

SAVING A NAVAJO LEGACY – DESERT BIGHORN SHEEP

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TODAY'S PRESENTATION

- ▶ **Desert Bighorn sheep**
- ▶ **History**
- ▶ **Status on the NN**
- ▶ **Management**



GOAL

The Dept. of Fish and Wildlife's goal is to restore and protect the Bighorn population by increasing the population and establishing additional herds of sheep

Bighorn sheep and their habitat are protected on the Navajo Nation

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

- ▶ Traditionally bighorn sheep supplied food, clothing, and other products
- ▶ Parts are used for medicinal and ceremonial purposes
- ▶ Goal to offer hunts for Tribal Members



ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE

NON-NAVAJOS WILL PAY \$35,000 TO \$55,000 FOR A HUNTING PERMIT



HISTORY OF THE BIGHORN SHEEP POPULATION

- ▶ Unpublished report states, “early records indicate that bighorn were fairly numerous ...until the 1860’s” (William Fair, 1942)
- ▶ 1963 – report of six BHS on the San Juan River
- ▶ 1979 – 1 confirmed BHS
- ▶ 1980’s – DFW initiated surveys of BHS (~15-25 BHS)
- ▶ 1997 – Study initiated (pop. 34 animals). 16 radio collars fitted.

HISTORY OF THE BIGHORN SHEEP POPULATION - CONTINUED

NOV. 2002 – 13 MORE FITTED WITH RADIO-COLLARS

2003 – A VIABLE POP. (78-80 BHS)

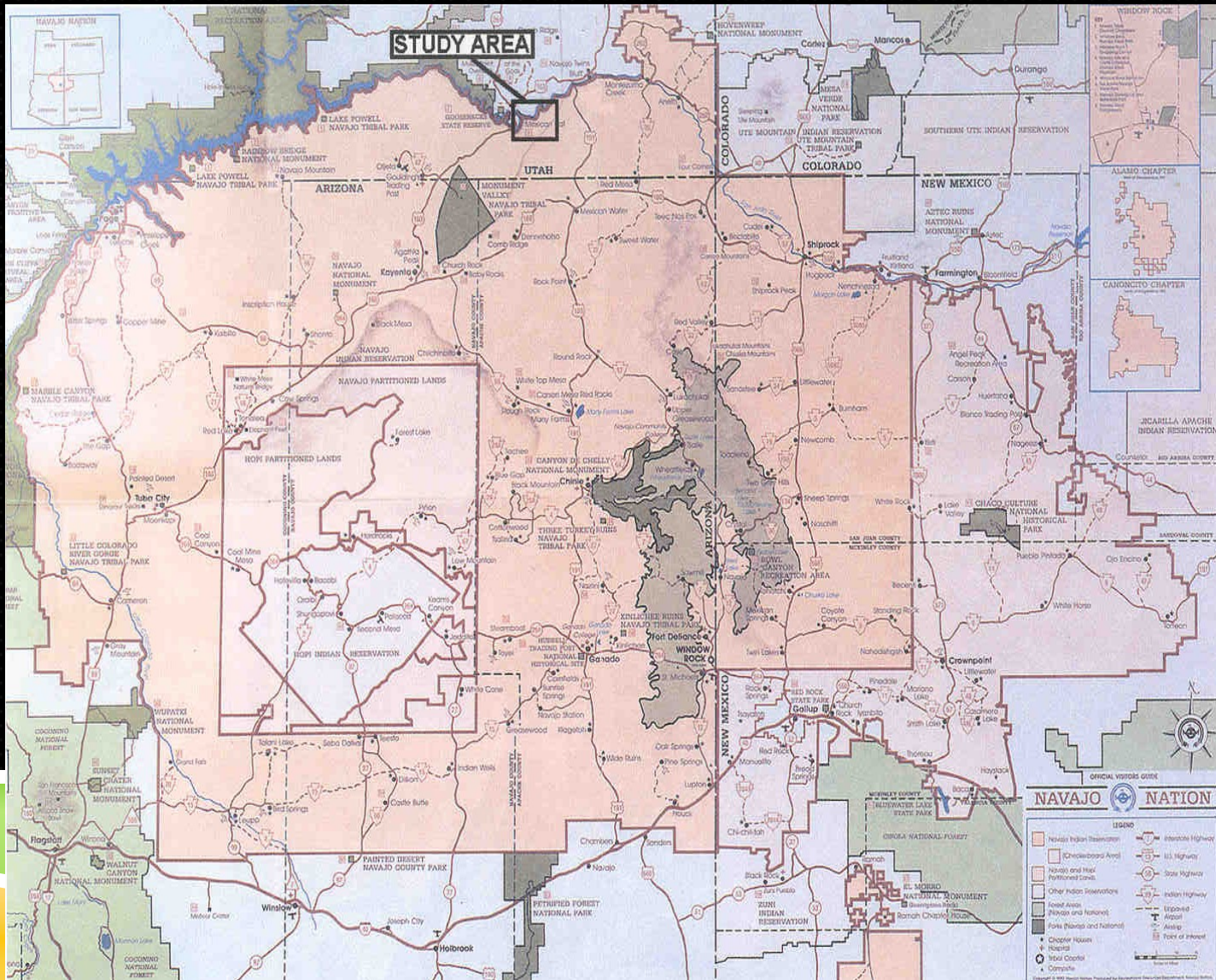
2004 – 19 ACTIVE RADIO COLLARS IN THE UPPER SJR
CANYON

