



FRIENDS OF HART MOUNTAIN NEWSLETTER



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Summer 2007

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This newsletter is published bi-annually by the *Friends of Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge* for the benefit of its members. Copies are also made available to visitors and through various other outlets in Lake County.

Friends of Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge is an independent, non-profit, 501(c)(3), corporation dedicated to supporting the primary purposes for which the Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge was established: to provide habitat and breeding ground for pronghorn antelope and other species of wildlife; for the protection of natural resources; and the development of incidental wildlife-oriented recreation where it does not interfere with the primary purposes of the Refuge.

Thinking of Volunteering By Ken Guza, Vice President

As I sit at home in Western Washington enjoying an unusual rainy day in late July, I'm thinking about Hart Mountain and the pleasures of volunteer work there. I am the vice president of the Hart Mountain *Friends* group and volunteer, with my wife, Diana, every spring for the grouse count at the refuge.

Our annual trips to the refuge are a gift in our lives. At home, being night people, we must pry ourselves out of bed in the mornings. But at Hart Mountain we gladly walk cross country to be at a grouse lek before dawn. The experience of spending time at Hart Mountain offers indelible memories: witnessing the sun break over the summit ridge of Steens Mountain on the east skyline, the sound of antelope hooves as herds of young antelope run back and forth in youthful vigor, sagebrush and rabbit bush decorated with heavy frost crystals, a coyote sitting in the middle of a lek surrounded by grouse, identifying all the early wildflowers, and weather systems with billowing clouds that dissipate crossing the high ridge line of the Hart Mountain escarpment.

Most of us have many blessings in our lives. Volunteering is an opportunity to give back. In the case of the National Wildlife Refuge System, volunteers mitigate, to some small extent, the severe reduction in funding support that is strangling the capacity of refuges to protect and manage unique wildlife habitats across the county. Without volunteers the Refuge System would be in a sorry state indeed. In addition to the service aspect of volunteering there is another important side, which is giving your time while immersed in a spectacular and isolated natural setting. How good can it get?

MESSAGE FROM THE MANAGER

By Rob Bundy

Hello to all of our **Friends** at Hart Mountain. My name is Rob Bundy and as of April, 2007, I am the new manager of Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge. Prior to my position here, I was the refuge manager at Bear Lake NWR in Montpelier, ID and prior to that, I was a wildlife biologist with Stillwater NWR in Fallon NV. I guess I've been bouncing around the Great Basin for the past 11 years but am pleased to now be located at the most awe-inspiring National Wildlife Refuge I have ever been associated with. No Kidding! I have worked for numerous agencies, academic institutions, and non-profit organizations, in seven states, over the past 20 years and this is the first station that literally took my breath away when I first saw it.

While I was at Stillwater NWR in the late 1990's, one of my best friends there just happened to be the planner that wrote most of the 1994, Hart Mountain NAR Comprehensive Management Plan. Don Delong told me stories about Hart Mountain (along with the fact that it was considerably more spectacular than the Carson Desert of Nevada; Don had a talent for understatement), so when I heard the manager position was open, I did not hesitate to apply. I certainly have not been disappointed, and have had an opportunity since arriving to visit with many of you, to get a feel for the history and perspective you have to offer "the new guy in town." I have learned a lot, thanks in large part to your guidance, but there is still a long way to go.

An additional challenge that our project leader will discuss in another section, is that staffing cuts across the National Wildlife Refuge System, have left many positions vacant and many refuges unstaffed. While Hart Mountain NAR remains a focus refuge within the FWS' Pacific Region, we were not immune to these cuts. As a result, I am assuming two positions at present; Deputy Project Leader in the Lakeview Complex Office (due to Dave Johnson's recent retirement) and the manager of Hart Mountain NAR. This is not the most desirable scenario; however, with your help, I think we can make the best of the hand we have been dealt.

