Introduction to Sheep Hunting on a Budget

BY LOU RUPP
Our duty to the whole, including the unborn generations, bids us restrain an unprincipled present-day minority from wasting the heritage of these unborn generations. The movement for the conservation of wild life and the larger movement for the conservation of all our natural resources are essentially democratic in spirit, purpose, and method.

Theodore Roosevelt,
A Book-Lover's Holidays in the Open, 1916.
Introduction to Sheep Hunting on a Budget

We hope that this series of articles will help shed light on the many great opportunities that do exist for both beginning and experienced sheep hunters alike.

Yes, we are well aware the title chosen for this article could be considered an oxymoron. However, this is exactly one of the major reasons a decision was made to research and present the information included in this article, especially in today's up and down economy, with hunters having to be more and more concerned with the costs associated with their sport. The second reason is in consideration of a “lesson-in-life” my dad instilled in me when I was growing up that “experience is the best teacher, especially when you can capitalize on someone else’s experience.” Therefore, this article is meant to pass along our experiences regarding an introduction to sheep hunting.

While the concept of an article on this subject has always been in the back of my mind, the real tipping point came because of the feedback generated by numerous staff members and volunteers, who man booths for the Wild Sheep Foundation at countless conventions and events across the country. These conventions and events give us opportunities to talk one-on-one with numerous hunters from every walk of life, and hear their view point on sheep hunting, its attention-getting when people passing by stop to look and we have the opportunity to engage visitors in a conversation. During these conversations, we encounter a lot of reasons why not to go sheep hunting, whether it be cost, opportunity, or poor draw odds. We hope that this series of articles will help shed light on the many great opportunities that do exist for both beginning and experienced sheep hunters alike. Sheep hunting is not unlike any other sport, in that you can commit as much money as you can afford to spend. If you’re just interested in experiencing a sheep hunt and you are concerned with minimizing expenses, there are several opportunities to consider.
Many people are not aware that fifteen states, almost one third of the lower 48, are home to a wild sheep population that totals 57,510 sheep. This total consists of 26,890 Rocky Mountain bighorns (Ovis canadensis canadensis), 8,560 California bighorns (Ovis canadensis californiana), and 22,060 desert bighorns (Ovis canadensis nelson).

In addition, not many people, even dyed-in-the-wool sheep hunters are aware that there are approximately 1,800 sheep licenses available each year in the lower United States. This total consists of approximately 85% resident and 15% non resident licenses. States where residents and nonresidents are treated on an equal basis in the drawings, a 50/50 ratio is reflected in the numbers for the available resident and nonresident licenses.

Now you have the full background and reasons for this article. So, what we plan to present is as follows:

**FIRST**, a state-by-state overview that will encompass the information gathered from a 2009 survey conducted with each western state’s sheep professionals, regarding sheep population, available annual sheep licenses (resident and nonresident), application deadlines, tentative drawing times, plus pertinent/unique aspects of each state, i.e. bonus/preference point system, “super tag” lottery raffles, etc.

**SECOND**, an overview of western state public lands, highlighting those with sheep populations. This will be a combined effort involving the U.S. Forest Service, BLM, and state agencies.

**THIRD**, a list of wildlife organizations, governmental agencies, application services, etc., where additional information relative to sheep hunting, recommendations on state areas to apply for licenses, plus an overview as to why the opportunities to hunt sheep today are as good as they are, and will continue to expand in the future.

**FINALLY**, hunting stories from two actual state “super tag” lottery raffle winners that confirm the opportunities out there to help you accomplish your introduction to sheep hunting on a budget!

Whether you choose and plan a totally do-it-yourself hunt involving backpacking and freeze dried food, rent a horse or two to pack gear and/or ride, hire a guide, or book a fully outfitted hunt, our hope and intent is to provide information and encouragement that can be used in planning a sheep hunt. A sheep hunt based on you obtaining a highly prestigious, possibly a once-in-a-lifetime license. A hunt that will result in that magical moment when a successful hunter bends down to pick up and feel that majestic set of horns and a new sheep hunter is born.

**State-by-State Overview**

In each 2010 issue of *Wild Sheep* we will highlight states from different regions that have open sheep hunting. For simplicity and categorization the regions will be classified as follows and 2009 numbers will be reported.

