

# **Bighorn Sheep Program Update**

**May 21, 2021**

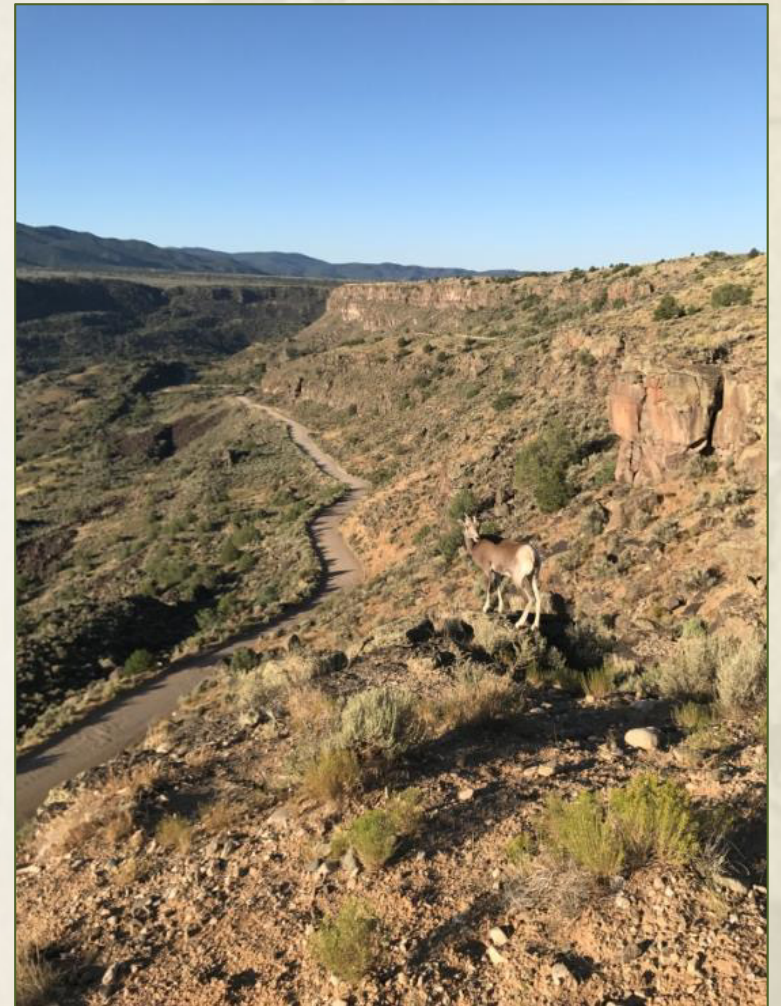
**New Mexico State Game  
Commission Meeting  
Virtual Meeting**



# Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep

## PAST

- Extirpated by early 1900's
- Successfully restored in NM starting in the 1940 to Sandia's



