**Northern San Juans Bighorn Citizen Science Project Newsletter**

**Number 1, April/May 2020**

This bimonthly newsletter is written by the Northern San Juan chapter of Great Old Broads for Wilderness to inform Ouray County residents about the Colorado Bighorn Sheep Monitoring project in the Northern San Juans. This citizen science project was startedin coordination with Mountain Studies Institute and other partner organizations. **Send an email to [bighorncitizenscience@gmail.com](mailto:bighorncitizenscience@gmail.com" \t "_blank) if you'd like to subscribe to this newsletter.**

**What is the issue?** Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep are at risk of developing respiratory disease contracted from domestic sheep that graze on public land. Effective separation of domestic sheep and goats from wild sheep is the only currently available management solution for preventing or minimizing disease transmission.

**What are the local bighorn herds?** There are 2 main bighorn populations around Ouray County, each with inter-connected sub-herds. The Cow Creek/Wetterhorn herds in Game Management Unit (GMU) S-21 range from south of Engineer Pass then north into the Uncompahgre and Wetterhorn basins and the Cow Creek drainage, and also west across the Sneffels Range towards Sawpit. The Lake Fork/Pole Mtn herds in GMU S-33 range from Red Mountain Pass to Lake City and south to Pole Creek Mountain. These herds are especially important because they are **Tier 1** herds – mostly indigenous to the area. The definition of Tier 1 is > 100 animals for > 90% of the years since 1986, with supplemental releases of < 50 animals total in the past; Tier 1populations likely have maintained the greatest genetic diversity. The S-21 herd is one of the few remaining mostly indigenous bighorn herds in Colorado while the S-33 bighorns are also indigenous but have received some augmentation. Recent years have seen a decline from an estimated 400 total bighorns in S-21 and S-33 in 2013 to a 2015 estimate of 305 total bighorns.

**Where can I find more info?**Mountain Studies Institute (MSI) has been coordinating a citizen science effort to help the federal agencies gain more information about the presence of bighorns near active grazing allotments in SW Colorado and the presence of stray domestic sheep in bighorn home ranges. Within Ouray County there is an active sheep grazing allotment in upper Bear Creek, and surrounding Ouray County there are active allotments to the south (Red Mountain Pass and south, both sides of the highway), to the east(American Flats above Bear Creek, and then south), and to the west (south of the Sneffels range from Telluride towards Sawpit). The MSI website has an interactive map that shows the overall bighorn range as well as domestic sheep grazing allotments.

Mountain Studies Institute Bighorn info: [http://www.mountainstudies.org/bighorn](http://www.mountainstudies.org/bighorn" \t "_blank)

**Below is an example map from MSI site:**

Legend: Pink is bighorn range, yellow is BLM domestic sheep grazing allotments, tan is USFS domestic sheep grazing allotments

**What can I do to help?**If you see bighorns, please take a picture with your phone and report via the iNaturalist app. You can take a picture with your camera separately and later upload, or you can take a picture within the app itself. Please make sure your phone has gps enabled and also that the camera can use the gps location service. If you see domestic sheep in the high country, please also report via the iNaturalist app. The observations are monitored by Mountain Studies Institute, although anyone can set up a subscription with iNaturalist to receive observations.

iNaturalist info: [https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/san-juan-mountains-rocky-mountain-bighorn-sheep-monitoring](https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/san-juan-mountains-rocky-mountain-bighorn-sheep-monitoring" \t "_blank)

Send an email to [bighorncitizenscience@gmail.com](mailto:bighorncitizenscience@gmail.com" \t "_blank) if you need help with iNat set-up.

**Bighorn news:**Here's a link to some recent news about an allotment retirement negotiation south of here:[https://durangoherald.com/articles/319834](https://durangoherald.com/articles/319834" \t "_blank)

**Future issue topics:** Info on where to hike or jeep to help, what are especially helpful observations (timing), trailhead signage, other resources, related news.

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Thanks for reading! Jennifer Cram, Northern San Juan chapter of Great Old Broads for Wilderness