

Projects – “Bighorns at the Junction” Documentary Film

June 2014



The WSSBC has confirmed an additional \$1,000 for the completion of Robert Moberg’s documentary film *Bighorns at the Junction* (see trailer at: <http://vimeo.com/86375324>).

The California bighorn sheep herds of the Junction Sheep Range Provincial Park and Churn Creek region along the Fraser River in British Columbia have been experiencing a declining trend for over a decade. These once healthy bighorn sheep populations have been a vital part of repopulating extirpated herds throughout much of the western United States and Canada. Although the decline has slowed in recent years, the population is not recovering to the robust levels once known. Several reasons are possible for this trend but there are more questions than answers. Many of the problems we see in this region have similarities with wild sheep populations throughout their entire range. The film will explore and investigate these challenges, while allowing the viewer to experience a rare and special world.

The film, "Bighorns at the Junction", has been successful in capturing footage of California bighorn sheep and their spectacular habitat for over a year now. Many interviews have been completed and more plans for extended trips into the Churn Creek area are being made. Although the film is being produced on a low budget, the film-makers are achieving very high production values and building a thought provoking, heartfelt story. With a small amount of additional funding, this worthy project will be completed and made available to a wide audience with the hope of bringing attention to the ongoing plight of the majestic bighorns in the Junction and Churn Creek areas.

Many of the challenges with maintaining healthy bighorn populations are similar no matter the region, a strong example being contact with domestic sheep. While the majority of members involved with hunting based organizations may be aware of these challenges, it is unlikely that the general public is adequately informed. Recent die offs in the Mojave National Preserve due to domestic sheep contact are a prime example of the critical need to educate and inform the public. Developments in wild sheep disease research have shown pathogens like *Mycoplasma Ovipneumoniae* to predispose bighorn sheep to pneumonia. Interviews with prominent researchers in this area of study, such as Dr Tom Besser from

Washington State University will be featured in the film. Additionally, the film will cover the issue of predation which is a key factor in wild sheep management with cougars and wolves contributing to declining populations. An entertaining and educational documentary film is a highly effective means of communicating a message. It is timely and urgent to bring attention to the aforementioned matters as well as the importance of conserving the ecosystems necessary to support healthy wildlife populations. Looking at the bigger picture, the film will view wilderness as a place of refuge for not only wildlife but for each of us as individuals, and the profoundly important role it plays in sustaining our world.

Through supporting a well crafted film, we hope to reach a wider audience and specifically an audience that may be unaware of the challenges we face in maintaining our treasured bighorn sheep populations. The majestic bighorn sheep is one of the most recognizable animals in North America yet few of us know that their future is far from assured. By reaching out to the general human population, we can tell their story in a personal and non-expert way, bringing much deserved attention to the "Bighorns at the Junction" and all wild places where bighorn sheep roam free.

Once completed, "Bighorns at the Junction" will be aggressively marketed to film festivals and broadcasters. The films' content is being structured in such a way as to be of interest to a wide variety of film festivals and broadcasters, and not fall into the much smaller niche markets of nature films. All funding partners, including the WSSBC, will have access to the film for trade shows and events as well as for their own members' use. Stock footage from the film will also be available and whenever possible we will work with our project partners to assist them in wild sheep conservation projects where this media is needed.

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