

Restoring bighorn sheep

Bighorn sheep capture and transplant operations this week in eastern Oregon are continuing decades-long efforts to restore this rare native animal to its historic range.

Since the first California bighorn sheep were brought from Williams Lake, BC, Canada in 1954, the population has grown to 3,500-3,700 among herds in southeast Oregon. Northeast Oregon's Rocky Mountain sheep have grown to about 800 since the first successful transplant of 40 animals from Jasper National Park, Canada in 1971.

ODFW's yearly capture and transplant operations help thin too-large herds, supplement herds that need more numbers and increase genetic diversity. This year, efforts focused on reducing the size of the I-84 herd. A total of 26 animals from the herd were relocated to the Diablo Mountain and Cogan Buttes herds in Lake County.

ODFW also captured seven Rocky Mountain sheep in the Lookout Mountain Unit and transported them to Washington state as part of the Hells Canyon Initiative, a joint effort by state and federal agencies and sportsman groups to restore bighorn sheep in the area.

During the capture operations last week, a helicopter was used to locate sheep before they were captured using a net fired out of the helicopter from a specially designed gun. Once captured, the sheep were blindfolded and restrained to calm them, then hoisted in the air by the helicopter and taken to a location where ODFW biologists and veterinarians processed the animals. Each bighorn sheep was disease-tested, and many were fitted with a GPS transmitter so their movements can be tracked. Volunteers from the Oregon Foundation for North American Wild Sheep (Oregon FNAWS) also assisted in the operation.

After completing the I-84 sheep capture operation, ODFW moved to southeast Oregon to disease-test and collar nearly 60 sheep in Whitehorse Unit. ODFW will be stepping up surveys and disease-sampling in herds in Oregon's southeast corner (Whitehorse and Owyhee Units) due to disease concerns.

A strain of pneumonia from a previous outbreak in Nevada's wild sheep is now affecting wild sheep in the Whitehorse Unit. Testing of sheep in the Rattlesnake and 10-mile area of the Whitehorse Unit has

confirmed the strain is one that led to a loss of sheep in Nevada's Santa Rosa Mountains in 2003-04.

"These bacteria can persist in sheep populations over long periods of time, even decades, and move long distances and across state boundaries," said Dr. Colin Gillin, ODFW wildlife veterinarian.

The Owyhee Unit is experiencing a more current disease outbreak after a new strain of *Mycoplasma ovipneumonia* (M.ovi), the respiratory pathogen that can cause pneumonia, was detected in this herd in late 2015. ODFW's mid-December 2015 helicopter surveys detected 50-60 percent fewer sheep in the Owyhee unit than in March 2015. Samples testing positive for the pathogen have come from hunter-harvested sheep on both sides of the Owyhee Canyon (from Leslie Gulch to Hole in the Ground, a distance of 37 river miles).

Further monitoring will help determine the extent of the outbreak and whether the disease has run its course or if more sheep are getting sick or dying.

"Our biggest concerns at this point is the level of infection, how prevalent the bacteria is in our herds, and whether we can devise a



PHOTO BY BRENT MCGREGOR

Sisters photographer had a close encounter with bighorn sheep in the Steens Mountain area.

management strategy to mitigate the effects of a pneumonia outbreak," said Gillin.

Due to the outbreak and concern that hunting opportunity could be poor, ODFW is cancelling bighorn sheep hunting in the Owyhee Unit for 2016. In recent years, the unit has been offering 10 bighorn sheep tags spread across three hunts.

Any hunter who has already applied for this hunt as a first choice may cancel the application for a refund, make their second choice sheep hunt their first choice, or change their application. See page 14 of the Oregon Big Game Regulations for details or call ODFW Licensing at 503-947-6101.

Sport hunters have been

instrumental in restoring bighorn sheep in Oregon. ODFW's annual auction and raffle of special bighorn sheep tags have generated thousands of dollars for their management and for research here in Oregon. Groups like Oregon FNAWS have also contributed money and time.

Bighorn sheep are one of the rarest game mammals in

Oregon today. Fewer than 100 bighorn sheep tags were offered to hunters last year on a "once-in-a-lifetime" hunt basis. ODFW also auctions and raffles off a bighorn sheep tag each year at events sponsored by sportsmen conservation groups; proceeds from the sales benefit the management of bighorn sheep.

SISTERS Entertainment/Arts/Events

Wed. ~ Jan. 27

The Open Door Live Music with Keelan Donovan & Megan Davies 6 to 8 p.m. For more information call 541-549-6076 or go online to opendoorwinebar.com.

