's. I made plans to meet Jim Breck at the

Arriving the day prior to the actual start of the hunt, Jim Breck and Bill didn't waste any time... "Let's go to the rifle range, make sure you're sighted in, and go hunting!" Bill has a long range shooting course and puts on a shooting school during Spring Time on the Ranch. The shooting range was amazing. After shooting my rifle & insuring it was sighted in, we headed off to the mountains in search of my aoudad.

The ranch is nestled at the base of the Sierra Vieja Mountain Range. The land surrounding the headquarters is somewhat flat, more like Pronghorn Country, while the back part of the ranch is definitely rugged Desert Sheep Country! During our ascent of the mountains, we took the Polaris Ranger up trails that would make a

& made for a bumper Quail Crop. With darkness fast approaching, we headed back to the headquarters for some great food & stories. I really enjoyed listening to Bill, Jim Breck, and Tye that evening... as these guys need their own TV show!

The next morning started well before daylight. Two Polaris Rangers were stocked with water and all the necessary equipment to make it through the day. We split into two groups in order to cover more ground. This would increase our odds of locating the elusive Aoudad. In the early morning darkness, Jim Breck found a great vantage point to glass for critters. As the sun came up, Jim Breck said, "There's some sheep". These guys are unbelievable at spotting! In the South Texas Brush, you don't normally see deer at 300 yards much



top: Bill cooking Kobe Wagyu steaks over an open flame  
bottom: Jim Breck Spotting Aoudad over 1 mile away

less a mile! So when Jim Breck spotted the sheep well over a mile away, I was amazed. Jim Breck calmly asked me exactly what I was looking for in a ram & I replied, "just excited to be on the hunt, but something over 28" would be really nice!" Jim Breck told me that there was at least one nice ram in the group on the ridge and that we should go after it. What was I to say? "Let's go, you're the expert!"

We were able to drive the Ranger within 1379 yards away & that's when we started the stalk. I distinctly remember Jim Breck telling me "Unless you can make that shot, we need to get closer & go get 'em". Let me tell you, these

guys did everything to ensure we were successful. Jim Breck had a spotter stay at the Ranger to communicate where the sheep were at all times while we closed in the distance making our stalk.

Looking back, I would have left everything in the Ranger except my rifle and water. Even the lightest item feels like lead hanging on your body as we cut across those deep draws. I pride myself for staying in shape, but let me tell you I was no match for Jim Breck. He's part Mountain Goat and part Marathon Runner. I was huffing and puffing and Jim Breck wasn't even breathing hard! He was nice enough to let me catch my

breath, as we finally got into position behind a large rock. All this time, Jim Breck was keeping communication with the spotter. Jim Breck would step out see where the sheep were, signal back, signal to move, and then finally the sheep made their way into view! There were about 10 total sheep with a couple young Mule Deer bucks trailing behind them. They had no idea we were set up behind the large rock. It was the perfect set up! Great Rams at only 140 yards! Jim Breck pointed out three and said, "Take whichever one you like."

There was one in particular that had beautiful blonde chaps. That was the one



Early 1900's Army Outpost  
located on the ranch

for me! I placed the crosshairs on his shoulder & squeezed the trigger. "Clean Miss!" "OH NO!!" I quickly chambered another round & squeezed the trigger again. The Big Ram rolled after this shot. After all this ruckus, the remaining sheep and Mule Deer stood there confused. They had no idea what had just happened or where it had come from. Finally, I had fulfilled a longtime dream...a free range Aoudad! Poor Jim Breck is probably still seeing a chiropractor to this day after the bear hug I gave him! But wait, the story is not over! Amongst all of the celebration, the Ram was back on his feet and running. OH NO!! There goes my dream! It took three more shots to take him down for good. You talk about highs and lows packed into a few minutes! This was a day I will never forget. When we walked up on the ram, he was bigger than I imagined both in body and horn. Bill estimated he was 400-450 lbs. and his horns measured 31" and 32" in length. What a beautiful trophy!