On the positive side, we have accomplished quite a bit over the last few months. With your help (many **Friends** members also volunteer on the refuge) we have completed the sage grouse lek counts and have found approximately 54 leks, which have between 2 and 202 territories (males). We have initiated and continue to conduct the 11th year of the pronghorn fawn mortality study. While results are preliminary, it would appear that mortality has been fairly high in 2007. The good news is that our most recent aerial surveys suggest that the population is still doing quite well and our fawn to doe ratio is still hovering somewhere in the 30-40% range which is still quite good. The bighorn sheep population remains around 300 individuals with many class IV rams and lambs recently observed. Apparently the population is quite stable.

Other projects we are pursuing include construction of the CCC campground, which we have now made available for use. The Oregon Hunters Association (OHA) helped us remove fence and built picnic tables for the site so again, our partners have come to our aide. We are also working on finishing the new refuge shop, providing desperately needed upgrades for our refuge housing, completing fence repairs and development of new fencing along Hart Lake, and beginning to develop the Frenchglen Road Improvement Project. It appears probable that we will be rehabilitating the entire Frenchglen Road from the bottom of the grade to our eastern boundary. With this project, we will develop a new restroom facility and interpretive information to enhance your future trips to the Mountain.

So even with tight budgets and a shrinking workforce, Hart Mountain NAR continues to grow. As long as we maintain and expand our external partnership capabilities and our relationship with the **Friends of Hart Mountain NAR**, I am certain we will continue to improve visitor opportunities, as well as our primary mission, improving habitat for wildlife, for many years to come.

Rising Costs, Staffing Cuts, and Local Effects By Paul F. Steblein, Project Leader

It's been a bit over a year since arriving at Sheldon-Hart Mountain Refuge Complex. When I arrived, the refuge complex had lost quite a few positions over the last couple years. This was a pattern playing out across the Refuge System, but seemed disproportionately high to Sheldon-Hart Mountain. After discussions with my regional managers, we were able to refill a few positions, but I need to explain the trend that has been taking place in the Refuge System.

Refuges saw increases in funding and staffing as it led up to the Refuge Centennial celebration in 2003. This new funding was directed to specific positions or projects and did not cover most of the cost increases required to keep the existing staff. Typical costs for the workforce increase by about 5% a year. Other costs also went up. Just as for everyone else, bills for utilities, rent, fuel, and other goods or services continue to rise. After 2004, funding went down or was not allowed to be spent on these basic refuge costs. To pay these mandatory costs, other things had to be cut including staff and projects. Regional refuge programs worked out individual strategies for dealing with funding shortfalls, and then worked out a collective strategy across the Refuge System in 2006 called "workforce planning."

Workforce planning is an effort to restructure costs in the Refuge System. Simply put, the Refuge System was not able to pay for the on-board staff because of increasing costs and decreasing funds. Since roughly 80% of the base funds are tied up in salary, few funds are left to pay for utilities, fuel, surveys and studies, or other things that are paid from base funding. Cuts were required in staff to be able to pay for remaining staff and refuge programs. The regional office, with input from the field, worked out a plan to reduce staff while trying to meet refuge priorities,

improve efficiency, and consider staff development. This is a tough challenge! The plan resulted in combining additional refuges together in complexes, reduced staff on refuges, and tried to keep strong the "focus" or highest priority refuges. Sheldon and Hart Mountain are classed as focus refuges. The plan calls for a cut of 50 positions on refuges across the northwest between 2005 and 2009. Hart Mountain lost two positions, including a maintenance position and combining of Refuge Manager and Deputy Project Leader positions. Focus refuges will be given priority in future budget increases, but all refuges will suffer under budget reductions.

Obviously this will impact all aspects of the program on Hart Mountain and across the Refuge System – everything from conducting wildlife surveys, to taking care of our facilities, and offering programs for the public. There are some hopeful signs for a budget increase in the 2008 appropriations bills, as a result of a large effort from CARE (Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement – group of 21 organizations that are seeking improved funding for the Refuge System) and good support from Congress.

The details of the funding status and issues for the Refuge System can be pretty complicated (it was my job for 3 years, and I can share a lot of information on the topic), but there is good information available from CARE and the National Wildlife Refuge Association (see Internet links below). These links also give more information about how you can get involved in the funding process. Advocacy for refuges was one of the key principles underlying *Friends* of Refuge groups. Your support, in many ways, is vital to Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge. Thank you!

