

# Bighorn in Baker 'looking for love'

By IAN CRAWFORD  
and JAYSON JACOBY  
Baker City Herald

Baker City residents are accustomed to mule deer roaming in town, but on Tuesday afternoon, Nov. 15, a much different wildlife visitor showed up.

A bighorn sheep ram, typically seen clambering on cliffs and among craggy peaks, wandered into the west side of Baker City.

The 4-year-old ram, from the Burnt River Canyon herd southeast of town, received a lot of attention on social media, with several people getting photographs or videos.

Employees from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife searched for the ram as dusk fell Tuesday, but they had no luck finding the animal.

But on Wednesday morning, Nov. 16, biologists tracked down the ram and shot it with a tranquilizer dart to immobilize the powerful animal, which was in a yard at 15th and Broadway streets, about five blocks west of the railroad tracks.

Brian Ratliff, district wildlife biologist at ODFW's Baker City office, said he took an airplane flight over town Wednesday morning to try to get a signal from the radio tracking collar the ram was wearing. Ratliff said he quickly picked up the signal, and about the same time an Oregon State Police officer called to say the ram was at 15th and Broadway.

Ratliff, who has worked in Baker City for about 16 years, said the ram is the first to wander into a city neighborhood that he knows of.

"We've had multiple bighorn sheep there on the hill just behind the golf course," Ratliff said.

He said the ram was most likely "looking for love" when it wandered into town, possibly lured by a domesticated animal. He said this is the peak of the bighorn breeding season.

The ram was quarantined at the ODFW station on Hughes Lane in Baker City while biologists waited for results of disease tests.

Ratliff said the results, which were all negative, arrived late Thursday afternoon, Nov. 17, and on Friday morning he was hooking up the trailer to haul the ram back to the Burnt River Canyon for release.

Ratliff said he was especially concerned about the ram being infected



Brian Ratliff/Contributed Photo

**A bighorn ram from the Burnt River Canyon herd wandered into Baker City on Nov. 15, 2022, and was captured the next day.**



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

**A bighorn sheep was spotted wandering in Baker City on Nov. 15, 2022, garnering the attention of many locals.**

with Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae bacteria, which has infected sheep in both of Baker County's bighorn herds over the past three years and caused fatal pneumonia in dozens of the animals.

Ratliff said the ram, which ODFW first trapped and collared on Dec. 2, 2021, has been exposed to the bacteria based on test results. But the nasal swab that biologists took on Wednesday was negative, and the sheep showed no signs of illness.

Ratliff believes the bacteria first infected sheep in the Lookout Mountain unit in eastern Baker County, north of Interstate 84 and south of Highway 86.

Sick and dead sheep were found in that area starting in February 2020. The Lookout Mountain sheep are Rocky Mountain bighorns.

Around October 2020, sheep in the Burnt River Canyon herd — those are California bighorns, a somewhat smaller subspecies — also began dying. Ratliff believes sheep from the Burnt River Canyon herd, which is just south of Interstate 84, crossed the

freeway and mingled with infected Lookout Mountain bighorns.

ODFW has not determined the source of the bacteria that initially infected Lookout Mountain sheep.

Ratliff estimated that all of the lambs born in the Lookout Mountain unit in the spring of 2020 — 65 to 70 animals — died due to the bacteria, along with about 75 adult bighorns. The herd, which has been Oregon's biggest herd of Rocky Mountain bighorns, included about 400 sheep as recently as 2018.

Few, if any, lambs survived in 2021, but Ratliff said one group of sheep seems to have fared better in 2022.

The Burnt River Canyon herd is much smaller, with about 75 to 85 sheep, and biologists counted 14 lambs in the area this spring. That compares with a pre-infection average of 25 to 30 lambs per year.

Ratliff said he replaced the ram's radio collar with a GPS version that makes it easier for biologists to track its movements remotely. The radio collar signals have a limited range.

