

A POLITICAL ASSASSINATION

The untimely death of an old friend. By Hank Vogler

To every hunter in the state of Nevada who has ever put in for a tag, my sincere apology for causing the cold-blooded murder of Chin Creek Chin. Several years ago a wild bighorn ram showed up on the Antelope Range in eastern Nevada, where he would hang out with my domestic sheep.

He was a lonely guy. Maybe he'd lost his way on his walkabout. Yet whenever he was in the area of my sheep, Mr. Chin would run down the hill to eat selenium salt and see if he could find a domestic ewe for a date. He even lost his fear of the guard dogs. Other than salt, he never got anything else.

Several years later, with Mr. Chin raised to legend status, I made the horrible mistake of telling a Nevada Department of Wildlife employee of his existence. Several low-level biologists knew of Mr. Chin, but took no action. My mistake was to tell a person higher in NDOW's pecking order of this bighorn's location and demeanor. My conversation with this NDOW employee was about getting a landowner compensation tag for private land.

I have removed piñon and juniper from more than 400 acres of private land and plan to clear another 400 acres, as funds and time allow. The problem was that, no matter how hard I worked to improve the habitat for wildlife, my credit for the tag kept getting closer to not getting a tag. I thought it was an incentive tag for improvements on private land. I guess being a domestic sheep owner who allowed a wild sheep to mingle with domestic sheep and not die instantly, as the pseudo-science seems to suggest, makes me NDOW public enemy number one in the incentive-tag department.

On July 27, 2009, there was a message on my answering machine from the NDOW employee with whom I thought, as he had indicated, common ground could exist. It was after five in the evening but I returned the call, telling the person that I was on my way to Canada, ironically to harvest a stone sheep. I

returned, having taken a beautiful ram, only to find out that in my absence, after years of coexistence, Mr. Chin quite miraculously had contacted some domestic-sheep disease, and was in such ill health that his death was necessary to save the rest of the wild sheep in the state. NDOW seemed convinced that, in his



CHIN CREEK CHIN © HANK VOGLER

delirium, Mr. Chin might have walked 15 miles off the mountain, crossed Antelope Valley, jumped a half-dozen fences, climbed through the Red Hills, crossed Spring Valley near the Summit Seeding, climbed 12,000 feet up Mt.

Moriah and then infected and killed his fellow wild sheep. So NDOW decreed that he must die, but his was a political assassination. If word was to get around that with a little management wild and domestic sheep pose little threat to each other, the myth that never the twain shall meet would be gone. That myth rallies the troops and brings in money. But, without the myth, no money would flow to NDOW coffers for studies and purchases of sheep permits, and then a new enemy would be needed. So Mr. Chin met his maker, and the results from autopsy indicated clean lungs. There was a lesion or two from host-specific lungworms, a nose bot or two, but Mr. Chin died of a gunshot wound, administered by his "caretakers."

Rise up, fellow hunters. NDOW has taken some sort of a detour into a politically correct parallel universe. In the last 25 years I have witnessed the ravaging of Nevada wildlife by predators. Predators are a thousand times more damaging to Nevada wildlife than the last 12 sheepmen in the state. Rise up hunters, and take back our wildlife. As Benjamin Franklin once said: "We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately." ■

Hank Vogler is one of the foremost sheep-husbandry experts in Nevada and once made Baxter Black laugh. He sits on Nevada's Board of Agriculture and is a lifetime rancher and shepherd.