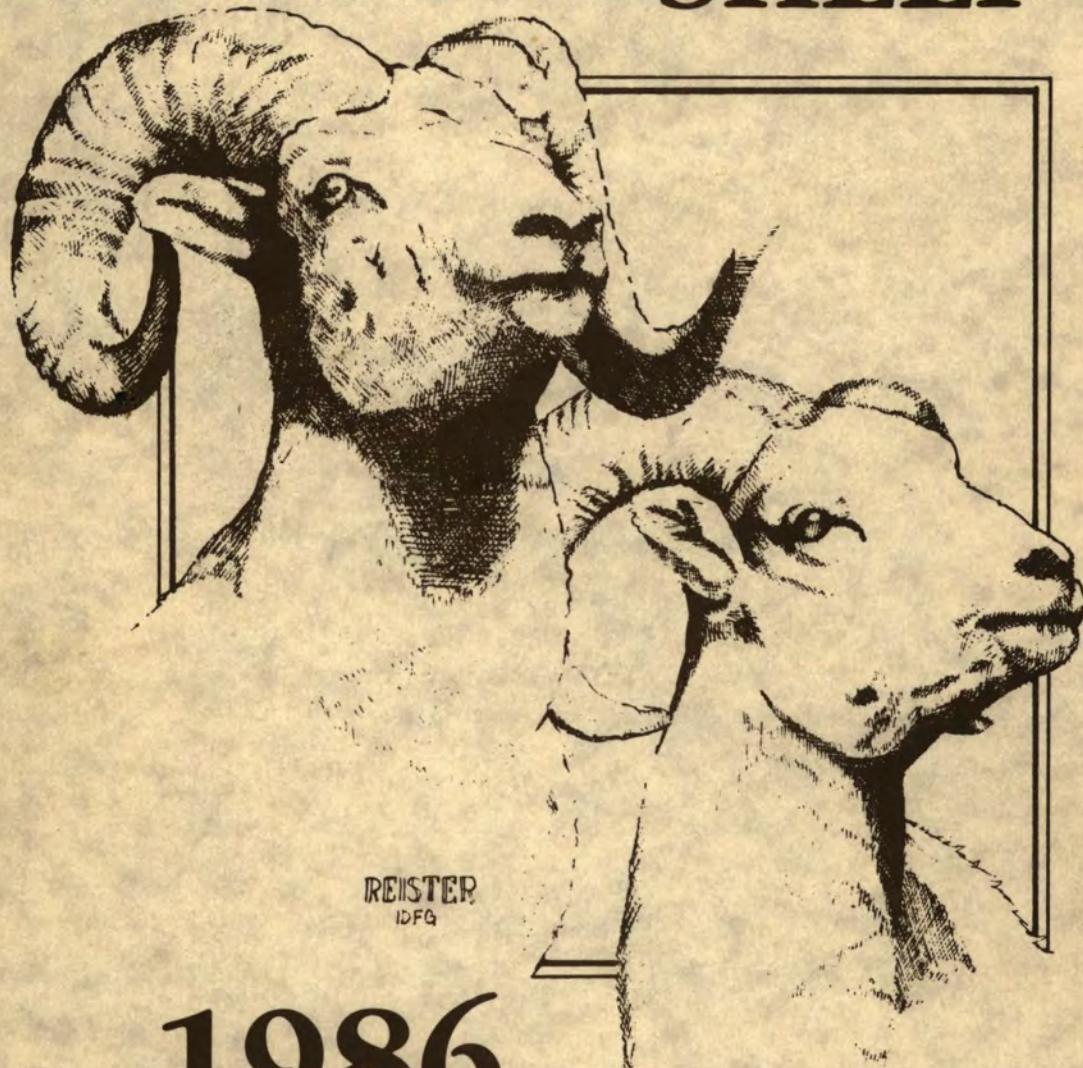


(132)

