



HEADLINES

- >News
- >Local News
- >Business
- >Sports
- >Outdoors
- >Health
- >Religion
- >Lifestyles
- >Letters to the Editor
- >Editorial
- >Columns
- >Town Talk
- >Community Calendar
- >Military/Veterans
- >Obituaries
- >Photo Gallery
- >Archive

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JOBS

WEATHER

CUSTOMER SERVICE

BUSINESS JOURNALS

ADS ONLINE

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Alamogordo Daily News

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All Categories

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## OUTDOORS

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### Lates

Wife buys chance at  
A walk on  
Summer a  
Valles Cal  
Trappers i  
through S  
Outdoor n

### Wife buys Arizona man chance at sheep slam

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By Darren Marcy/Outdoor Editor  
Jul 20, 2003, 07:28

ALBUQUERQUE — Every bighorn sheep hunter should be so lucky as to have a wife like Greg Koons'.

Koons of Phoenix has three of the four sheep to his credit needed for a Grand Slam of North American sheep.

With the Dall, Stone and desert bighorn sheep on the wall, Koons needs only the Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep to fill the grand slam.

"His wife told him, 'I wish I could buy you a Rocky Mountain bighorn hunt, but I can't,'" said Eric Rominger, bighorn sheep biologist with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. "So she bought him 10 New Mexico raffle tickets instead."

Koons' lucky number was drawn June 23 in Albuquerque.

Koons now can pick between the Pecos Wilderness sheep hunt and the Wheeler Peak sheep hunt. Both offer great bighorn hunting, but Rominger believes Koons will hunt Wheeler Peak.

— "The third and fourth biggest record rams came off that mountain last fall," Rominger said. —

Koons, a sheep hunting guide in Arizona, is a general contractor by trade. He can hunt Sept. 1-30 if he chooses the Wheeler Peak hunt.

Koons has been lucky before.

In Arizona, he found the No. 2 world-record desert bighorn skull. That head measure 202 inches, while the world record is 205 inches.

"In Arizona, people can keep the skulls they find," Rominger said.

In New Mexico, antler sheds may be kept, but skulls and horns found must be turned over to the state.

The raffle tickets Koons' wife bought him cost \$20 each, and the raffle brought in more than \$50,000. The sheep hunt raffle is handled by the New Mexico Chapter of the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep.

Proceeds benefit wild sheep management.

"There is a lot of activity scheduled in 2004," said Darrel Weybright, NMDGF big game manager. "The money will be used for bighorn habitat manipulation — thinning piñon-juniper forests in the desert to allow sheep to see predators. There also are three bighorn captures this fall, which cost about \$100,000 each, so the money will help with those operations as well."

The first of those captures will be conducted Aug. 11-16 when Game and Fish officers plan to trap approximately 30 Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep from Wheeler Peak.



The animals will be sent to Arizona as part of an exchange for desert bighorn sheep. Arizona sent 20 desert bighorns to New Mexico last November.

Desert bighorns are endangered in New Mexico, while the Rocky Mountain species of sheep has been thriving in the Land of Enchantment.

"If we capture 10 more animals, we'll send them to one of the herds in the Gila," said Elise Goldstein, bighorn sheep biologist for the Department of Game and Fish.

An estimated 45 department employees will be involved in the trapping operation, in which helicopters will use drop nets to capture primarily ewes and lambs, or possible some young rams, but no mature rams.

"We are not taking any big rams," Goldstein said. "If a few smaller rams come under the net, we'll take them. But I don't expect to get a lot of rams, they don't hang out with the ewes."

The sheep will be transported to Arizona in horse trailers or crates designed for transporting the sheep.

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[Top of Page](#)

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