

# Making a Difference for Wildlife

Hundreds of local conservation projects are undertaken annually by SCI Chapters. They are reinforced by many notable conservation initiatives funded by the SCI Foundation.



## Bighorn Sheep Survival

Black Hills, South Dakota, USA

Total Funds: \$30,000

However, since 1994 these herds have been in decline. Lack of genetic diversity, disease, wildfires, drought and inadvertent cattle overgrazing appear to have diminished critical sheep habitat and reduced lamb survival rates. In some areas, lamb recruitment dropped from 80 to 90 percent to 50 percent by 2002.

Since its inception in 1999, SCI's *Greater Dacotah Chapter* has awarded South Dakota Game, Fish, & Parks (SDGF&P) equipment and \$30,000 in funds to support efforts to increase

viability of the Black Hills bighorns. Other efforts of the *SCI Chapter* have included in-field volunteer work in bighorn trap and transfers and habitat monitoring, as well as political advocacy for bighorn habitat management and expansion.

Thanks in part to help from *SCI Greater Dacotah*, SDGF&P most recently has focused on bighorn habitat recovery and a 2002-2003 winter feeding program. Based on



**I**N THE EARLY 1800s, Audubon's bighorn sheep were abundant in South Dakota. Native American reports often described sustainable hunting practices where as many as 100 animals were harvested in a single season.

However, by 1910 Audubon's bighorn numbers had disappeared from the state. A 1922 reintroduction attempt using Rocky Mountain bighorns failed in 1959 when unknown causes decimated the herd.

In 1964 and 1967, Rocky Mountain bighorns were again reintroduced into Badlands National Park and Custer State Park, respectively, with much better results. In 1991, another herd was established in the central Black Hills, using sheep transferred from Colorado and the Badlands herd.



preliminary census data, these and other efforts are contributing to yet another positive turnaround for the Black Hills bighorn herds.

"I get really emotional when I think about all the work we've done," said former *SCI Greater Dacotah* President Jeff Olson. "Seeing the sheep now, it's a complete feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment."