BIGHORN SHEEP



1986
1990

IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
SPECIES MANAGEMENT PLAN

BIGHORN SHEEP MANAGEMENT PLAN

1988 - 1990

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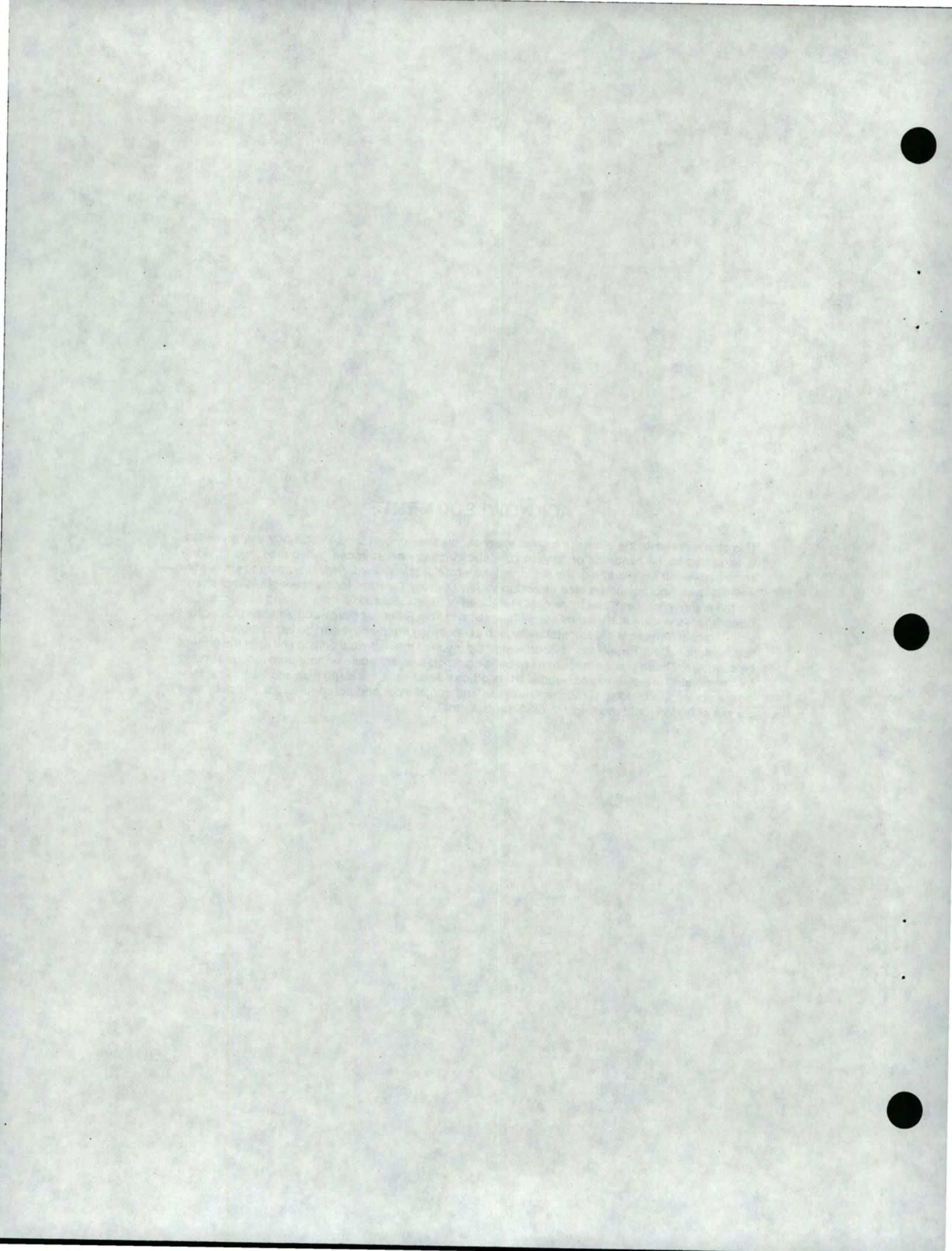
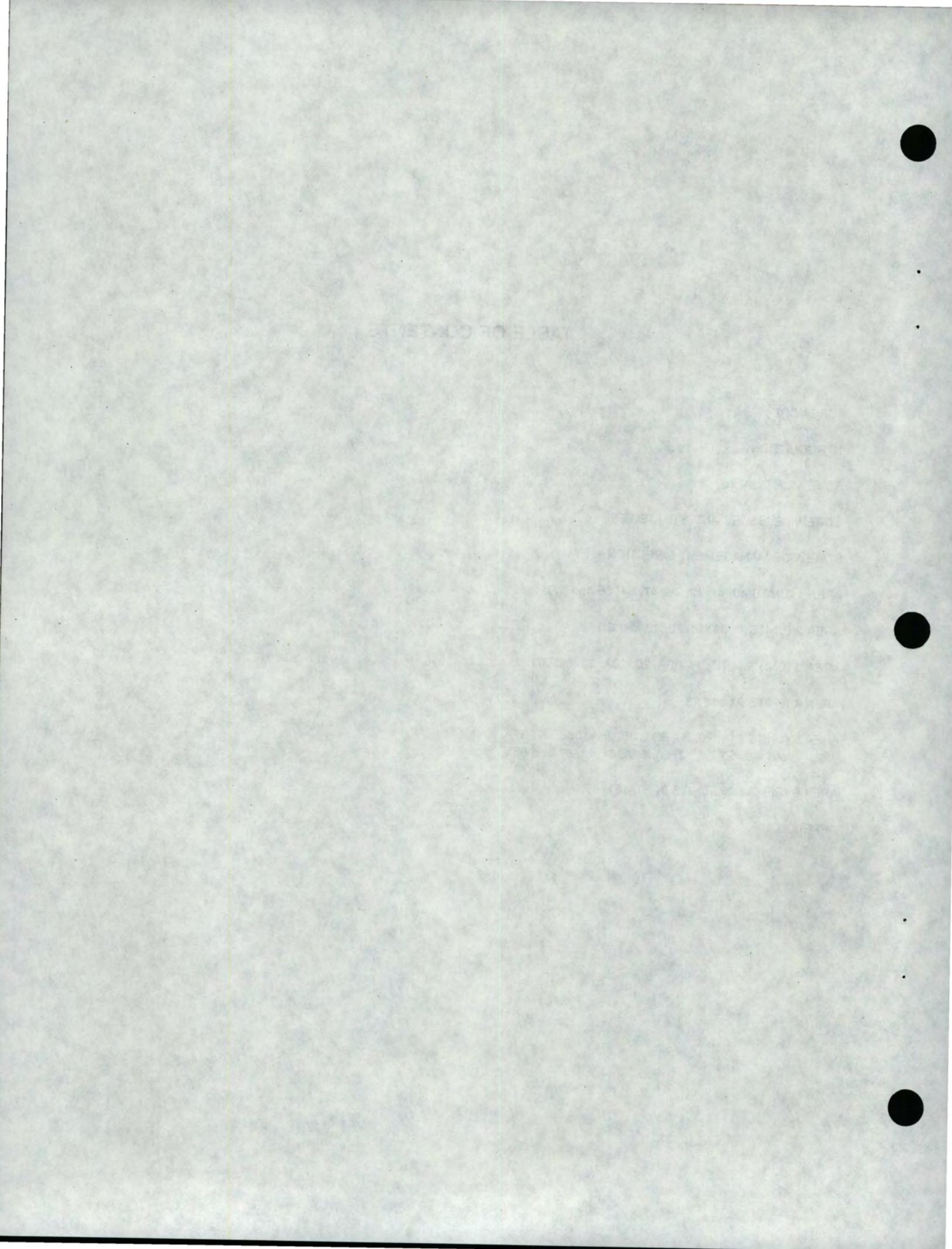


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FOREWORD

The Management Plan contained herein supplements our Policy Plan. This plan charts the course of our efforts during 1986-1990 to manage Idaho's valuable bighorn sheep resources for their own benefit and to provide aesthetic, recreational and physical products to man.

Many persons provided input during development of this plan. Chief among them were field and staff management and research personnel. Input during the review process from Department personnel, other agencies and the general public was invaluable. We acknowledge the assistance of these many concerned and dedicated individuals. We appreciate the support of Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration of this project.

This management plan was reviewed and approved by the Director and was adopted by the Fish and Game Commission on October 3, 1985.

Data used in this Plan were those available in 1985. Some changes will likely be necessary before the end of the planning period (1990) as new data regarding the resource and its users become available.

This plan will provide an understanding of the Department's management philosophy and direction. In addition, we have spelled out what we see as the major issues facing us in our efforts to discharge our statutory, professional and moral responsibilities to manage this valuable resource for its perpetuation and for the benefits which bighorn sheep provide to man. Idaho's "quality of life" is for many, if not most of her residents, inseparably tied to the fate of her wildlife resources. We will do our best to preserve these resources and necessary habitats for the enjoyment of present and future Idahoans and visitors to our great State.

Preserving Idaho's wildlife heritage will require the cooperation, concern and unselfish efforts of many agencies and individuals. With your support and help the Department of Fish and Game can prevent the ultimate loss of a large share of our valuable wildlife resources. We look forward to working with you to ensure a bright future for wildlife in Idaho.

INTRODUCTION

Bighorn sheep currently occupy only a small portion of their original range in Idaho. Historical records indicate the Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis canadensis*) occupied suitable habitat throughout Hells Canyon of the Snake River, the Salmon, Big Lost, and Little Lost rivers, the Birch Creek drainage, as well as areas along the Montana-Idaho border from northwest of Missoula, Montana to Yellowstone Park and some areas in southeast Idaho. California bighorns (*Ovis canadensis californiana*) were found along the Bruneau and Owyhee River drainages, Salmon Falls Creek and other suitable canyon-type habitats of southwest Idaho. Reports by early explorers, trappers and settlers suggest that bighorn sheep were one of the most abundant large mammals in Idaho.

Subsistence hunting by pioneers, competition with livestock and disease transmission from domestic livestock are thought to be the main factors which caused the decline and near extirpation of sheep throughout Idaho and much of North America. By the early 1900's, bighorns had been nearly eliminated from Idaho, and they survived only in the Salmon River drainage where remoteness offered them some protection from the impacts of settlement.

Much of the bighorn's original range can no longer be considered as potential bighorn habitat because it has been "permanently" changed by urbanization and/or cultivated agriculture. However, under proper management, many of the remaining unoccupied historic habitats could again support herds of bighorn sheep. Changes in livestock management practices and natural plant succession over the years have made several areas again suitable for bighorns. The substantial decrease in numbers of domestic sheep grazed in Idaho in recent years has reduced competition for forage on the steep topography preferred by bighorns. This decline in domestic sheep also reduced the potential for transmission of parasites and disease between bighorns and domestic sheep. Most of the potential habitat for bighorn sheep in Idaho occurs on public lands administered by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) or Bureau of Land Management (BLM); only small amounts of private or state lands are involved.

