

THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

A Celebration of Success: Wild Sheep of North America

The Wild Sheep of Modern North America, published in August of 1975, recounts the deliberations of the "Proceedings of the Workshop on the Management Biology of North American Wild Sheep." This workshop, sponsored by the Boone and Crockett Club, the National Audubon Society and the Wildlife Management Institute, was held in Missoula, Montana, on June 18 to 20, 1974, for the purposes of determining the current status of North America's wild sheep, to assess the effectiveness of current management programs and to define research needs and management strategies that would assure the future well-being of these animals.

Those participating in this international effort included professionals directly involved in managing and studying wild sheep in Canada, Mexico and the United States. Prominent national conservation organizations also sent delegates, resulting in the broadest and most representative assemblage of "sheep people" ever brought together. The publication, resulting from this meeting, *The Wild Sheep of Modern North America*, edited by James B. Trefethen and published by the Boone and Crockett Club, became the

Bible for wild sheep management on this continent and provided the map that has resulted in the greatest single-species conservation success of the 20th century.

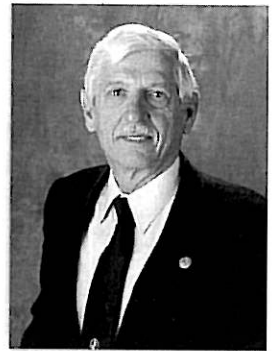
That 1974 was the turning point in the conservation of North America's wild sheep is best illustrated by the table below. This table compares wild sheep numbers estimated during the 1974 workshop with statistical information compiled by Drs. Dale E. Towell and Valerius Geist for our new publication, *Return of Royalty: Wild Sheep of North America*. This beautifully illustrated work was released February 18, 1999, at the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep Convention in Reno, Nevada.

The statistics indicate a 43 percent increase in the total number of wild sheep estimated to exist in North America during the 25-year period since the workshop. Some of this increase is probably due to better surveying methods and please keep in mind that I used some personal discretion (taking the high side of all estimates) in interpretation of the data. The dramatic statistic in this table involves desert bighorns. Numbers of this species have increased from 14,700 in 1974 to over 22,500 according to current estimates. That represents a 53 percent increase despite the fact that desert sheep in Mexico declined from 6,000 in 1974 to just under 5,000 in 1999.

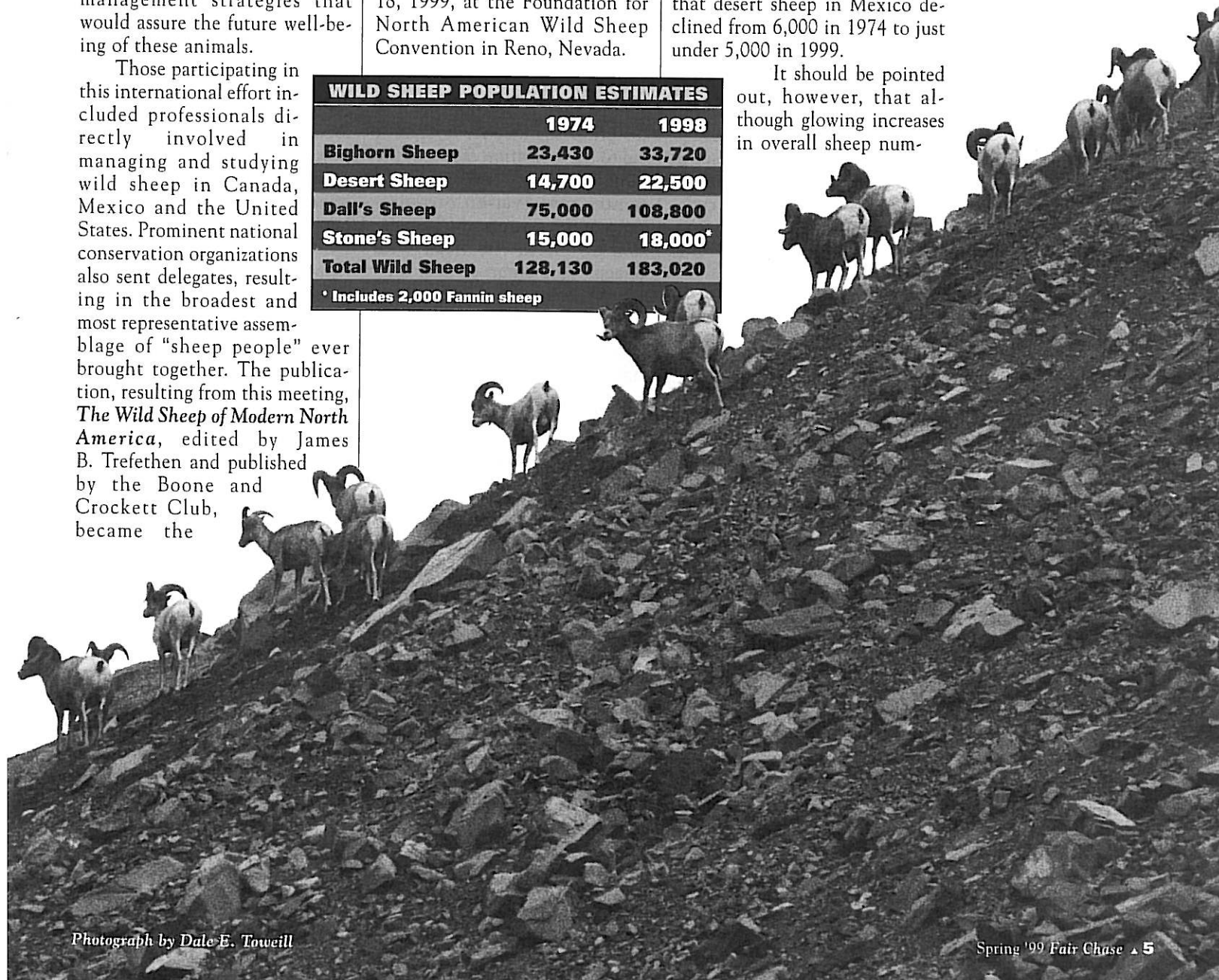
It should be pointed out, however, that although glowing increases in overall sheep num-

