FORGING THE FUTURE OF WYOMING’S WILDLIFE:
Human Dimensions Research Results in Support of the
Wyoming Game and Fish Department’s 2018-2023 Strategic Plan

Conducted for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department
by Responsive Management

2018
FORGING THE FUTURE OF WYOMING’S WILDLIFE: Human Dimensions Research Results in Support of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department’s 2018-2023 Strategic Plan

2018

Responsive Management National Office
Mark Damian Duda, Executive Director
Martin Jones, Senior Research Associate
Tom Beppler, Senior Research Associate
Steven J. Bissell, Ph.D., Qualitative Research Associate
Andrea Criscione, Senior Research Associate
Amanda Center, Research Associate
Patrick Doherty, Research Associate
Gregory L. Hughes, P.E., Research Associate
Justin Kauffman, Research Associate
John Widrick, Survey Center Manager
Alison Lanier, Business Manager

130 Franklin Street
Harrisonburg, VA 22801
Phone: 540/432-1888
E-mail: mark@responsivemanagement.com
www.responsivemanagement.com
Acknowledgments

Responsive Management thanks the following Wyoming Game and Fish Department personnel for their input, support, and guidance on this project:

Scott Talbott, Director
Scott Smith, Deputy Director
John Kennedy, Deputy Director
Jean Cole, Chief, Fiscal Division
Meredith Wood, CFO, Fiscal Division
Brian Nesvik, Chief, Wildlife Division, Chief Game Warden
Doug Brimeyer, Deputy Chief, Wildlife Division
Alan Osterland, Chief, Fish Division
Dirk Miller, Deputy Chief, Fish Division
Renny MacKay, Communications Director
Jessica Brown, Executive Assistant

David DeWald, Senior Assistant Attorney General, Wyoming Attorney General’s Office

Responsive Management also thanks the Game and Fish personnel who attended public meetings:

Todd Graham, Wildlife Supervisor
Rob Keith, Fish Supervisor
Mark Zornes, Wildlife Management Coordinator
Lucy Diggins-Wold, Information and Education Specialist
Jason Hunter, Wildlife Supervisor
Craig Amadio, Fish Supervisor
Rene Schell, Information and Education Specialist
Brian Parker, Habitat and Access Supervisor
Rob Gipson, Fish Supervisor
Brad Hovinga, Wildlife Supervisor
Mark Gocke, Information and Education Specialist
Doug McWirter, Wildlife Management Coordinator
Derek Lemon, Habitat and Access Supervisor
John Lund, Wildlife Supervisor
Hilda Sexaur, Fish Supervisor
Miles Anderson, Habitat and Access Supervisor
Dan Smith, Wildlife Supervisor
Sam Hochhalter, Fish Supervisor
Brad Sorensen, Habitat and Access Supervisor
Tara Hodges, Information and Education Specialist
Brian Olsen, Wildlife Supervisor
Matt Hahn, Fish Supervisor
Janet Milek, Information and Education Specialist
Matt Pollock, Habitat and Access Supervisor
Craig Smith, Wildlife Supervisor
Bud Stewart, Information and Education Specialist
Paul Mavrakis, Fish Supervisor
Seth Roseberry, Habitat and Access Supervisor
Bobby Compton, Fish Supervisor
Steve Gale, Fish Biologist
Corey Class, Wildlife Management Coordinator
Micah Morris, Habitat and Access Biologist
Rick King, Wildlife Supervisor
Jerry Cowles, Habitat and Access Supervisor
Robin Kepple, Information and Education Specialist
Christina Barineau, Fish Biologist

Finally, Responsive Management also thanks the Game and Fish Commissioners: Keith Culver, President; Mark Anselmi; David Rael; Patrick J. Crank; Mike Schmid; Gay Lynn Byrd; and Peter J. Dube.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
This study was conducted for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (also referred to simply as Game and Fish) to conduct human dimensions research in support of an agency-wide strategic plan.

The human dimensions research conducted by Responsive Management encompassed seven components in addition to the launch meeting:

1. An online qualitative assessment (Game and Fish employees)
2. Pre-survey focus groups (the general public, including hunters, anglers, and other recreationists)
3. A scientific telephone survey of three samples
   a. Wyoming residents (the general public; note that this included resident hunters and anglers in the proportion that they occur in a general population sample)
   b. Nonresident hunters (this sample is solely of nonresidents because the sample of Wyoming residents contained resident hunters)
   c. Nonresident anglers (again, note that the sample of Wyoming residents contained resident anglers)
4. An employee survey (Game and Fish employees)
5. Post-survey focus groups (the general public, including hunters, anglers, and other recreationists)
6. Public meetings (the general public); administered after the survey
7. An online public forum (the general public)

An overview of the methodologies used and a synopsis of the results of each method immediately follow. For more detailed information about the methodologies and a comprehensive discussion of results, please see the main body of this report.

METHODOLOGY
The methods starts with a discussion of the launch meeting. It then gives a brief overview of the seven components of the project.

METHODOLOGY: LAUNCH MEETING
Prior to the start of this multi-faceted research project, staff from Responsive Management and The Cooperation Company convened a project launch meeting with Wyoming Game and Fish Department personnel on September 14 and 15, 2017, at the Curt Gowdy State Park Visitor Center. The launch meeting was attended by Game and Fish executive staff and division leadership and allowed for an in-depth discussion of project goals, objectives, and contextual information relating to previous agency planning efforts—these topics helped to establish the overall direction of the current study.
The researchers also discussed with staff details related to the data collection from Wyoming residents, including planned focus group and public meeting locations and populations and groups to be surveyed. The researchers used a portion of the launch meeting to conduct a “SWOT” analysis, so named because it is a structured planning method that evaluates an organization’s Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. A SWOT analysis is an initial identification of favorable and unfavorable internal and external factors that an organization can address through its objectives in its strategic plan.

METHODOLOGY: QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF GAME AND FISH EMPLOYEES AND STAKEHOLDERS

The purpose of the qualitative assessment was to establish a foundation of data from Game and Fish employees and stakeholders pertaining to the study goals, outcomes, and key agency characteristics relevant to the upcoming strategic plan. The questionnaire was coded using online software, and a link to it was distributed to employees and stakeholders by email using a database of email addresses provided by Game and Fish.

