

Arizona Transplant Equipment Update

By: Charlie Kelly



At the 2022 Wild Sheep Foundation annual *SheepShow* in Reno, I had a chance to visit with Amber Munig, now retired Big Game Management Supervisor, about the status of the transplant equipment used during Arizona translocations of primarily Rocky Mountain, Desert Bighorn Sheep, and Pronghorn. Amber shared with me her “wish list” of what she’d like to have available for future work, which included:

- Refurbishing the existing transplant boxes hauled on a gooseneck trailer. These were originally built by the ADBSS over 40 years ago and donated to the AZGFD.

- Building (2) new transplant boxes that would fit inside a standard size pickup bed and could hold 4-6 animals. Having individual boxes available helps with quicker transport time by not having to fill up a whole trailer load, and thereby reduces transplant stress.

- Ordering a new custom trailer with a lower deck height to increase capacity for larger transplant projects and reduce unloading injuries during releases.



Completing these projects required funding, design work, sourcing a trailer manufacturer, and recruiting volunteers for construction or refurbishing of the existing boxes. Matt Dominy, the 1995 ADBSS Past President, oversaw the construction of the (2) new pickup transplant boxes, and determined we’d be better off in the long run building (5) new, larger transplant boxes to replace the (10) smaller ones built over 40 years ago.



The (5) larger boxes can hold more animals, and include loading and unloading doors on both ends, allowing all transported animals to be released in one direction quickly at the release site. The old boxes that were set back-to-back on the trailer, required the trailer to be turned around halfway through the release in order to orient all released animals in the same direction. The newly designed boxes have additional expanded metal siding panels that provide better air flow for the animals, which is an important consideration in Arizona to avoid overheating and transplant stress.



Expanded metals floors with removable foam pads also allow for easier cleanup and sanitizing between translocation projects. Construction details also included durable powder coating of the welded steel frames, stainless steel hardware and using *Polymax* Polyethylene (HDPE) panels that do not require painting and are extremely durable and UV resistant. Volunteers from the Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society, the Arizona Antelope Foundation, as well as other Game and Fish individuals recruited from their volunteer program, built the new transplant boxes at the AZGFD development yard over several work periods. The new transplant boxes as built will require very little maintenance in the future and last a considerable amount of time.



Sourcing a suitable new gooseneck transplant trailer proved to be more of a challenge. Amber talked to several other wildlife agencies, and was finally lucky enough to connect with Daryl Lutz, from the Wyoming Game & Fish Department. Wyoming had just received a new 24 ft gooseneck stock trailer manufactured by *Trails West* that included all of the options she was hoping for and was earmarked for sheep translocations in their state.



After settling on this design, a similar custom trailer was ordered from Hay's Trailer Sales in Tucson and finally arrived in December of 2023. It includes both a center divider and intermediate dividers that enable separation of bighorn rams from ewes and lambs, as well as separation of pronghorn bucks and does. The lower deck height will help reduce the chance of unloading injuries to transplanted animals, especially pronghorn. The new transplant trailer was recently completed in February with the installation of a full wrap, featuring both bighorn sheep and pronghorn images.

To fund this combined project, a partnership of very dedicated wildlife organizations came together to provide necessary funding. They include the Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society, the Arizona Antelope Foundation, the Arizona Game and Fish Department, as well as a grant from the *L. Gary Stinson License Plate Grant Program*, administered by the Arizona Sportsmen for Wildlife Conservation. In partnership, the generosity of these great organizations will help ensure that future translocations of bighorn sheep and pronghorn will be easier to complete with less losses, injuries, and transplant stress due to this updated and improved transplant equipment!