After taking care of my ram and having an opportunity to come down from the "West Texas High" just a little bit... the experience just kept getting better. We were blessed to spend some time with Bill touring the ranch the rest of that day and

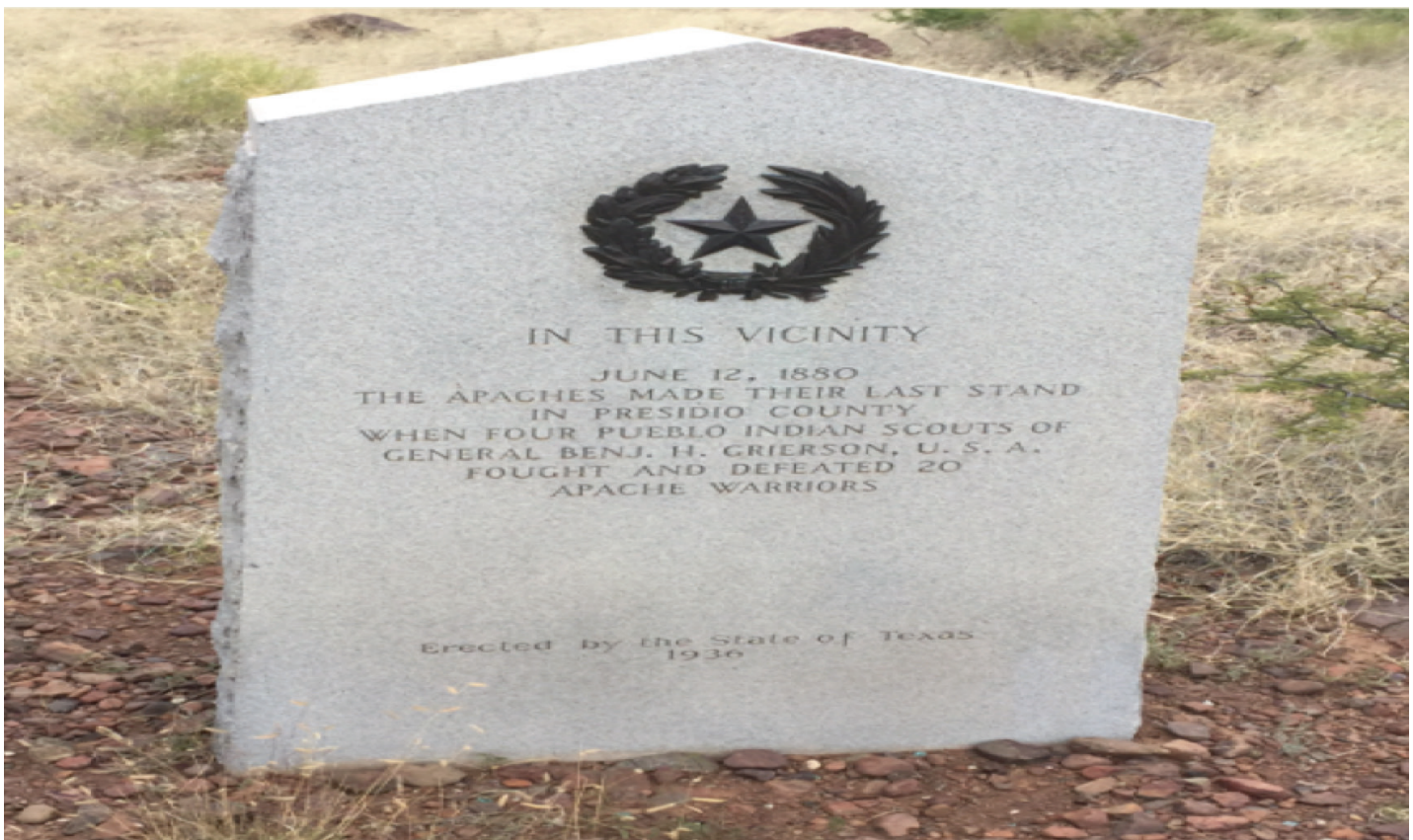
learned so much of the Rich History. Bill is a Rancher/Historian/Biologist all rolled into one. Time spent having Bill walk us through the Ranch Story was awesome!