The data were collected between October and November 2017. Responsive Management obtained a total of 223 completed responses from employees and stakeholders. The data were then analyzed based on the following breakdown of respondents:

- Internal employees, which includes all permanent and non-permanent Game and Fish employees; and
- Stakeholders, which includes Game and Fish Commissioners, members of the Governor’s Fish and Wildlife Task Force, and directors of other Wyoming agencies.

METHODOLOGY: PRE-SURVEY FOCUS GROUPS

Responsive Management planned, coordinated, and facilitated five focus groups in November 2017 in Cheyenne, Rock Springs, Riverton, Gillette, and Cody. These focus groups were conducted prior to the telephone survey and other data collection in order to help plan topics for the survey and other opinion gathering tools. Each focus group consisted of 9 to 12 residents who engaged in one or several forms of outdoor recreation relevant to Game and Fish, including hunting, fishing, trapping, boating, hiking, and wildlife viewing/photography (note that most group participants engaged in more than one of the activities, meaning that many hunters also fished, many boaters also hiked, and so forth). Additionally, most groups included at least one landowner of 10 acres or more, with some groups having several landowners.

The use of focus groups is an accepted research technique for the qualitative exploration of attitudes, opinions, perceptions, motivations, constraints, and behaviors. Focus groups provide researchers with insights, new hypotheses, and understanding through the process of interaction. Focus groups allow for extensive open-ended responses to questions; probing; follow-up questions; group discussion; and observation of emotional responses to topics—aspects that cannot be measured in a quantitative survey. Qualitative research provides researchers with a more detailed understanding of the topics or issues of concern in the study.
Each focus group was conducted using a discussion guide that allowed for consistency in the data collection. The discussion guide included top-of-mind questions as well as more specific questions addressing opinions on and attitudes toward outdoor recreation, wildlife management, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, and other pertinent topics. Each group was recorded for later analysis and transcription. The groups each lasted approximately 2 hours and were led by one of Responsive Management’s trained moderators. Responsive Management recruited focus group participants using a random sample of general population residents in each of the five locations, as well as databases of hunting and fishing license holders provided by Game and Fish.

**METHODOLOGY: TELEPHONE SURVEY**

While the other methods (those previously discussed as well as some that are discussed later) offered maximum opportunity for the public to provide input, obtained in-depth qualitative data, and/or provided the researchers with a comprehensive look at the full range of issues and reactions associated with outdoor recreation and wildlife management in Wyoming, a scientific, probability-based survey was conducted to acquire *quantitative* data for evaluating the true distribution of residents’ and recreationists’ awareness, opinions, and attitudes. Surveys are quantitative research used to systematically examine the population being studied based on a representative sample so that the results can be replicated and generalized to the population of interest. For this study, a scientific survey was used to examine three groups: Wyoming general population residents, nonresident hunters, and nonresident anglers.

For the survey, telephones were selected as the preferred sampling medium because of the almost universal ownership of telephones (both landlines and cell phones were called). Additionally, telephone surveys, relative to mail or Internet surveys, have better representation of the sample than do surveys that are read by the respondent (i.e., mail and Internet surveys) because the self-read surveys systematically exclude those who are not literate enough to complete the surveys or who would be intimidated by having to complete a written survey—by an estimate of the U.S. Department of Education’s National Institute of Literacy (2016), up to 43% of the general population read no higher than a “basic level,” suggesting that they would be reticent to complete a survey that they have to read to themselves. Finally, telephone surveys have fewer negative effects on the environment than do mail surveys because of reduced use of paper and reduced energy consumption for delivering and returning the questionnaires.

The telephone survey questionnaire was developed cooperatively by Game and Fish and Responsive Management, based on the research team’s familiarity with outdoor recreation and wildlife management issues, and the input obtained from the qualitative assessment of Game and Fish employees and stakeholders and the pre-survey focus groups. Responsive Management conducted pre-tests of the questionnaire to ensure proper wording, flow, and logic in the survey.
As discussed previously, three separate populations were sampled: 1) the statewide population of Wyoming residents, 2) nonresident hunters, and 3) nonresident anglers. Within each sample, a probability-based selection process was used to ensure that each eligible respondent had an approximately equal chance of being selected for the survey.

In the analysis of the data from the telephone survey, six data runs of the following groups were examined:

1. Residents overall (from the statewide resident sample).
2. Residents regionally (residents categorized into one of eight regions based on their place of residence).
3. Hunters, broken down into residents and nonresidents (resident hunters being anybody in the resident sample who bought a Wyoming hunting license in the previous 5 years; nonresident hunters being the nonresident licensed hunter sample provided by Game and Fish).
4. Anglers, broken down into residents and nonresidents (resident anglers being anybody in the resident sample who bought a Wyoming fishing license in the previous 5 years; nonresident anglers being the nonresident licensed angler sample provided by Game and Fish).
5. Consumptives vs. non-consumptives (“consumptives” referring to anybody who had a hunting, trapping, or fishing license; “non-consumptives” referring to those who did not have a hunting, trapping, or fishing license—in other words, everybody else). Note that “consumptives” are also referred to as “hunters/trappers/anglers” in the graphs or text, and “non-consumptives” are also referred to as “non-hunters/trappers/anglers” in the graphs or text.
6. Non-consumptive wildlife viewers (being those who viewed wildlife but did not hunt, trap, or fish). Note that this is different from the non-consumptives above because it includes only those who specifically viewed wildlife.

A note about “consumptives” and “non-consumptives” as used in this report:

“Consumptives” applies to hunting, trapping, and fishing. In this report, as discussed in item #5 above, one data run was made of those who had a license to hunt, trip, or fish (not on whether they had actually hunted, trapped, or fished). Therefore, “consumptives” refers to holders of licenses that allowed hunting, trapping, or fishing. On the graphs, consumptives are also identified as “hunters/trappers/anglers”; note that this is based on having a license.

“Non-consumptives” refers, in this report, to anybody who did not hold a hunting, trapping, or fishing license. This includes those who viewed wildlife or did any of the other activities that were asked about in the survey, as well as those who did none of the activities about which the survey asked questions. Because this all-encompassing data run (i.e., it was consumptives compared to everybody else) included those who did no wildlife-associated recreation, the last data analysis run discussed above (item #6) was conducted. It looks at those who specifically viewed wildlife as one of their activities but did not hunt, trap, or fish. The graphs and tables, therefore, always indicate that this last data run is of non-consumptive wildlife viewers.

