



**TURNER
ENDANGERED
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FUND**

Desert Bighorn Sheep Restoration Project Great Success

*Turner Endangered Species Fund Reports Important Success
for Long-term Restoration Effort*

For Immediate Release

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BOZEMAN, Mont., -- Today the Turner Endangered Species Fund (TESF) recognizes the successful restoration of desert bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis mexicana*) by noting the removal of 16 ewes from the Fra Cristobal Mountains for conservation purposes. Due to the herd's size, on Sunday October 30 the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish captured and translocated 16 ewes from the Fras to suitable habitat elsewhere in the state to further secure the species' future. This represents the first time that desert sheep have been restored to private property and managed so successfully that the herd grew to sufficient size to serve as a "donor population".

That Fra Cristobal's project desert sheep restoration project began in 1995, in close collaboration with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, with the release of 37 endangered sheep to the Fra Cristobal Mountains at the Armendaris Ranch (Figure 1). Another 7 sheep were released in 1997.

TESF and the Ranch had intensively monitored the sheep and cougars to promote survival for the last 16 years. Controlling cougars to minimize predation on sheep was the principal management activity during that time. To ensure success, TESF and the Ranch successfully employed remote, motion sensitive cameras to improve our ability to document the presence of cougars (Figure 2 and 3) on the mountain and the threat they posed to sheep.

By May 2011 the sheep population that inhabited the Fra Cristobal Mountains included 200 to 220 sheep and had catalyzed a second population on the nearby Caballos Mountains that included 65 to 75 sheep. This "meta-population" of 265 to 295 sheep is the largest in state, includes over 40% of all sheep in the state, and is an important reason that New Mexico State Game Commission intends to remove the species from the state list of imperiled species in November 2011.

Staff from the Bureau of Land Management, San Andreas National Wildlife Refuge, and White Sands Missile Range provided long standing support to the recovery program. About 60% of the desert bighorn sheep in New Mexico occupy these lands.

Over the years important funding was provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Wild Sheep Foundation in addition to that provided by Turner and New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. General sports persons also contributed financially to desert sheep recovery through license fees and federal taxes paid for sporting goods taxed via the Pitman/Robertson Act

The TESH is a non-profit, private operational charity dedicated to preserving nature by ensuring the persistence of imperiled species and their habitats with an emphasis on private land. The Fund was formed by Ted Turner in June 1997.

The Armendaris Ranch contains 358,643 acres of desert scrub, Chihuahuan grasslands, and the Fra Cristobal Mountains on which the TESH conducted the desert sheep project. The ranch is located in south central New Mexico and is owned by Ted Turner. The Armendaris Ranch is the only desert sheep restoration site on private land in New Mexico.



Figure 1. Desert bighorn release to the Fra Cristobal Mountains, Armendaris Ranch, New Mexico, 1995.



Figure 2 and 3. The Turner Endangered Species Fund and the Armendaris Ranch successfully employed several motion sensitive remote cameras to improve our understanding of cougar movements and the threat they posed the desert sheep. This understanding improved our ability to remove cougars from the mountain before they killed sheep.