- **Rocky Mountain**
  (Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Utah, Wyoming) – Spring Issue

- **Southwest**
  (Arizona, New Mexico, Texas) – Summer Issue

- **Far West**
  (California, Nevada, Oregon, Washington) – Fall Issue

- **Plains**
  (Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota) – Winter Issue

**Colorado** uses a modified preference point system, wherein a person must build up to three preference points before they are considered eligible to draw a license. Then beginning with the fourth year, each unsuccessful applicant will receive a bonus point each year. Colorado is a great state to apply for Rocky Mountain bighorns. Colorado only accepts paper applications for sheep. Once successful in drawing a license and taking a sheep, there is a five year waiting period before one can reapply. Colorado also offers a “super lottery” raffle drawing opportunity to draw a sheep license, allowing the holder to hunt in any open unit within the state.
Idaho does not offer a preference or bonus point system. Therefore, all applications are entirely random and on equal footing. This results in the best drawing odds in the West, with a 1 in 20 chance for California bighorns and a 1 in 30 chance for Rocky Mountain bighorns. Should you apply for sheep, you would be excluded from applying for any other big game species in that year. Once drawn, if a sheep is not taken, there is a two year waiting period before reentering the sheep application process. If a sheep has been harvested, the tag is once-in-a-lifetime. A non-refundable hunting license must be purchased prior to applying. Idaho also offers a “super lottery” raffle drawing opportunity to draw a sheep license, allowing the holder to hunt any open unit within the state.

Montana is a state anyone interested in a Rocky Mountain bighorn must consider applying for, due to the number of nonresident tags and the proven high quality of sheep taken every year; some of the biggest and very best in the west. Montana has a bonus point system, wherein a bonus point is given for each year of an unsuccessful application and a $20.00 bonus point fee is included with the application. Each bonus point accumulated increases the chances of being drawn in future years, i.e. one extra chance for each bonus point. Residents and nonresidents are in the same drawing with the same odds of being drawn until the pre-established nonresident quota is reached for the respective hunting unit. Applicants may skip two consecutive years without forfeiting their accumulated points. Once successful in drawing a sheep license, there is a seven year waiting period before one may reapply. The full license fee is charged at the time of application. Montana also offers a “super lottery” raffle drawing opportunity to draw a sheep license, allowing the holder to hunt any open unit within the state.

A unique feature offered by Montana (and no other western state) are the five unlimited areas with guaranteed licenses. The hunt units are 300, 303, 500, 501, and 502 bordering the northern boundary of Yellowstone National Park. Hunters who plan on hunting any of the unlimited areas are not eligible to apply in the regular application process.

Wyoming has a bonus point system, wherein you earn a bonus point for every unsuccessful year. Half of all permits are reserved for max point holders, with the remaining half open to all other applicants. A computer randomly generates a number for each bonus point. The lowest number then becomes the draw number. The lower the number, the better the applicant’s chances are at being drawn. All sheep permits are once-in-a-lifetime. A non-refundable hunting license must be purchased prior to applying. Utah also offers a “super lottery” raffle drawing opportunity to draw a sheep license, allowing the holder to hunt any open unit within the state.

Utah

Sheep population ................. 5,060
Resident licenses ................. 58
Nonresident licenses ............. 3
Special auction/raffle ........... 2
Application deadline ............. February
Tentative drawing date ........... June
Resident permit cost ............. $508.00
Nonresident permit cost ......... $1,513.00

In light of the fact that one can now apply for three different species of sheep (Rocky Mountain, California, and desert), Utah is for sure a must apply state to build points for all three. Applications are only accepted online. Utah has the highest number of nonresident sheep licenses and produces quality rams, this is a for sure application state. Wyoming has a modified preference point system, wherein a point is earned for each unsuccessful year of applying. 75% of the available licenses in each unit go into preference drawing with 25% of available licenses in a random roll-over drawing. Wyoming has a points only option as well.

Once successful in drawing a license, there is a five year waiting period before one can apply again.
Introduction to Sheep Hunting on a Budget (Part Two)

Hopefully, in the first part of this series of articles we have been able to provide a helpful summary of the basic details on how you can obtain one of the 253 highly coveted nonresident or one of the 1,526 resident sheep hunting licenses (in 2009) and tags. Obviously, the key to increasing your odds is first to apply in as many states as your budget allows. Do not forget, some states allow you to apply with the use of a credit card and the amount of the license is not charged unless you are successful and draw a license. Some may be concerned with the idea of applying in a number of states in the same year for fear of possibly drawing multiple licenses. Yes, it is possible, and Lady Luck even smiled on the author once, but the odds of drawing multiple licenses in a single year are so remote that if you do, you had better start buying state lottery tickets on a regular basis, since you must possess a magic touch you need to capitalize on for sure. Secondly, you need to build bonus/preference points as often as possible for future years and for sure apply for “points only” in states where the opportunity is offered. We also included “Super Tag” opportunities in the first series, which can be employed whether you enter a state regular license application process or not. Hopefully, you will take advantage of both opportunities to maximize your chances of drawing that coveted sheep license or tag. Good luck!

