



(Photo: BC Parks)

2.11 SHEEP: Bighorn Sheep (*Ovis canadensis*, *Ovis dalli*: ssp: *dalli*, *stonei*)

Appearance and Size

California and Rocky Mountain bighorns look similar, but the California subspecies is slightly darker in colour, and in rams the horns flare outward more than those of Rocky Mountain rams. Bighorn Sheep have a rich brown coat with a contrasting ivory-white rump patch, a white muzzle, and white trim on the back of all four legs. The brown coat fades to a drab

grey-brown by late winter. The adult ram's massive, brown, spiralled horns grow throughout the sheep's life, and can be as long as 127 cm around the curve and as thick as 40 cm around the base. Ewes have slightly curved horns about 30 cm long. Adult rams stand about 100 cm high at the shoulder, and usually weigh 90 kg to 135 kg. Ewes are about two thirds the size of rams.



(Photo: William S. Keller, US National Park Service)

Life History

Bighorn Sheep are among the most social of British Columbia's hoofed mammals. They breed between early November and mid-December. Most ewes do not breed until they are two years old; and rams until they are seven or eight years old. Gestation lasts about 6 months, and lambs are born from the last week in April to early June. As lambing time nears, pregnant ewes leave their social group and isolate themselves in rugged lambing cliffs near the winter-spring range. They usually produce a single lamb that weighs 3 kg to 5 kg, but some well-nourished females produce occasional twins. Bighorn Sheep can live as long as 20 years, but most do not live beyond 12 to 14 years.



(Photo: J. Schmidt, US National Park Service)



(Photo: Tourism BC)

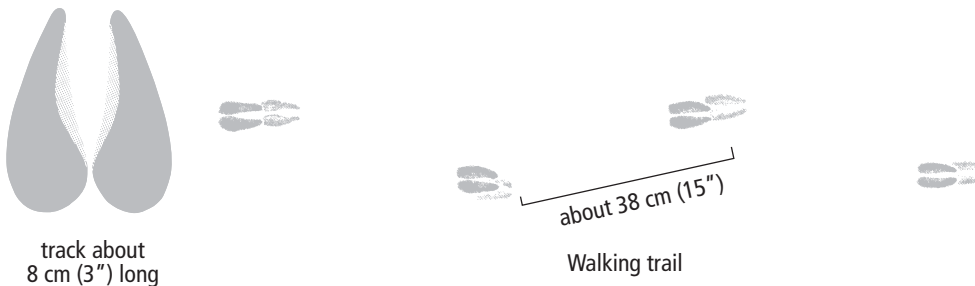
Abundance and Distribution

The main native herds of California Bighorns total about 3000 animals. They occur in the Okanagan area (Ashnola, Vaseaux Lake-Penticton Creek, Shorts Creek); on the east side of the Fraser River from Lillooet to Williams Lake; west of the Fraser around Churn and Lone Cabin Creeks; in the Bridge River watershed; in the Taseko Lake-Chilko Lake area; and at the Junction of the Chilcotin and Fraser Rivers. (Map 2.11) California Bighorns have been introduced in a number of locations, including the Grand Forks area, Kamloops Lake, and Dog Creek. There are about 2500 Rocky Mountain Bighorns. In the East Kootenay region, their herds occur in the Kootenay ranges on the east side of the Rocky Mountain Trench, from Radium south to Bull River; the Galton Range on the east side of the Trench from Elko to the Montana border; the Front ranges along the west side of the Elk River north of Sparwood; the west slope of the Rockies from Crowsnest Pass to Fording River; and the Kootenay River headwaters near Mount Assiniboine Park. More isolated herds also occur near Golden and north of McBride. New herds have been established near Chase, Castlegar, and Spences Bridge, which are outside of the historic range of this subspecies, and animals from an introduction in Washington State have spread into the Salmo area.



(Photo: Jim Turner, BC Ministry of Transportation)

Text and map adapted from: British Columbia Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, 2000a.



Adapted from: McDougall (1997); and Sheldon and Hartson (1999).