WILD SHEEP POPULATION ESTIMATES		
	1974	1998
Bighorn Sheep	23,430	33,720
Desert Sheep	14,700	22,500
Dall's Sheep	75,000	108,800
Stone's Sheep	15,000	18,000*
Total Wild Sheep	128,130	183,020

* Includes 2,000 Fannin sheep



Daniel A. Pedrotti
President
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**SUGGESTED
READING**

Return of Royalty: Wild Sheep of North America, by Dale Towell and Valerius Geist, published by Boone and Crockett Club and the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, Missoula, Montana, 1999. Released at the FNAWS Convention in February 1999. Available from Boone and Crockett Club. See advertisement on page 4.



Putting Sheep on the Mountain: The Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, Twenty-Five Years Dedicated to Wild Sheep, 1974-1999, by Dr. Roy Schultz, Daniel A. Pedrotti and Susan C. Reneau, published by the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, Cody, Wyoming 1999. Released at FNAWS Convention February 1999. See advertisement on page 4.



bers occurred, in a number of cases populations have decreased as in the case of desert sheep in Mexico.

Today there are clearly more bighorns on the mountains, more thriving, healthy populations, many more big rams than were there 25 years ago and we have enjoyed a huge increase in the number of sheep hunting opportunities. This is reflected in the large number of recent bighorn entries into the B&C records book. The fact that we are on the right track, in the face of population expansion, increased hunting pressure and considerable loss of habitat during this period can be attributed to the following profound results of the workshop:

1. The workshop set in motion a wonderfully effective "spirit" of cooperation between scientists, managers and sportsmen. After

all Jack O'Connor, the guru of sheep hunting and renowned writer on wild sheep was in attendance.

2. The work was conducted across boundaries and jurisdictions - states, provinces, territories, nations - as if these did not matter. And they did not.
3. Excellent recommendations for sheep management emanated from the meeting and were carried out.
4. The participants came away dedicated to fulfill the mandates of the workshop.
5. The public, for the first time, became aware of the plight of wild sheep.
6. Most importantly, a meeting of sheep hunters that occurred at Mt. Horeb, Wisconsin, in the fall of 1974.

The Mt. Horeb meeting is of historical significance because it led to the formation of one of the most aggressive and successful hunter-conservation organizations of the century, the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep. This group of dedicated sheep hunters and conservationists, commonly

referred to as FNAWS, picked up the challenge of raising the funds needed to accomplish much of the work outlined by the workshop.

FNAWS funding provided for research, habitat improvement and protection, support of the wildlife biologists of the sheep states and wild sheep transplant efforts in over 16 states and provinces. FNAWS members lobbied for sheep hunting regulations and enforcement. They worked toward mountain sheep recovery, watched and hunted rams, generated a rich economy about sheep that gave individuals a stake in life, an income and a future and increased the resource at the same

time. Who else can make that proud claim? And it was done in a spirit of good fellowship with very little pain. Now with a consistent membership of more than 5,500, FNAWS has raised and returned to the species over \$15 million. (For a detailed history of this organization and its conservation successes, obtain a copy of *Putting Sheep on the Mountain*.)

Now to the point of my story. Today we have a very accurate progress report on the conservation of one of our great big game species. In a sense, we have an inventory to set the stage for the next 25 years and to dwell on the subject of what should wild sheep populations in North America look like 100 years from now. Think what we could accomplish if we had data like these on all of our big game species. Probably a lot of this information is available in various state game departments or other government files but someone needs to access and collate this into a usable form.

The next question, using wild sheep as an example, how do we use this information in planning for the future? Can we expect to increase wild sheep numbers by another 43 percent over the next 25 years? Would we be satisfied with same number in 2025? Or are both of these scenarios too optimistic? What about 2050 or even 2100?

The Boone and Crockett Club published *The Wild Sheep of Modern North America* in 1974. *Return of Royalty: Wild Sheep of North America* (1999) is a cooperative publishing venture between the Boone and Crockett Club and FNAWS. I am hopeful that the Boone and Crockett Club can reach out to the other conservation organizations and co-publish a series of studies that will allow us to see the current condition and population trends so that we can answer the questions raised above relative to all big game species of North America. ▲▲▲

