

## CONSTRUCTION OF FENCING TO PREVENT PENINSULAR BIGHORN SHEEP ACCESS TO URBAN AREAS IN LA QUINTA



The Coachella Valley Conservation Commission is a joint powers authority overseeing the implementation of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP), which is a visionary 75-year plan to conserve nearly 240,000 acres of land valley-wide and protect 27 plants and animals, including Peninsular bighorn sheep. The CVMSHCP makes provisions for management actions in instances where Peninsular bighorn sheep are using urbanized areas and are exposed to associated hazards. This has become the situation in the City of La Quinta which necessitates construction of an exclusion fence that is now underway.

- [Peninsular bighorn sheep](#) are listed as endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act. They are also listed as threatened under the California Endangered Species Act and are a fully protected species under California Fish and Game Code 4700, which prohibits take or possession of the species. Their populations are well adapted to the desert slopes and dry-wash woodlands found in the lower elevations of the mountains of the Coachella Valley. In 1998, they were listed as endangered due to habitat loss, disease, predation, and human disturbance that decimated their population.
- In the City of La Quinta, the bighorn sheep are frequenting golf courses, roads and backyards, particularly in PGA West and Trilogy neighborhoods. The bighorn sheep have become reliant on feeding on golf courses instead of their natural habitat, which has resulted in concerns about the health and lifespan of the bighorn sheep.
- Fencing is intended to prevent bighorn sheep deaths as a result of eating highly toxic vegetation such as oleander, drowning while attempting to drink out of the Coachella Canal and swimming pools, or getting hit by cars on streets in La Quinta
- The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) notified the CVCC that steps were necessary to exclude bighorn sheep from "using artificial sources of food or water in unfenced areas of existing urban development within or near a conservation area." The CVCC was required to undertake extensive studies of a "fence, barrier or functional equivalent" to comply with both federal and state environmental regulations of the issue.
- This process began in 2014, and environmental review was completed along with public hearings. A Final Environmental Impact Report was approved by the CVCC in 2019. Construction of a fence, however, is dependent on securing permission from property owners. Access agreements with PGA WEST, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, and Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD) were completed in 2022.
- The fence construction is approximately 2.6 miles long, stretching from Avenue 54 to the base of Lake Cahuilla County Park at Avenue 58. It will connect to existing fencing constructed by CVWD and the City of La Quinta.
- CVCC's construction will continue at least through fall of 2024. Construction scheduling will be mindful of lambing season.
- Peninsular bighorn sheep have adapted over thousands of years to forage for desert plants and survive dry climates. The habit of eating grass from the golf course habituates bighorn sheep to the urban environment and exposes them to associated urban hazards. The fence will prevent urban-related bighorn sheep deaths and encourage them to return to the wilderness that is their natural habitat.

*Additional information on the CVMSHCP, including all documents on the fence, can be found at [www.cvmshcp.org](http://www.cvmshcp.org). For more information on the fence, please contact Kathleen Brundige, Director of Conservation: [kbrundige@cvag.org](mailto:kbrundige@cvag.org) or at (760) 346-1127.*