The next most asked question from prospective sheep hunters is, “Before I apply for a license, shouldn’t I have researched and identified an area containing a sheep population that is open for public hunting, in case I decide to do a do-it-yourself hunt?” The answer is obviously yes and with today’s technology/information at the tip of your fingers, identifying western public lands open to all types of hunting, including sheep hunting, has never been easier. In addition, I personally do not think there has ever been as much public access hunting opportunities as exist today in the West.

We hope that this series of articles will help shed light on the many great opportunities that do exist for both beginning and experienced sheep hunters alike.
FIRST, western states have “state and school trust” lands open to the public. As an example, the state of Idaho has 6,939 square miles of state and other lands open to public hunting that contains a sheep population. Likewise, Montana has 142,864 acres that fall into this category. Arizona has 9,286,226 acres and New Mexico has 12,782 square miles. Other western states offer a similar situation that can be checked out with the individual state’s Fish & Game Department.

SECOND, even with the current energy development demands on western lands, the CRP (Conservation Reserve Program) still offers a major opportunity for public land hunting. No, the CRP lands are not home to sheep. We are including mention of this public access hunting opportunity here, because you may want to consider a deer, upland bird, or waterfowl hunt while traveling to or from your sheep hunt or for a hunt during those years you’re waiting to draw a sheep license. The state-by-state data indicates there are millions of acres of CRP open to public hunting, as recently reported by the Mule Deer Foundation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>National Forest Acres</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>3,084,319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>2,781,723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>2,017,677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>1,439,780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>1,091,238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>714,442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>547,366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>537,930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>208,053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>145,423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>126,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>12,693,951</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

THIRD, and along the same lines as the CRP lands, several of the western states have initiated programs known by various names to provide additional public access hunting opportunities. Each state approaches the program a little differently, i.e. some require the purchase of a special “use” permit to offset the cost of the program, where others simply add an extra fee into their general license fee. Either way, the extra out of pocket cost is minimal to the hunter. Montana calls theirs “Block Management,” North Dakota’s is called “P.L.O.T.S.,” South Dakota’s is “C.H.A.P.,” Kansas titles theirs as “W.I.H.A.,” and in Colorado the program simply goes by “Walk-in Access Program.” By whatever name, the programs provide access for hunters and gives landowners an opportunity to conveniently allow access. Maps of these areas can be secured from the individual state Fish & Game Departments.

The FOURTH and FIFTH public land hunting opportunities are governed by the Federal agencies of U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), which again encompasses millions of acres and are home to the largest wild sheep populations in the lower 48. The following is a state-by-state list of National Forest lands within the individual state boundaries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>National Forest Acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>11,793,784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>24,408,714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>17,247,599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>21,458,142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>19,249,391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>567,343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>6,311,576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>10,486,131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>2,287,988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>17,522,242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>3,413,141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>9,129,869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>10,563,079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>10,921,729</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As always, a picture is worth a thousand words. Therefore, the following two western state maps of BLM lands open to public hunting and a map USFS lands open to public hunting.
hunting with an overlay indicating sheep populations are here to illustrate the amount of sheep hunting opportunities on public lands.

Additional maps containing access/trail information can be obtained from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) office in Denver, Colorado or check their website at www.usgs.gov. Another good mapping resource can be found at www.maptech.com.

As you can see, there are millions of acres open to public hunting in the West; whether it is for upland birds, waterfowl, deer, elk, and especially sheep. Take advantage of what is yours – Go Hunting!