Finally, the use of these terms does not imply that other wildlife-associated and outdoor recreation does not have an impact on wildlife and fish; any outdoor activity, such as wildlife viewing, camping, or hiking, can affect wildlife and habitat in the area and can change the behaviors of wildlife. Rather, the terms in this report are used strictly as indicated above to define specific data runs.
METHODOLOGY: ONLINE EMPLOYEE SURVEY
Concurrent with the scientific telephone survey of Wyoming residents, nonresident hunters, and
nonresident anglers, Responsive Management conducted an online survey of Game and Fish
employees. Prior to this survey, employees were sent a short questionnaire of open-ended
questions about the general strengths and weaknesses of the agency (the SWOT analysis referred
to previously). The results of that qualitative analysis were used in part to develop this survey,
which is quantitative in nature and covers more specific areas.

The survey questionnaire was developed cooperatively by Game and Fish and Responsive
Management. The database of employee email addresses was provided by Game and Fish.
Emails were sent to all on the list, and employees had the option of taking the survey. The emails
included a link to the survey, and the survey could only be taken through this email link. In other
words, it was not possible for just anybody surfing the Internet to come across the survey. Also, a
globally unique identifier tied to each email address ensured that each person could take the
survey only once.

Responsive Management provided assurances at the outset that all employee responses would be
kept completely confidential. It should also be noted that all questions in the survey were
optional—a respondent could continue on with the survey if he or she chose to leave a question
blank.

METHODOLOGY: POST-SURVEY FOCUS GROUPS
Following the telephone survey of Wyoming residents, nonresident hunters, and nonresident
anglers, five focus groups were conducted in February 2018 in Laramie, Casper, Sheridan,
Worland, and Jackson. (Recall that five focus groups were conducted in November 2017, prior to
the telephone survey, in different locations throughout the state.) The groups included in the
focus groups and the methods used in recruiting participants, conducting the focus groups, and
analyzing the data are the same as those described for the pre-survey focus groups.

METHODOLOGY: POST-SURVEY PUBLIC MEETINGS
Responsive Management planned, coordinated, and facilitated ten regional public meetings with
the general public and Game and Fish stakeholders. The purpose of the public meetings was to
provide an open forum for input and feedback, an opportunity for two-way dialogue between the
agency and its constituents, and a means of identifying issues of interest or concern with regard
to outdoor recreation and wildlife management in Wyoming. These meetings were also intended
to help reinforce transparency and encourage public investment in decision-making. Game and
Fish staff attended each meeting in uniform and, toward the end of each meeting, reiterated the
major themes they had heard.
The public meetings were advertised ahead of time, held in a public or publically accessible site, and allowed anybody who wished to attend to do so. The ten public meetings were planned to occur near every Game and Fish regional office, as well as in Cheyenne and Gillette. The locations and dates of the public meetings are:

- Cheyenne (February 5, 2018)
- Laramie (February 5, 2018)
- Casper (February 6, 2018)
- Lander (February 6, 2018)
- Gillette (February 7, 2018)
- Green River (February 7, 2018)
- Sheridan (February 8, 2018)
- Pinedale (February 8, 2018)
- Cody (February 9, 2018)
- Jackson (February 10, 2018)

Each meeting was facilitated by Responsive Management staff. Each meeting began with a brief presentation that included an overview of the research being conducted for Game and Fish by Responsive Management, a summary of results of the research to that point, the guidelines for conducting public meetings, and a list of questions intended to guide the flow of public input during the meeting. Rules for public input were then explained to the attendees, which included the requirement that only one person speak at a time, a time limit for speaking during the meeting, the restriction of open debate and challenges to other members of the audience, and adherence to the established topic of the meeting.

**METHODOLOGY: PUBLIC FORUM**

Six online public forums were offered for any member of the general population to be able to provide input and engage in open discussion with other interested parties. The forum allowed comments on one or more of the following topics: wildlife and wildlife viewing; hunting; fishing; boating; hunter education, educational programs, and communication; and any other miscellaneous Wyoming Game and Fish topics. The forums were maintained on a dedicated website (www.wildlifeforum.org) that included a description of the strategic planning research, a listing of the public meetings, and introductory questions for each forum posed by researchers for all website visitors to read, if desired.

Commenters could visit the forum as often as they liked and leave comments addressing the questions or any other aspects of outdoor recreation or wildlife management in Wyoming. Commenters also had the opportunity to engage with one another in a typical online discussion format. Responsive Management maintained a moderating presence in the forum but otherwise did not engage with participants in any way.

The forum remained active from December 2017 to June 2018. All forum comments posted during this time (excluding any comments that were deleted by the moderator due to inappropriate or irrelevant content) were reviewed and considered when developing the summary of results for the public forum. A separate report includes the verbatim comments.
LAUNCH MEETING RESULTS
Staff from Responsive Management and The Cooperation Company convened a project launch meeting with Wyoming Game and Fish Department personnel on September 14 and 15, 2017, at the Curt Gowdy State Park Visitor Center. The launch meeting was attended by Game and Fish executive staff and division leadership.

The primary purpose of this meeting was to help establish the overall direction of the study and to brainstorm topics that should be covered.

This meeting identified the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the Game and Fish Department, as well as the perceived opportunities available to the agency and the threats to it.

This meeting established that the project would entail a short assessment questionnaire for employees and stakeholders, focus groups, a telephone survey of the general population (which includes resident hunters and anglers) and nonresident hunters and anglers, an employee survey, focus groups to occur after the surveys, public meetings, and a public forum for comments.

RESULTS OF THE QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF GAME AND FISH EMPLOYEES AND EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS
Like the Launch Meeting, the primary purpose of this assessment was to establish the topics that should be covered in the subsequent research, as well as to help put those topics into perspective.

One aspect of the assessment was to establish goals of the project. The most important goals that were identified in the assessment were to educate the public and garner their trust, to develop a useable and measurable strategic plan, to assess and improve employee morale, to increase funding, and to manage all wildlife, not just game and fish species.

Another aspect of the assessment was to identify desired outcomes of the project. These included garnering public support for Game and Fish activities, making an actionable strategic plan, and maintaining robust fish and wildlife populations.

An additional part of the assessment identified key strengths of the agency. These included committed and knowledgeable employees, abundant natural resources, a strong relationship with the public, financial stability, good relationships with other entities, success stories, and autonomy in management of natural resources.