Bighorn sheep are considered grazers, but may eat significant amounts of browse where palatable species exist. They do well on native shrub/grassland where escape terrain is present and competition from other ungulates is not severe. Winter habitat for Rocky Mountain sheep is usually in the shrub/grass and ponderosa pine/Douglas-fir/grass types at lower elevations where snow accumulation is minimal and the topography is steep, rocky and broken. Generally, Rocky Mountain bighorns move upward in elevation to summer range in alpine and subalpine types, but some sheep can be found at any elevation during summer. In the desert country of Idaho, California bighorns are usually not migratory and are closely associated with the steep canyons of the river drainages. Oftentimes, these areas are not suitable for domestic livestock due to lack of access to water.

The potential for increasing the distribution of bighorns in Idaho is greater than for any other big game species. The success we've had in establishing "new" sheep populations in the past 25 years clearly demonstrates this potential. For example, the Owyhee County, Mt. Borah and Hells Canyon transplants have all been successful. The major thrust of our bighorn sheep management over the next decade will be to establish viable

bighorn sheep populations in as many suitable unoccupied historic habitats as we can. Since bighorn sheep do not spread into adjacent areas rapidly, transplanting is necessary to stimulate population and geographic expansion.

During the 1986-90 period, sheep for transplanting may be available to the Department from other western states or Canadian provinces, and from animals captured from our own herds. We will concentrate on obtaining transplant stock from our own healthy bighorn herds when possible. The Department will prioritize potential reintroduction sites for Rocky Mountain and California bighorn habitats on a statewide basis. This priority list will be updated annually.

The Department is committed to keep California and Rocky Mountain sheep geographically separated in Idaho. We are also working with adjacent states toward this end. Habitats south and west of Interstate Highway 84 are reserved for California bighorn sheep, while the remaining habitats are reserved for Rocky Mountain bighorns.

The bighorn sheep ram is generally considered one of the most prized game animals in North America. The premier status of bighorn sheep has its basis primarily in the difficulty of the hunt, the challenge of finding a large ram in steep, rocky, mountain terrain, and the relative scarcity of sheep hunting opportunities. Sheep traditionally have been, and continue to be, hunted under conservative regulations in most of North America. Idaho has followed this tradition and has restricted harvest to a limited entry hunt for $\frac{3}{4}$ curl and larger rams since 1970. To allow the harvest of older rams with broomed horns, the regulations were changed in 1984 to include $\frac{3}{4}$ curl and larger horns and/or rams over 4 years of age.

Many western states and Canadian provinces currently allow harvest of young rams and ewes where continued population growth might lead to habitat degradation or wildlife depredation problems. From a population dynamics standpoint, a balanced harvest of both sexes and all age classes may be no more detrimental to healthy sheep herds than to other ungulate herds. Idaho's present conservative harvest strategy is designed to allow sheep populations to increase and expand geographically and to provide sheep for transplants. Hunting of young rams and ewes may be considered in the future.

Information needed to manage Rocky Mountain sheep populations have been collected primarily through helicopter surveys conducted in late winter when sheep are generally on their lower elevation ranges. Dependent on yearly funding levels, these flights have occurred on an annual or semi-annual basis or where funding for sheep flights has been inadequate, counts have been incidental to elk and deer surveys. In California bighorn habitats, where seasonal movements are not substantial, sheep counts have been flown in late summer.

During the 1986-90 planning period, all sheep populations will be surveyed at least once on helicopter flights specifically for bighorns. Some sheep populations will be counted more frequently. Survey frequency will be specified in the management direction section for each management area.

Valuable as bighorn sheep are as a huntable resource, their worth as a nonconsumptive resource is many times greater. A recent economic study indicates the estimated value the general hunting public places on the opportunity to see a bighorn in

the wild or simply to know they exist is well in excess of 100 million dollars in the State of Idaho (present net value). If the nonhunting public were included in the analysis, this figure would be even higher. The Department recognizes the high viewing and existence values the public places on bighorn sheep. The present season structure of limited ram hunting is not considered disruptive to sheep populations and is therefore generally compatible with nonconsumptive uses. The Department will consider re-establishing bighorn populations in

accessible areas with a primary objective of providing nonconsumptive recreation to the general public.

The Department has intensively studied sheep for many years. Much of our knowledge and many of our insights have come from these studies. During the 1986-90 planning period we will continue a bighorn sheep research program, devoted to the population status and habitat needs of California bighorns in southwestern Idaho.

STATEWIDE GOALS

(1) Increase Idaho's bighorn sheep population to allow an increase in sheep harvest and recreation opportunity; (2) establish new bighorn herds by transplanting sheep; and (3) recognize and promote the nonconsumptive values of bighorn sheep.

PAST AND PRESENT STATUS AND 1990 OBJECTIVES¹

Year	Population	Harvest	Hunter Days	Days/Animal
1981 est.	3,035	47	1,020	22
1985 goal	4,125	82	1,605	20
1985 est.	3,620	92	1,840	20
1990 goal	4,550	107	1,926	18

¹Figures in this table are summations of estimates for individual units contained in subsequent tables.

STATEWIDE ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

A PRIORITY LISTING

ISSUE — Many potential habitats are not occupied by bighorns.

STRATEGY — The Department will actively pursue a bighorn reintroduction program, and will (1) start as many new herds as possible with the stock available for release; (2) continue to seek Rocky Mountain and California transplant stock from outside Idaho; (3) capture sheep from our own Idaho herds as funds permit; (4) coordinate our reintroduction program with adjacent states; (5) obtain transplant stock from other states or provinces as available for habitats where "homing" of relocated bighorns might be a problem; (6) seek outside funds to help cover transplanting costs; (7) cooperate with appropriate land management agencies to inventory, prioritize and obtain approval for release of bighorns on suitable habitats they manage; and (8) develop additional trapping sites in areas occupied by healthy sheep herds in Units 36A, 36B, 50 and others.

ISSUE — Increased access associated with mining, logging and other developments can adversely impact bighorns by increasing harvest rate and/or displacing sheep from preferred habitats.

STRATEGY — The Department will (1) generally recommend that bighorn habitats be managed in a primitive or semi-primitive manner; (2) recommend that public land managers restrict access to occupied or potential bighorn sheep habitat; and (3) consider access as a major factor when evaluating and prioritizing release sites.

ISSUE — Domestic livestock compete for forage with other ungulates, especially bighorn sheep. Water developments to improve livestock distribution can aggravate the problem.

STRATEGY — The Department will (1) recommend that public land managers give bighorns priority consideration on critical habitat; (2) avoid introducing bighorns into areas where domestic livestock occur on ranges in fair to poor condition; (3) conduct research on bighorn sheep/cattle interactions; (4) oppose conversion from cattle to domestic sheep use on critical bighorn habitats; and (5) as an aid to land management agencies, develop maps delineating critical bighorn sheep habitat, both occupied and suitable but unoccupied.

ISSUE — Bighorn sheep are susceptible to many diseases, both endemic and those transmitted from domestic livestock, especially domestic sheep.