**State-by-State Overview**

**Arizona**

- Sheep population: 7,000
- Resident licenses: 90
- Nonresident licenses: 10
- Special auction/raffle: 3
- Application deadline: June
- Tentative drawing date: July
- Resident tag cost: $272.50
- Nonresident tag cost: $1,400.00

**Arizona** is one of the top states for anyone wanting to hunt a desert bighorn sheep and is a must-state to apply for. Currently, Arizona only accepts paper applications, but is trying to setup an online application service. As with many states, Arizona offers a bonus point for each unsuccessful year of applying. Nonresidents are limited to 10% of the total tag quota. 20% of all tags are reserved for max point holders. Unique to Arizona is the opportunity to earn a “permanent bonus point” for taking Arizona’s hunter education course, and is applicable to any species applied for. Furthermore, those hunters applying for five consecutive years, beginning in 2001, receive a “loyalty point” for the species applied for during that period. It is possible to draw a license the every first year of applying. You can also build points by utilizing the “bonus point only” option without actually applying for the tag itself. In order to apply, you must also purchase a non-refundable hunting license. Arizona sheep tags are once-in-a-lifetime for both Rocky Mountain and desert bighorns. The state also offers a “super lottery” raffle drawing opportunity for sheep that allows the holder to hunt any open unit within the state.

**New Mexico**

- Sheep population: 1,450
- Resident & Nonresident combined licenses: 16
- Special auction/raffle: 2
- Application deadline: April
- Tentative drawing date: June
- Resident license cost: $163.00
- Nonresident license cost: $3,160.00

**New Mexico** is a great state to apply for, despite the high up-front license fee, which is refunded if unsuccessful. New Mexico does not have a bonus or preference point system. Everyone (residents and nonresidents) are equal in the drawing process. Applications can be made for both Rocky Mountain bighorn and desert bighorn on the same application. The Land of Enchantment also offers a “super lottery” raffle drawing opportunity to draw a sheep license that allows the holder to hunt any open unit within the state. The raffle is conducted by a not-for-profit conservation organization. If drawn in the regular application process, the lucky tag holder is not eligible for the “super lottery” raffle. New Mexico is a once-in-a-lifetime state for each of the two species.

**Texas**

- Sheep population: 1,500
- Total licenses: 15 (in 2008)
- Application deadline: November
- Tentative drawing date: November
- Resident license cost: $25.00
- Nonresident license cost: $315.00

**Texas** has a bonus point system wherein you receive a bonus point for every year you apply and are not successful in drawing a license. You can draw a license the first year you apply. Texas does not offer a bonus point only option. When you draw a license, the hunt will be conducted on a wildlife management area and you must be guided by Texas Parks and Wildlife personnel at no cost. Based on the quality of the sheep, the bonus point system, the fact you could draw your first year, the low license cost, and finally, the fully guided hunt at no extra cost, this is a must-apply state for anyone looking for a desert sheep or just a super sheep hunt.
A fter reading the first two articles of this series, your conclusion should be, “Yes, there is really a way I can consider going on a sheep hunt in the lower 48,” and the ignition switch is on encouraging you to start the planning process. Keep in mind, sheep hunting, like most endeavors in life, offers rewards of success directly in proportion to the efforts and time devoted to achieving the goal. Success starts with thorough research and planning, dedicated commitment, and ends, in this case, the day you join a privileged group of hunters whose trophy room features a set of those magnificent curly horns that generated the lasting memories. So let’s get started.

In this article, we are going to supply detailed contact information where valuable information can be obtained as you progress with your plans. As you start talking to the contacts listed in this article it will become immediately obvious, there is something very unique about people who are interested in sheep and sheep hunting. I tend to think this demonstrates a unique quality in this group of society, maybe a fraternal aspect of a shared interest, but whatever it is, everyone I have ever contacted requesting information or guidance when planning a sheep hunt has been extremely helpful and gone out of their way to help. If they do not know the answer to your question, you can bet, they will know someone who does. Yes, sheep and sheep hunting generates a common fever!

Let’s start with a list of state Fish and Wildlife contacts (as of press time).