C.A.R.E. – Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement
<http://www.fundrefuges.org/CARE/CareHome.html>

National Wildlife Refuge Association
<http://www.refugenet.org/default.htm>



Introducing Holland Banks Biology Technician Summer 2007

As a student from Oregon State University studying Wildlife Science, I never thought I would acquire an experience at the age of 21 like the one I have had so far at Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge. I came here to intern for the summer, and it has been truly amazing. I have never been to this side of Oregon before, and it is like a whole other country out here compared to the wet NW. No matter how many pronghorn I have seen on the refuge since I've been here, I don't think I could ever look at them and say "ah, seen one, seen them all". They are truly magnificent animals, along with everything else out here.

A typical day at work for me starts with me monitoring pronghorn fawns by radio telemetry. I stand up on a high point and scan the area for fawns, hoping not to hear a mortality signal. Forty fawns were captured and tagged in May, and my job is to track these little guys and determine their mortality rate and why they died. So far we have had a tagged-fawn mortality rate of 75% which is very high, although not as high as previous years. Predators include coyotes, golden eagles, cougars and bobcats, with the primary predator being coyotes. Luckily, the fawns are getting much bigger now, at almost two months old, so they are able to outrun a coyote much easier. I also go out and monitor Bighorn Sheep once a week.

It normally takes me about three hours to monitor, so when I get back I have jobs like making spreadsheets for past collected data, including the 2007 fawn study, organizing files, folders, and disks in the office, ridding creek banks of invasive weeds, and sometimes going out to retrieve a deceased fawn. I also get to sit in on meetings held at the refuge headquarters, finding out what it's really like to work as a biologist on a refuge, and how to manage populations of different animals. I want to thank the Order of the Antelope for the funding they are providing for me to be here, as I have learned so much from my experiences here so far, and I am grateful to have a job working at Hart Mountain.

Introducing Gail Collins Hart-Sheldon Complex Biologist



Hello to all of our Friends at Hart Mountain. My name is Gail Collins and as of May 2007, I am the new complex biologist for Sheldon-Hart Mountain National Wildlife Refuge Complex. Prior to coming to Oregon, I was stationed in Alaska for almost 10 years as a wildlife biologist for two different refuges – Tetlin Refuge (1 million acres) in the interior and Togiak Refuge (5 million acres) along the western coast. Working on such large refuges really gave me an ecosystem perspective and an interest in working at the landscape level.

Prior to heading to Alaska, I lived and worked all over the western states. I was raised in Colorado and Washington, and received both my Bachelor and Master degrees in Wildlife Biology from Washington State University in Pullman. Most of my experience to date has been as a large mammal biologist, and I have had the opportunity to conduct research on a wide variety of species ranging from grizzly bear, to caribou and moose, to mountain lion.

While I greatly enjoyed my time in Alaska, I am very excited to be here in the Great Basin. I believe that both Hart Mountain and Sheldon Refuges are wonderfully unique within the refuge system here in the 'lower 48', and I am looking forward to working closely with our partners to ensure that we have these jewels long into the future.

WE NEED YOUR HELP

We are try to keep our address list up to date. If your address label is not correct, please let us know. If you know of someone who did not get their newsletter, it may be one of the ones returned by the postal service as undeliverable. Please send corrections to: **Friends of Hart Mountain**, Anne Woods, Secretary, PO Box 21 Lakeview, OR 97630. Help save postage costs with correct addresses!

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE

Our website has been updated to include our past newsletters, you can shop online, join the Friends or renew your membership, change your address (snail and email), contact us and much more. The address on the Internet is www.friendsofhartmountain.org.

BIGHORN RESEARCH ON HART MOUNTAIN NAR

Craig "Fozz" Foster, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

California bighorn sheep were reintroduced to Hart Mountain in 1954 when 22 bighorn trapped in Williams Lake, BC, Canada were released into a 1000 acre pen above the CCC camp. By 1992 the sheep pen had been taken down and the herd had increased to about 600 animals. From 1971 through 1994 Hart Mountain sheep were the primary source herd for establishing new California bighorn herds throughout Oregon. From 1985 on, all of the bighorn captured for transplant were sampled for exposure to disease and parasites.

