

30TH BIG GAME AWARDS

As most of you know, the Boone and Crockett Club hosts, on a triennial basis, an event that celebrates our hunting and conservation heritage by showcasing the largest trophies taken in recent years. The event includes a public display of the top-scoring trophies of native North American big game from both adult and youth hunts and is highlighted by the Club's awards celebration and banquet.

Once again, Bass Pro Shop's Wonders of Wildlife National Museum and Aquarium graciously hosted the event this summer, a milestone 30th triennial occasion celebrating the slogan, "North American Big Game, More and Healthier Than Ever Under the Watchful Eye of Sportsmen".

I'm especially pleased that the word "healthier" has been included in this descriptor. In the story we tell about America's hunter-supported conservation success stories, we tend to focus mostly on the numbers, the tale of how so many big game species—from pronghorn to whitetail deer—that faced a bleak and uncertain future at the turn of the 20th century are today thriving and abundant, thanks to science-based wildlife management programs.

While big numbers tend to get the headlines, we should keep in mind that the health of a particular species is also a key indicator of its future success. In this respect, the Club's longstanding *Records of North American Big Game* provides a treasure

trove of historical data.

The Club notes, for example, that among the truly stunning wildlife conservation success accounts over the past few years has been the number of new world-class bighorn sheep. This includes a new World's Record, scoring 216-3/8 B&C points, a picked-up ram from Montana's Wild Horse Island on Flathead Lake whose score was verified last spring by a Special Judge's Panel.

According to Justin Spring, B&C director of big game records, "Since the Club's current scoring system was adopted in 1950, this is only the fifth World's Record bighorn, and three of those have been declared just since 2001. This ram doesn't have the longest horns on record or the largest bases, but the mass carried over the entire length of its nearly 50-inch horns is what makes this ram the largest we've seen by a significant margin. The last three World's Record rams have been 208-1/8, 208-3/8, 209-4/8 and now 216-3/8. That's a jump we just never expected to see."

"We are now seeing," Spring added, "what nature and sound wildlife management are capable of producing in the wild. When it comes to big game, the Boone and Crockett score is a measurement of quality habitat, especially in sheep."

In addition to the bighorn, the Club's latest record book (the 14th edition) includes new World's Records for Alaska-Yukon moose, pronghorn

and Rocky Mountain goat. This edition, in a two-volume set, includes more than 32,000 entries of which more than 5,000 are new. The 30th awards period, encompassing 2016, 2017 and 2018, may constitute the highest number of trophy entries since the three-year recording period began in the early 1980s.

The Boone and Crockett Club's big game records, begun in 1932, provide important historical benchmarks that enable us to better gauge how various species



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have fared over the decades and, together, these statistics reaffirm the value of wildlife management programs and our continuing conservation successes.

Hope to see you down the trail. ■



These three rams were picked up by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks on Wild Horse Island in Montana and were on display at the 30th Big Game Awards exhibit in Springfield, Missouri.