**California Department of Fish & Game**
Tom Stephenson
407 W. Line Street, Bishop, CA 93514
P 760-873-4305; F 760-872-1284
C 760-937-0238
tstephenson@dfg.ca.gov

**Colorado Division of Wildlife**
Janet George
6060 Broadway, Denver, CO 80216
P 303-291-7332; F 303-291-7114
C 303-517-2516
janet.george@state.co.us

**Idaho Department of Fish & Game**
Dale Toweill
PO Box 25, 600 S. Walnut, Boise, ID 83707
P 208-287-2746; F 208-334-2114
C 208-867-8180
dale.toweill@idfg.idaho.gov

**Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks**
Tom Carlsen
68 Lost Trail, Clancy, MT 59634
P 406-266-3367; F 406-461-6742
C 406-980-1553
tcarlsen@mt.gov

**Nebraska Game & Parks Commission**
Todd Nordeen
P.O. Box 725, Alliance, NE 69301
P 308-763-2940; F 308-760-6395
todd.nordeen@nebraska.gov

**Nevada Department of Wildlife**
Mike Cox
1100 Valley Road, Reno, NV 89512
P 775-688-1556; F 775-688-1518
C 775-842-8211
mcoux@ndow.org

**New Mexico Department of Game & Fish**
Eric Rominger
P.O. Box 25112, Santa Fe, NM 87504
P 505-476-8045; F 505-476-8127
C 505-690-3207
eric.rominger@state.nm.us

**North Dakota Game & Fish Department**
Brett Wiedmann
225 30th Avenue SW, Dickinson, ND 58601
P 701-227-7431; F 701-227-7432
C 701-290-5682
bwiedmann@nd.gov

**Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife**
Don Whittaker
3406 Cherry Avenue NE, Salem, OR 97303
P 503-947-6325; F 503-942-6330
don.whittaker@state.or.us

**South Dakota Department Game, Fish, & Parks**
John Kanta
4130 Adventure Trail, Rapid City, SD 57702
P 605-394-2391; F 605-394-1793
C 605-381-5856
john.kanta@state.sd.us

**Texas Parks & Wildlife Department**
Clay Brewer (WSWG Chair)
28 County Road 458, Rochelle, TX 76872
P 325-463-5001; F 325-463-5001
C 512-217-3908
Clay.Brewer@tpwd.state.tx.us

**Alaska Department of Fish & Game**
Becky Schwanke
P.O. Box 47, Glennallen, AK 99588
P 907-822-3431; F 907-822-3811
C 907-259-3421
becky.schwanke@alaska.gov

**Arizona Game & Fish Department**
Bob Henry
9140 E. 28th Street, Yuma, AZ 85365
P 928-341-4048; F 928-343-0730
C 928-580-0210
bhenry@azgfd.gov

Photo Credit: Cody Phillips
where additional information may be obtained. As you become familiar with these organizations, I would strongly encourage your serious consideration of becoming a member of one or several. If you love hunting as the author does and want to make a difference and a positive impact for future generations as you enjoy the sport today, there is no better way than to become a member and support the organization of your choice.

M. David Allen, President/CEO of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, wrote of, “the role of hunters in conservation,” in the January–February, 2010 issue of Bugle, the foundation’s publication. “Far too many of the general public view hunters as me-first bubbas who don’t ‘get’ the big picture of habitat and species conservation. Nothing could be further from the truth. I challenge anyone to name another group of people who have done a fraction as much as sportsman to keep North America rich in wildlife and wild country.” No truer words can describe America’s sportsman’s role any better. Pick an organization and join.

When it comes to “Sheep Conservation,” the leader of all conservation organizations is the Wild Sheep Foundation (WSF), formerly known as the Foundation For North American Wild Sheep (FNAWS) based in Cody, Wyoming. The organization was founded in 1977 by sheep and mountain hunting enthusiasts and conservationists. With a membership of more than 5,000 worldwide and a chapter and affiliate network in North America doubling the membership to more than 10,000, WSF is the premier advocate for wild sheep, wild goats, and other mountain wildlife and their habitat. Since forming in 1977, the Wild Sheep Foundation has raised and expended more than $75 million on conservation, education, and mission advocacy programs in North America, Europe, and Asia with its purpose of “Putting and Keeping Sheep on the Mountain.”

The Wild Sheep Foundation contact information is:

Wild Sheep Foundation
Gray Thornton, President/CEO
720 Allen Ave.
Cody, Wyoming 82414-3402
(307) 527-6261
info@wildsheepfoundation.org
www.wildsheepfoundation.org

For a list of other sheep organizations, check out our Chapters & Affiliates listing of this magazine on our webpage.

From a commercial stand point, the author, like many hunters of the western states consider Carter’s Hunter Services and their Huntin’ Fool publication as the bible especially in regards to staying fully up to date on the rules and regulations within the individual states. They cover application deadlines and drawing dates, recommend and overview the individual areas within each state, and make recommendations as to the areas with the largest population and/or animal size potential. If your work and time schedule prevents you from staying on top of the application process and application deadlines, Carter’s Hunter Service also provides a state application service to insure your application is filled out correctly and submitted on time. If once you draw your sheep permit, you decide to go via a drop camp or fully guided outfitted hunt, Carter’s can also recommend guides and outfitters in every state to whatever level you desire. Carter’s contact information is as follows.