STRATEGY — The Department will (1) reintroduce bighorns only where contact with domestic sheep will be nonexistent or minimal; (2) work closely with agencies responsible for managing ranges presently occupied by bighorns to minimize contact between bighorns and domestic livestock; (3) promote relocation of domestic sheep allotments away from identified bighorn ranges; (4) determine the need and best methodology of inoculating or treating transplant stock for known disease problems; (5) develop a policy addressing the treatment of existing bighorn sheep herds for known disease problems; and (6) intensify population data collection on sheep herds where disease problems are suspected so harvest can be adjusted if necessary.

ISSUE — Due to the inaccessibility of most sheep herds, the opportunities for nonconsumptive recreation are limited.

STRATEGY — The Department will (1) evaluate establishing bighorn herds primarily for nonconsumptive recreation in suitable habitats accessible to major human population centers; (2) seek non-Department funding for any nonconsumptive transplant; and (3) use these herds for transplant stock.

ISSUE — The current strategy of censusing sheep concurrently with deer and elk surveys in some units may not provide adequate coverage. Survey timing is probably not optimum. Sheep counted during census periods may occupy different hunting units during fall. Mature rams may be more observable during the rut.

STRATEGY — The Department will (1) conduct survey flights specifically for sheep; (2) consider radio-tracking movements of mature rams where we suspect they may cross hunt boundaries; and (3) seek funding to allow completion of herd surveys.

ISSUE — Unregulated killing of bighorn sheep occurs in some units and could endanger new transplants. Also, bighorn sheep horns and capes are highly sought after and valuable. This increases illegal activity, which results in fewer permits authorized.

STRATEGY — The Department will (1) intensively patrol where sheep are vulnerable; (2) encourage sportsmen to assist in preventing and detecting unregulated killing of sheep; (3) continue the informant reward program called "Citizens Against Poaching" (CAP); (4) continue to encourage and work with Indian tribes to closely regulate harvest of sheep by their members and request that they share harvest data with the Department; (5) continue to require all sheep heads to be checked so horns can be permanently marked and require permittees to return unfilled tags for cancellation; and (6) consider making the sale of "picked up" horns/heads and fresh heads, hides or capes illegal.

ISSUE — Efficient fire suppression over the last several decades has allowed some grassland sheep ranges to stagnate, leading to a deterioration in forage quality. Some ranges may also be lost to conifer invasion.

STRATEGY — Fire management plans currently exist for some bighorn ranges. The Department will continue to work closely with agencies responsible for managing ranges, especially USFS and BLM, and urge them to adopt and aggressively pursue fire management programs that improve and create habitat for bighorn sheep.

ISSUE — The number of bighorns, optimum group size, minimum group size and best sex and age mixture suitable for transplanting into unoccupied habitats is unknown.

STRATEGY — The Department will (1) review all available information on sheep transplant attempts; and (2) use this information to develop guidelines for minimum transplant size and sex/age composition.

ISSUE — The existing controlled hunt drawing system results in successful permittees being notified during the first week in August. Many sheep hunts begin in late August or early September, which allows too little time for permittees to plan a hunt and "scout" the area to be hunted.

STRATEGY — The Department will consider administrative changes to allow earlier selection of permittees.

ISSUE — Criteria for determining allowable harvest levels need to be established to prevent over-harvest of mature rams.

STRATEGY — The Department will (1) develop a system to determine allowable permit levels by management unit (a possible goal may include authorization of permits for no more than 15 to 20% of the legal rams observed during the most recent sheep census flights, adjusted based on population trends, removal of rams for transplant purposes and known losses due to illegal activity and diseases); and (2) design and implement, for research purposes, an experimental liberal bighorn hunt in a remote management unit to assess effects of increased permit numbers during September on ram survival.

ISSUE — At high bighorn population densities, herd productivity may decline, ranges may be over-utilized and the risk of epidemic disease is greatly enhanced. Limited ram harvest may not be sufficient to reduce such population densities.

STRATEGY — If such a situation is identified, the Department will institute a trapping and transplanting program to move excess sheep into unoccupied habitat.

ISSUE — In some backcountry units with poor access, mature rams may be difficult to locate during early fall hunting periods, but conversely are too vulnerable to harvest during the rut.

STRATEGY — The Department will (1) maintain sequential seasons (the latest ending shortly after rutting activity starts) in some hunts; (2) use the mandatory sheep school to inform sheep hunters of behavioral and habitat selection traits which might influence hunter success in these units; (3) increase permit levels in these units based on past hunter success rates (where consistent with ram harvest goals); and (4) not authorize hunts during the peak of rutting activity.

ISSUE — The demand for bighorn sheep hunting opportunity has and will continue to exceed the supply of available permits. Potential sheep hunters have requested that drawing odds be improved.

STRATEGY — The Department will (1) maintain the "sheep and sheep only" controlled hunt application rule; and (2) maintain the once-in-a-lifetime rule through 1990 but consider allowing hunters to harvest one California and one Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep.

ISSUE — Bighorn sheep can benefit from habitat protection afforded by wilderness designation. However, some management activities, such as capture and census work or habitat manipulation may be restricted.

STRATEGY — The Department will work closely with the public land management agencies to minimize restrictions which would significantly limit management options in areas selected for wilderness.

ISSUE — The status of some transplanted sheep herds is uncertain.

STRATEGY — The Department will radio-collar at least two adult ewes in each transplant group, and regularly monitor their status.

ISSUE — Many permittees have no experience hunting sheep; identifying legal rams can be difficult; some sub-legal rams may be unintentionally killed.

STRATEGY — The Department will (1) retain and improve the mandatory video tape school for permittees; (2) continue to exempt from attending any permittee who supplies us with verification that he/she will be accompanied by a guide who has attended such school; (3) emphasize current sheep hunting regulations and identification of mature rams in the school; (4) consider an "any ram" hunt on a trial basis in one sheep unit; and (5) continue to evaluate method(s) of defining and distinguishing a legal ram.

STATEWIDE MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

Management direction is to (1) reintroduce sheep into as many suitable habitats as possible, keeping the Rocky Mountain and California bighorn subspecies geographically separated; (2) maintain controlled hunt strategy and offer more hunter opportunity where consistent with management goals; (3) encourage bighorn sheep habitat improvement projects by land management agencies; (4) harvest rams under the present $\frac{1}{4}$ curl + 4 years regulation, but consider an any ram hunt on a trial basis; (5) harvest and / or remove for transplant no more than 15 to 20% of the observed legal rams in a hunt unit; and (6) promote the nonconsumptive value of bighorn sheep and consider such values in our management decisions.

AREA 1

UNITS 40, 41, 42, 46, 47, 54, 55 AND 57



Area 1 is reserved for the California bighorn subspecies; all other Areas are designated as Rocky Mountain bighorn habitat. Interstate Highway 84 was selected as the boundary because it is readily definable and there are few places where suitable sheep habitat abuts this boundary from either the north or the south. Likelihood of bighorn sheep movement across this boundary is essentially nonexistent.

Area 1 units are characterized by large expanses of flat terrain dominated by sagebrush/grass vegetative types. The major drainage systems, the Bruneau, Jarbidge and Owyhee rivers, have formed steep canyons which provide the habitats preferred by California bighorns. Grass-covered benches along these canyons provide foraging sites. Steepness of these canyons and isolation of forage areas by rimrock reduces competition between bighorns and cattle. Thus, bighorns seldom compete with cattle for forage on those sites. However, the potential for bighorn sheep/livestock conflicts may intensify adjacent to the canyons as the numbers of either or both increase.