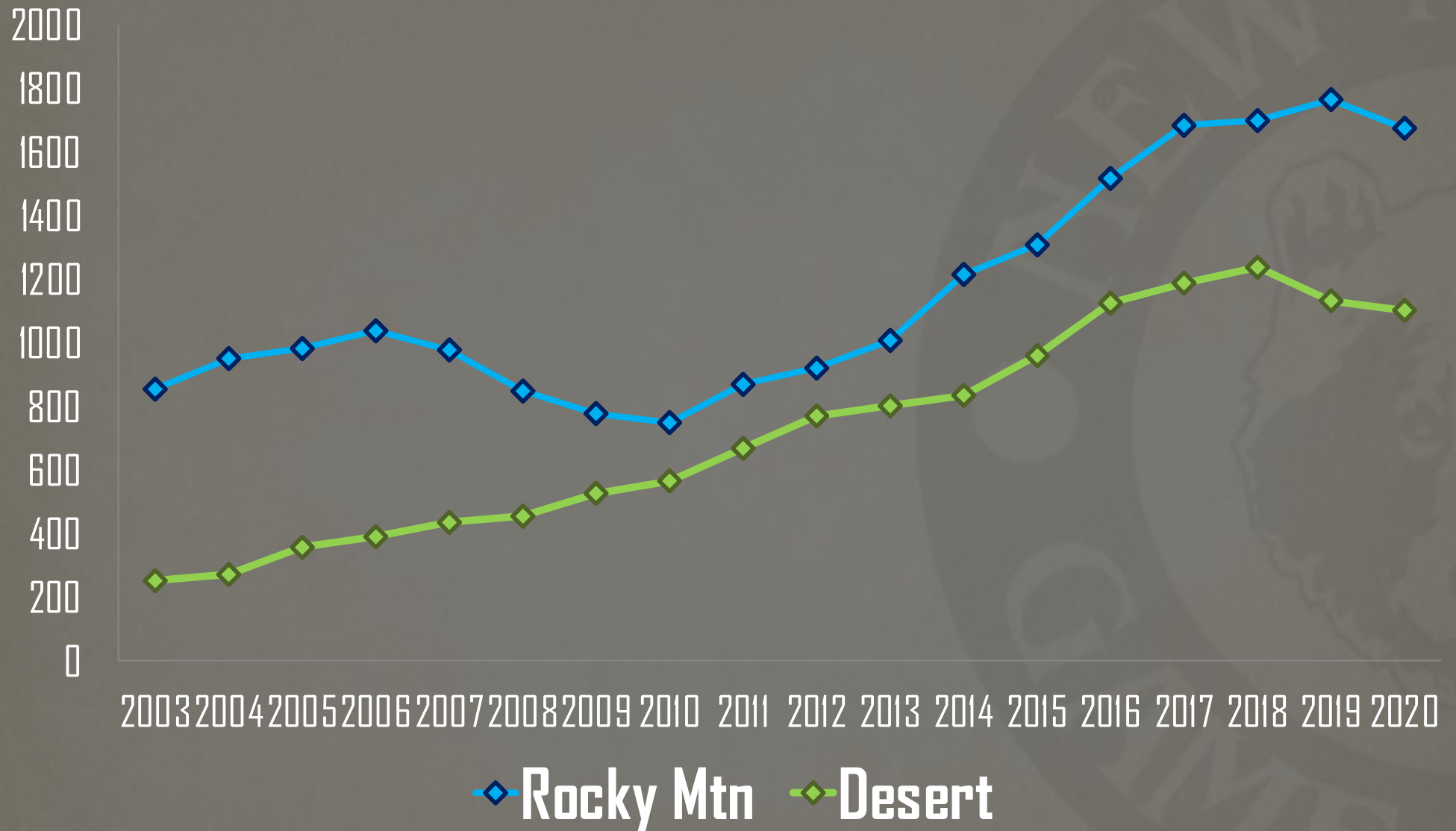
# Desert bighorn sheep

## PAST

- Hundreds present in early 1900's but by 1946 only two known populations (San Andres & Hatchet Mountains)
- Red Rock Wildlife Area and Captive Facility established in 1970
- State endangered in 1980
- Delisted in 2011