# Transmission line opponents voice concerns at hearing

By ISABELLA CROWLEY  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Opponents of the proposed Boardman to Hemingway transmission line had another opportunity to speak their minds about the controversial project.

The hearing, Wednesday, Nov. 16, at Eastern Oregon University in La Grande, was one of the early steps in the Oregon Public Utility Commission's quasi-judicial process to either grant or deny Idaho Power's petition for a certificate of public necessity. The Boise-based power company is a major funder of the proposed B2H transmission line.

Public Utility Commissioners Mark Thompson and Letha Tawney traveled to La Grande for the public hearing. Commissioner Megan Decker attended virtually.

"We felt like the commissioners listened," Jim Kreider, co-chair of the Union County-based Stop B2H Coalition, said.

Around 40 residents filled seats in the David E. Gilbert Event Center to listen to the public comment hearing, and nearly 20 people shared their concerns. Many residents spoke out against the transmission line and looked to the commissioners as a last hope to stop B2H. Overlapping concerns raised by residents at the meeting fell into three categories — issues with the process, the impact on Oregon as a whole and the impact at the local level.

Residents who had issues with the process cited the lack of an updated budget from Idaho Power on the transmission line and the failure to include the alternate route proposed by the Bureau of Land Management.

Broader concerns include environmental and ecological destruction along the transmission line. Individuals also brought up the possible damage to the Oregon Trail ruts and the impacts that would have on tourism.

At a more local level, people were concerned with the potential for wildfires caused by power lines and high noise levels emitted by the lines. Residents also voiced safety concerns about trucks using local roads to access towers if the

transmission line is approved. Another major local concern was the impact on Morgan Lake if that route is used.

Fuji Kreider, a member of the Stop B2H Coalition, said many residents felt left out of the process and trapped in a cycle of governmental bodies making decisions without considering public input.

"We're in a vicious cycle," she said.

The commissioners were not able to answer questions at the hearing — rather their goal was simply to listen to opinions and gather information.

"There are things we heard tonight that we will make sure our staff looks into," Thompson said.

The proposed transmission line would connect a new station near Boardman to an existing substation in southwest Idaho near Melba. In September, Oregon's Energy Facility Siting Council approved a site certificate for the B2H line. The permit authorizes construction of the 290-mile, 500-kilovolt line across the Eastern Oregon counties of Morrow, Umatilla, Union, Baker, and Malheur. Federal agencies already granted permission for the line to cross land they manage.

As part of the petition process, Idaho Power must provide evidence of need and justification to construct the line. The certificate details the purpose and route of the transmission line. It also provides a cost estimate and other relevant information.

It is up to the Public Utility Commission to determine the necessity, safety, practicability and justification in the public interest for the proposed transmission line, according to Oregon law.

If granted, the certificate would demonstrate that the transmission line is a public use and necessary for public convenience. The certificate would not condemn any land directly, but would be used by Idaho Power in court proceeding to use land along the path of the transmission line.

In addition to the application from Idaho Power, the Public Utility Commission will consider comments from members of the public and independent evidence gathered by commission staff.

# Ready for Winter Snow?



## SVL75-2

- 74.3 Gross HP; 4-Cylinder Turbocharged Kubota Diesel Engine
- Powerful Breakout Force
- 360° Visibility in Cab
- High Ground Clearance



## BX2380

- 21.6 Gross HP; 3-Cylinder Kubota Diesel Engine
- HST Transmission



## L2501

- 24.8 Gross HP; 3-Cylinder Kubota Diesel Engine



## L3560HSTC

- 37 Gross HP; 3-Cylinder Kubota Diesel Engine
- Spacious, Heated Grand Cab™

**Full-Service Dealer with Parts & Service**



**You chose Kubota for its quality and performance. Keep it running like new with the expert service and quality parts we provide at any of our Platt Equipment locations.**



211 HIGHWAY 20 S  
HINES, OR  
541-573-1322  
541-589-3877