The BLM administers most of the habitats suitable for bighorns within Area 1. Some parcels of USFS, state and private lands also contain suitable habitat. Most currently occupied habitat is under study by the BLM for possible wilderness designation.

Four releases of California bighorns from British Columbia into Owyhee County in the 1960's provided the nucleus for the original herds along portions of the Owyhee River and in Jacks Creek. As those herds grew, hunting seasons were initiated. Beginning in 1980, 50 sheep were transplanted to other parts of the Owyhee, Bruneau and Jarbidge rivers. An additional 12 sheep from British Columbia were released into Idaho's Jarbidge River Canyon in 1984 when deep snows prevented Nevada Department of Wildlife personnel from reaching their proposed release site in Nevada. Presently, Area 1 contains an estimated 600 California bighorns, about 10% of the North American population of this subspecies. Much suitable habitat remains unoccupied in Area 1; there are significant opportunities to enhance population growth and geographic expansion of these sheep through a continuing transplant program. During this planning period, California bighorn sheep may be released into several areas of unoccupied habitat. Areas under consideration are listed in Appendix 1.

GOALS

(1) Increase population; (2) establish new populations; (3) increase harvest; and (4) provide more recreation.

ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

ISSUE — The reintroduced California bighorn sheep population in Owyhee County has expanded rapidly. Present population, distribution and status in relation to range capacity is unknown.

STRATEGY — The Department will (1) initiate a five-year research project on California bighorn status, distribution and inventory techniques; (2) periodically count and classify sheep by helicopter; and (3) actively solicit reports of sightings, especially in the vicinity of recent releases.

ISSUE — Water developments to improve distribution of cattle can detrimentally impact bighorn sheep by increasing competition between bighorns and cattle.

STRATEGY — The Department will (1) urge land managers to avoid water developments within one mile of bighorn habitat and/or where such impacts seem likely; and (2) initiate a research study of bighorn sheep/cattle relationships.

ISSUE — The Owyhee River herd may be expanding to the west and hunt boundaries may need adjustment.

STRATEGY — The Department will continue to monitor all available data to determine if or when hunt boundaries should be redefined.

MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

Follow statewide management direction. Continue to cooperate and coordinate management with Nevada and Oregon to ensure that adjacent sheep habitat is stocked with only the California subspecies. Conduct a research study of Area 1 bighorn population status, habitat needs and livestock interactions. Increase permit levels from 22 in 1985 to about 35 by 1990.

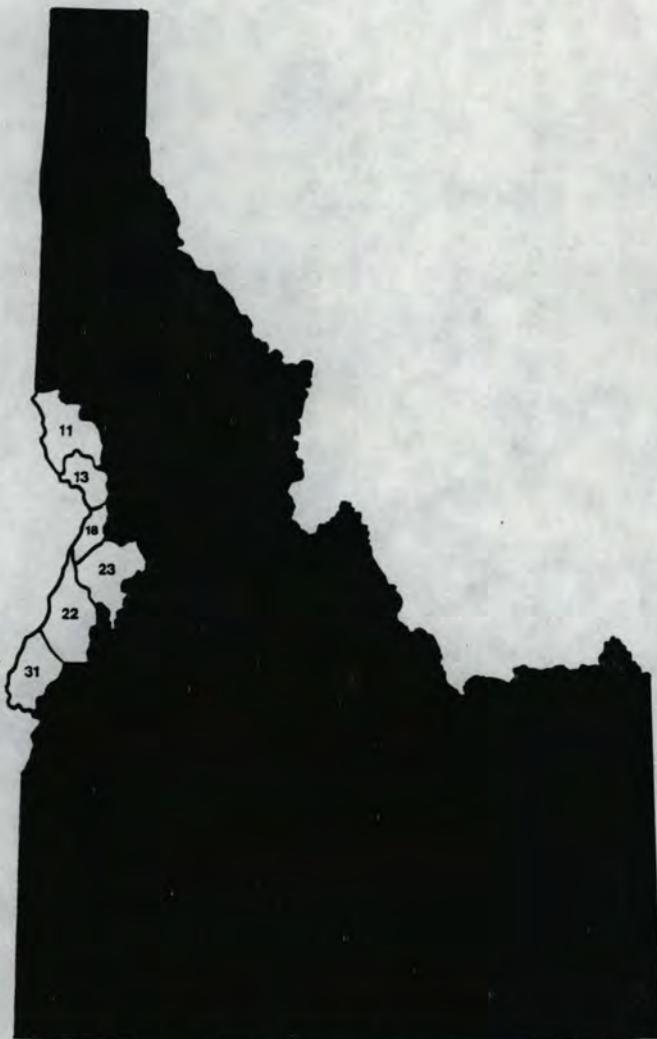
PAST AND PRESENT STATUS AND 1990 OBJECTIVES						
Unit	Year	Population	Harvest	Hunter Days	Days/Animal	
Unit 40	1981 est.	10	0	0	—	
	1985 goal	20	0	0	—	
	1985 est.	10	0	0	—	
	1990 goal	20	0	0	—	
Unit 41	1981 est.	125	2	12	7	
	1985 goal	200	5	35	7	
	1985 est.	200	4	20	4	
	1990 goal	300	4	20	4	
Unit 42	1981 est.	250	8	75	9	
	1985 goal	325	10	100	10	
	1985 est.	375	12	75	6	
	1990 goal	450	15	100	7	
Unit 46 and 47	1981 est.	0	0	0	—	
	1985 goal	15	0	0	—	
	1985 est.	20	0	0	—	
	1990 goal	60	0	0	—	
Unit 54	1981 est.	0	0	0	—	
	1985 goal	10	0	0	—	
	1985 est.	0	0	0	—	
	1990 goal	30	0	0	—	
Unit 55	1981 est.	0	0	0	—	
	1985 goal	0	0	0	—	
	1985 est.	0	0	0	—	
	1990 goal	0	0	0	—	
Unit 57	1981 est.	0	0	0	—	
	1985 goal	0	0	0	—	
	1985 est.	0	0	0	—	
	1990 goal	0	0	0	—	
Area 1	1981 est.	385	10	90	9	
	1985 goal	570	15	135	9	
	1985 est.	600	16	115	7	
	1990 goal	910	19	120	6	

**RECOMMENDED SEASON FRAMEWORK
AREA 1 UNITS 40, 41, 42, 46, 47, 54, 55 and 57**

Season Type	Hunt Number	Opening Dates					Season Length	Open For
		1986	1987	1988	1989	1990		
CONTROLLED								
Firearm	741-1, 742-1, 742-3, 742-5	8/30	9/5	9/3	9/2	9/1	16 Days	Legal rams
Firearm	741-2, 742-2, 742-4	9/27	9/26	9/24	9/23	9/22	16 days	Legal rams

AREA 2

UNITS 11, 13, 18, 22, 23 AND 31



Area 2 contains the bighorn sheep habitats along the Snake River where it forms a portion of Idaho's western border. Numerous benches, grassy slopes and steep canyons provide excellent bighorn habitat along the deepest river canyon in North America - Hells Canyon. Much of Area 2 bighorn habitat remains roadless.