2008 TRANSPLANT 24 SHEEP TO LAKE POWELL

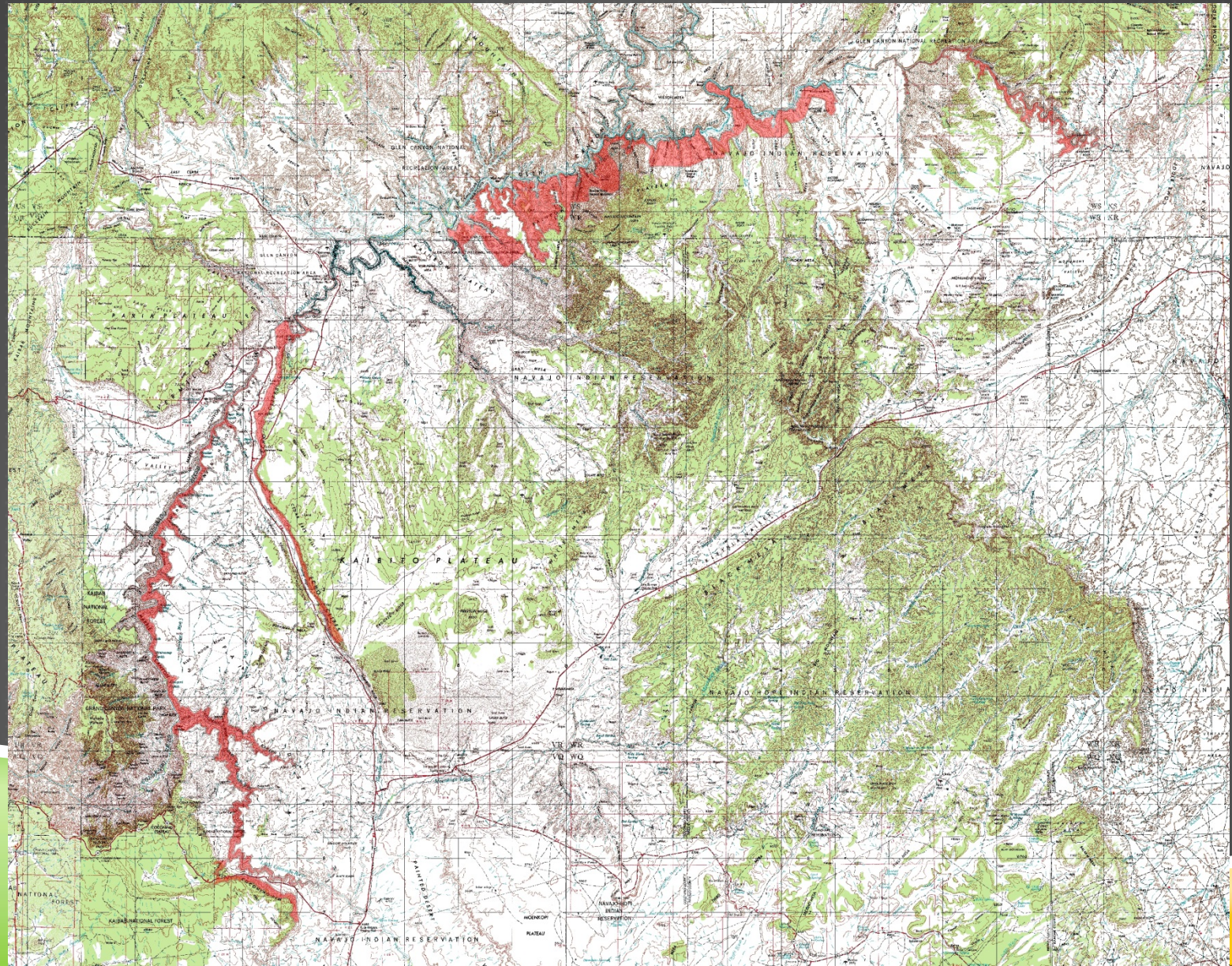
2011 RADIO COLLARED MORE SHEEP ON RAPLEE RIDGE HEARD AND
TRADED 20 SHEEP TO ARIZONA FOR A TRANSPLANT

