Morenci Roundup Nets 23
Bighorn Sheep for Relocation

Twenty-three Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep from Morenci now have a new home, having been moved about 100 miles north of the mine as part of an ongoing relocation program by the Arizona Game and Fish Department.

In June 2014, Arizona Game and Fish Department conducted three roundups to collect the bighorn sheep. Members of Morenci’s Environmental Services and Security departments volunteered to help keep the sheep cool and secure during the process.

“There is a thriving population of bighorn sheep around the Morenci mine,” said Duane Aubuchon, Field Supervisor for the Arizona Game and Fish Department. “On several occasions, with support and assistance from Freeport-McMoRan, we have captured bighorn sheep from this area and released them in other parts of the state to build up other populations of the animals.”

The relocation events are held every few years. This year, the sheep were attracted to the roundup location by the shade and water available and a large net was dropped to gather the sheep. They were then checked by wildlife veterinarians, tagged, GPS collared and placed in a holding trailer for transport.

Arizona Game and Fish Department uses information gained from the relocation program to better understand wildlife-highway relationships. The GPS data provides information on the sheep’s natural movement corridors, which can help with effective placement of future wildlife crossing structures.

“The bighorn sheep are an integral part of the culture in Morenci,” said Amar Patel, Morenci Environmental Scientist. “To use Morenci herds to repopulate other areas in the state is an excellent opportunity to support statewide biodiversity. The lowered potential for collisions with the sheep provides a safer community for local residents and travelers along Highway 191, which is a goal of the Company’s collaboration with Arizona Game and Fish.”

Relocation events facilitated by this partnership span back to 2005 and Freeport-McMoRan plans to continue this important alliance with the Arizona Game and Fish Department.

Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, like these photographed near Morenci, are the focus of relocation efforts in a partnership between Freeport-McMoRan and Arizona Game and Fish Department.