I would personally like to thank the Bean Ranch and Miller Ranch for making this possible. Also, The guiding of High West Outfitters Jim Breck Bean,

Tye Vick, Jim Breck's Uncle & friend who did a great job spotting for us and the hospitality of Bill and Jill Miller. I'm looking forward to receiving my half-life mount with native habitat from Tye Vick with Desert Taxidermy. This was not only a great hunt, but a great experience with some awesome West Texas Folks.



*Walking through the old Army Barracks*



*Historical Marker Located at the Outpost*

# Lone Star Desert Bighorns

Saving North America's most elusive species.

Considered by hunters to be the hardest of all North American wild sheep to collect, desert bighorns inhabit raw, brutally rough desert country. *Ovis canadensis* was wiped out of most of its traditional habitat by the middle of last century because of susceptibility to diseases and parasites carried by domestic sheep, unregulated market hunting, and competition with domestic livestock, and today, opportunities to hunt are extremely rare and prized. In one lifetime we've gone from the scene of Jack O'Connor, the father of sheep hunting, who used to shoot multiple specimens during a single hunt in Mexico, to Craig Boddington, who has shot exactly two desert bighorns in his lifetime and who will most likely never shoot another.

Uniquely adapted to hot, arid environs, desert sheep can go without drinking for months at a time, obtaining the moisture necessary for survival from vegetation, a source called metabolic water. They readily adapt to extremes in temperature, a necessity in desert country where temperatures can fluctuate 50 degrees or more in a day. Their primary defenses against predators are exceptional eyesight and the ability to climb seemingly up sheer vertical faces, but unfortunately, neither is a defense against disease.

Males in their prime can weigh up to 280 pounds, and like their Rocky Mountain brothers, their horns are massive and blocky compared to their northern thin-horned cousins, the Dall's and Stone's wild sheep.

Originally spread from Baja California across Mexico's north-

ern mountains and north through Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Colorado, Utah, California, and Nevada, desert bighorn sheep made up a healthy chunk of the 1.5 to 2 million bighorns estimated to have inhabited North America during pre-Columbian times. In the southern Utah country, petroglyph and pictograph hunting scenes depict more bighorn sheep than deer, indicating that they were once the primary game species.

Today, small bands of sheep are found in all of the states originally inhabited by desert bighorns. They were virtually extinct from Texas, Colorado, and Utah by the World War II era, but thanks to rigorous recovery efforts begun in southwestern Arizona in 1939, since the 1960s, numbers have trended up from 8,000 to over 23,000.

Where populations have recovered to the point that there are surplus mature rams, hunting permits are given by lottery or auctioned off, the proceeds going to fund conservation efforts. Due to the extreme rarity of such opportunities, auction tags tend to bring exorbitant amounts: \$50,000 is considered a great price, and tags for coveted areas known for big genetics sometimes bring double that.

Anti-hunters tear their hair out over the practice of hunting desert bighorns, claiming that doing so goes directly against reason. However, it is a fact that no organization contributes even a small percentage as much to wild sheep recovery efforts—either financially or in volunteer work—as do hunters. Preserving a huntable population for posterity is a powerful motivator, and claim what they may, anti-hunters simply don't love and respect the animals on the same plane as do hunters.

Good conservation can result in healthy populations of desert sheep in historic habitat, such as this band in a remote region of Texas.





## INSIDE THE RECOVERY SCENE

I recently had the opportunity to participate in a reestablishment effort on the Adams Ranch on Texas's border with Mexico. Sandwiched between the Maderas del Carmen mountains in Mexico and the Big Bend National Park and the Black Gap Wildlife Management Area in Texas, the Adams Ranch is 10,000 acres laid smack dab across a historic travel corridor connecting the three sheep populations. Currently almost devoid of sheep other than the occasional wandering individual, the Adams Ranch offers prime sheep habitat.

A recovery effort on the Adams Ranch in Texas will connect three different desert sheep populations via a historic travel route, benefitting all.

Hopes are that establishing a viable population there will tie the several different demographics together, enabling them to exchange genes and move more naturally in their historic habitat.

The Adams Ranch is not public land. It's been purchased by CEMEX, a conservation- and restoration-minded cement company with massive holdings in Mexico and the U.S., and put into a conservation easement to benefit wildlife, specifically desert sheep.

