

# BIG GAME RELEASE SITE PLANNING AND APPROVAL SUMMARY

**SPECIES OR SUBSPECIES:** Desert Bighorn Sheep                      Reintroduction                      FY2011

**APPROXIMATE NUMBER TO BE RELEASED:** 40

**RELEASE SITE:**

**MOUNTAIN RANGE/AREA:** Virginia Range, Unit 195                      **SITE NAME(S):** Clark Mountain  
**COUNTY:** Storey

**COOPERATING LAND MANAGEMENT AGENCY:**

This is a private lands release in Storey County onto land owned by Tahoe-Reno Industrial (TRI). TRI is the primary private landowner in this area, controlling approximately 100,000 acres of land (61% of Storey County). The majority of the Virginia Range lies within Storey County with smaller portions in Washoe and Lyon Counties, and Carson City. The extreme southern and eastern portions of the range contain private land holdings checkered with public land administered by the BLM Carson City District. The northern section however, which is the area in which NDOW estimates will be where the bighorn sheep will establish their home range, is almost entirely under private ownership.

**AGENCY APPROVAL DOCUMENT AND STATUS:**

A Virginia Range Reintroduction Plan was written in 2009/10 and contains all applicable details of the release site, land ownership, adjacent grazing allotments and management considerations. A cooperative agreement between TRI and NDOW was signed in July 2010 outlining the details of the release, subsequent monitoring of the herd and each parties obligations.

**OTHER DOCUMENTS AND THEIR STATUS:**

A letter from NDOW to all landowners and adjacent permittees will be sent out resolving them of any liability in the case of any disease or mortality events of the bighorns following the release.

**NOTIFICATION OF USER GROUPS:**

Several meetings were held in 2009/10 with TRI representatives to discuss the cooperative agreement and release details. The Board of Commissioners of Storey County and the county's Wildlife Advisory Board were involved in these discussions and have given their full support(see Reintroduction Plan attachments). Wildlife Advisory Boards, adjacent livestock permittees and interested participants in this process will be notified by mail or phone to participate in the release.

**HABITAT ASSESSMENT (be specific; include any limiting factors both short- and long-term):**

The target area which NDOW has evaluated for this reintroduction is comprised of Clark Mountain, the designated release area, with its surrounding canyons, and the Truckee River corridor. Elevation varies from approximately 4,500 feet on the alluvial fans to 7,198 feet at Clark Mountain. The topographic features of Clark Mountain include north, south, east and west facing exposures with numerous breaks and drainages providing adequate escape cover for bighorn sheep. God's Throne Canyon, which extends northwest off Clark Mountain is a representative sample of good bighorn sheep lambing habitat. Though much of the understory has been invaded by cheatgrass, there is still adequate coverage of perennial grasses and palatable shrubs to support a bighorn sheep population. Topographic features of the Truckee River corridor provide mostly north facing cliffs and steep slopes descending abruptly down to the Truckee River and the Derby Ditch. The Truckee River corridor and Interstate 80 will both be major impediments to northward expansion of the reintroduced bighorns. Bighorn habitat is in fair to good condition in most places with water availability being the limiting factor in the northern part of the range.

Feral horses occupy the unit and are the most abundant ungulate. Two water developments will be built upon approval of the release by the Commission. These and existing water sources in the area will be fenced to preclude use by feral horses and thus reducing this competition.

**PREDATOR MANAGEMENT NEEDS:**

Area biologist recommendations and current mountain lion harvest statistics indicate predator control in the release area is not necessary at this time. A request will be made to Wildlife Services to conduct a field evaluation of predator sign and the need for predator removal prior to the bighorn release per Commission Policy 22. The areas surrounding Clark Mountain are hunted by lion hunters every year, mainly due to it's proximity to Reno. Mule deer populations are low due in part to the expansion of the Truckee Meadows and U.S. Highway 395 which cut off migration routes into the unit two decades ago. Lions in the Virginia Range have already shown a tendency to prey almost exclusively on feral horses, a major competitor with other ungulates. There are radio-collared lions (at least one) occupying the north part of the Virginia Range and these lions are part of a cooperative study between the University of Nevada, Reno and NDOW, along with several other contributors. These collared lions will be avoided during pre-release predator control due to the scientific and economic investment that NDOW and other contributors have in the study. If these lions should prey on released bighorn sheep it will be known immediately and appropriate action will be taken at that time to target the specific lion.

**COMMENTS:** The goal of this release is to reestablish a herd of desert bighorn sheep into their native habitat within the Virginia Range. There are many benefits of a reintroduction of this type, including: having a site that would help alleviate higher densities of sheep elsewhere in the state by providing a release location; allowing for potential release stock if the population persists in the future; having a population of desert bighorn sheep within minutes of the State Capitol and Reno would provide viewing opportunities for school age children. The landowners have already agreed to hunting the population per NDOW recommendations, and they are eager to facilitate the educational aspects of the release site as described above.

**NDOW REGION:** Western

**DATE PREPARED:** August 2010