

Teton Range Bighorn Working Group



The Teton Range offers excellent wildlife habitat and spectacular opportunities for outdoor recreation. Land and wildlife managers strive to balance those values. **Today, there is increased concern about bighorn sheep in the Tetons, as local experts document those animals are at risk of local extinction.**

Teton Bighorn Sheep

- ▶ A small, isolated herd of native bighorn sheep resides in the Teton Range. **Over the last 5-10 years, the herd has declined nearly 50 percent**, from 100-125 animals to about 60-80.
- ▶ The Teton Range herd is a small, native population of bighorn sheep with unique genetics and is at risk of local extinction.
- ▶ Human development and pressures have cut off this herd from traditional low-elevation winter range and from other bighorn sheep herds. Long-term fire suppression has also affected habitat quality and blocked access to some low elevation winter ranges.
- ▶ The Teton Range bighorn sheep now live in rugged high country, enduring severe winter conditions on windswept ridges.
- ▶ Scientists have documented that Teton bighorn sheep avoid areas frequented by winter recreationists. In some cases, sheep have effectively lost up to 30% of the good winter habitat in the high country because of this displacement. Bighorn sheep that share winter habitat with humans frequently move to avoid them, burning energy, which can result in poor reproduction and starvation.
- ▶ The loss and alteration of important winter habitats have made the herd especially vulnerable; additional factors such as winter backcountry recreation and expanding mountain goats now pressure the herd's survival even further.

Conservation Measures

- ▶ Resource managers have a responsibility to ensure the future of the Teton Range Bighorn Sheep.
- ▶ As a conservation measure, domestic sheep allotments in the Tetons were voluntarily closed with economic incentives to producers, effectively mitigating the risk of disease transmission.
- ▶ Mountain goats are not native to the Tetons, and can spread diseases to bighorn sheep and compete for habitat. Grand Teton National Park is developing a management plan to address this issue within the park.
- ▶ Two areas of Grand Teton National Park have been closed to human entry in the winter for some time: the summit area of Static Peak (~1990) and the Mount Hunt/Prospectors Mountain complex (2001) to help conserve the bighorn sheep.



How You Can Help

- ▶ When recreating in the Teton backcountry, be sure to give bighorn sheep plenty of space. If you see them, chances are they have already seen you. Take a route that will not stress them further.
- ▶ Please report any sightings of bighorn sheep in the Teton Range by calling **(307) 739-3558**.

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The Teton Range Bighorn Sheep Working Group is a public-private group of biologists working together since the early 1990s to conserve bighorn sheep.

This winter the group's goal is to create awareness with the public in particular, about the plight of bighorn sheep in the Tetons. Based on their conversations with interested parties, members of the working group may gather ideas on how to moderate winter pressure on bighorn sheep.

If you would like to speak with the working group or learn more, contact one of the members listed on the right.

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