Texas Parks and Wildlife's Desert Bighorn Sheep Program Leader Froylan Hernandez points out that such landowner cooperation is critical. "There is still a vast amount of sheep habitat within private property that is still unoccupied," he said. "And whether we capture bighorns on private land or release bighorns onto sheep habitat situated within private land, landowner support is a must. Without their support and cooperation, progress will essentially cease, and we will be limited to only work within state land."

Spearheaded by the Texas Bighorn Society (TBS), volunteers from the Dallas Safari Club (DSC), biologists from Texas Parks and Wildlife, and folks from the TBS gathered to build and repair guzzlers. Much of the Adams Ranch is devoid of natural water sources, and a good guzzler will, with only a single inch of rainfall per year, supply local wildlife with water.

Materials for such guzzlers cost from \$7,500 to \$12,000, depending on location. For this event, the DSC made a contribution to the TBS sufficient to build a complete guzzler, and I accompanied DSC's Steve Wagner, photographing the project and assisting the adept crowd building it.

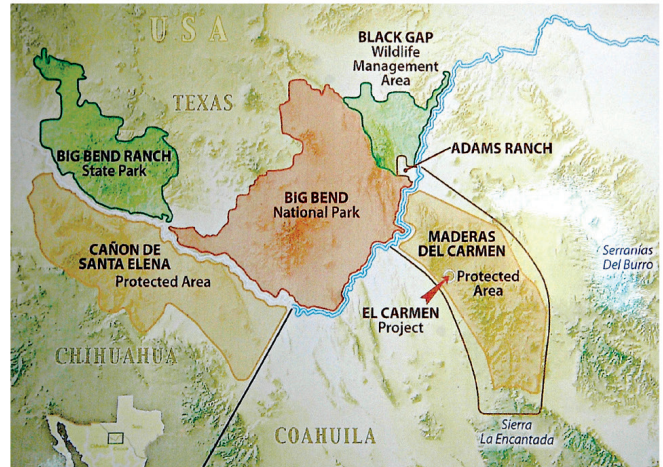
I expected much of the crowd to have experience hunting sheep, but I couldn't have been more wrong. Of the 100-plus volunteers, only three had hunted bighorns.

Over dinner I questioned TBS president Kathy Boone about the rest. "Are these folks hunters?"

"Absolutely," she said. "Almost all of them."

I spoke with several, including Bill Scott, secretary of the organization. "I don't hunt anymore," he said. "But I used to. Never got to hunt sheep, and I never will, but I want to be sure that if my grandson's grandson wants to hunt sheep, they will be there to hunt."

With three brand-new guzzlers completed, the group of volunteers headed north to the Black Gap area to repair existing guzzlers while biologist Clay Brewer took Wagner and me to the superbly successful Elephant Mountain Wildlife Management Area for a look at the pride of Texas: a bighorn population so successful that the state fills most of its transplant needs from it.



Although desert sheep can survive long periods without water, guzzlers help populations flourish and benefit other species from quail to mule deer.

For many years, Brewer worked for Texas Parks and Wildlife, heading up sheep-recovery projects. Currently, he serves as the Wild Sheep Working Group Chair for the Western Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA). According to Boone, he's likely the most knowledgeable bighorn sheep expert in Texas. As we made the three-hour drive to the Elephant Mountain WMA, I peppered him with questions.

"Does Texas still bring sheep in from other states?" I asked.

"Not really," he responded. "We have a 'clean' population of desert sheep—no disease—and frankly, we're afraid to get sheep from Nevada, Arizona, or wherever any more. We don't want to risk infecting our sheep. Plus, we pretty much supply our needs with captures here in the state now. We've captured close to 200 sheep from Elephant Mountain alone."

Over 1,500 desert sheep now inhabit Texas, mirroring population estimates from the late 1800s. A man named Butch Carson was employed by the Texas government in the early part of the last century and spent 22 years studying desert sheep. By the early 1940s he estimated only about 150 wild sheep remained. Railroad and mining camp meat hunters had taken a massive toll, and that coupled with disease carried by domestic sheep put bighorns in danger. Twenty years later, wild sheep were extinct in Texas.