Carter’s Hunters Service
P.O. Box 250
Cedar City, UT 84721
(435) 865-1020
submit@huntinfool.com

Another resource for application services and guide/outfitter recommendations is the Cabela’s organization via their “T.A.G.S.” trophy application and guide service. Their contact information is:

Cabela’s T.A.G.S.
610 Glover Rd. - Suite B.
Sidney, NE 69162
1 (800) 755-tags (8247)
(308) 254-3658
www.cabelasoutdooradventures.com
A third application service is offered by Hunter Application Service (H.A.S.) Operated by Larry and Stephanie Altimus of Pearce, AZ. A unique feature offered by H.A.S. is that for states requiring up-front money for the application process, they will issue a guaranteed check using their funds, in addition to recommending areas for application and completing and submitting your application to insure the respective deadline is met. Their contact information is:

Hunter Application Service  
P.O. Box 552  
Pearce, Az. 85625  
(520) 826-1032 phone/fax  
Altimus@vtc.net

There are other application services, but this provides the option of three (3) to work with and compare if you do not feel you’re up to or want to undertake the task of researching, making area selections, and insuring the application is in before the deadline.

In addition, there are a number of booking services available to assist you once you are lucky and draw a permit, and decide you would like to consider a drop camp or a fully guided hunt.

State-by-State Overview

California  
Sheep population 4,420  
Resident licenses 14-21  
Nonresident licenses 1  
Special auction/raffle 2  
Application deadline June  
Tentative drawing date July  
Resident tag cost $357.50  
Nonresident tag cost $500.00

California has a modified “preference” point system, wherein you receive one preference point each year you apply and are unsuccessful. One tag in each hunt unit goes to a drawing with all applicants and additional tags within the unit go to a drawing of the applicants with the maximum number of preference points. California does not currently offer a preference point only option or have a “super lottery” raffle. A non-refundable hunting license must be purchased prior to applying. California is a once-in-a-lifetime tag state.

Nevada has a unique bonus point system, where in addition to receiving a bonus point for each year of an unsuccessful application, Nevada squares the number of points when applying them in all future drawings, making the system the most effective of all the states. All accumulated bonus points are lost if the applicant fails to apply for the respective species for two consecutive years. A tag can be drawn the first year of applying. If an application is made for each of the three sheep species (Rocky Mountain and California), it is possible to draw more than one tag in a given year. Applications are normally available online the third week of March and the drawing results are available 48 hours after the drawing is held. If you wish to accumulate points, a non-refundable hunting license must be purchased. Nevada also offers a “points only” option. Once a sheep tag is drawn, there is a ten year waiting period before the applicant is eligible to reenter the application process.

Oregon has some of the largest California bighorns in the West and therefore is a must apply state. Oregon permits application for one of the sheep species in a given year (Rocky Mountain and California), not both. A non-refundable hunting license must be purchased when applying. Oregon does not currently have a “bonus” or “preference” point system for the sheep tag drawing. Oregon also offers a “super lottery” raffle drawing opportunity to draw a sheep license that allows the holder to hunt any open unit within the state. Oregon is a once-in-a-lifetime state with only one of each species to be taken.

Washington has no preset nonresident quota. Residents and nonresidents are all in the same drawing. So in theory, all available licenses could all go to residents or nonresidents. Washington offers a “bonus” point system wherein a bonus point is earned for each unsuccessful year of applying. Accumulated points are then squared when applying. Washington does offer a “points only” option.
Introduction to Sheep Hunting on a Budget (Part Four)

We hope that this series of articles will help shed light on the many great opportunities that do exist for both beginning and experienced sheep hunters alike.

With the remaining western states being covered in this final article of the four article series, we have provided all information necessary for you to research, plan, and apply for one of the coveted western state resident and nonresident sheep licenses, as well as enter the various state raffle drawings. But here is some good news that is hot off the press! As you read in the article on page 23 of the Fall, 2010 issue of Wild Sheep entitled “New Mexico Bighorn Success” the state of New Mexico very well may increase the number of desert sheep licenses in the annual drawing from one to ten in 2011. The increased number of licenses is due to the annual fund raising efforts of the Wild Sheep Foundation and the WSF New Mexico chapter for the past twenty years. Now that’s called “PUTTING AND KEEPING SHEEP ON THE MOUNTAIN™.”