# New Mexico bighorn sheep

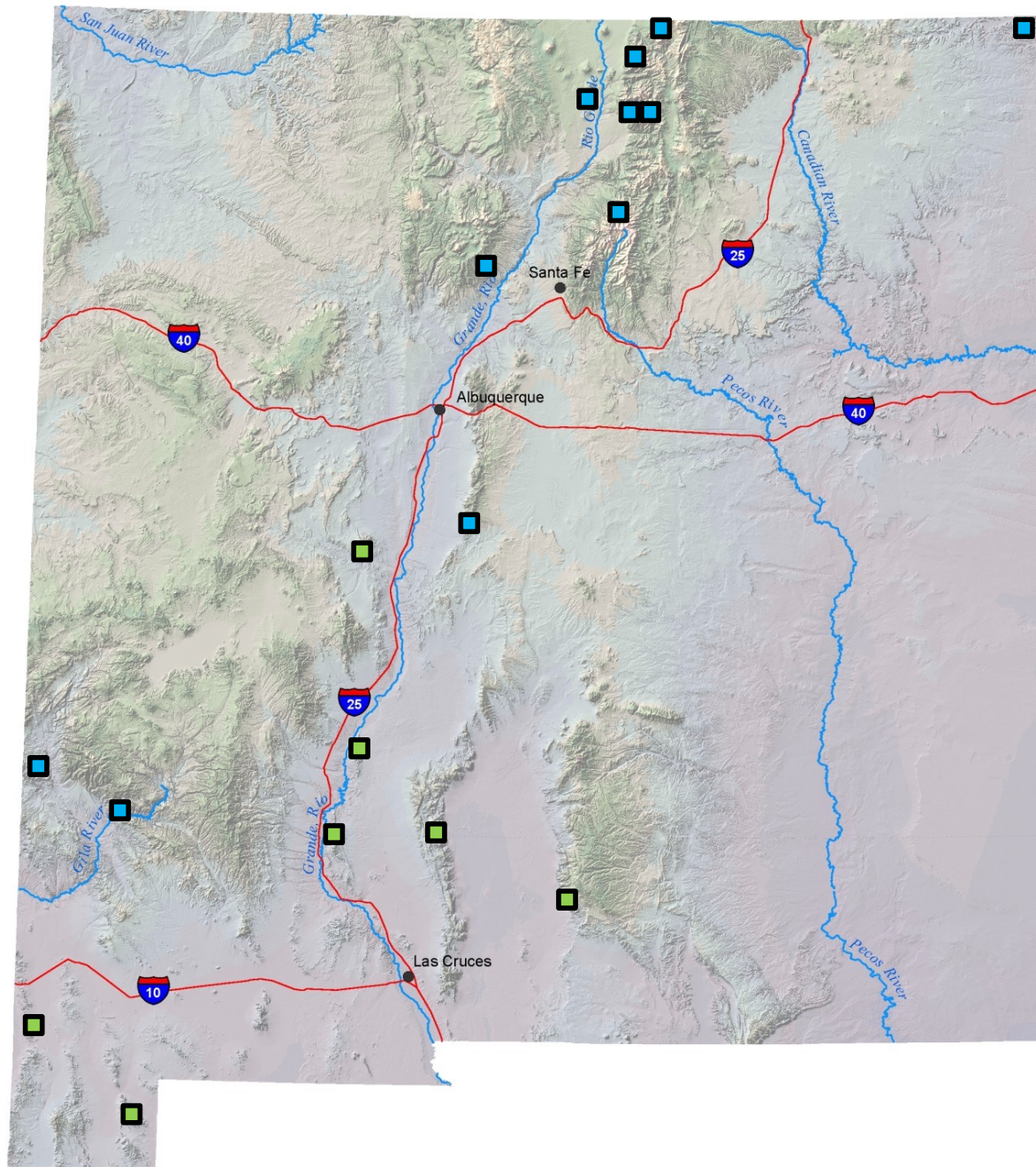




7

Desert  
Populations

~1,100



11

Rocky  
Mountain  
Populations  
~1,700

# Bighorn Sheep Hunting

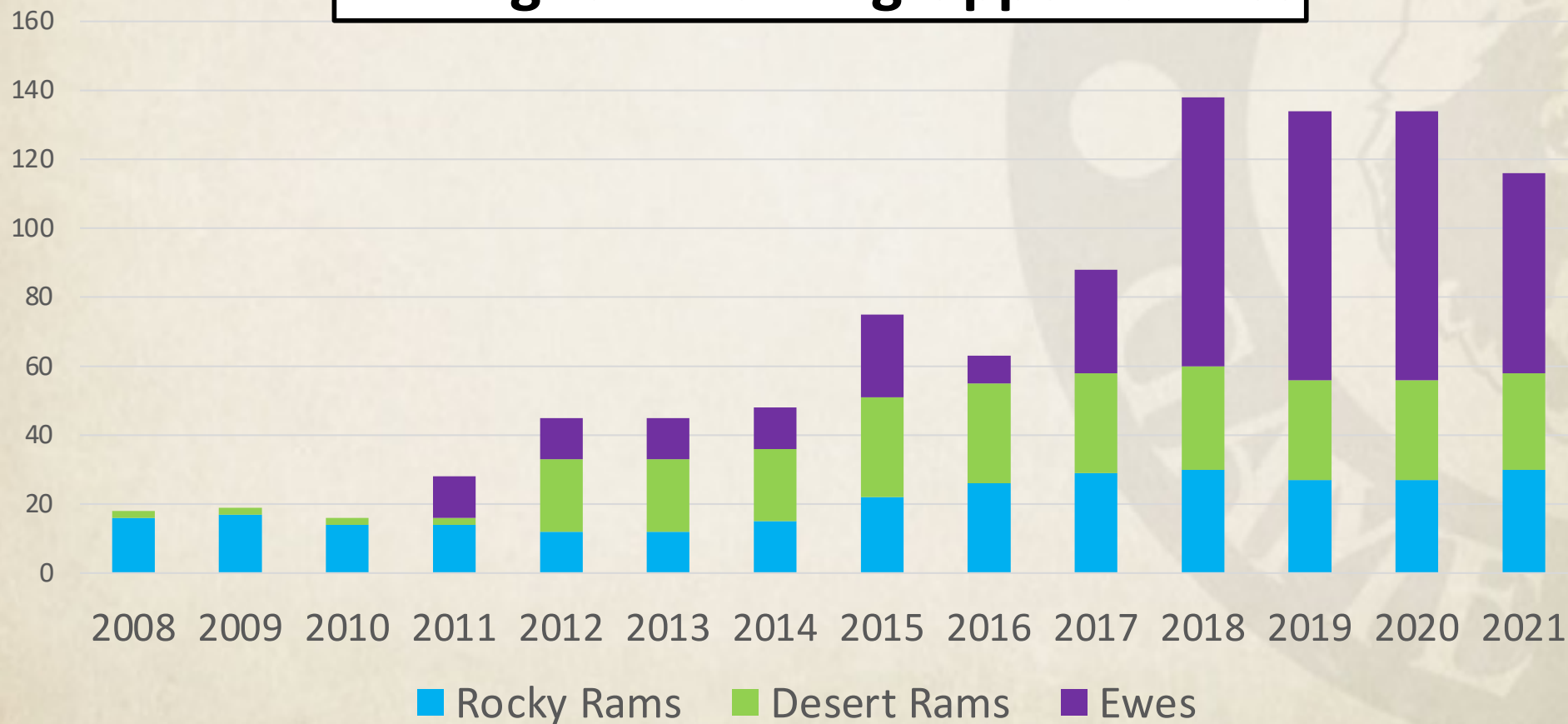
## 2021-2022 LICENSE YEAR (public draw)

Rocky Mountain Bighorn → 30 ram licenses, 58 ewe licenses

Desert Bighorn → 28 ram licenses



### NM Bighorn Hunting Opportunities





# Bighorn Sheep Hunting

2020-2021

## Rocky Mountain Bighorn



## Desert Bighorn





# Management: Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep

- Statewide population generally stable
- Individual populations managed using translocations & ewe harvest
- Restored to most known historic habitat
- Potential opportunities for inter-state translocations
- Respiratory disease concern ubiquitous





# Management: Desert bighorn sheep

- Recent declines in some individual populations
- Reintroduced to Sacramento's in 2018
- Since 2014, augmentations in Sacramento's, Peloncillos, Ladrones, Hatchets
- Predation from lions the primary cause of mortality
- Respiratory disease concern
  - M. ovi transmission and disease outbreak also contributed to Fra Cristobal decline



# Management: Desert bighorn sheep

## *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* aka *M. ovi*

- A bacteria that is initially transmitted via contact with domestic sheep or goats, but can subsequently spread between bighorn populations
- Outcomes range from minimal consequence to all-age die-offs with long-term impacts to the herds