By 1994 we were starting to see a decline in sheep numbers on the refuge, and the estimated population since 2000 has been around 300 animals. Due to the population decline ODFW quit capturing sheep for transplant during the late 1990's, which also meant we did not sample for disease or parasite exposure. Samples from 20 bighorn caught in 2000 for release in Idaho did not give any indication of exposure to disease or parasites which would account for the decline. Additionally, lamb recruitment since 1998 has been high enough that the Hart Mountain herd should be increasing.

If lamb recruitment was adequate to increase the population, but after the decline the population stabilized at a lower level, then any losses should be in the adult segment of the population. These losses should be due to either adult mortality being higher than observed prior to the early 1990's, or emigration of bighorns from the refuge. Since we had not observed an unexplained increase in bighorn populations off the refuge or establishment of a new herd range without transplant, USFWS biologist Mike Dunbar, proposed a cooperative research project to investigate adult mortality of bighorns on the refuge.

In January 2004 we caught and collared

29 ewes and 11 Rams. Two rams died within days of the capture and their death was attributed to injuries resulting from the capture. Five months after capture one of the ewe collars failed and hasn't been heard from since. As the study progressed we have collared additional bighorns. In November 2004 we caught and collared 5 ewes, and in January 2006 we caught and collared 4 ewes. Excluding the two rams lost because of capture and the one ewe with a failed collar we have been monitoring survival on 46 bighorns, (37 ewes and 9 rams).

To date 16 (35%) of the marked bighorn have died. Ten were killed by cougars, 3 died of unknown causes, 2 died from accidents/injury, and one was shot by a hunter. Of the 9 rams we've been monitoring, 2 were killed by cougars, 2 died of what appeared to be injuries received during the rut and 1 was killed by a hunter. Of the 37 ewes, 8 were killed by cougars and 3 died of unknown causes. Annual natural mortality rates have ranged from 3 to 11% for ewes and 0 to 22% for rams. In hindsight I wish we would have collared more rams. The sample size for rams is very small so a single death can have a large effect on percent mortality calculations.

The study will be completed in January 2008, after that I will be writing up the final report and giving a presentation of the results at the Northern Wild Sheep and Goat Council meetings in April. Based on a very cursory look at the results to date, I believe there has been an increase in adult mortality and a lot of that mortality is due to cougar predation. When we get the analysis completed and have a more detailed look at the results, I am sure the **Friends** will want another article for the **Friends** newsletter.

Note: Many thanks to Fozz for sharing his expertise and information with us.

The Pronghorn Store



Sales at our **Friends** Store has continued to do well since our last newsletter under the nurturing of our Treasurer Nadine Reynolds. Our items are displayed in the large showcase in the Visitor area at the Refuge Headquarters. Most of the items listed here are available for mail order. All proceeds from the sale of these items go to support the activities sponsored by **Friends of Hart Mountain**, such as the \$4,000 donation to USFWS for the helicopter costs for the annual pronghorn survey. Your purchases help us do "good things for the wildlife".

New!!!!!!! Bumper Stickers that tell the world that you love Hart Mountain. \$2.00 + \$.85 postage.

Souvenir 3 cent postage stamp from 1956 with Pronghorn. Donation of \$2.00 + 50 cents postage. Stamps donated by Jim Yoakum. While supplies last.



Color Topo Maps of the Refuge are approximately 19.5" x 26.5". They are \$8.00 + \$1.00 shipping.



We now have our logo on ceramic mugs with the words Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge. These will be available only at Headquarters at Hart Mountain due to fragility of shipping. \$6.00



Water Bottles are white and have our antelope head logo and Hart Mountain Antelope Refuge printed on them in black ink. Cost is **Summer Sale \$1.00** + \$1.00 shipping.

Travel Mugs are tan and have our antelope head logo and Hart Mountain Antelope Refuge printed on them in black ink. Cost is **Summer Sale \$2.00** + \$1.00 shipping.



Ball caps are all done with embroidery. There is an antelope on the front with the words Hart Mountain. On the back above the size adjuster there are the words National Antelope Refuge. Caps are blue with a khaki tan brim. Cost is \$15.00 + \$3.00 shipping.