LOCATION OF BIGHORN SHEEP RANGE

@1996



BIGHORN SHEEP POPULATION TODAY



BIGHORN SHEEP MANAGEMENT

- ▶ **1997 radio telemetry study initiated. GOAL: To provide information necessary for effective conservation and management.**

- ▶ **size**
- ▶ **distribution**
- ▶ **habitat/diet requirements**
- ▶ **carrying capacity**



BIGHORN SHEEP MANAGEMENT CONT.

Threats to Bighorn sheep

1. Disease from domestic sheep
2. Competition with domestic and feral animals for forage
3. Poaching
4. Predation
5. River recreation
6. Accidents

DISEASE FROM DOMESTIC SHEEP

What can we do?

-prevent the domestic sheep and Bighorn from interacting as much as possible

How?

Keeping a close eye on our sheep

If a wild sheep comes in contact with domestic sheep we will remove that sheep from the wild

Any sheep we handle gets preventative disease treatments and disease testing

COMPETITION WITH LIVESTOCK

- ▶ **Competition for forage**
- ▶ **There are no grazing permits in the Raplee Ridge area**
- ▶ **Trespass livestock were removed and fences were installed to exclude them**



POACHING



- ▶ **One confirmed case**
- ▶ **Radio-collared ram**
- ▶ **Carcass found without head**
- ▶ **S. side of river closed to vehicles. Two locked gates on the road to Raplee Ridge**

OTHER THREATS TO BHS

- **PREDATION**

Keen eyesight and rugged terrain
minimize predation

Mtn. lion, feral dogs, coyote,
eagles

- **ACCIDENTS**

Falls and fighting

- **OTHER**

Bacterial infections resulting
from ingesting
non-native weeds



BACTERIAL INFECTION FROM A NON-NATIVE GRASS – SUMMER 2001



Bromus tectorum (cheat grass) ended this ram's life

RIVER RECREATION

- ▶ River closure to camping
- ▶ No dogs allowed on river

Preparing to release the sheep



CONCLUSION

- ▶ **What have we have accomplished so far?**
 - ▶ **Established 3 herds of sheep**
 - ▶ **Developed a Bighorn Sheep Management Plan**
 - ▶ **Population has increased from 34 to 475**
 - ▶ **Importance of this natural resource to the Navajo Nation**
 - ▶ **Culturally and economically**
 - ▶ **Threats to the continued survival of this herd**
- ▶ **What Will We Continue to do?**
 - ▶ **Monitor the population**
 - ▶ **Seek additional transplant sites**