

Greetings Hikers,

Following is a an opportunity to participate in a citizen science project – observations of both bighorn and domestic sheep in and surrounding Ouray County are needed. Observations can be reported by simply taking photos from your phone with the iNaturalist app.

Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep are at risk of developing respiratory disease contracted from domestic sheep that graze on public land. Effective separation of domestic sheep and goats from wild sheep is the only currently available management solution for preventing or minimizing disease transmission.

Mountain Studies Institute (MSI) has been coordinating a citizen science effort to help the federal agencies gain more information about the presence of bighorns near active grazing allotments in SW Colorado and the presence of stray domestic sheep in bighorn home ranges. This effort initially focused on the Weminuche Wilderness. MSI and bighorn advocates are now expanding the program to include observations farther north, including Ouray County and surrounding areas. Within Ouray County there is an active sheep grazing allotment in upper Bear Creek. Surrounding Ouray County there are active allotments to the south (Red Mountain Pass and south, both sides of the highway), to the east(American Flats above Bear Creek, and then south), and to the west (SW of Mt. Sneffels).

If you see bighorns, please take a picture and report via the iNaturalist app. You can take a picture with your camera separately and later upload, or you can take a picture within the app itself.

If you see domestic sheep in the high country, please also report via the iNaturalist app.

The observations are monitored by Mountain Studies Institute, although anyone can set up a subscription with iNaturalist to receive observations.

For more information:

Mountain Studies Institute Bighorn info: <http://www.mountainstudies.org/bighorn>

iNaturalist info: <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/san-juan-mountains-rocky-mountain-bighorn-sheep-monitoring>

If you would like to attend a training to learn more, need help setting up an iNaturalist account, or have any questions contact bighorncitizenscience@gmail.com