As I have encouraged people to take advantage of the opportunity to draw a state tag and/or enter the various raffles, I too often encounter the comment, “Oh what is the use, the odds are so bad.” To this response I have always answered, “Thank you.” Because if you decide not to enter the drawings or raffles, you are one less competitor for me who has already drawn twenty-two special licenses including four sheep and one mountain goat and I still put in every year in every state where the once-in-a-life-time ruling has not eliminated me from submitting an application. I guess you can say, “I practice what I preach.”

As further testimony of the value of this approach, I am including excerpts from hunting stories submitted by two young Arizona hunters, Eric Hunt and Scott Krieg, who were lucky enough to have drawn the Arizona “super lottery” license in back to back years. These stories are good examples of, “if you never swing at the ball, for sure, you will never hit it!” When you read what happened to Eric after he drew the “super lottery” in regards to an Alberta bighorn hunt, you will want to sign a contract with him to purchase all your future lottery tickets.

In summary, do your research and get involved with the annual western state license drawings and lotteries. Build points! You will be happy you did in future years. Good luck in the drawings and especially when you strike-it-rich and go on that sheep hunt!

…in June 2007 I got an email from the Arizona Big Game Super Raffle Committee reminding me to buy tickets soon, because of the deadline that was quickly approaching. I hesitated a bit because I had always considered myself unlucky, but decided to buy some tickets because I knew the money would go to a good cause. I proceeded to buy five tickets each for elk, mule deer, antelope, and desert sheep and quickly forgot about it until a couple weeks later. On July 7th I got a call from a strange number and decided to let it go to my voicemail. After about fifteen minutes I checked my
message and about passed out when I heard Chris Denham informing me that I had just won the Super Raffle desert sheep tag!

After a sleepless night I started doing my research right away the next morning and making all the phone calls. My first call was to the Huntin’ Fool magazine. Garth Carter gave me some great information. I had a great list of guides so I started making my phone calls. It took about a week after talking to some great sheep experts, but I finally chose to hunt with Chris Harlow and Tyson Hatch who own Double H Outfitters. Chris informed me that I would be hunting with Gino Wullkotte and that we would most likely start our hunt in October sometime.

October came very fast and we were joined on the hunt by Gino’s son Colton and good friend Lee Hop, and my dad who would help us glass during the day, but was quickly elected to camp cook during the evenings because of his great cooking abilities. We hunted hard for three days and saw a ton of sheep, but with the rut going a little slower than expected we didn’t see the mature rams that we had hoped for. After day three we decided to pull out and return in a few weeks hoping conditions would improve.

Mid November we headed back up north and with high hopes. Gino had arrived at camp the evening before me and had spotted some sheep deep in one of the large canyons. With no way to approach the area from down below we decided to hike in and come above the area we hoped the sheep would be. Our hike took 7-8 hours to get to where we wanted to be. When we finally reached our canyon we were slowly creeping along the edge looking below when Gino spotted a ram. As I peered over I could see a dark horned ram feeding below. I grabbed the .300 WSM I was using and got set up on Gino’s pack for the shot. Gino ranged the ram at just over 300 yards straight down into the canyon. I squeezed the trigger and at the shot he dropped immediately and we finally had our ram! – Eric Hunt

…I was sitting in my home office in front of my computer when my cell phone rang the afternoon of July 19th, 2008. I almost did not answer it, as I did not recognize the number. The guy on the other end introduced himself as Chris Denham calling on behalf of the Arizona Big Game Super Raffle. I could not believe it. Chris asked me if I was sitting down, because I had just won the desert bighorn tag from the Arizona Big Game Super Raffle.

The following week Larry Heathington of Sheep Ltd. and I set up a plan on how and when we wanted to hunt. Larry has guided on a lot of sheep hunts and has harvested some real monsters. He is definitely a person with a vast amount of knowledge about sheep and their habits.

After not finding the right ram in August, we went out again in September and found lots of sheep and some really nice rams, but nothing I wanted to shoot. Then in October on one of our hunting trips we saw a really nice ram that had what I would call perfectly shaped horns; not a ding or chip on them. He was a pretty big ram, but not quite what I was looking for. During that trip all of the rams I saw I kept coming back to that one ram with the perfect horns for comparison. I think at that moment Larry knew what to look for in a ram that I was willing to go after.

