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**BIG RANGE FOR BIGHORN SHEEP  
IS SET UP IN SOUTHERN NEVADA**

A million-acre Federal game range for Nelson's mountain sheep, or desert bighorns, and other wildlife has been established in Southern Nevada by an executive order of President Roosevelt. Before unrestricted hunting reduced the number of bighorns to small scattered bands, these mountain sheep were widely distributed in the rugged arid sections of the Southwest. Since then most Western States have enacted laws protecting bighorns throughout the year.

The range, to be known as the Desert Game Range, surrounds the Dixie National Forest, and is located in Clark and Lincoln Counties. Its high, narrow desert mountain ranges once contained large bands of bighorns, says

the U. S. Biological Survey. The executive order makes primary provision for a maximum number of 1,800 bighorns on the range. Should a surplus occur the extra animals would probably be used to stock other ranges, or afford hunting on a limited scale, to avoid overgrazing the range. In addition to mountain sheep



He butts the "barrel cactus" to get food

Gambel's quail and other wildlife will receive protection and encouragement on the area.

Under the order the Secretary of Agriculture is to administer the conservation and development of wildlife in the area, and the Secretary of the Interior is to regulate public grazing on the range. Natural forage resources on the range, the order says, "shall first be utilized for the purpose of sustaining 1,800 Nelson's mountain sheep, the primary species, and such non-predatory secondary species in numbers as may be necessary to maintain a balanced wildlife population, but in no case shall the consumption of forage by the combined species be allowed to increase the burden of the range dedicated to the primary species."

The Desert Game Range is the second hereditary range for big-game animals to be established by executive order in connection with the organization of western grazing districts for livestock under the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934. The first range, the Hart Mountain-Charles Sheldon Addition, occupying 1,136,000 acres in Southern Oregon and Northern Nevada, was set up September 6, 1935. It joins the Charles Sheldon Antelope Refuge in Northern Nevada and is used primarily as a range for antelope, mule deer, and sage grouse.

Much of the land of the Desert Game Range is barren, but under regulated grazing officials of the Biological Survey believe it possible to restore native forage. Range grasses on the Charles Sheldon Refuge, for example, have made a surprising comeback the last two years under modified grazing conditions. In that period the area also received slightly more rainfall than usual.

In recent years desert bighorns have shown little, if any, increase in number, the Biological Survey reports. Local extinction in many sections was due to unrestricted hunting -- often for meat to supply mining camps, herders, or livestock outfits. Sportsmen seeking the massive horns of the sheep as trophies also took their toll.

Further inroads into the ranks of these animals probably have been made by scabies and other diseases contracted from domestic sheep that overran their range.

Mountain lions and eagles prey upon bighorn lambs in the spring.

Mountain sheep, however, commonly bear twins and under favorable conditions multiply rapidly, say the biologists. In eluding people and predatory animals these sheep climb precipitous parts of the mountains. Sure-footed climbers, they travel with surprising speed.

In North America there are two species of mountain sheep, the Rocky Mountain bighorn, and the Dall, or Alaska white sheep. The desert bighorn is one of the subspecies, or geographic races, of the Rocky Mountain bighorn, distinguished by its small size and pale color. The natural range of the desert bighorn includes the arid mountainous regions of the southwestern States and parts of Mexico.

Desert vegetation eaten by these bighorns includes cactuses and other thorny plants. The tender leaves of spiny pole-like ocotillo are a favorite food. In times of food shortage old rams often butt their way through the thorny armament of barrel cactus to eat the juicy pulp inside the plant.

In the winter the hairy coat of these animals is dark brown, sometimes so dark that a band of sheep at a distance appear as a black spot when they move across a light background. During the spring and summer, however, their coats are bleached by the sun into a dull yellow. Many of the old rams have fine horns, larger in proportion to the weight of their bodies than the horns of larger species. Predatory animals that attack mountain sheep usually make a hasty retreat after one or two well-directed butts.

Wild sheep of many species occupy mountains in most of Asia, in Southern Europe, and Northern Africa. Asia still has by far the greatest number of existing species and individuals. Scientists believe it to be the region where wild sheep originated.

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