

## **BILL ANALYSIS**

H.B. 5398  
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Culture, Recreation & Tourism  
Committee Report (Unamended)

### **BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE**

Aoudad sheep, originally introduced in West Texas in the 1950s, have since established large and rapidly growing populations across the Trans-Pecos region. The bill author has informed the committee that this species offers valuable hunting opportunities, but that their high reproductive rates and adaptability pose a serious threat to native wildlife. The author further informs the committee that aoudad sheep have broader dietary flexibility and occupy the same habitats as native species such as mule deer and desert bighorn sheep, often outcompeting them for limited resources. Additionally, aoudad sheep carry a pneumonia-causing bacteria known as *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* which poses a significant health risk to native species. The Borderlands Research Institute along with partnering agencies found that desert bighorn sheep in particular have contracted these infections, resulting in the mortality of at least half of the desert bighorn sheep population since 2019. H.B. 5398 seeks to address this issue by including aoudad sheep among the depredating animals a qualified landowner or landowner's agent may contract to participate in taking as a hunter or an observer when using a helicopter.

### **CRIMINAL JUSTICE IMPACT**

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly create a criminal offense, increase the punishment for an existing criminal offense or category of offenses, or change the eligibility of a person for community supervision, parole, or mandatory supervision.

### **RULEMAKING AUTHORITY**

It is the committee's opinion that rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Parks and Wildlife Commission in SECTION 1 of this bill.

### **ANALYSIS**

H.B. 5398 amends the Parks and Wildlife Code to include depredating aoudad sheep among the animals a qualified landowner or landowner's agent, as determined by Parks and Wildlife Commission rule and under the authority of a permit to manage wildlife and exotic animals from aircraft, is authorized to contract to participate in taking as a hunter or observer when using a helicopter. The bill requires the commission, as soon as practicable after the bill's effective date, to adopt or amend rules as necessary to implement the bill's provisions.

### **EFFECTIVE DATE**

September 1, 2025.