Thursday ~ Feb. 4

The Belfry Live Music with Coco Montoya 7 to 10:30 p.m. \$20 online at bendticket.com or \$25 at the door. World-class blues guitar master! Info: belfryevents.com.

Thursday ~ Jan. 28

Sisters High School Sisters Folk Festival Winter Concert with The Wood Brothers 7 p.m. Masterful folk with blues, Americana and acoustic soul. For info or tickets call 541-549-4979 or go to sistersfolkfestival.org.

Friday ~ Feb. 5

The Belfry One-Act Plays 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. "Now You're Talking" produced by Silent Echo Theater Co. & Sisters Classic Old-Time Radio Experience. \$12 adults & \$10 seniors/students at bendticket.com or \$15 and \$12 at the door. Info: belfryevents.com.

Friday ~ Jan. 29

The Belfry Live Music with The Notables Swing Band 7 to 10:30 p.m. The Big Band Era comes alive! \$8 online at bendticket.com or \$10 at the door. For more information go to belfryevents.com.

Saturday ~ Feb. 6

Paulina Springs Books Author Reading with Jodi Schneider McNamee 6 p.m. Jodi will read from "Raising Rover: Positive Pet Parenting Solutions for Your Pooch." \$5 entry refunded upon purchase of featured book. Refreshments provided! Info: paulinasprings.com.

Saturday ~ Jan. 30

Caldera Arts Center Open Studio at Blue Lake 1 to 3 p.m. Free to the public. Meet the Artists in Residence! For more info go to calderaarts.org or call 541-595-0956.

Hoodoo Winter Carnival 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. 34th year! Tube races, contests, bingo & more! Dummy Downhill at 3 p.m. Info: skihoodoo.com or call 541-822-3398.

The Belfry Backcountry Film Festival 6 to 10 p.m. \$10 per person, film starts at 7 p.m. For more information call 541-815-9122, go to belfryevents.com or backcountryfilmfestival.org.

Monday ~ Feb. 1

The Open Door Live Music with Linda & Mark Quon 6 to 8 p.m. For more information call 541-549-6076 or go online to opendoorwinebar.com.

Sunday ~ Feb. 7

Sisters Library Dr. Rob Jeffrey: "Pain - Treatment & Prevention" 1:30 p.m. Sponsored by Friends of the Sisters Library, as part of the Diane Jacobsen Speaker Series. For additional information call 541-549-2107.

Deadline to submit items is 5 p.m. Fridays. Email teresa@nuggetnews.com



Sisters MOVIE HOUSE
STARTS FRIDAY
FRI., JAN. 29 - THURS., FEB. 4

Kung Fu Panda 3 (PG)
Fri 4:45, 7:00
Sat 2:00, 4:15, 6:30
Sun 1:15, 3:30, 5:45
Mon-Thurs 4:00, 6:15

The Finest Hours (R)
Fri 5:00, 7:30
Sat 2:15, 4:45, 7:15
Sun 1:30, 4:00, 6:30
Mon-Thurs 4:00, 6:30

Room (R)
Fri 7:15 • Sat 4:30, 7:00
Sun 3:30, 6:00
Mon-Thurs 6:30

The Revenant (R)
Fri 6:45
Sat 3:45, 6:45
Sun 2:45, 5:45
Mon-Thurs 6:00

Brooklyn (PG-13)
Fri 4:30 • Sat 1:30
Sun 12:30
Mon-Thurs 3:45

The Big Short (R)
Fri 4:30 • Sat 1:45
Sun 12:45
Mon-Thurs 3:45

Movie times and titles are subject to change. Visit website or call for latest information.

WWW.SISTERSMOVIEHOUSE.COM
541-549-8800

The Belfry

Jan. 29 / Fri. / 7 PM
The Notables
17-member swing band provides rousing live big band music for dancing and entertainment.

Jan. 30 / Sat. / 6 PM
11th Annual Backcountry Film Festival
Tickets are \$10 ~ raffle prizes, auction items and more. For more info go to backcountryfilmfestival.org

Feb. 4 / Thur. / 7 PM
Coco Montoya
One of the top-drawing guitarists and vocalists on the blues-rock scene!

Feb. 5-6 / Fri.-Sat / 7:30-8:30 PM
Now You're Talking: Sisters One-Acts 2016
7 Plays, 7 Directors, 7 Misadventures

PUB OPENS ONE HOUR PRIOR TO SHOWS
BelfryEvents.com
Call for Details
541-815-9122