



### Background

The Bighorn Sheep Management and Hunting Indoctrination Class or Seminar was first instituted in 1966 with the first desert bighorn ram horn harvest restrictions of 144 minimum Boone and Crockett score (largest side doubled) or 7 years of age or older. The seminar was to help hunters better field score and age rams to prevent rams harvested that didn't meet the minimum horn and age criteria. All California and Rocky Mountain ram hunts since their inaugural seasons in 1984 and 1985, respectively, have been "any ram". The seminar was mandatory since 1966 for all desert, California, and Rocky Mountain bighorn hunts. The seminar over the years has been expanded to include many important aspects of the bighorn hunt beyond field aging and scoring and has been very popular with tagholders and bighorn conservation organizations. Tagholders who hire hunting guides were eventually given the choice to not attend if their hunting guide attended the seminar. Beginning in the 1980s, select desert bighorn hunt units were changed to "any ram" regulations. In 1996, all bighorn ram hunts statewide went to "any ram" regulation.

The "any ram" change, combined with statewide quotas surpassing 150, and challenges each year with staff having to provide last minute seminars to a few tagholders unable to attend the scheduled seminars, the mandatory requirement was eliminated for those that attended a seminar after 1990. Also hunting guides who attended a seminar after 1997 never had to attend again. In 2012, the seminar became no longer mandatory. Statewide ram quotas had reached 350+ in 2014. Gradual decline in attendance occurred at the Las Vegas and Reno seminars. This decline was taking place while gradual increases in harvested ram ages occurred since the late 1990s. Game Division biologists and staff believe the seminar is still highly valuable to tagholders and answers many of their questions that would otherwise be pursued via phone or email. Also, the need to alert tagholders and collect biological and pathogen samples in monitoring and averting potential disease events has increased greatly along with more local and federal restrictions to bighorn hunting. Many ardent supporters of the bighorn restoration program believe those privileged enough to draw a bighorn tag should be educated and informed of the past and current management efforts to sustain bighorn populations to build more advocates to support the future success of the program.

## **2020 Bighorn Sheep Management and Hunting Seminar - Potential Action**

NDOW is not scheduling in-person bighorn sheep seminars in August 2020 due to current Covid-19 guidelines and not knowing restrictions on social gatherings/events of over 50 people at that time. We are seeking guidance from the Wildlife Commission for bighorn seminars this year and moving into the future. The following options are suggested for 2020:

- Providing the current voluntary bighorn seminar via Zoom for those not able or wanting to attend in person.
- Providing a voluntary virtual/online bighorn seminar for all tagholders.

## **Future Bighorn Sheep Management and Hunting Seminar – NDOW Recommendations**

Currently all bighorn ewe and mountain goat tagholders must view a mandatory online identification course to help tell the differences among gender and age classes of animals before they receive their tags. As stated above, Game Division biologists and others believe there is great value for all bighorn ram tagholders to view the bighorn sheep management and hunting seminar each year.

It is recommended, starting in 2021 that a condensed version of the current bighorn sheep management and hunting seminar be made into an online presentation and be made mandatory for all bighorn ram tagholders to view and to adequately answer questions posed at the end of the presentation before they receive their tag. The online viewing and tagholder completion tracking process would be similarly managed by Kalkomey, as they currently manage the ewe and mountain goat identification courses. If this recommendation were to be approved, NDOW staff would draft the appropriate NAC regulation changes for such a mandatory online course and draft the presentation for viewing and suggested edits from the Wildlife Commission at their November 2020 meeting.