(Photo: Tom Hall)

Characteristic Features

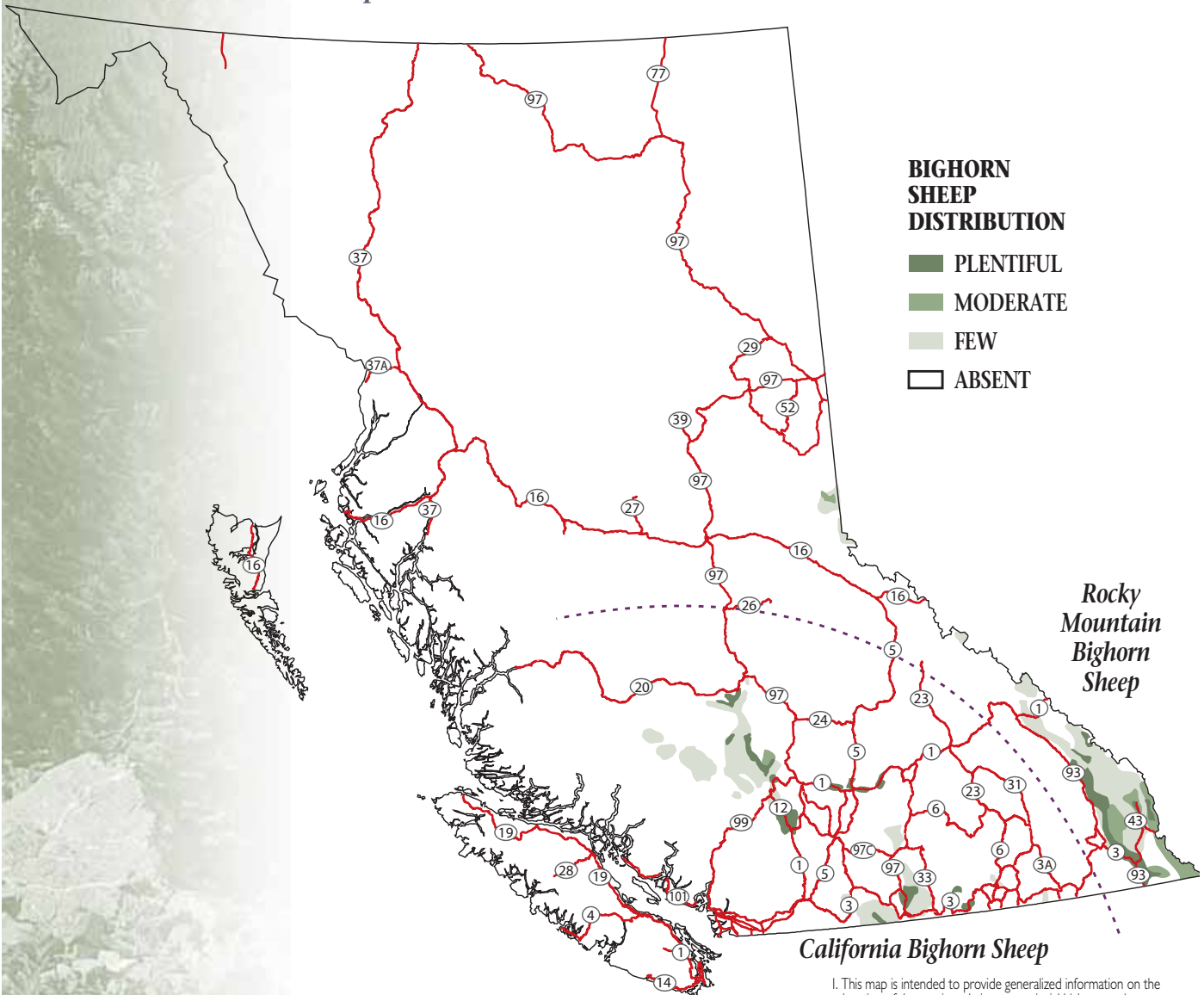


(Photo: Leonard Sielecki, BCMoT)



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Map 2.11



1. This map is intended to provide generalized information on the location of the species relative to provincial highways only.
2. Discrepancies may exist between the location of a wild animal remains found on a Provincial highway and the normal range of the species.