

Rocky Mountain goats released at base of Mount Jefferson

Published: Thursday, July 29, 2010

Updated: Thursday, July 29, 2010, 12:36 PM

By **Bill Monroe, Special to The Oregonian**

BEND — Biologists and volunteers from the **Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife** and the **Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs** released 45 Rocky Mountain goats on tribal lands Tuesday at the base of Mount Jefferson.

It's the first time since the 1800s that goats have been in the central Oregon Cascades.



Lisa Dubisar, CTWSRO

Rocky Mountain goats wander the lower slopes of Mount Jefferson for the first time in more than 100 years

The goats were captured from the Elkhorn Mountain Range in Baker County, home to half of Oregon's estimated 800 Rocky Mountain goats. The relocation is the 10th from the Elkhorn parent herd.

Wild goats disappeared from the Cascade Mountains in the 19th century, probably because of a combination of over-hunting, severe weather and climactic fluctuations.

State biologists plan to return Rocky Mountain goats to much of their historic range, and they found a willing partner in the Warm Springs tribes.



Jim Yuskavitch, ODFW

State and tribal biologists release Rocky Mountain goats into the central Oregon Cascades

Historical literature describes goats on Mount Jefferson, and tribal lands in the upper Whitewater River were identified as a release site in the state's **Rocky Mountain Goat and Bighorn Sheep Management Plan** in 2004. The area is very similar to the Elkhorns and should provide excellent habitat for the goats, state biologists said.

Rocky Mountain goats are notoriously nomadic, but the Warm Springs tribes will manage the Mount Jefferson population to provide hunting and cultural and ceremonial opportunities for tribal members after an adequate population is established: 50 or more goats for five years.

"It is exciting that the tribes are getting a native animal back to its home range and another opportunity to experience traditional hunting," said Robert Brunoe, general manager of natural resources for the Warm Springs tribes.

It's not known where stray goats will travel. Some from the Elkhorns have wandered as far as the Columbia River Gorge and Mount Adams.

In future years, state biologists said, Rocky Mountain goats might be released at other sites in central Oregon, including Three-fingered Jack and the Three Sisters. If successful, the releases could result in widespread viewing as well as controlled hunting.

Rocky Mountain goats were extirpated from Oregon before or during European settlement in the late 19th century. They are the rarest game animal hunted in the state today; 11 tags are available for the 2010 season. All controlled Rocky Mountain goats tags are "once in a lifetime": Once a hunter draws the tag, he or she may never draw it again.

ODFW also raffles off a Rocky Mountain goat tag each year to raise money for research and reintroduction efforts like this one. Raffle sales for this fall's tag fetched \$24,739.

Reintroduction of Rocky Mountain goats (this is the 18th release) began in 1950, when five goats were transported from Chopaka Mountain in northern Washington to the Wallowa Mountains.

-- **Bill Monroe**

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