Weaknesses were also identified as a part of the assessment. These included inflexible leadership and structure, low employee morale among some employees, a limited funding base, lack of engagement with non-users, favoritism toward landowners, and poor communication.
The assessment was also used to identify opportunities for the agency. These included public interest in wildlife, partnerships with other entities, existing research, and pending employee turnover because of retirements (i.e., the opportunity to hire new employees).

Finally, the assessment identified threats to the agency. These included lack of funding, habitat loss, disease, and (undue) political influence.

PRE-SURVEY FOCUS GROUP RESULTS
Five focus groups were conducted prior to the telephone survey and other data collection methods. Focus groups are discussions among a small group of people, led by a moderator through a discussion guide, in which participants are allowed to give any input that they want. These focus groups with residents were conducted in geographically diverse areas across Wyoming: Cheyenne, Rock Springs, Riverton, Gillette, and Cody.

Generally, it seems that focus group participants are satisfied with Game and Fish. They clearly expressed their value of Wyoming’s wildlife in relation to their families and to the many outdoor recreational opportunities across the state. They also expressed their overall appreciation for the work of Game and Fish, especially given their budgetary limitations.

PRE-SURVEY FOCUS GROUP RESULTS: ACCESS
Access was the most discussed issue in each focus group across multiple topics of conversation. The issue of access was brought up across multiple conversations, even when the focus group discussion promptings did not directly involve access.

Hunters expressed frustration that landowners restrict hunting on their land to those able to pay large fees for trophy hunts, while not permitting resident Wyoming hunters to hunt their land.
This occurs, they say, even while excessive elk and deer populations are destroying landowners’ food sources and properties. To add to participants’ frustration, they noted that some landowners also receive compensation from the state for land that has been damaged by elk and deer.

With regard to fishing access, some participants noted the difficulty of fishing on streams and rivers that are owned partially by the state and partially by private landowners. They claim such scenarios can require impractical fishing and boating methods to avoid trespassing on the privately owned streambeds and banks.

Some non-consumptive outdoor recreationists also discussed access in terms of roads and trails that have been closed due to a lack of maintenance, thereby prohibiting them from hiking, viewing wildlife, photographing wildlife, and other similar activities.
PRE-SURVEY FOCUS GROUP RESULTS: MANAGEMENT

Regarding species management, some focus group participants questioned the wisdom of reintroducing wolves, while others noted the increasing danger to hikers, hunters, and wildlife viewers—especially near Cody—of encountering grizzly bears.

Focus group discussions included those who questioned the efficacy and the financial practicality of attempting to eliminate certain non-native fish species in order to bring back native species.

Some in the focus groups noted the need for Game and Fish to place greater emphasis on managing nongame species.

Regarding habitat management, some participants commented on the widespread deadwood in Wyoming’s forests as a fire hazard and reflected on the perceived mismanagement of Russian olive and sagebrush.

Finally, regarding recreation management, some participants who are particularly interested in non-consumptive outdoor recreation emphasized more maintenance on trails and roads throughout the state in order to increase access.

PRE-SURVEY FOCUS GROUP RESULTS: REGULATIONS

There were multiple comments across all focus groups regarding the complexity of Game and Fish hunting regulations.

Some appreciated the complexity and noted that it requires a level of commitment to read and understand the regulations that eliminates uncommitted hunters. However, others expressed frustration and/or concern over the regulations’ complexity and asserted that (at a minimum) it discourages the recruitment and retention of young and/or inexperienced hunters.

Across all five focus groups, many participants called for simplifying the regulations to some degree, thereby making hunting and fishing more accessible to Wyoming’s outdoor recreationists.

It was suggested a few times in different focus groups that the administrators who write the regulations are too removed from the field to properly understand how such regulations may or may not be practically applied to hunting, fishing, and access scenarios.

In connection to the regulations, many focus group participants also noted the difficulty of drawing tags for big game hunts, and expressed difficulty understanding the regulations concerning boundaries between public and private land, including the many designated hunting areas (and the accompanying area-specific regulations) from which to choose.

Boaters commented on the need to better enforce AIS inspection regulations.
PRE-SURVEY FOCUS GROUP RESULTS: EDUCATION

Multiple focus group participants across all five focus groups commented on the need for more educational initiatives, especially toward youth and young hunters. They are concerned that, without proper education through parents, schools, or other community or state programs, fewer youth will be interested in hunting.

Some boaters emphasized the development of statewide boating ethics and etiquette education in relation to interacting with other outdoor recreationists.

PRE-SURVEY FOCUS GROUP RESULTS: COMMUNICATION

Multiple participants across all focus groups requested more and better communication from Game and Fish regarding one or more of the following: regulations, policy decisions, annual Game and Fish budgetary allocations, website improvement and development, simplifying the regulations, and other suggestions.

It seems that some outdoor recreationists—particularly hunters and anglers—experience varying degrees of difficulty using the Game and Fish website to retrieve needed information; purchase licenses, tags, stamps, etc.; and locate pertinent Game and Fish contact information.

PRE-SURVEY FOCUS GROUP RESULTS: GAME AND FISH FUNDING

Some focus group participants noted that they would like Game and Fish to consider excise taxes and fees for non-consumptive outdoor recreation items and activities as an additional funding source. However, some hunters and anglers expressed apprehension with this idea, indicating that they would prefer Game and Fish to remain mostly funded by license fees and related expenses from hunting and fishing.

The latter people noted that they would like to retain as much consideration, attention, and funding from Game and Fish toward their respective activities as possible. Instead, they suggested increasing current resident and nonresident hunting and fishing fees. A few hunters and anglers expressed their willingness to pay slightly higher resident hunting and fishing license (and related) fees. Some also emphasized increasing nonresident license fees and tags in order to generate additional funding for Game and Fish.

PRE-SURVEY FOCUS GROUP RESULTS: RESOURCES AND PERSONNEL

Some focus group participants noted they would like to see Game and Fish allocate more resources and personnel for non-consumptive outdoor recreational interests and for nongame species management efforts.

They perceive that the subsequent lack of attention to such issues is due to limited funding and other limited resources. As mentioned earlier, some would like to see Game and Fish funding sources expand to include non-consumptive outdoor recreationists, which would include (from their perspective) more resources and personnel allocated to non-consumptive activities and nongame species management.
GENERAL POPULATION AND HUNTER / ANGLER SURVEY RESULTS

The results that follow are from a scientific, probability-based random sampling survey of the general population (i.e. residents statewide), as well as nonresident hunters and nonresident anglers. The survey was conducted by telephone. The analyses were conducted on several groups, including residents statewide, resident hunters, nonresident hunters, resident anglers, nonresident anglers, and wildlife viewers.

