



Oregon

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To: The Honorable Brad Witt, Chair
House Committee on Natural Resources



House Bill 2071

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The Department appreciates the opportunity to discuss House Bill 2071 with you today. Controlled hunt tags for mountain (bighorn) sheep are defined in ORS 497.112 as “once in a lifetime” with the exception of hunters who purchase an auction tag or win a raffle tag. House Bill 2071 provides an exemption from this ‘once in a lifetime’ restriction for mountain sheep hunters who are issued a tag for hunting a female mountain sheep.

Once largely extirpated in Oregon, efforts to restore bighorn populations have been a conservation success story. Oregon currently has about 700 Rocky Mountain Bighorns and 3,900 California Bighorns in 45 herds. Most suitable habitats in Oregon now have established bighorn populations. Because of this success, the Department has transitioned from a restoration mode of animal capture and relocation to a sustainable mode of herd management.

When local bighorn populations reach high densities, it becomes increasingly likely that individual animals will disperse in search of forage and reproductive opportunities. Unfortunately, when they disperse they run the risk of exposure to domestic sheep diseases. When this happens, isolated disease outbreaks (mainly pneumonia) have locally devastating effects. Some bighorn herds, primarily California bighorns, have increased to levels where future harvest of female (ewes) is a viable way to manage population size, and potentially prevent devastating disease outbreaks by minimizing animal dispersal.

By removing ewe hunts from the ‘once in a lifetime’ limitation, any hunter would have an opportunity to draw a ewe tag without giving up their ‘once in a lifetime’ opportunity to harvest a bighorn sheep ram. Ewe hunts in Oregon would be rare and limited in number. The Department will continue to first look for opportunities to relocate bighorns rather than ewe harvest.

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