

NDG&F April 4th Newsletter

Bighorns Show Record Lamb Recruitment

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual bighorn sheep survey revealed a minimum of 297 bighorn sheep in western North Dakota. The 2012 count was second highest on record and 5 percent above last year's survey.

In total, biologists counted 87 rams, 156 ewes and a record 54 lambs. Not included are approximately 30 bighorn sheep in the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

Big game biologist Brett Wiedmann said the northern badlands population was the highest on record, but the southern badlands herds declined slightly.

"Although adult rams and ewes were virtually unchanged from 2011, we were very pleased to see a record number of lambs recruited into the population, as well as a record recruitment rate of 38 percent," Wiedmann said. "Nearly all of the lambs we counted during last summer's survey survived the winter."

Game and Fish Department biologists count and classify all bighorn sheep in late summer and then recount lambs the following March to determine recruitment.

A bumper crop of lambs is indicative of a healthy population, so Wiedmann is encouraged with the results of this year's survey. However, Wiedmann added that this year's healthy lamb numbers likely won't be reflected in increased hunting licenses for several years, as the total number of rams remains much lower than it was in 2008, and the current age structure of rams is also much younger than what Game and Fish biologists would like to see.

"Consequently, we'll likely have to continue to be conservative with hunting pressure for a few years, but the future certainly looks promising," Wiedmann said. "Adult mortality was also low last winter, so we expect another good crop of lambs to begin hitting the ground within a couple of weeks."

Game and Fish has issued four bighorn sheep licenses for 2013, the same as 2012.

Hunting Guide and Outfitter Test Set

The next guide and outfitter written examination is May 11 at 1 p.m. at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department office in Bismarck. The test is given periodically to anyone interested in becoming a hunting guide or outfitter in the state.

In addition to passing a written exam, qualifications for becoming a guide include a background check for criminal and game and fish violations; certification in cardiopulmonary resuscitation and standard first aid; and employment by or contract with a licensed hunting outfitter.

Hunting outfitter eligibility requirements include the guide qualifications, as well as an individual must have held a hunting guide license for two years; and must have proof of liability insurance.

Interested individuals are required to preregister by calling the Game and Fish Department's enforcement office at 328-6604.