TELEPHONE SURVEY RESULTS: PARTICIPATION

Participation in hunting and fishing is robust in Wyoming. About a third of residents had purchased a hunting license within the past 5 years, and nearly half had purchased a fishing license in that time.

Other activities with robust participation include hiking, camping, and wildlife viewing. Nearly three fourths had hiked, about two thirds had camped, and about two thirds had gone wildlife viewing.

Public lands are of great importance for both hunting and fishing in Wyoming. A large majority of hunters use mostly public land, and an even larger majority of anglers access their fishing mostly through public land.

TELEPHONE SURVEY RESULTS: ISSUES OF CONCERN

The viability of wildlife populations, poaching, and wolf management were important concerns of residents when asked about Wyoming’s fish and wildlife.

Regarding issues pertaining to hunting, residents most commonly name access.

Invasive species as an issue is the most commonly named fishing issue, according to residents.

As with fishing issues, the most commonly named boating issue is invasive species.

Residents’ top concern regarding educational programs of the Game and Fish Department is that more are needed in schools.

Finally, the top issues confronting wildlife enthusiasts who do not hunt, fish, or trap, as perceived by residents, are dissemination of information and access.

TELEPHONE SURVEY RESULTS: ACCESS

Rating of access was asked about directly for several activities. The best ratings are for access to view wildlife and to hike. There appears to be room for improvement regarding fishing and hunting: although a majority give access ratings of excellent or good to these activities, in both cases the good ratings exceed the excellent ratings.
Maintaining roads and keeping them open were common ways that residents think access can be improved.

**TELEPHONE SURVEY RESULTS: KNOWLEDGE OF THE GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT**

The typical Wyoming resident is knowledgeable about Game and Fish: nearly three quarters say that they know *a great deal or a moderate amount* about the agency. Hunters/trappers/anglers have, of course, robust knowledge levels, but even a majority of those who do not hunt, trap, or fish say that they know *a great deal or a moderate amount*.

**TELEPHONE SURVEY RESULTS: SATISFACTION WITH THE GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT**

Satisfaction is high with the agency: 90% of residents are satisfied, including 62% who are *very satisfied*. Satisfaction is high across various user groups: more than 90% of hunters and anglers (both resident and nonresident) are satisfied, and just under 90% of non-hunting/non-trapping/non-fishing wildlife viewers are satisfied.

The perception that there is not enough law enforcement is a leading reason for dissatisfaction, exceeding reasons related to habitat or fish/wildlife management.

![Satisfaction With the Game and Fish Department Among Residents](image)

Q58. Overall, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department? (Residents)
TELEPHONE SURVEY RESULTS: OPINIONS ON THE GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

The agency enjoys high ratings of credibility among the general public, hunters, and anglers. Among residents, 95% rated the agency credible, with 79% rating it very credible. Hunters, anglers, and wildlife viewers give similarly high ratings of credibility.

The conservation and protection of wildlife, habitat, and natural resources was the top-named benefit that the Game and Fish Department provides. Additionally, providing opportunities for hunting, fishing, and viewing wildlife are important benefits that were named. Rounding out this list of perceived benefits is the provision of information and education about fish and wildlife.

The majority of residents agree that Game and Fish balances fish and wildlife management with opportunities for hunting and fishing. Listening to the public and incorporating feedback into agency decision-making was one aspect that could be improved, according to the percent who agree that they do this well.
When the survey asked about influences on the agency, politics was seen by residents as the top influence. Landowners and resident hunters were also perceived as having high levels of influence. In the middle of the ratings on this was scientific fish and wildlife methods, and lowest on the list was nonresidents. Environmental/conservation groups and the energy industry are perceived as having about the same level of influence, and both are in the middle of the ranking of influences.
TELEPHONE SURVEY RESULTS: PRIORITIES OF THE GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

Residents’ top priorities are the protection of fish and wildlife by the enforcement of laws, the protection of Wyoming’s waters from invasive species, and the management and maintenance of Wildlife Habitat Management Areas.

Q115-Q141. Mean ratings of how important respondents think each of the following should be to the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. (Residents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q117. Protecting fish and wildlife by enforcing wildlife and fishing laws</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and regulations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q129. Protecting Wyoming waters from aquatic invasive species</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q134. Managing / maintaining Wildlife Habitat Management Areas</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q115. Managing species that are hunted</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q141. Providing hunter education</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q120. Improving and maintaining quality fish and wildlife habitats</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q123. Responding to, investigating, and mitigating wildlife/human</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conflicts, including through educational programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q133. Monitoring the health of fish that are stocked into lakes / streams</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q130. Issuing hunting and fishing licenses, permits, stamps, tags,</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>preference points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q122. Conducting fish and wildlife research through field studies and</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by maintaining wildlife research facilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q121. Ensuring public safety on watercraft through education and by</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enforcing boating laws and regulations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q118. Maintaining and increasing access to hunting and fishing</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q116. Managing species that are not hunted or fished, including species</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that are threatened, endangered, or sensitive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q128. Raising and stocking fish</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q139. Providing news, updates, and info. on wildlife, hunting, fishing</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q137. Providing fish and wildlife education programs for the public</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q140. Evaluating projects on federal land to minimize impacts to wildlife</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q131. Issuing watercraft registrations</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q125. Investigating and handling nuisance wildlife situations</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q132. Maintaining continuous development / assessment of technologies</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for law enforcement, incl. wildlife forensics / computer...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q126. Providing opportunities to fish for trout</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q136. Developing online / other technology tools for wildlife mngmnt. /</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>public use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q127. Providing opportunities to fish for species like walleye, bass,</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crappie, catfish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q135. Acquiring new land and access through private lands</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q119. Raising and releasing pheasants for hunting</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q138. Recruiting new hunters and anglers</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q124. Compensating property owners for livestock and crop losses due</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to wildlife</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ratings of Importance of Game and Fish Department Efforts
Residents’ best performance ratings are given to the Game and Fish Department’s efforts at providing fishing opportunities, protecting fish and wildlife by the enforcement of laws, and the issuing of licenses.

Note that the protection of fish and wildlife showed up in the top three in importance and performance. This comparison of importance and performance is the topic of the next item.

When comparing the ratings of importance and performance, those efforts rated highly important are the same ones, in general, that are rated highly in performance. In other words, the ratings of performance are generally commensurate with the importance residents place on the efforts.