Brewer has glassed from the same ridges, slept in the same caves, and studied desert sheep in the same way that Carson did. Before Brewer's time, efforts to breed desert bighorns in a 427-acre enclosure at Black Gap failed due to disease. The remnants were shuffled to an 18-acre pasture in the Sierra Diablos in the 1970s. Success exploded when sheep were

brought from Utah, Nevada, and Arizona to four advanced, 10-acre brood facilities on Elephant Mountain in 1987.

"Do you think that Texas can viably support more than 1,500 sheep?" I asked.

"Sure," Brewer said. "I think 3,000 sheep would do just fine here. It's a big state...plenty of room."

"What about aoudad? Do they compete?"

"I hate aoudad," he growled. "They're very hard on desert sheep. For starters, they carry 11 different potential disease threats. More importantly, they compete for habitat. Aoudad are a lot more aggressive than desert sheep. I've watched aoudad rams haze bighorns, pushing them away from water and feed."

"Hunting aoudad is probably the closest you can come to hunting desert bighorns," Brewer said. "Same habitat, same hunting methods. But if we want sheep to survive, we've got to keep the aoudad down." I couldn't argue with that.

I asked about natural predators. "Mountain lions are the worst, but there are lots of other predators," he said. "Golden eagles, bobcats. I once observed a golden eagle flying off with a lamb in its claws."

We arrived at Elephant Mountain. Almost immediately, glassing from the gravel road around its base, Brewer found a band of ewes and lambs perched atop a giant boulder below a cliff face.

Brewer took Wagner and me up the mountain, a rare privilege. In the rugged cliffs and broken pockets under the top of the domed, mesa-like mountain, we found rams. In all, we saw 29 different rams, several Brewer estimated would go 170-plus, well over the magic 165-inch minimum that qualifies for Boone & Crockett.

Seemingly taunting us to stay, the Texas sun glared from the west as we left Elephant Mountain. I wanted nothing more than to make camp and climb among the cliffs and ledges in tomorrow's dawn, packing a long lens and shooting desert rams with the only tool I could legally trigger.

"I WANT TO BE SURE THAT  
IF MY GRANDSON'S  
GRANDSON WANTS TO  
HUNT SHEEP, THEY WILL  
BE THERE TO HUNT."

It's strangely logical that North America's most elusive species is also probably its most fragile. I've been accruing points in Utah's draw for well over a decade, but even if I'm very lucky, I don't have a prayer of drawing until I'm in my sixties. But it doesn't matter. I've never hunted sheep, but like the good folks volunteering their time and skills to preserve desert bighorns in Texas, I don't have to have hunted one to be an enthusiast.

One can dream and while dreaming can get involved in efforts that ensure that our grandson's grandsons will be able to hunt sheep. ①

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# ROUNDUP PHOTO ALBUM

| June 10-11, 2016 | Thank you to everyone for attending! | Fort Worth, TX |

As TBS members assembled in Fort Worth last June for our annual Roundup, there was a feeling that it was to be a special weekend.

The venues were quintessential Cow Town; Friday night at Coopers Barbeque with good Texas "Que" and all the fixins, and Saturday night at Club 81 with gigantic steaks and baked potatoes and plenty of room to circulate. Owner, and TBS member, Don Jury was a wonderful host, even providing horse carriage rides running from the hotel to the events.

The TBS membership was excited, as well over one hundred

registered for the weekend and began their travels. TBS' Auction Committee, headed by Co-Chairs Steve and Kathy Boner, had assembled tremendous auction items for both nights, with the crown jewel being the 2016 Texas Governor's Tag for a trophy desert bighorn sheep hunt. The TPWD Trans-Pecos staff members once more graciously volunteered to display each item during the live auctions, and long-time professional auctioneer Forbes Meadows was once more ready to excite the crowd and raise big money for Texas sheep.

When it all came together, it happened like the reunion gala it really

is, and with a spirit and heart that you only find in Texas! The Governor's Tag sold for a near record price and the Friday and Saturday night auctions combined for a near record total in revenue. Everyone had a blast. Out in far West Texas, we think the sheep heard us all!

We look forward to seeing everyone again in June 2017 at Tapatio Springs Resort in the Texas Hill Country, where we'll all "round-up" and make noise again.













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