

# RECENT RECORDS UPDATES

## TROPHY TALK



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The records committee has two major updates. The first is a modified desert sheep boundary in California, and the second is a new entry affidavit for all bison entries. While the updates are straightforward, a bit of discussion on both topics follows to show how changes like this are brought forward and considered.

### DESERT SHEEP

The desert sheep boundary adjustment was first brought to the attention of records leadership by Vern Bleich, a professional member, member of the records committee, and the former bighorn sheep biologist for California. His

concern was that the previous boundary for desert bighorn also included Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep. His slightly shortened explanation follows.

“Two subspecies currently occur in California. These are Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis sierrae*) and desert bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni*). Sierra Nevada bighorns are not a desert bighorn sheep and are classified as endangered by state and federal governments. Thus, there is no legal harvest. Since the taxon is not a desert sheep, nor a Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, there is no need to include its distribution on

the map; its range is entirely west of the boundary line I have drawn, which is U.S. Highway 6.

“The state and federal governments also have listed bighorn sheep occupying the peninsular ranges in southwest California as a distinct population segment, but they truly are a desert bighorn sheep. As a distinct population segment, they are classified as endangered by the federal government and listed by the state as threatened. There currently is no legal harvest of the animals within the boundary of the distinct population segment because of those classifications, but they are desert bighorn sheep, and included within the distribution of desert bighorn sheep shown on the map...”

The topic was added to the agenda for the records committee meeting held just before the awards program in Springfield last summer. Other sheep biologists and the committee reviewed Vern’s proposed boundary adjustment. They voted to approve.

Interestingly, two picked-up heads in the book could be from the now-excluded area. As the pickups are a distinct subspecies, a new

category would need to be created to recognize them. The requirements for category creation include a request from the managing states or tribes and a population robust enough to maintain a category. As neither of these stipulations is met with Sierra Nevada sheep, and a precise kill location cannot be ascertained, these picked-up heads will be footnoted in the next edition of *Records of North American Big Game*. The next edition of the scoring manual will also explain that the area of northern California that does not include any sheep category is home to a subspecies that does not warrant its own category and is currently excluded.

### BISON

The bison entry affidavit update was a couple of years in the making. The issue was that while Boone and Crockett’s records have always required that entries be free-ranging, native North American big game, Custer State Park does have a

The updated boundary map for the sheep range.



View all our category boundaries online



See the new bison affidavit online at the bottom of the score charts page



Congratulations to Philip Herrnberger for signing up 200 members!

boundary fence. Because of this, the records committee put together a subcommittee to investigate the topic, led by former vice president of Big Game Records and records committee chair Eldon "Buck" Buckner.

During this research, it was found that early on, when the Big Game Awards Programs were referred to as competitions, bison were accepted for recording but were not eligible for competition. When the committee voted to change the name to awards programs and the emphasis taken off the competition aspect, all trophies listed became eligible by default. At the time, Custer State Park was the only location that allowed bison hunting. Recent bison herds that have been reviewed were held to the standards of our other categories.

The subcommittee recommended that for historical purposes and to document the limited recovery of the species, an updated affidavit would be required for entries from Custer State Park instead of removing all entries from there. While this seems to be a slight divergence from the previous policy, it is rooted in the conservation ethos of the Club and records program. The bison is the only big

game species that has not been recovered in a significant portion of its range in North America. This is largely due to the fact that the habitat requirements of bison can rarely be met on today's landscape. In many areas where bison recovery is taking place, some form of containment is needed. The updated wording can be found in the Club's trophy eligibility statement, available on the Club's website.

It should be noted the Club still has stipulations on eligible herds. These include management by state, federal, or tribal agencies, licenses for harvest, and management consistent with a free-ranging herd, including minimal handling. In essence, the updated wording still requires the herd to be reviewed for inclusion by the committee but no longer will containment be an automatic disqualification of a herd. This should be welcome news to certain tribal wildlife agencies as they work to bring back bison to their lands. ■

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