

# **Bighorn Sheep Project - Seminoe Mountain Range**

## **Observation Report – March 25, 2011**

### **Justin Clapp, WGFD**

Bighorn sheep movements in the Seminoe Range have not altered dramatically from previous reports (Feb. 22, 2011), but a tendency to band into larger groups has been recently observed. High winds and warm temperatures melted much of the snowpack on and around Seminoe through the first few weeks of March, leaving most south-facing and low-elevation slopes relatively open.

Recent predations were inspected shortly after predation. Hounds were used on March 10 in an attempt to legally harvest the lion from the kill (Figure 3, #2), but after identifying tracks of a mature female with two kittens, the hunt was discontinued. Over the next few days, mountain lion sign (i.e., tracks, scrapes, previous kills) was identified in the lower Morgan Creek region, with at least one mature male lion responsible for the kill to the west (Figure 3, #4), as well as several older mule deer kills found in the general vicinity between the two predations. This indicates that resident lions which feed on the higher concentrations of deer in the area may have taken advantage of the newly-relocated sheep occupying the south facing slope, but do not appear to be targeting them specifically as a prey source.

A WGFD Chapter 56 (lethal-take) permit was issued for the male mountain lion, and if captured, plans were made for the female and kittens to be moved from the area, in an attempt to augment survival potential for the remaining ewes in Morgan Creek. Mule deer carcasses with trail cameras were distributed throughout the area, and cage traps were set for several days, with no mountain lion activity documented since initial predation took place. Multiple hunters were also encouraged to legally harvest a lion, but with no snow and rugged terrain, their efforts have been unsuccessful, to date. With most of the snowpack melted, many of the concentrated populations of mule deer in the area have dispersed, possibly causing mountain lions in the area to alter movements based on primary prey activities. We will continue to monitor carcasses and mountain lion activities in the area in addition to routine tracking activities of bighorn sheep.

With the exception of recent predations, overall health of remaining bighorn sheep on Seminoe is promising, with no sickness or injuries observed. The remaining ewes in Morgan Creek continue to be closely monitored, and all sheep over the next month should begin to separate in preparation for lambing, with a minimum of 30 mature ewes observed throughout the range.

**If you're interested in finding out more about this Seminoe BHS transplant, and what monitoring has shown, + the latest happenings on Wyoming's bighorn sheep scene, be sure to attend the (free) seminars from 1:00-4:00 PM on Saturday June 4th, at the Parkway Plaza in Casper. As you can see from the seminar listing in the 2011 WY-WSF Fundraiser/Convention announcement (see page 8 of this newsletter), presentations will be given on the Newcastle/Hunt Area 20, Wheatland/Hunt Area 19, Seminoe/Ferris Mountains/Hunt Area 17, Targhee/Hunt Area 6, and Jackson/Hunt Area 7 bighorn sheep herds. Come, listen, learn, and visit with Wyoming's bighorn sheep managers. And while you're there, plan on coming to the WY-WSF banquet that evening!**

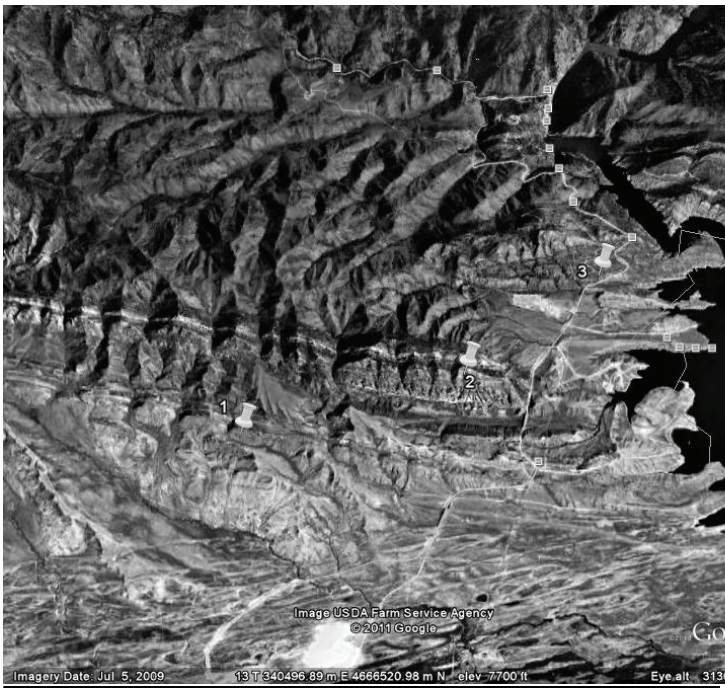


Figure 1. Bighorn locations on S side Seminoe Mtns.  
 1) Largest group of bighorns (n=21), including 3 rams, multiple ewes and lambs. All 2010 transplants.  
 2) Lone ram.  
 3) Lone ewe.  
 \*\*Not shown- Group of six bighorns occupying Bennett Mountains directly east.

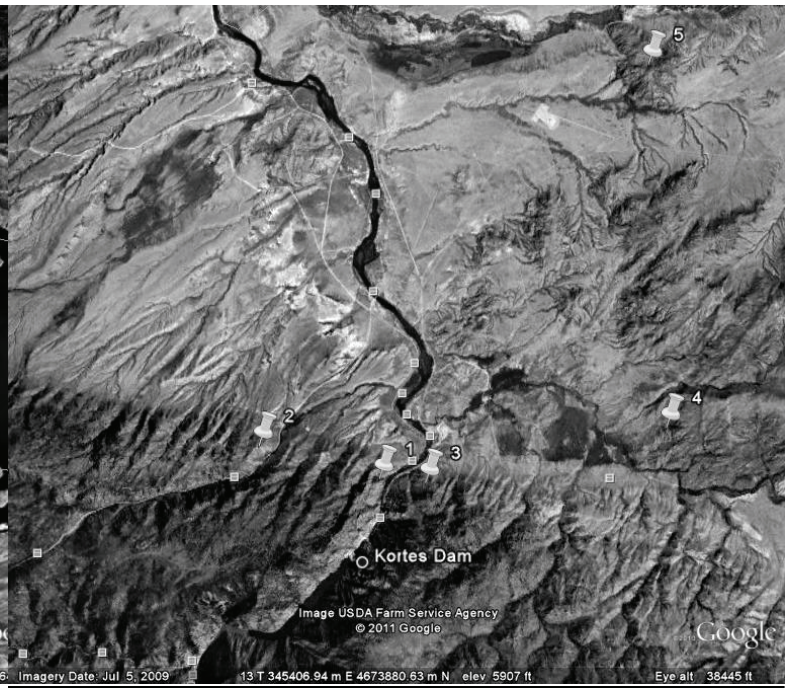


Figure 2. Bighorn locations on N side Seminoe Range.  
 1) Three ewes, two lambs on W side Cortes Canyon.  
 2) Eleven sheep (2 rams, 6 ewes, 3 lambs) around Hamilton Creek; these sheep show integration from multiple transplants.  
 3) Two ewes on E side Cortes Canyon.  
 4) Lone ram.  
 5) Lone ewe from Pedro Mountain moved to the E, near Alcova highway.

Figure 3. Bighorn sheep in Morgan Creek.

- 1) Three remaining ewes on face N of government housing area.
- 2) Bighorn ewe mortality from lion depredation. March 9, 2011.
- 3) Unknown mortality signal from bighorn ewe, early February 2011.
- 4) Bighorn ewe mortality from lion depredation. March 10, 2011. This kill found within 100yds of lion depredation that occurred Jan. 1, 2011.

