

HISTORY OF TRANSPLANTING MOUNTAIN SHEEP AND MOUNTAIN GOATS – YUKON

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The history of trapping and transplanting sheep and goats in the Yukon dates back to 1968, 5 years before the first biologist was hired. Although it spans almost 30 years, the history is extremely short. The Yukon is in the enviable position of having most historic sheep and goat ranges still occupied. Management efforts have therefore focused on maintaining populations rather than restoring them.

DALL SHEEP

Between October 1968 and April 1972, 22 sheep (15 lambs, 4 ewes and 3 rams) were removed from what is now Kluane National Park Reserve and taken to zoos and the Yukon Game Farm. At least 7 additional sheep died during the trapping operations or by becoming entangled in the corral nets (Hocfs and Cowan 1979).

In 1990, 2 young rams were captured in the Kluane Wildlife Sanctuary and taken to the Yukon Game Farm as fresh breeding stock. In exchange, the Game Farm agreed to provide 2 mountain goats to the Yukon Government for reintroduction to the wild.

Preliminary work to restore an extirpated sheep population near Carcross began in 1990. While funding and approvals were being obtained, sheep recolonized the mountain naturally and the program was abandoned. There are now at least 35 animals in the population.

MOUNTAIN GOATS

Eight goats were captured in the southern portion of the Kluane Wildlife Sanctuary in October 1975 for breeding and display purposes at the Yukon Game Farm. In consideration of this acquisition, the Game Farm agreed to return 8 goats to the wild at a later date.

The only government sponsored relocation program took place in 1983 and 1984 to reestablish a mountain goat population on Mt. White, near the B.C./Yukon border (Carey and Barichello 1986). This population had been extirpated following the construction of a road along its base. A total of 13 goats were captured in the Kluane Wildlife Sanctuary and released on Mt. White.

A survey in June 1989 found only 6 goats, none of them kids or billies. The fear was that not enough animals had been born to replace the original billies, so in 1990 2 young billies from the Yukon Game Farm were released to augment the population.

A 1992 survey revealed that the lack of goats in 1989 was probably due to our inability to count them rather than their failure to reproduce. Twenty-four nannies and kids, but no billies, were seen. A month later, a letter from the Yukon Game Farm was received, stating that they were now prepared to fulfill their 1975 obligation to return goats to the wild. With no money available for monitoring, it was decided that these 8 animals would be released on Mt. White as well. Today the population is estimated to be at least 50 animals.

CURRENT PLANS

There are currently no plans to establish any new sheep or goat populations through trapping and transplanting. Re-establishment of other extirpated populations may be considered as part of community-based management programs.

LITERATURE CITED

- Carey, J., and N. Barichello. 1986. Relocation of mountain goats to Mt. White, Yukon 1983-1984. Y.T.G. Renewable Resources TR-86-1. 21 pp.
- Hocfs, M., and I. McT. Cowan. 1979. Ecological investigation of a population of Dall sheep (*Ovis dalli dalli* Nelson). *Sycis*:12, 1-81.