**TELEPHONE SURVEY RESULTS: OPINIONS ON LICENSING REQUIREMENTS**

The large majority of hunters and anglers agree that the hunting and fishing regulations and licensing requirements are clear and easy to understand. Hunters rated the clarity of both the hunting regulations and the hunting licensing requirements, and anglers did the same regarding fishing: of the four ratings, no less than 88% agreed that the regulations/requirements are clear and easy to understand (agreement ranged from 88% to 96%).

**TELEPHONE SURVEY RESULTS: SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

The Internet, including the Game and Fish website, are the most important sources of fish and wildlife information among residents, and more so among hunters and anglers.

In a direct question, two thirds of residents indicated visiting the Game and Fish website at some time. Of course, visitation is even higher among hunters and anglers.

The large majority of those who visited the website agreed that the information was easy to find.

The only concern might be that, although 82% overall agreed that the information was easy to find, agreement was fairly evenly divided between strongly agree and moderately agree, suggesting that the latter group’s visitation was not completely smooth.
TELEPHONE SURVEY RESULTS: FUNDING

Among the general public, less than half named hunting and fishing licenses as a source of Game and Fish funding—suggesting that a majority are unaware, perhaps, that this is an important funding source and are not giving due credit to hunters and anglers for this funding. Furthermore, more than a quarter of residents named general taxes, which is not a primary source of funding.

A low percentage of residents, as well as hunters and anglers, named excise taxes on hunting and fishing equipment, which is an important source. One might have expected that a higher percentage of hunters and anglers would have mentioned excise taxes on their equipment (at most, 6% named it).

More than three quarters of residents, hunters, and anglers agree that elected officials should explore options for new funding sources to help pay for fish and wildlife conservation in Wyoming.

Residents’ Opinion on the Game and Fish Department’s Exploring Funding Options
EMPLOYEE SURVEY RESULTS

Employees were administered a survey that included questions about their job satisfaction, their opinions on entities that may or may not influence the agency, the importance of various Game and Fish efforts, and the performance of Game and Fish at those efforts, as well as other questions.

In this survey, many of the questions were open-ended, and many employees gave quite detailed responses to the questions; the analysis includes a qualitative look at these responses. Although there was good information in the responses, to protect anonymity, the report cannot show the verbatim comments, as use of colloquialisms and so forth could compromise anonymity.

Satisfaction with their overall job is high among employees (91% are satisfied). Although overall satisfaction is high, those who are satisfied are fairly evenly distributed between being very satisfied and somewhat satisfied, meaning that this latter group could be more satisfied.

![Chart showing job satisfaction levels](chart.png)

Satisfaction or Dissatisfaction With Their Job Overall, Employees

Regarding various aspects of their job, employees are most satisfied with their work environment. The area in which they are not as highly satisfied is communications. This includes inter- and intra-divisional communications.
Percent of respondents who are [satisfied / dissatisfied] with each of the following aspects of their job at the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. (Employees)

- Your job overall as a Wyoming Game and Fish Department employee:
  - Very satisfied: 51%
  - Somewhat satisfied: 40%
  - Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied: 4%
  - Somewhat dissatisfied: 4%
  - Very dissatisfied: 1%
  - Don’t know: 4%

- Your work environment:
  - Very satisfied: 51%
  - Somewhat satisfied: 32%
  - Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied: 7%
  - Somewhat dissatisfied: 8%
  - Very dissatisfied: 2%

- Your morale:
  - Very satisfied: 31%
  - Somewhat satisfied: 37%
  - Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied: 13%
  - Somewhat dissatisfied: 14%
  - Very dissatisfied: 5%

- Your day-to-day workload:
  - Very satisfied: 26%
  - Somewhat satisfied: 39%
  - Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied: 16%
  - Somewhat dissatisfied: 15%
  - Very dissatisfied: 3%

- Communication within your division:
  - Very satisfied: 25%
  - Somewhat satisfied: 38%
  - Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied: 17%
  - Somewhat dissatisfied: 15%
  - Very dissatisfied: 5%

- Communication within the Wyoming Game and Fish Department as a whole:
  - Very satisfied: 13%
  - Somewhat satisfied: 41%
  - Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied: 19%
  - Somewhat dissatisfied: 23%
  - Very dissatisfied: 4%

Satisfaction or Dissatisfaction With Various Aspects of Their Job, Employees
Employees' perceptions of their opportunities for training and professional development are positive, as are their perceptions of how well the agency retains employees. Less positively perceived is transparency in decision-making (which is related to communication, which was cited above as being not as good as it could be).

The overwhelming majority of employees rate the Game and Fish Department in the top half of the scale at conserving fish and wildlife: 93% give a rating of excellent or good. The caveat to this positive rating is that these 93% are about evenly divided between excellent and good, meaning that for the latter, the efforts could be rated higher.

Employees’ highest priorities are for managing species that are hunted, improving habitats, issuing licenses, and protecting fish and wildlife by enforcing laws.

Regarding performance, the top-rated efforts pertain to fishing and boating, as well as two items already discussed as being highly important: managing species that are hunted, and issuing licenses and related products.

Employees also rate the priority of providing education highly.
Please rate how important each of the following areas related to the work of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department SHOULD BE to Game and Fish on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being not at all important and 10 being extremely important. (Employees)

Managing species that are hunted 9.6
Improving and maintaining quality fish and wildlife habitats 9.3
Issuing hunting and fishing licenses, permits, stamps, tags, and preference points 9.3
Protecting fish and wildlife by enforcing wildlife and fishing laws and regulations 9.2
Managing and maintaining Wildlife Habitat Management Areas 9.0
Maintaining and increasing access to hunting and fishing 8.9
Protecting Wyoming waters from aquatic invasive species 8.9
Conducting fish and wildlife research through field studies and by maintaining wildlife research facilities 8.8
Acquiring new land and access through private lands 8.7
Providing hunter education 8.7
Monitoring the health of fish that are stocked into lakes and streams 8.5
Managing species that are not hunted or fished, including species that are threatened, endangered, or sensitive 8.5
Recruiting new hunters and anglers 8.5
Providing opportunities to fish for trout 8.4
Responding to, investigating, and mitigating wildlife/human conflicts, including through educational programs 8.4
Evaluating projects on federal land to minimize impacts to wildlife 8.3
Maintaining continuous development and assessment of technologies for law enforcement, including wildlife… 8.3
Providing fish and wildlife education programs for the public 8.2
Developing online and other technology tools for wildlife management and public use 8.1
Raising and stocking fish 8.1
Providing news, updates and information on wildlife, hunting, and fishing 7.9
Providing opportunities to fish for species like walleye, bass, crappie, and catfish 7.7
Investigating and handling nuisance wildlife situations 7.0
Ensuring public safety on watercraft through education and by enforcing boating laws and regulations 6.8
Issuing watercraft registrations 6.6
Raising and releasing pheasants for hunting 5.3
Compensating property owners for livestock and crop losses due to wildlife 4.7

Importance of Game and Fish Department Efforts, Employees
Employees generally feel that the agency balances fish and wildlife management and providing fishing and hunting opportunities. There is less agreement that the agency balances the interests of all groups it serves.

