

POSITION OF THE WILD SHEEP FOUNDATION

Title: Aoudad
Submitted by: WSF Conservation Staff
Approved by: Board of Directors
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Overview

Barbary sheep (*Ammotragus lervia*), commonly known as aoudad, are a non-native species from North Africa first brought to America through the New York Zoological Park and the Smithsonian's National Zoo in 1900. They were later introduced by the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department into the panhandle and Trans Pecos region of Texas in the 1950s to be huntable species.

As a prolific breeder that can lamb twice a year with a 94% survival rate and little documented impact from mountain lion or coyote predation, plus range expansion, migration, aided by intentional translocations, aoudad populations have increased significantly in recent years. Today, aoudad exist in Texas, New Mexico, California, Oklahoma, central Oregon as well as Mexico. Many ranges are also occupied by native desert bighorn or Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep and numerous other native wildlife species. In Texas alone, aoudad populations, once estimated just four years ago at 25,000, now exceed 100,000 animals.

Recent scientific research has shown that aoudad are having an adverse impact on desert bighorn sheep, mule deer, other wildlife, and domestic livestock grazing. In Texas, aoudad have contributed to the decline of native desert bighorn sheep populations by over 75%, with desert bighorn numbers continuing to decline. These declines are a direct result of degradation of habitat, competition for food and water, impacts on the social structure of native bighorn sheep herds, and the transmission of respiratory pathogens from aoudad, which have proven fatal to desert bighorns.

As an organization committed to conserving, protecting, managing, and enhancing wild sheep populations worldwide, the Wild Sheep Foundation is concerned with the unchecked population increases of aoudad that overlap with the ranges of native desert bighorn and Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep.

Position

Conservation of native wild sheep and the ecosystems they occupy comprise the primary mission of the Wild Sheep Foundation (WSF). WSF supports scientific solutions to resource management challenges. To that end, WSF has invested heavily in research related to disease investigations and

mitigation, wild sheep populations and habitat management, control of non-native wildlife, and other strategies.

The Wild Sheep Foundation acknowledges the motivations behind the original introduction of aoudad, which aimed to provide hunting opportunities in areas where native game species had not yet fully recovered. The Foundation recognizes that, at the time of their introduction, the negative impacts of the proliferation of a non-native species like aoudad on the landscape were not known or anticipated. The Foundation acknowledges that aoudad have become a desired huntable species to sportsmen and, therefore, of economic value to some landowners and outfitters. The Foundation also acknowledges that our own promotion of aoudad hunting, while intended to relieve pressure on native wild sheep and other wildlife, has instead exacerbated the problem by promoting the sustainable use of aoudad. Consequently, the Wild Sheep Foundation believes that the threats that unchecked aoudad populations now represent necessitate swift action.

For its part, the Foundation has concluded that promoting aoudad hunting as implied conservation for the species is in direct opposition to its purpose of "Putting and Keeping Wild Sheep on the Mountain[®]" and has enacted a new policy regarding this matter.

Effective immediately, WSF has implemented a moratorium on all sales, support, promotion, or advertising of any aoudad hunting at any WSF event, publication, on social media, or other communication. This includes, but is not limited to, promotion & selling of aoudad hunts by exhibitors at its annual Sheep Show[®] convention, inclusion in WSF's auctions, raffles, and its Awards program. The moratorium and prohibition does not affect the promotion or sales of Barbary sheep legally hunted in its native range in northern Africa. Additionally, WSF respectfully requests that all its Chapters and Affiliates take the same action.

The Wild Sheep Foundation will continue to do everything possible as an organization to seek measurable solutions to mitigate this problem and encourage others to do the same.

