



NEWS RELEASE

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First Bighorn Sheep Lambs Sighted in Pusch Ridge Wilderness in a Generation

TUCSON, Ariz. -- What may be the first lambs born to two of the bighorn sheep recently reintroduced to the Santa Catalina Mountains were sighted last week in the Santa Catalina's Pusch Ridge Wilderness.

The apparently healthy lambs were both seen from a distance by an Arizona Game and Fish Department biologist. The lambs were close to their mothers, ewes that were among the 31 bighorn sheep released at Catalina State Park on Nov. 18, 2013 after relocation from the Trigo and Plumosa mountains.

"This is another important milestone in the Santa Catalina Bighorn Sheep Restoration Project," said Regional Supervisor Raul Vega of Game and Fish in Tucson. "Our goal is to restore a healthy, viable and self-sustaining population of desert bighorn sheep to the range that coexists with an equally healthy native predator population in a naturally functioning ecosystem."

The project dovetails with a larger, holistic restoration effort to mitigate human impacts, improve habitat in the Catalinas and return fire as a natural process necessary for proper habitat functioning.

Bighorn sheep populations are constrained by their low reproductive success. Unlike other ungulates which regularly give birth to twins, female sheep only have one lamb per year with typically only 20-25 percent of these surviving until the yearling stage. The lambing season, January through April, is an important time when bighorn sheep are most vulnerable to disturbances.

Biologists that observed the lambs did so from a far distance and were able to capture photos through the use of a high-magnification spotting scope and handheld camera. Biologists utilize these techniques to minimize disturbance during this critical stage of the bighorn sheep's life cycle.

"This is great news, and a timely reminder of the importance of trail restrictions currently in place within the Coronado National Forest's Bighorn Sheep Management Area," said Trica Oshant Hawkins, with the Arizona Wilderness Coalition and a member of the advisory committee to the project. "We're hopeful that other ewes will successfully birth lambs over the coming months. The January through April lambing season is a very sensitive time for bighorn sheep, so it's really critical that people do not hike off trail or take their dogs into the area."

Volunteers and trailhead notices are being used to remind hikers of the potential adverse impacts to the sheep caused by dogs or by hiking more than 400 feet off-trail within the bighorn sheep recovery area during lambing season. For additional information, please visit the U.S. Forest Service webpage at www.fs.usda.gov/coronado/.

"These little lambs are the first Catalina-born desert bighorn sheep in nearly 25 years," said Mike Quigley, with The Wilderness Society and member of the projects advisory committee. "This used to be a common event and hopefully will be again."

Additional information about the Santa Catalina Bighorn Sheep Restoration Project can be found on the Arizona Game and Fish Department Facebook page at www.facebook.com/azgafd#!/CatalinaBighorns the Arizona Game and Fish Department webpage at www.azgfd.gov/w_c/bighornSheep.shtml or the Catalina Bighorn Advisory Committee webpage at www.catalinabighornrestoration.org/.

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