Similar suitable habitat for bighorn sheep occurs in the contiguous areas of Oregon and Washington. Historically, this area supported many bighorn sheep, and this Area can still support a large population of bighorns. Excessive livestock grazing pressure applied here around the turn of the century has been reduced, and vegetation is reverting to native grasslands. Domestic sheep have been removed from some potential bighorn ranges.

The Department began releasing Rocky Mountain bighorns in Area 2 in 1975. Ten sheep from our Panther Creek herd were released near Granite Creek in Unit 18. Since then, we have released another 15 sheep near Granite Creek and seven sheep near Bernard Creek. In 1984, 17 bighorns from Wyoming's Whiskey Mountain population were released on the Department Craig Mountain WMA within Unit 11. A minimum of 162 Rocky Mountain bighorns have been transplanted to Area 2 and adjacent habitats in Oregon and Washington since 1975.

Bighorn rams have been observed as far downstream as the Willow Creek-Steep Creek area. The Hells Canyon population is apparently well established and expanding its occupied range within the canyon. However, a disease outbreak in 1984 may slow herd expansion.

A large amount of unoccupied bighorn habitat remains available in Area 2. We will continue to release sheep into these habitats to accelerate geographical expansion of this population.

Most presently occupied sheep habitat in Area 2 is administered by the USFS with lesser amounts managed by the BLM, Idaho Department of Lands, the Department of Fish and Game and private interests. Significantly larger areas of excellent bighorn habitat along the lower Salmon River in Units 11 and 13 are privately owned. Such lands are important for public acquisition through either purchase or land trades. Acquired lands will be a priority for reintroduction sites.

GOALS

(1) Increase population; (2) increase recreational opportunity; (3) continue reintroduction program; and (4) provide for harvest of sheep in Unit 18 if population levels are suitable.

ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

ISSUE — Domestic sheep were implicated in the recent outbreak of disease in bighorn sheep in Hells Canyon. Disease transmission requires direct contact between the two species.

STRATEGY — The Department will continue to work with the USFS, Hells Canyon National Recreation Area and permittees to (1) minimize contact between domestic sheep and bighorn sheep; and (2) seek better understanding of the disease organisms involved.

MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

Follow statewide management direction. Conduct helicopter surveys specifically for bighorn sheep every other year. Evaluate impact of 1984 disease losses and adjust harvest rates of rams in Unit 18 accordingly. Continue to work with the USFS and the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area to minimize potential for disease transfer between domestic sheep and bighorns. Work with Washington and Oregon to ensure that only Rocky Mountain bighorns are released in the Hells Canyon area. Increase permit levels from 2 in 1985 to 4 or more by 1990.

PAST AND PRESENT STATUS AND 1990 OBJECTIVES					
Unit	Year	Population	Harvest	Hunter Days	Days/Animal
Unit 11	1981 est.	10	0	0	—
	1985 goal	25	0	0	—
	1985 est.	25	0	0	—
	1990 goal	50	0	0	—
Unit 13	1981 est.	0	0	0	—
	1985 goal	0	0	0	—
	1985 est.	0	0	0	—
	1990 goal	0	0	0	—
Unit 18	1981 est.	75	0	0	—
	1985 goal	150	3	40	13
	1985 est.	100	1	40	13
	1990 goal	150	3	40	13
Unit 22	1981 est.	0	0	0	—
	1985 goal	20	0	0	—
	1985 est.	30	0	0	—
	1990 goal	50	0	0	—
Unit 23	1981 est.	0	0	0	—
	1985 goal	0	0	0	—
	1985 est.	0	0	0	—
	1990 goal	0	0	0	—
Unit 31	1981 est.	0	0	0	—
	1985 goal	0	0	0	—
	1985 est.	0	0	0	—
	1990 goal	0	0	0	—
Area 2	1981 est.	85	0	0	—
	1985 goal	195	3	40	13
	1985 est.	155	1	13	13
	1990 goal	250	3	40	13

**RECOMMENDED SEASON FRAMEWORK
AREA 2 UNITS 11, 13, 18, 22, 23 and 31**

Season Type	Hunt Number	Opening Dates					Season Length	Open For
		1986	1987	1988	1989	1990		
CONTROLLED								
Firearm ¹	518	8/30	9/5	9/3	9/2	9/1	28 days	Legal rams

¹Continuation of this hunt is dependent on surveys conducted to assess the impact of a 1984-85 disease related die-off of a portion of this herd.

AREA 3

UNITS 14, 17, 19, 19A, 20, 20A, 26 and 27



Area 3 units contain the bighorn habitats of the lower Salmon, Middle Fork Salmon, and the Selway river drainages. Bighorn populations in this area were protected from the pressures of early settlement by the remote nature of the country and, thus, were better able to maintain their numbers. Access into most occupied sheep habitats is limited. Herds are relatively stable although yearly fluctuations are commonly associated with varying winter losses and lamb survival rates.

Much of this area is in the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness Area, the Gospel Hump Wilderness and other roadless areas managed by the USFS. Most bighorns of the Salmon River country winter along the river breaks corridor and then migrate to alpine and sub-alpine habitats during the summer. However, some sheep remain along the Salmon and Middle Fork Salmon rivers during the summer where they provide a valuable visual resource for river float parties.

Past grazing practices, especially on the upper river winter ranges, changed some ranges from grassland to brush-dominated habitats. However, recent range trends are back toward grass-dominated habitat types because of changes in livestock and fire management. This trend may benefit bighorns but any population response is expected to occur slowly. There may be opportunities to improve some sheep habitats by the use of prescribed burns.

There is evidence that bighorns have extended their distribution downriver into Unit 14. There may be some other limited areas where additional expansion of these herds can be expected. Because of the relatively stable nature of bighorn herds along the main Salmon River and the scarcity of unoccupied habitat for transplants there are few opportunities to significantly increase these sheep populations.

The Selway River herd summers in alpine and sub-alpine habitats in Montana and along the Idaho-Montana border. These sheep winter in Idaho along the Selway River. This herd has not been hunted in Idaho; however, a few rams are harvested by Montana hunters. The Selway population appears to be increasing in numbers and distribution.

GOALS

(1) Maintain or slightly increase populations; (2) maintain harvest; and (3) maintain recreational opportunity.

ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

ISSUE — It is unknown whether bighorn rams from the Selway population remain in Idaho and can be harvested there.

STRATEGY — The Department may radio collar mature rams on their winter range to determine their migration patterns.

ISSUE — The lower Selway River drainage below Moose Creek may be potential bighorn habitat.

STRATEGY — The Department will evaluate and prioritize this area in their bighorn sheep trap and transplant program.

ISSUE — The present hunt boundary of Hunt Area 520A-1 crosses major topographic features that make access to the entire unit difficult.

STRATEGY — The Department will consider hunt area boundary changes.

MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

Follow statewide management direction. Conduct sheep census flights on a three-year rotation. Attempt to identify opportunities for increasing the distribution of bighorns in Area 3. However, trapping and transplanting efforts during this planning period will probably focus on other areas where the potential for increases are greater.

Providing high quality back country hunting will be stressed. Due to the difficulty hunters experience in locating legal rams in some units, expect somewhat lower success rates than more accessible units. Adjust permit levels to attempt to reach statewide management direction for rate of ram harvest. Increase permit levels from 96 in 1985 to about 105 by 1990.