**Percent of respondents who [agree / disagree] with each of the following statements. (Employees)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Modestly agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Modestly disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Wyoming Game and Fish Department should be given more resources for the management of Wyoming’s fish and wildlife populations</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wyoming Game and Fish Department effectively balances fish and wildlife management with providing quality hunting and fishing opportunities</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wyoming Game and Fish Department is doing enough to conserve Wyoming’s fish and wildlife populations</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wyoming Game and Fish Department does a good job listening to members of the public and incorporating the feedback into agency decision-making</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wyoming Game and Fish Department should devote more time, money, and effort to the management of non-game fish and wildlife species</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wyoming Game and Fish Department effectively balances the interests of all the people and groups it serves</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Agreement or Disagreement With Statements About the Game and Fish Department’s Accommodation of All Constituents, Employees
Employees think that politics and landowners have the biggest influence on the work of Game and Fish. They also attribute outfitters and guides as having a high level of influence. In the middle of their ranking is scientific fish and wildlife methods.

Some employees stated that agency priorities are redirected if someone contacts a friend at the Governor’s office, the Game and Fish Director’s Office, the Game and Fish Commission, or the legislature; they went on to state that when special interests result in top-down decisions, it can have negative consequences on wildlife, employee morale, and the public trust. Special interests that were cited as having too much influence include politicians, outfitters, ranchers (livestock producers), the energy industry (extraction or wind and solar), the agricultural industry, and large landowners in general.

Some feel that special interests have a disproportionate influence on agency decisions. Certain groups are said to dominate public meetings and influence management decisions, particularly politicians, outfitters, ranchers (livestock producers), the agricultural industry, the energy industry, and large landowners in general.

Employees overwhelmingly agree that elected officials should explore options for new funding sources. Many feel that non-consumptive recreationists should contribute in some way to habitat and wildlife management. There are concerns that youth apathy will eventually result in decreased funding from license sales.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department is responsible for managing over 800 species of wildlife. Fewer than 100 of these are game animals. Historically, the sale of hunting and fishing licenses and conservation stamps, application fees, and Federal excise taxes have funded nearly all wildlife management in Wyoming.

Would you agree or disagree that elected officials should explore options for NEW funding sources to help pay for fish and wildlife conservation in Wyoming? (Elected officials include the U.S. Congress, Wyoming’s governor, and Wyoming’s state legislature.) (Employees)

Opinion on Exploration of New Funding Sources, Employees
Which of the following potential funding sources do you think should be considered to pay for fish and wildlife conservation in Wyoming?

- Tax on outdoor equipment other than hunting, shooting, and fishing items: 75%
- Lottery funds: 71%
- User fees / fees for specific groups of recreationists: 56%
- State sales tax: 48%
- General federal tax revenue: 45%
- Fee increases for hunting, fishing, and trapping licenses: 41%
- Fee increases for watercraft registrations: 32%
- Specialty license plates: 4%
- Lodging tax: 3%
- Mineral tax: 3%
- Gas tax: 2%
- Other: 7%

Items above the line were presented to respondents. Items below the line were written in as “other” options by respondents.
Leadership should trust employee input and micromanage less.
Many employees stated that decisions are made top-down, with little input from field personnel or subject matter experts in the specific units or programs.

**COMPARISON OF GENERAL POPULATION AND EMPLOYEE RESULTS**
The telephone survey of the general population and the online survey of Game and Fish employees include a number of identical questions. This section looks at the responses by the public and by employees side-by-side. It compares how the opinions and attitudes of Game and Fish employees regarding the influences, priorities, and performance of the agency match up to the opinions and attitudes of the constituents they serve.

On a number of issues Game and Fish employees appear to be more critical of the agency than the general population is. This was reflected in certain questions regarding agency effectiveness and influences, but not in a series that had direct ratings of performance. Major findings from the comparisons are shown below.

**Game and Fish employees are more critical than the public about the agency’s effectiveness in balancing the interests of all the groups it serves.**
The general population (35%) was much more likely than employees (15%) to strongly agree with this statement, whereas employees much more often selected moderately disagree or a neutral response.

**Game and Fish employees, compared to the public, less often agree that the agency is doing enough to conserve Wyoming’s fish and wildlife populations.**
About half of the general population (49%) strongly agrees with this statement, compared to 25% of Game and Fish employees.

**Most Game and Fish employees (96%) think that politics influences the agency’s work.**
This compares to 79% of the public who thinks that. Breaking it down, 72% of employees said that politics influences the agency a great deal and 24% said it does a moderate amount. Other factors that employees, more so than the public, think influence the agency’s work are outfitters and guides, the energy industry, and landowners.

**The general population, compared to Game and Fish employees, are overwhelmingly more likely to say the agency is influenced by outdoor recreationists other than hunters and anglers.**
Nearly a third of the public (30%) thinks this group influences the agency a great deal and 43% said it does a moderate amount; this compares to only 4% and 16% of employees, respectively. Other factors that the general population, more so than Game and Fish employees, thinks influence the agency’s work are the general public, nonresidents, and environmental and conservation groups.
Comparisons of Opinions on the Influences as a Whole

Game and Fish employees overwhelmingly support options for new funding sources. In all, 72% of employees strongly agree with the concept and 19% moderately agree, for a total of 91%. The general population also agrees, although support is markedly lower (49% and 30%, respectively).
Comparisons of Opinions on New Options for Funding

Game and Fish employees, compared to the public, ranked outdoor recreation issues higher in priority.
The two groups ranked the priority of 27 areas of work related to the agency. Some of the most striking differences related to issues concerning outdoor recreation. For example, “acquiring new land and access through private land” was ranked 9th on the list by employees but 24th by the public. Also, “recruiting new hunters and anglers” was ranked 13th by employees but 26th by the public. This latter difference suggests that employees value the funding provided by new hunters and anglers, whereas the public may not be aware of this funding connection. Also, the public may have the mindset that they do not want more crowding or competition in their places of recreation. Other categories ranked notably higher by employees include “issuing hunting and fishing licenses, permits, stamps, tags, preference points” and “maintaining and increasing access to hunting and fishing.”