It was a few weeks later in the afternoon when Larry called me to tell me he had seen a ram that I might be interested in. Once I was there I asked all kinds of questions about the ram as I think Larry knew this ram was probably the one I was looking for. Larry told me that he was not as big as some of the other rams we had seen, but he had all of the attributes I was looking for in a ram. He estimated him to score around 160. We were in the area well before sun up the next morning and it was hard sitting in the jeep waiting on the sun. Once the sun was up it did not take long to find that group of sheep that Larry had seen the ram in the day before. The ram we were looking for was there and he had those perfectly shaped horns with no dings or chips. After looking at this ram with my binoculars and Larry’s spotting scope for a few minutes I said lets go after him.

We watched the sheep milling around for a few minutes and came up with a plan. Larry asked how close I needed to get for a shot and I told him that I felt comfortable at 300 yards. Well nothing goes as planned of course so at 300 yards and a couple of shots later, the sheep ran to the next ridge and stopped to look at us. It was pretty frustrating, but the look that Larry gave me was priceless and after a few words we went right back to it. We watched the sheep for about 20 minutes to let them settle down and as luck would have it the sheep bedded down. We worked our way up to the top of a ridge some 200 yards from the sheep and peeked over. The sheep were still there bedded down. The only problem was that the sheep were all piled next to each other and I could not take a clear shot. The sheep had no idea that we were there and it was probably about 25 minutes later when they started to stand up and mill around. The ram I was after stopped and gave me a clear shot, which I took before they moved again, the unmistakable sound of a hit echoed back. There were a lot of emotions when that sheep dropped. As we walked over to my ram it was hard to believe that the hunt was over. All of the hard work that we had put into this hunt had come together for a very successful hunt one that I will never forget. – Scott Krieg
**State-by-State Overview**

**Nebraska**

Sheep population: Total .......... 280 (Rocky Mountain Bighorn)

Licenses available: Total .......... 0 to 2 (Number of licenses dependent upon annual population survey.)

(Resident – 1)

(Special – 1)

Application deadline .......... August

Tentative drawing date ........ late August/early September

Cost ........................................ $25.00

NOTE: Due to the population levels, Nebraska only offers a resident license when they have a license drawing. A non-resident is eligible to purchase a tag at auction. The license includes a fully guided hunt conducted by the Nebraska Game and Parks staff and up to four (4) days and nights meals and lodging at the historic Fort Robinson State Park Lodge.

**Nebraska** is a once-in-a-lifetime state no matter how the tag is obtained.

Nebraska currently does not have a “bonus or preference” point system and does not offer a “super lottery” raffle opportunity.

Nebraska has a very unique and progressive requirement regarding young new hunters. Everyone 12–25 years of age has to either have hunter education if hunting with a firearm or bow hunter education if hunting with a bow or purchase a “hunter education exemption certificate” and be accompanied at all times in the field (close verbal contact) by an experienced licensed hunter, nineteen (19) years of age or older who has hunter education.

**North Dakota**

Sheep population: Total .......... 475 (Rocky Mountain Bighorn)

Licenses available: Total .......... 5

(Resident – 5)

Application deadline .......... May

Tentative drawing date .......... Mid June

Cost: ........................................ $20.00

NOTE: North Dakota currently does not have a “bonus or preference” point system. Each year everyone making application is on an equal basis.

**South Dakota**

South Dakota has a “preference” point system wherein a preference point is earned for each year of an unsuccessful application.

South Dakota offers a “points only” option in case someone wants to build points without the chance of drawing in the respective year at a cost of $5.00 nonrefundable.

South Dakota currently only offers residents permits. A non-resident can obtain a permit via auction when offered.

South Dakota does not currently offer a “super lottery” raffle.

**North Dakota** currently does not have a “bonus or preference” point system. Each year everyone making application is on an equal basis.

**North Dakota** currently does not offer a “super lottery” raffle.

Hunter education is required.

North Dakota is a once-in-a-lifetime state.

Sheep population: Total .......... 475 (Rocky Mountain Bighorn)

Licenses available: Total .......... 5

Application deadline .......... May

Tentative drawing date .......... Mid June

NOTE: South Dakota sheep herd is currently in a recovery due to a pneumonia die-off in ’04/’06

**South Dakota**