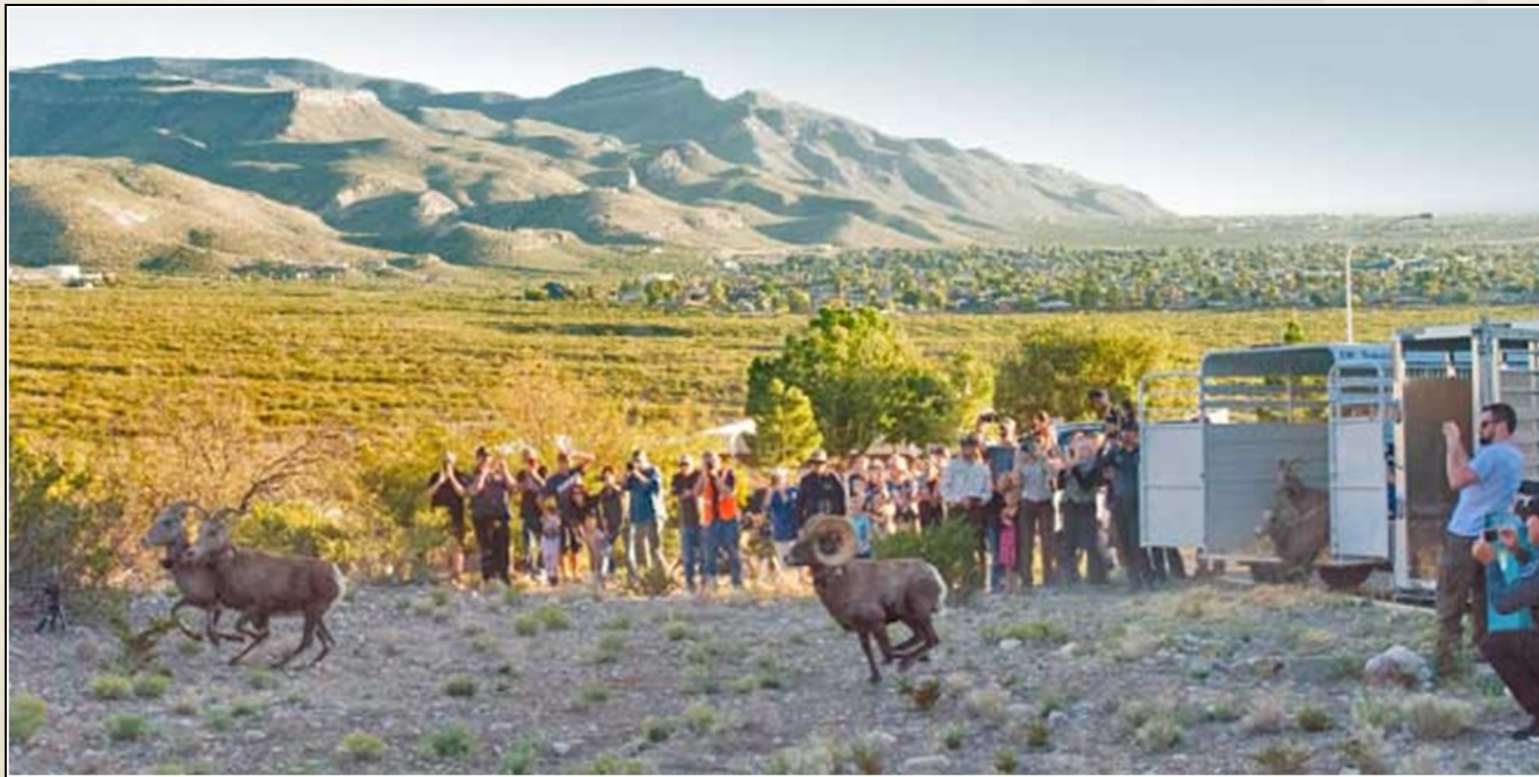




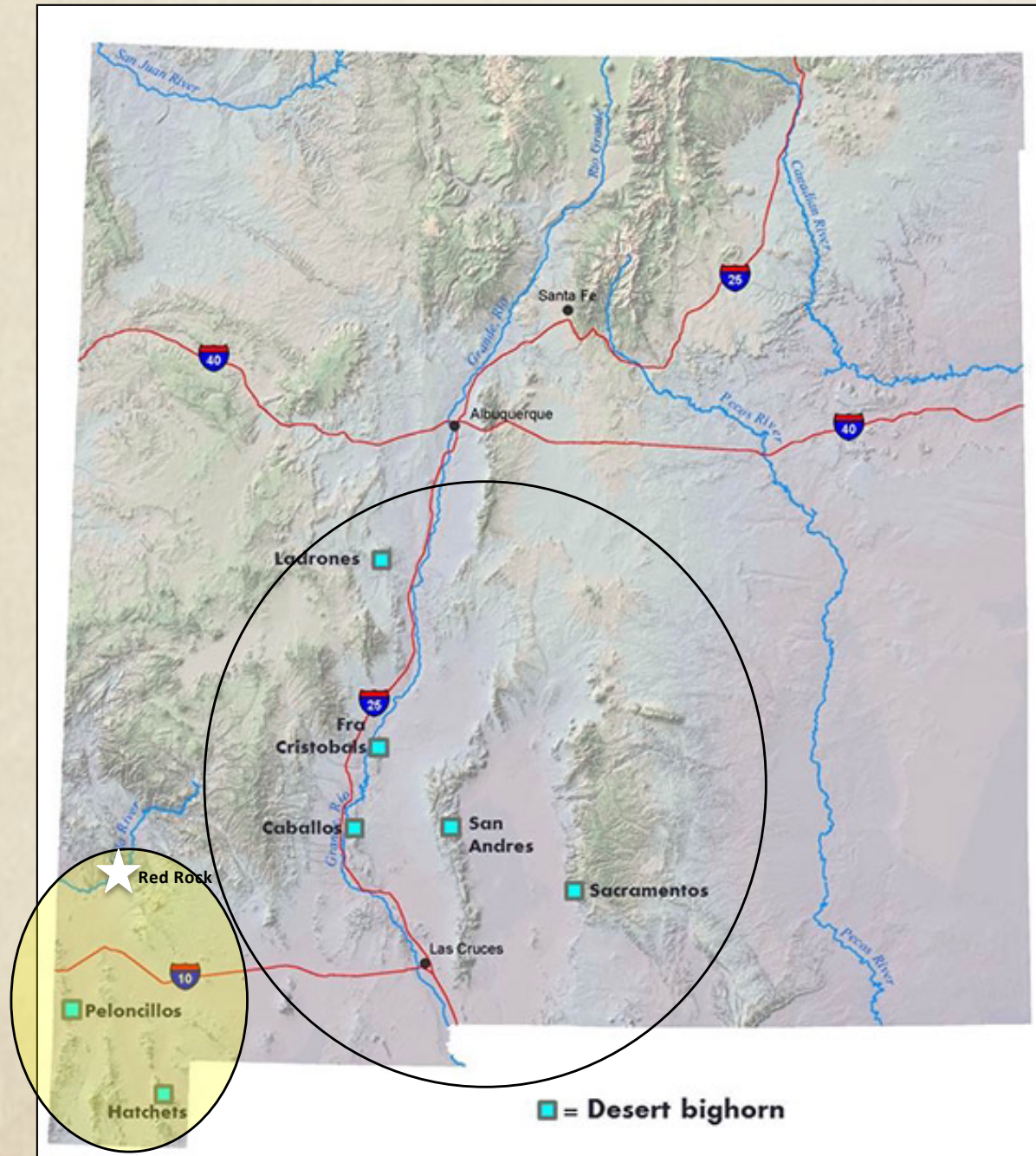
# Desert bighorn sheep

## Restoration

- Augmentations of existing herds continue to be important
- Unoccupied habitat remains on landscape



# Desert bighorn sheep



## Restoration

- *M. ovi* status should be considered in restoration efforts
- Unexposed bighorn populations remain in bootheel region of NM