PAST AND PRESENT STATUS AND 1990 OBJECTIVES

Unit	Year	Population	Harvest	Hunter Days	Days/Animal
Unit 14	1981 est.	50	1	15	15
	1985 goal	75	1	15	15
	1985 est.	25	0	0	—
	1990 goal	25	0	0	—
Unit 17	1981 est.	125	0	0	—
	1985 goal	150	2	30	10
	1985 est.	135	2	30	10
	1990 goal	155	2	30	10
Unit 19	1981 est.	150	1	10	10
	1985 goal	175	3	30	10
	1985 est.	150	3	30	70
	1990 goal	165	4	40	10
Unit 19A	1981 est.	75	0	0	—
	1985 goal	75	1	15	15
	1985 est.	50	0	0	—
	1990 goal	75	0	0	—
Unit 20	1981 est.	250	6	80	13
	1985 goal	275	10	130	13
	1985 est.	220	10	130	13
	1990 goal	245	10	130	13
Unit 20A	1981 est.	325	9	126	14
	1985 goal	375	9	126	14
	1985 est.	300	10	140	14
	1990 goal	300	10	140	14
Unit 26	1981 est.	150	2	90	45
	1985 goal	150	3	125	42
	1985 est.	125	10	450	45
	1990 goal	150	10	450	45
Unit 27	1981 est.	375	8	350	44
	1985 goal	400	11	425	39
	1985 est.	450	15	660	44
	1990 goal	450	15	660	44
Area 3	1981 est.	1,500	19	671	35
	1985 goal	1,675	40	896	22
	1985 est.	1,455	50	1,440	29
	1990 goal	1,565	51	1,450	28

**RECOMMENDED SEASON FRAMEWORK
AREA 3 UNITS 14, 17, 19, 19A, 20, 20A, 26 and 27**

Season Type	Hunt Number	Opening Dates					Season Length	Open For	
		1986	1987	1988	1989	1990			
CONTROLLED									
Firearm	520A-1, 520A-2, 527-3, 527-4	8/30	9/5	9/3	9/2	9/1	58 Days	Legal rams	
Firearm	519-1, 520-1, 520-3, 520-5, 526-1, 527-1, 527-5, 527-7	8/30	9/5	9/3	9/2	9/1	28 days	Legal rams	
Firearm	519-2, 520-2, 520-4, 520-6, 526-2, 527-2, 527-6, 527-8	9/27	10/3	10/1	9/30	9/29	30 days	Legal rams	
Firearm	520A-3	8/30	9/5	9/3	9/2	9/1	37 days	Legal rams	

AREA 4

UNITS 21 and 28



Area 4 contains the bighorn habitats of the Panther Creek drainage and along the roaded portion of the main Salmon River below the town of North Fork. Access to major portions of sheep ranges and ongoing or planned development projects dictate special management considerations in this area. Easy access in this area can lead to overharvest and loss of quality hunting if seasons should extend into the rutting period when breeding-age rams become highly vulnerable.

Area 4 sheep populations are thought to be high quality herds and exhibited good lamb production and herd growth through the 1970's. The Panther Creek population experienced a population decline in the early 1980's probably due to weather related mortality, and has exhibited poor lamb recruitment in recent years.

Both units are well roaded, with potential for copper or cobalt mining, geothermal development and timber harvest, which

could lead to even more development and roads. The increased roading can lead to high levels of unregulated harvest.

The Panther Creek sheep population has been our primary source of Rocky Mountain bighorn transplant stock, with 125 bighorns removed for transplant since the mid-1970's. During the 1981-85 planning period new trapping sites were developed in Unit 21 along the main Salmon River. Easy access to winter ranges has simplified the logistics involved in trapping.

Viewing and photographing these sheep along the Salmon River and Panther Creek roads is a popular recreational pastime. We expect this type of nonconsumptive use to increase in importance.

GOALS

(1) Increase populations; (2) increase harvest; (3) increase level of recreation; and (4) utilize sheep from Area 4 for transplant stock.

ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

ISSUE — Intensive management of the Panther Creek and Unit 21 sheep herds for transplant stock necessitates detailed population data.

STRATEGY — The Department will (1) annually monitor numbers and composition in trapped herds; and (2) determine what part of the annual increment of the trapped herds can be removed by hunting and transplanting without negatively affecting herd numbers.

ISSUE — Low lamb recruitment and a general population decline in the Panther Creek sheep herd may negatively effect our use of these sheep for transplant stock in the future.

STRATEGY — The Department will (1) emphasize capture of sheep from other herds for transplant stock until it is determined that such removal will not negatively effect this sheep population; and (2) seek outside funding to establish a research project to determine the cause of poor lamb survival in the Panther Creek sheep herd.

ISSUE — These sheep become highly vulnerable to hunting during the rut because they move into an accessible area.

STRATEGY — The Department will close the season in Area 4 prior to the start of rutting activities.

ISSUE — Proposed mining, timber harvest and geothermal development activities could severely impact sheep in Area 4.

STRATEGY — The Department will (1) urge land managers to apply constraints on land use practices in important bighorn habitats, (2) cooperate with the USFS to develop timber management guidelines in bighorn habitats; and (3) cooperate with USFS in development of a habitat management plan for the Panther Creek sheep population.

MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

Unless constrained by poor recruitment, management will be directed toward developing and maintaining Area 4 sheep herds as a source of transplant stock. Increase permit numbers from 22 in 1985 to about 26 in 1990.

PAST AND PRESENT STATUS AND 1990 OBJECTIVES					
Unit	Year	Population	Harvest	Hunter Days	Days/Animal
Unit 21	1981 est.	150	2	50	25
	1985 goal	200	3	70	23
	1985 est.	200	3	70	23
	1990 goal	225	4	84	21
Unit 28	1981 est.	250	6	140	23
	1985 goal	500	10	230	23
	1985 est.	300	8	168	21
	1990 goal	400	10	190	19
Area 4	1981 est.	400	8	190	24
	1985 goal	700	13	300	23
	1985 est.	500	11	238	22
	1990 goal	625	14	274	20

**RECOMMENDED SEASON FRAMEWORK
AREA 4 UNITS 21 and 28**

Season Type	Hunt Number	Opening Dates					Season Length	Open For
		1986	1987	1988	1989	1990		
CONTROLLED								
Firearm	521, 528-1, 528-2	8/30	9/5	9/3	9/2	9/1	37 days	Legal rams

AREA 5

UNITS 21A, 29, 30, 30A, 36, 36A, 36B

37, 37A, 45, 49, 50, 51, 52

58, 59, 59A, 61, 63, 67 AND 68



Area 5 units all supported Rocky Mountain bighorn herds in the past. By the early 1900's sheep were eliminated from most of the area and severely reduced in the remaining habitats. Vegetative changes due to livestock use on winter ranges, disease losses, and indiscriminate harvest by settlers and miners probably were the main causes of sheep declines.

Habitats are diverse, generally mountainous types, with sheep summering mostly at higher elevations in alpine and sub-alpine ranges. The winter ranges are mostly sagebrush/grass types where precipitation is low. Summer ranges are generally administered by the USFS, whereas winter ranges are managed primarily by BLM.

Recent changes in land management practices have resulted in improved range conditions for bighorns in much of Area 5. Recent increases in sheep herds in Units 36A and 36B are thought to be related to these improved range conditions. Improved grazing managements and controlled burns on bighorn sheep ranges could further improve conditions for sheep in other units. There are good opportunities for increases in existing sheep herds, and excellent possibilities for reintroductions into some vacant sheep habitats in Area 5. Many of our recent releases of bighorns have occurred in these units.