The general population, compared to Game and Fish employees, ranked boating issues higher in priority.
The category “ensuring public safety on watercraft through education and by enforcing boating laws and regulations” was ranked 11th by the public and 24th by employees, and “issuing watercraft registrations” was ranked 18th by the public and 25th by employees.

The general population, compared to Game and Fish employees, ranked education and nuisance wildlife issues higher in priority.
Categories that were ranked higher on the public’s list include “protecting Wyoming waters from aquatic invasive species”; “providing hunter education”; “responding to, investigating, and
mitigating human/wildlife conflicts, including through educational programs”; “providing news, updates, and information on wildlife, hunting, and fishing”; and “investigating and handling nuisance wildlife situations.”

The agency’s performance is rated favorably by both the general population and Game and Fish employees.

Although earlier comparisons suggested that employees are more critical of the agency than are the public at large, performance ratings of the 27 categories were generally high and comparable between the two groups. In fact, employees have markedly higher ratings than the public regarding “raising and stocking fish,” “raising and releasing pheasants for hunting,” and “compensating property owners for livestock and crop losses due to wildlife.” Note, however, that these categories were ranked at and near the bottom in the Game and Fish employees’ list of priorities.

POST-SURVEY FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

Five focus groups were conducted after the surveys had been administered. These focus groups were conducted with a diverse selection of Wyoming residents in Laramie, Casper, Sheridan, Worland, and Jackson from February 5 through 10, 2018. The methodology is discussed in full in Chapter 12, “Methodology.”

While the points highlighted below do not illustrate the full range of comments and feedback offered by focus group participants, they do delineate the most often and thoroughly discussed issues across all five of the focus groups, indicating that they are major themes and areas of interest and/or concern among focus group participants.

Overall, focus group participants indicate they have a favorable view of Game and Fish. Many participants view Game and Fish as doing a very good job with fish and wildlife management while also balancing the various needs and requests of their respective constituencies.

While most participants tend to think Game and Fish is doing the best job possible, given budgetary and personnel limitations, they also would like to see Game and Fish pursue additional funding sources to increase its budget and overall effectiveness, preferably without taking additional federal dollars.

One of the most often discussed requests, which arose in almost every conversation across all five focus groups, is for Game and Fish to provide more educational opportunities for the general public, including for largely untapped demographic groups such as women and youth.

In tandem, there are many requests for more information regarding aquatic invasive species, regulatory and policy decision-making rationale, and contact information. Almost any time in focus group conversations where participants responded that they would require more information on a specific topic in order to offer an informed comment, the discussion turned to the need for Game and Fish to provide more education and information to Wyoming residents concerning issues related to licensing, aquatic invasive species, regulations, poaching, and outdoors skills, among many other topics.
Multiple participants also request that Game and Fish streamline its educational and informational outreach by increasing its use of social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, YouTube) and by developing and promoting outdoors-skills development for youth and the general public.

In addition to providing more education and information, many participants request more advertising (via newspaper, television, and social media) and outreach (via local events, public meetings, etc.) to develop their knowledge base.

Most participants, with the exception of those in Jackson, feel that Game and Fish should open a hunting season on grizzly bears to responsibly manage the growing population. Unlike their attitudes toward wolves, focus group participants tend to view grizzlies as being native to Wyoming and therefore deserving of more patience.

Some participants, with the exception of most in Jackson, feel that Game and Fish should promote a “shoot-on-sight” policy with wolves. Other participants across multiple focus groups who do not feel as strongly about a shoot-on-sight policy still favor opening a hunting season on wolves. Multiple participants across all focus groups (including Jackson) also note that landowners who kill wolves to protect their livestock should not be penalized. Due to the perception that the initial wolf reintroduction involved a species of wolf that is not native to Wyoming, many focus group participants seem to view wolves in general as unwelcome in the state.

Most focus group participants think that land access in Wyoming has improved, but also feel that Game and Fish can and should continue to promote additional access to public land by working with landowners. Additionally, a number of participants note examples of federal land with closed trails and roads due to an apparent lack of maintenance. These participants indicate that better partnerships between Game and Fish and federal agencies (e.g., U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management) could help promote better road and trail maintenance and provide more access to federal public lands as a result.

Most participants understand that license fees are higher for nonresidents and therefore make up an important revenue source for Game and Fish. But participants also struggle with the practical impacts of increasing visitation from nonresidents (recreational pressure, irresponsible behavior, etc.).
RESULTS OF POST-SURVEY PUBLIC MEETINGS

This section discusses the results of the ten public meetings that were held in (listed in chronological order of the meeting dates) Cheyenne, Laramie, Casper, Lander, Gillette, Green River, Sheridan, Pinedale, Cody, and Jackson. For full details of the methodology and structure of the public meetings, see Chapter 12 of this report).

Through an analysis of the public meetings, 31 distinct topics are covered in the full report that follows this executive summary, which emerged as primary areas of concern among meeting attendees.

In addition, analysis of most public meetings warranted an “other” category. Funding, agency performance, and equity (or the balancing of various stakeholders’ interests) emerged as the top areas of discussion.

Not every topic was mentioned in every meeting, nor were the topics discussed given equal attention in each meeting.

In part, this is due to the eight distinct Game and Fish management regions, with each region having its own wildlife, geography, and concerns. In addition, however, some meetings attracted larger audiences of guides, non-consumptive users, or anglers, while other meetings attracted larger numbers of hunters and other groups.

The order and importance of particular topics is often indicative of the makeup of each meeting’s attendees.

For example, introducing a muzzleloader/primitive weapon hunting season was only mentioned in two meetings, and only briefly in one of those meetings. In the Gillette public meeting, however, the introduction of a muzzleloader/primitive weapon season was the most mentioned topic. With this level of interest in hunting, one could safely assume that the Gillette public meeting had a relatively large number of hunters in attendance.

Funding was the most frequently discussed topic in the meetings overall, being the only topic that was mentioned in all ten public meetings. