

Tribes’ bighorn sheep tags: Auction help conservation

The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs are making significant progress in revitalizing its bighorn sheep population, with these efforts contributing to broader conservation successes on the reservation.

Austin Smith Jr. and the tribes’ Natural Resources team recently attended the Wild Sheep Show in Las Vegas. There, they successfully auctioned off a once-in-a-lifetime bighorn sheep hunt, raising an impressive \$280,000.

Mr. Smith, Natural Resources general manager, emphasized the importance of this fundraising effort.

“Just having funding to fundraise and go out and get auction, permits authorized and funding coming back to the Wild Sheep Foundation is great because it puts more money back into managing the resource,” he said.

The success story of the Warm Springs bighorn sheep population is remarkable. Smith Jr., who began working in natural resources at age 14, witnessed the re-establishment of the Mutton



Bighorn sheep tag auction helping conservation.

Mountain sheep herd in 2002, starting with just 20 sheep. Today, after more than two decades of management through various challenges, the population has grown to over 300.

Bighorn sheep hold significant cultural importance for Native Americans in the region. Smith Jr. noted, “If you go down there, there’s a lot of rock art down there, you know, the petroglyphs, and there are drawings of bighorn sheep,” he said. “So, I mean, that dates back thousands of years. Time in memorial. I mean, so they are

very important not only for our history, our culture, but also just the management of it.”

This recent auction was the second bighorn sheep hunting fundraiser for the reservation. Its success is particularly crucial given the limited state and federal funding available for conservation efforts on the Warm Springs Reservation, especially for wildlife. The ability to raise nearly half a million dollars in the past through these auctions has become a vital source of support.

Smith Jr. explained the motivation behind these high-value auctions: “There are a lot of people with money who are willing to spend it, but they just like if someone were to give money to a church, this is kind of their way of getting money back. Know that 100% of it goes back to managing these key resources.”

The funds raised not only support conservation efforts but also allow the tribe to expand its natural resource employment. The Big Horn Tag auction is expected to continue, offering hunters a lifetime opportunity to pursue game over nearly 200,000 acres of prime sheep country.

The successful bidder will have the chance to hunt any California bighorn ram from August 1, 2025, to November 31, 2025, during a 10-day hunt. While an additional guide fee will cover Tribal guide services, hunters can also hire a preferred outfitter of choice, who must work with CTWS and Tribal member guides. All hunters must

adhere to the rules and regulations outlined in the CTWS hunting regulations, the CTWS Hunting and Trapping Code 350, and other CTWS Tribal Laws and Policies. These contributions play

a crucial role in supporting sound wildlife management and conservation efforts that benefit not only wild sheep but also the broader ecology of the Warm Springs reservation.

by Tom R of OutdoorHub.com

Oregon law would help to address MMIP

A new bill progressing in the Oregon Legislature would allocate staff and resources within the Oregon Health Authority to address the state’s ongoing crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous people.

The legislation would provide victim outreach and prevention services related to missing and murdered Indigenous people.

In addition, it would instruct the health authority to create and maintain datasets on missing and murdered Indigenous people and to create several partnerships with tribal governments, Native American-led organizations, community leaders, and local, state, tribal and federal law enforcement.

The legislation, House Bill 3198, is sponsored by Rep. Tawna Sanchez of Portland. The proposal comes six years after another law that produced a report on the issue yielded limited results.

An InvestigateWest inves-

tigation into the state’s response to the 2019 bill found there was limited progress on the report’s recommendations for improving relationships between Indigenous communities and law enforcement and for improving data collection—and that Gov. Tina Kotek then had no awareness of progress on the law. Rep. Sanchez told InvestigateWest last year that she was formulating new legislation to spur further action.

Advocates were unsatisfied with the results of the 2019 bill, saying it didn’t improve conditions for Native American families searching for loved ones.

As originally written, the 2025 bill would’ve ordered another study in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Justice—but amendments proposed by Sanchez, the Legislature’s second Indigenous lawmaker, moved it toward an “action plan” that would provide long-sought resources.

In addition to ordering the collection of data on cases, the bill would dedicate staff within the Oregon Health Authority to establish inter-agency agreements with tribal governments, Native American-led organizations, law enforcement, and community leaders.

These staffers would focus on victim services, outreach, education, and violence prevention for Indigenous communities. The bill’s estimated cost is \$500,000.

“The community wanted something to happen,” Sanchez told the House Committee on Judiciary in a public hearing in February.

“And they wanted it to happen sooner than taking a lot of time to continue to do more studies.”

The Oregon Health Authority, the state’s health agency, would be tasked with the response, with Sanchez saying that it already has an existing prevention-model system used in public health cri-

ses and a good working relationship with the nine tribes.

As it stands, practical support for families, like legal advocacy, emergency financial assistance, emotional support and assistance navigating the criminal justice system, has primarily come from individuals’ communities or Native American-led community organizations.

Many family members, including in written testimony on the bill, cite the confusing and overwhelming process of juggling the search for a loved one, the associated emotional trauma and financial concerns.

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