



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Sequoia and Kings Canyon
National Parks

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Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks

News Release

For Immediate Release June 18, 2010
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Research on Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep Proposed for Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks

A study on Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep within and adjacent to Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks is being proposed by the National Park Service (NPS) in cooperation with the California Department of Fish and Game.

The Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep was listed as an endangered species on April 20, 1999, under the Endangered Species Act. An "endangered species" is an animal or plant species in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. In the late 1990s, the population of bighorn had declined to about 100 animals and very few remained within Sequoia and Kings Canyon. Today, the population numbers about 370 animals, an increasing number of which are using the parks.

Meadows are focal vegetation communities for both wildlife and human activities. The preliminary objectives of the study are to: (1) identify the extent to which bighorn sheep use meadows within these parks, specifically meadows and other habitats that are used by pack stock and backpackers; (2) determine whether the use of meadows and other habitats by pack stock or backpackers limits use by bighorn sheep either through competition for forage or by the presence of pack stock; and 3) develop a model to predict the relative probability of use of various habitats by bighorn sheep.

Meadow systems are important habitats to Sierra Nevada bighorn and provide a high density of nutritional forage. Meadows occupy only 1-2% of the landscape at higher elevations in the Sierra Nevada, and the persistence of high-elevation meadows is threatened by a number of factors, including climate change. Given their sensitivity to disturbance and their slow recovery following disturbance, it is important that the NPS understand the extent to which human activities affect the value of meadows as wildlife habitat.

The draft study details are being developed, but it is likely that up to 40 Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep would be captured and collared using helicopter/net-guns. About 75% of the work would occur in the sheep's winter range, which is located outside and east of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. Some of the captures, however, could occur within the eastern portion of these parks. The California Department of Fish and Game would be the principal investigator on this project, conducting the operation under their existing permit with the Fish and Wildlife Service.

The NPS is interested in any public concerns and potential issues related to the proposed study. Public comments are currently being accepted during this scoping phase. After analyzing comments received during scoping, the NPS will determine the level of analysis needed for this project.

More information on the proposed project is available online at the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment website, <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/seki>, then clicking on Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. Information is also available by contacting Environmental Protection Specialist Nancy Hendricks at (559) 565-3102 or Wildlife Biologist Harold Werner at (559) 565-3123.

All comments must be received in writing by July 19, 2010. It may be submitted at this website, or sent to the park via e-mail to seki_planning@nps.gov or via mail or hand delivery to:

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.


Superintendent

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks

Attn: Bighorn Sheep Study

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Before submitting comments, participants should be aware that the entire comment – including any personal identifying information such as name, address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information included – may be made publicly available at any time. Those submitting comments can request in their comment that personal identifying information be withheld from public review, but the NPS cannot guarantee that they will be able to do so. Submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives of or officials of organizations or businesses, are always made available for public inspection in their entirety. Anonymous comments will not be accepted.

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