

Proposed changes to big horn sheep hunt cause concern

BY COLETTE DERWORIZ, CALGARY HERALD, CALGARY HERALD MARCH 25, 2015

A potential change to the age of big horn sheep being hunted in Alberta is causing concern among some hunters, outfitters and taxidermists.

The proposal, which is being considered for the 2016 hunting season, would change the legal definition of trophy sheep to a full curl from a four-fifth curl and shorten the hunting season in some areas of the province.

"It means that the sheep will be a couple of years older," said Duncan MacDonnell, a spokesman for Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

A big horn sheep with a four-fifth curl is around four to five years old.

A diagram explaining the difference between a four-fifth curl and a full curl in the Alberta hunting regulations.

The change, which would affect many of the areas in the Foothills, has led to concern by some Alberta business owners.

"Our biggest concern is the full curl regulation," said Chad Lenz, who owns two outfitting companies near Caroline, AB, and sits on the board of the Alberta Professional Outfitters Society.

He said similar restrictions in southern Alberta led to a major reduction of the harvest of trophy rams for the first five years.

"Commercially, as outfitters, that's a huge concern," he said. "We would be out of business in five years, no question. Our clients that come for big horn sheep expect a realistic opportunity to harvest one.

"So, if that's taken away, we would not be able to sell our hunts."

The province, however, said they've also heard concerns that the quality of trophy rams has gone down in the province.

"Analysis of over 30 years of data supports these concerns, that over-harvesting is occurring and the quality of our trophy rams in the province has been decreasing," Environment Minister Kyle Fawcett said this week when asked about the proposal in the legislature.

There's also a concern that the continued harvest of the four and five-year old trophy rams is not sustainable in the longterm.

"Biologically, there needs to be some mature rams left in the population to ensure a healthy range and size-class structure in order for them to succeed," said Fawcett.

The number of rams has been dropping over the years, according to Alberta Environment.

It's estimated there's between 6,200 and 6,600 sheep on provincial lands, but the main concern is that the number of four- to five-year old rams after each hunting season is not meeting the five per cent target set by the province.

Some suggest the situation could lead to a crash in the sheep populations, while others question the science.

MacDonnell said the change made in 1996 in southern Alberta has helped recover those target populations.

A map of the hunting areas, known as wildlife management units. The proposed change to the full curl sheep would affect areas 303, 306, 308 and 402-434, while the shortened hunting season would apply to 302 and 400.

In the legislature, Fawcett admitted there would be a reduced harvest in the short term, but he added that it would allow the rams to reach maturity before being hunted.

"We will continue consulting on this issue and this will result in a review of the big horn sheep management plan as well as habitat plans regarding big horn sheep resiliency," he said. "We'll continue to make that data available publicly so we are transparent about any decisions being made."

Officials with his department said they will post all of the proposed changes on the [Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development website](#) by the end of the month.

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Calgary, Alberta-20081031- Photos of Big Horn Sheep. This picture is showing two rams fighting for the top position. the one on the right was legally killed this year. Photo credit; Peter Neuhausl. / (For CITY section story by Stephane Massinon)

Photograph by: Calgary Herald archives, Calgary Herald



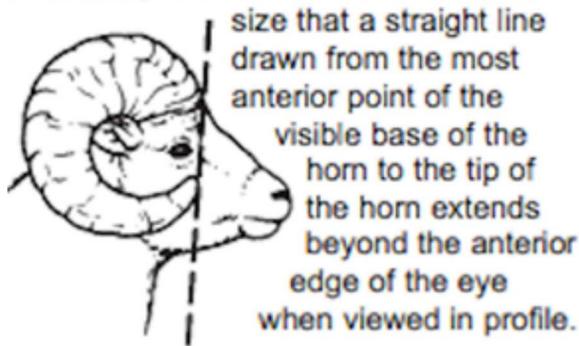
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Trophy Sheep – A male bighorn sheep with horns, one of which is of sufficient



size that a straight line drawn from the most anterior point of the horn to the tip of the horn extends beyond the anterior edge of the eye when viewed in profile.

Full-Curl Trophy Sheep – A male bighorn sheep with horns, one of which is of sufficient

size that when viewed in profile, its tip extends upward beyond a straight line drawn from the rear-most point of the base of the horn to the centre of the nostril.



Be Careful! Study a ram carefully when determining its trophy status. Be sure to view the ram's head from a horizontal plane and in profile, with the front of the right and left horn bases aligned. Views from below, in front, or any other perspective other than "in profile" will not provide for accurate judgement. Some rams may not be legal even if they are old or have horns severely broomed or with turned up tips.

Trophy sheep diagram

Photograph by: Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, Calgary Herald

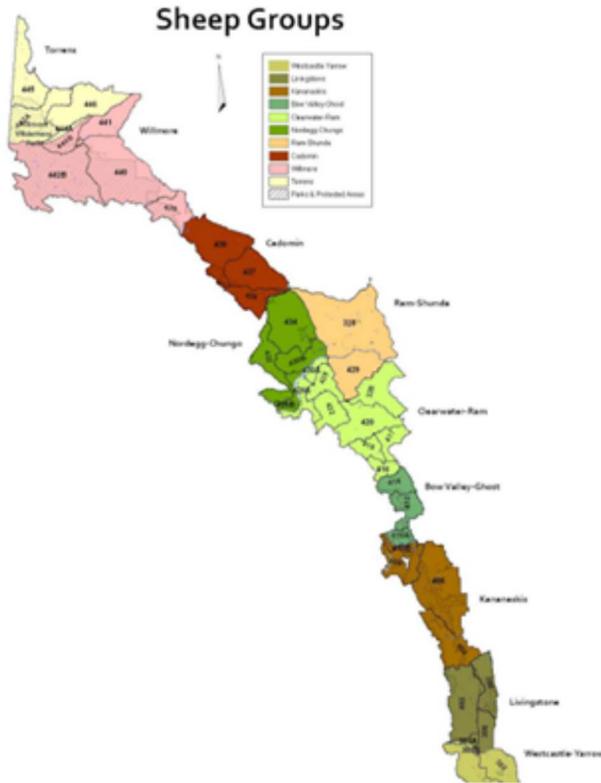


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Map of areas

Photograph by: Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, Calgary Herald