The Mt. Borah sheep population in Units 37, 50 and 51 was started from releases of seven bighorns from Morgan Creek in 1969 and 24 bighorns from Banff Park, Alberta, in August 1970. This sheep herd presently numbers nearly 300 animals. The first hunt was authorized in 1981 and has become very popular with bighorn sheep hunters.

Sheep obtained from the Whiskey Mountain bighorn herd in Wyoming were released in Elbow and Jaggle canyons of Unit 50 in 1978 and 1980. Wyoming sheep were also released in Badger and Uncle Ike's creeks in Unit 51 in 1983 and 1984.

Bighorns trapped from the Panther Creek population have been released into Long, Skull and Bloom canyons of Unit 58 in four transplants between 1976 and 1982. In 1982, eight Rocky Mountain bighorns from Panther Creek were released in Birch Creek southwest of Challis in Unit 36B. This transplant was an attempt to stimulate growth of a small, stable population of sheep in the area. In January 1985, 22 bighorns obtained from Oregon were released in Unit 30A near Leadore.

Many potential release sites are available in Area 5 units. During the 1986-90 period, we will continue to inventory these sites and establish priorities for reintroductions.

GOALS

(1) Increase population; (2) increase harvest; (3) increase amount of recreation provided; (4) transplant bighorns into Area 5; and (5) provide additional statewide transplant stock from established populations.

ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

ISSUE — Suitable release sites for bighorn reintroductions need to be identified and prioritized in Area 5.

STRATEGY — The Department will inventory and evaluate potential release sites in Area 5. Land management agencies will be informed of high priority release sites and assisted with appropriate reintroduction impact assessments upon request.

ISSUE — Status of the recent releases of bighorns in Units 50, 51 and 58 has not been documented.

STRATEGY — The Department will (1) seek additional funding to determine the status of reintroduced sheep herds; and

MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

(2) share resulting data with land management agencies so appropriate management of the habitat will be possible.

ISSUE — Some winter-spring ranges could be improved by burning.

STRATEGY — The Department will encourage controlled burning of such ranges.

Follow statewide management direction. Continue current hunts in Units 36A, 36B and the Mt. Borah area. Open additional hunts as transplanted populations become established. Management efforts will be directed toward completing inventories of potential release sites, assessing status of recently established herds and increasing sheep numbers through transplants into unoccupied habitat. Utilize established sheep populations in Area 5 for transplant stock, if feasible. Increase permit numbers from 19 in 1985 to about 30 in 1990.

PAST AND PRESENT STATUS AND 1990 OBJECTIVES

Unit	Year	Population	Harvest	Hunter Days	Days/Animal
Unit 36A	1981 est.	125	0	0	—
	1985 goal	175	2	40	20
	1985 est.	150	4	80	20
	1990 goal	175	6	108	18
Unit 36B	1981 est.	125	0	0	—
	1985 goal	150	2	40	20
	1985 est.	200	4	72	18
	1990 goal	225	6	96	16
Unit 37A	1981 est.	30	0	0	—
	1985 goal	30	0	0	—
	1985 est.	30	0	0	—
	1990 goal	80	0	0	—
Mt. Borah 37, 50, 51	1981 est.	275	2	50	25
	1985 goal	400	6	120	20
	1985 est.	350	6	108	18
	1990 goal	400	8	128	16
Units 58-59A	1981 est.	40	0	0	—
	1985 goal	100	0	0	—
	1985 est.	60	0	0	—
	1990 goal	75	0	0	—
Units 50-51	1981 est.	40	0	0	—
	1985 goal	100	0	0	—
	1985 est.	60	0	0	—
	1990 goal	75	0	0	—
Unit 30A	1981 est.	0	0	0	—
	1985 goal	0	0	0	—
	1985 est.	30	0	0	—
	1990 goal	50	0	0	—
Unit 61	1981 est.	30	0	0	—
	1985 goal	30	0	0	—
	1985 est.	30	0	0	—
	1990 goal	30	0	0	—
Remaining Units	1981 est.	0	0	0	—
	1985 goal	0	0	0	—
	1985 est.	0	0	0	—
	1990 goal	200	0	0	—
Area 5	1981 est.	665	2	50	25
	1985 goal	985	10	200	20
	1985 est.	910	14	260	19
	1990 goal	1,310	20	332	17

RECOMMENDED SEASON FRAMEWORK
**AREA 5 UNITS 21A, 29, 30, 30A, 36, 36A, 36B, 37, 37A, 45,
49, 50, 51, 52, 58, 59, 59A, 61, 63, 67 and 68**

Season Type	Hunt Number	Opening Dates					Season Length	Open For
		1986	1987	1988	1989	1990		
CONTROLLED								
Firearm	536A, 536B, 550	8/30	9/5	9/3	9/2	9/1	37 days	Legal rams

AREA 6

REMAINING UNITS IN STATE



Historic records indicate that bighorn sheep occurred in several management units in Idaho that are not included in Areas 1-5. Much of the remaining good sheep habitat in the state appears to have been lost due to "permanent" alteration. However, small areas of suitable bighorn habitat may exist in which sheep herds could be established close to large human population centers. These sheep could provide a valuable nonconsumptive recreational opportunity and might provide future transplant stock. We will attempt to identify such opportunities during this planning period.

APPENDIX 1

BIGHORN SHEEP REINTRODUCTION SITES

Site Name	Area – Unit	Land Ownership	Environmental Assessment Status	Date Completed
California Bighorn Sheep				
Jarbridge River	Unit 46-47	BLM	EA Not Required	
Cottonwood Cr.	Unit 54	USFS	EA Completed	1981
City of Rocks	Unit 55	BLM/USFS	EA Not Completed	
Salmon Falls Cr.	Unit 46	BLM	EA Not Completed	
Big Jacks Creek	Unit 41	BLM	EA Not Completed	
Lower Bruneau River	Units 41-46	BLM	EA Not Completed	
S. Fk. Owyhee River	Unit 42	BLM	EA Completed	1982
N. Fk. Owyhee River	Unit 40	BLM	EA Not Completed	
Sheep Creek	Unit 41	BLM	EA Not Completed	
Black Mountain	Unit 40	BLM	EA Not Completed	
Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep				
Falls Creek	Unit 37A	USFS/BLM	EA Completed	1985
Eighteen Mile Cr.	Unit 30A	BLM	EA Not Completed	
Sheep Creek	Unit 21A	USFS	EA Not Completed	
Sheep Mountain	Unit 36A	BLM/USFS	EA Not Completed	
Jerry Peak	Unit 36A	BLM/USFS	EA Not Completed	
Rattlesnake Cr.	Unit 28	BLM/USFS	EA Not Completed	
Grouse Creek/Dickey Peak	Unit 37	BLM/USFS	EA Not Completed	
Second Cr. to Ryegrass Cr.	Unit 29	BLM/USFS	EA Not Completed	
Snake R.-Hells Can.	Unit 18	USFS	Approved	
Craig Mountain	Unit 11	BLM	Approved	
Selway River	Unit 17	USFS	EA Not Completed	
City of Rocks	Unit 45	BLM	EA Not Completed	
Petticoat Peak	Unit 74	BLM	EA Not Completed	
Chamberlain Creek	Unit 20A	USFS	EA Not Completed	

