

## Appendix F. RECOVERY STRATEGY FOR PENINSULAR RANGES BIGHORN SHEEP

The Endangered Species Act, as amended, includes the requirement to develop and implement recovery plans (Section 4(f)). Recovery, or the arrest or reversal of the decline of an endangered or threatened species, is the cornerstone and ultimate purpose of the endangered species program. The Secretary of the Interior has delegated responsibility for endangered and threatened species recovery to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Recovery plans identify actions that frequently require coordination among Federal, State, and local agencies, academic researchers, conservation organizations, private individuals, and major land users in order to be successful. However, the development and approval phases of recovery plans are excluded from National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) requirements because they are advisory in nature.

The Peninsular Ranges population of bighorn sheep (PRBS; *Ovis canadensis nelsoni*) was listed as endangered in 1998. In October of 2000, the USFWS completed the *Peninsular Ranges Bighorn Sheep Recovery Plan* which recommends actions to recover and protect this listed species. In February 2001, the USFWS designated critical habitat for the PRBS. This management plan addresses PRBS recovery issues on Federal Land only. The Bureau of Land Management employees were consulted during preparation of the recovery plan. The Recovery Plan makes the following recommendations which are directly applicable to the CDCA Plan Amendment for the Coachella Valley.

- i. Protect essential habitat, consisting of physical and biological resources needed for (1) normal behavior and protection from disturbance, and (2) individual population growth and movement, including dispersal to support a future population
- ii. Acquire, or exchange to acquire, bighorn sheep habitat from willing landowners.
- iii. Remove exotic vegetation and prevent further invasion by exotic plants, especially tamarisk.
- iv. Reduce or eliminate wild horse populations from bighorn sheep habitat.
- v. Implement a fire management plan in fire adapted habitats to help maintain bighorn sheep habitat.
- vi. Maintain existing water sources and consider providing additional water sources on public lands.
- vii. Maintain or re-establish connectivity through out all habitat.
- viii. Construct fences to exclude bighorn sheep from urban area where they have begun or may begin using urban sources of food and water.
- ix. Manage road use and aircraft activities to reduce or eliminate habitat fragmentation or interference with bighorn sheep resource use patterns.
- x. Conduct or approve monitoring and research activities on public land to support adaptive management, enhance understanding of human/sheep interactions, understand habitat relationships, understand predator relationships, and clarify factors affecting population trends.
- xi. Consider approval of predator removal activities on public lands.
- xii. Consider approval of reintroduction and augmentation activities on public lands.
- xiii. Develop and implement education and public awareness programs.

Through the CVMSHCP, which will include a trails management plan for the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains, and the CDCA Plan Amendment, the BLM is considering a range of alternatives, each composed of a suite of actions and guided by the Recovery Plan recommendations listed above. The alternatives include habitat improvements (tamarisk control, water sources, etc.), land exchanges, land acquisitions, trails management, and limits to other activities. Altogether, the decisions regarding these actions will compose the strategy to be implemented on BLM-managed public lands in order to contribute to bighorn sheep population recovery. By means of these planning efforts, the alternative strategies for public lands are analyzed by an interdisciplinary team and with the benefit of public input and comment under NEPA, as well as plan-level consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

On a more specific level, the Recovery Plan identified trails and areas with potential conflicts that should be addressed in an interagency trails management plan. The Recovery Plan also makes the following recommendations which are directly applicable to the trails management plan element of the CVMSHCP (an activity-level plan for BLM-managed lands):

1. Develop and implement a trails management program with affected land management agencies, scientific organizations, and user groups.
  - i. Prepare a public education and outreach program for trail users.
  - ii. Confine dogs to designated areas and prohibit dogs in bighorn sheep habitat.
  - iii. Apply seasonal restrictions on selected trails in lambing habitat between January 1 and June 30.
  - iv. Seasonal restrictions may be appropriate for selected trails that lead to water sources.
  - v. Address possible seasonal restrictions, trail re-locations or permanent trail closures where restrictions cannot be enforced and relocations are not possible.
  - vi. Use trails as a tool to focus use away from more sensitive areas.
  - vii. Avoid constructing new trails, except for peripheral trails located on the edge of urban areas to relieve pressure on other sensitive trails and to discourage sheep use of urban areas. Where new trails are used impacts should be minimized.
  - viii. Maintain a uniformed agency presence during peak use period to educate the public, monitor compliance with trails rules, and enforce rules against violations.
  
2. Manage trail use to reduce or eliminate habitat fragmentation or interference with bighorn sheep resource use patterns

Through the trails management plan element of the CVMSHCP, a range of alternatives will be considered that represents different approaches to trails management recommendations expressed in the Recovery Plan. Similar to the broader Resource Management Plan decisions discussed above, an environmental impact analysis of the various approaches will be provided with the CVMSHCP. Trails management decisions, however, are more easily adapted over time because they do not require a plan amendment to modify them.

The Recovery Plan also makes recommendations which may be the subject of future activity planning, project planning, or environmental analysis prior to implementation. This is generally because the specific projects are not known, or additional more-detailed planning is necessary to develop and analyze specific proposals or alternatives.

New actions outside the scope of the analysis completed for this plan would be subject to additional project-level consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:

1. Prohibit use of goats as a pack animal on trails.
2. Prohibit fences in which sheep may become entangled or strangled, or that block sheep movement in bighorn sheep habitat
3. Acquire, or exchange to acquire, bighorn sheep habitat from willing landowners.
4. Remove exotic vegetation and prevent further invasion by exotic plants, especially tamarisk.
5. Implement a fire management plan in fire adapted habitats to help maintain bighorn sheep habitat.
6. Maintain existing water sources and consider providing additional water sources on public lands.
7. Construct fences to exclude bighorn sheep from urban area where they have begun or may begin using urban sources of food and water.
8. Manage road use and aircraft activities to reduce or eliminate habitat fragmentation or interference with bighorn sheep resource use patterns.
9. Conduct monitoring and research to support adaptive management and to enhance understanding of human/sheep interactions.
10. Consider approval of predator removal activities on public lands.
11. Consider approval of reintroduction and augmentation activities on public lands.