



IDAHO FISH AND GAME GOLDSHEET

March 2026 Commission Meeting

Agenda Item: GMU 40 Bighorn Sheep Season Modification (**Action**)

Presented by: Hollie Miyasaki

Position/Title: Wildlife Staff Biologist

Agenda Item No.: 6B
Supervisor Approval: SR

Background:

The Idaho Bighorn Sheep Management Plan 2022–2027 provides direction for managing harvest, predation, habitat, disease, and translocations. *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* (Movi) was detected in the Reynolds Creek bighorn sheep herd within the Owyhee Front Population Management Unit (PMU)/GMU 40 in December 2025 during helicopter captures conducted for health testing and radio marking. After evaluating the risk of Movi spreading to the Castle Creek herd, also within the Owyhee Front PMU/GMU 40, and to bighorn sheep in the Jacks Creek PMU/GMU 41, IDFG collaborated with USDA Wildlife Services to depopulate the Reynolds Creek herd in January and February of 2026 to reduce the risk of transmission to neighboring California bighorn sheep. Staff will provide additional details of the depopulation effort during the presentation.

Following the Reynolds Creek depopulation, an estimated 30–35 bighorn sheep remain in the Owyhee Front PMU, including 7–10 Class III and IV rams that move between Units 40 and 41. The Bighorn Sheep Management Plan recommends harvesting no more than 20% of Class III and IV rams only in populations of approximately 100 or more bighorn sheep. Current bighorn sheep numbers in GMU 40 fall outside those harvest guidelines. To remain consistent with the management plan, the Department proposes closing the 2026 bighorn sheep hunting season in Hunt Area 40 (1 tag).

Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues:

Idaho Statute 36-104 authorizes the Commission to establish rules for the taking of wildlife consistent with state policy. Species management plans provide Commission direction for population and harvest management. This agenda item is to propose changes to the 2026 California bighorn sheep hunting seasons by closing 2026 harvest season in Hunt Area 40 (Hunt #7001).

Public Involvement Process:

The Commission and the Department receive input from the public on bighorn sheep management throughout the year via social media, email, phone calls, public meetings and hearings, and other events. The public also has the opportunity to comment on this topic at the March Commission public hearing.

Justification:

Action is required to change 2026 California bighorn sheep hunting seasons.



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Staff Recommendation:

To remain consistent with harvest guidelines outlined in the Idaho Bighorn Sheep Management Plan 2022-2027, the Department proposes closing the 2026 hunting season in Hunt Area 40 (Hunt #7001). This would eliminate 1 California bighorn sheep tag.

Suggested Motion:

I move the Commission adopt staff recommendations to close the 2026 California bighorn sheep hunting season in Hunt Area 40 (Hunt #7001).