Can Coolers are green and have our antelope head logo and Hart Mountain Antelope Refuge printed on them in white ink. Cost is **Summer Sale \$1.00** + \$1.00 shipping.

T-shirts with our logo contest winner's design screen printed on it. These shirts are \$11.00 plus \$4.00 shipping. We hope to be having other shirts in the future. Check in at Headquarters when you are on the mountain.



NEW!!!! We have new T-shirts that are a royal blue that have the same embroidery as our ball caps, with National Antelope Refuge under the antelope. We have sizes Medium to 2XL and the cost is \$15.00 + 4.00 shipping. These are going fast and we are already looking at making a second order.



The **Friends** are also selling firewood and mosquito repellent. Don't forget there are mosquitoes at Hart Mountain.

Our treasurer, Nadine Reynolds, is hosting the mail order store from her home in Lakeview. You can order your items directly from her at PO Box 128, Lakeview, OR 97630. If you have questions or are ordering multiple items you will need to contact Nadine at 541-947-4929. Items may also be ordered from our website: www.friendsofhartmountain.org

DONATIONS

Some of our **Friends** donate beyond their annual dues or life membership dues. Your donations will support Refuge projects and general activities of the **Friends**. We appreciate any amount you are willing to donate. Please remember that since you receive no goods in exchange all donations are tax deductible. We wish to thank the members for all that they have generously donated in the past year. Your generosity helps the **Friends** pursue the activities in support of the Refuge in fulfilling its mission. Make your check out to **Friends of Hart Mountain** and send your donations to: **Friends of Hart Mountain, PO Box 21, Plush, OR 97637.**

WHAT ARE YOUR DONATIONS USED FOR?

The **Friends** purchased four Garmin GPS units which are used for mapping locations on Hart Mountain. We also purchased a slide/photo scanner for scanning the scores of photos and slides in the Refuge archives. We also purchased four hours of helicopter time which was used to count wildlife on the Refuge.

Jim Yoakum was busy working on some wildlife projects and could not write for us this time but he did send us a few pictures (below) of the first lamb born on Hart Mountain from the sheep introduced in 1954.



THANK YOU!

In May of this year, Morrie Chappel resigned as President of the **Friends of Hart Mountain**. Morrie held the position for several years and we are thankful for his leadership in the formative years of the **Friends** group. Also in May, with the Board's approval, Board member Barbara Davis assumed the duties of President. However, July 31st Barbara stepped down as President and Board member. We would like to thank Barbara for all the hours and ideas she contributed to the **Friends** group, especially her contributions as editor of the **Friends** newsletter.

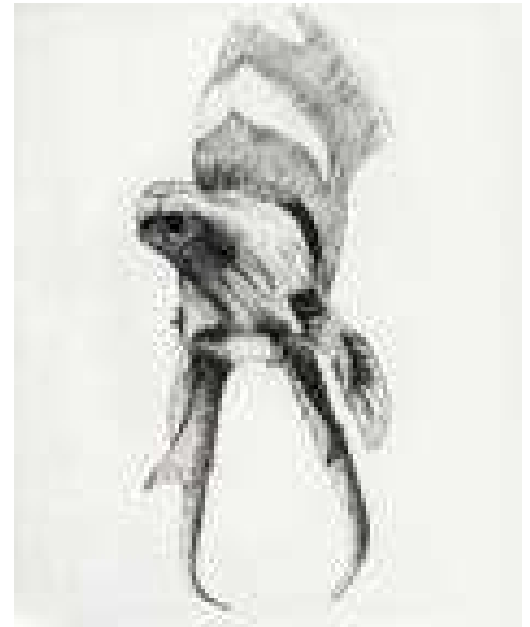
THANK YOU!

A GREAT BIG THANKS TO OUR WONDERFUL DONORS!

Summer 2007

- Lucy Henderson
- Dan Rathbone
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- Frank Faha
- Doug Holloway
- Jim & Sandy LeTourneux
- Robert Jenkins
- Matt Chappel
- David Johnson

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