# Desert bighorn sheep

## Restoration

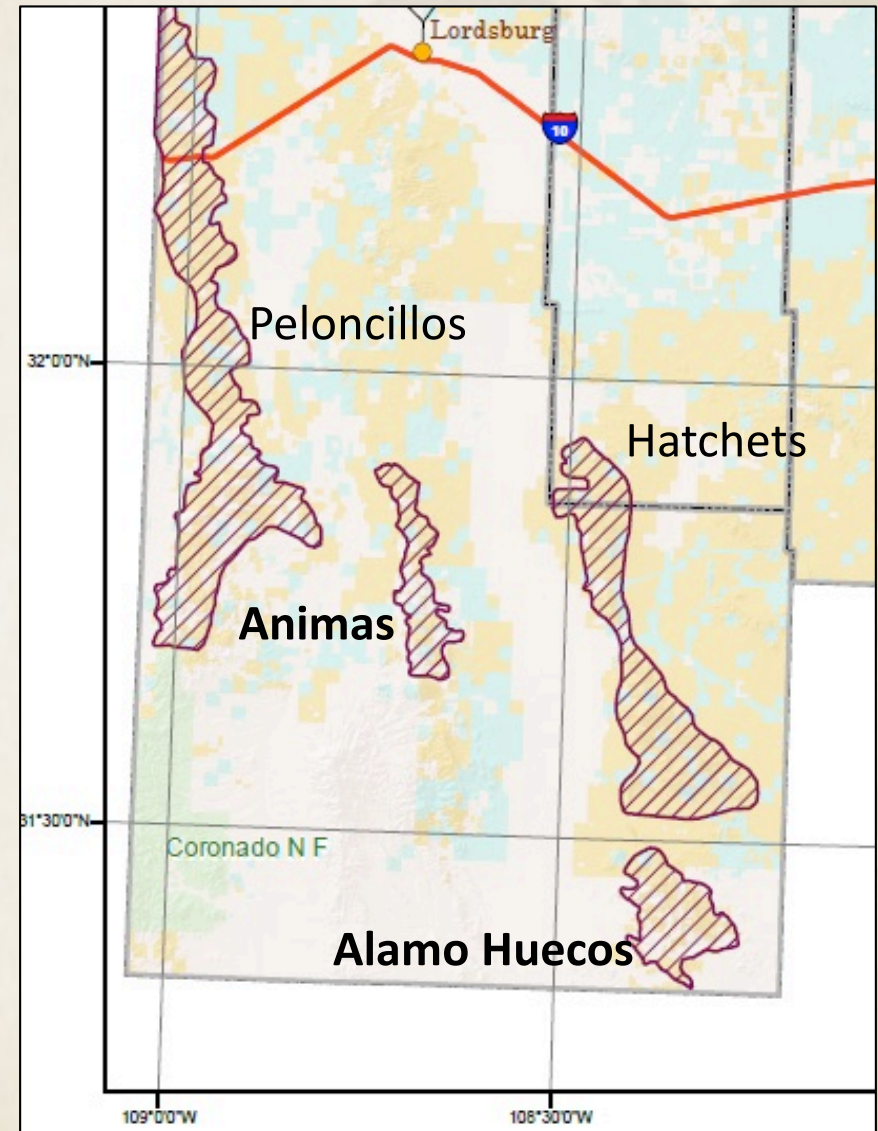
- Red Rock facility has enough bighorn to sustain a capture of ~40-45 bighorn in autumn 2021
- Potential release sites in the bootheel are the Alamo Hueco Mountains and the Animas Mountains.



# Desert bighorn sheep

## Alamo Huecos

- 10 bighorn observed in 2017
- 96km<sup>2</sup> of bighorn habitat
  - Could support a population of ~192 bighorn
- Closer distance to extant herd in Big Hatchets
- Currently 2 functional water catchments





Questions?





# Bighorn Sheep Program Update

- I. Past to Present
- II. Hunting
- III. Management
- IV. Desert bighorn Restoration





# Bighorn Sheep Hunting

## Great Rams in New Mexico



Ray Collins, public hunter,  
2017, 197 7/8 (#1 Rocky in NM)



Rick Smith, auction hunter,  
2017, 192 7/8 (Top Archery Ram)



Jay Mouttet, public hunter,  
2019, 196 4/8 (#2 Rocky in NM)



Jim Hens, raffle hunter, 2013,  
196 4/8 (#1 Desert in NM, #5 in world)



George Walden, public hunter,  
2019, 181 2/8



Kevin Small, auction  
2017, 188 0/8 (#4 Des in NM)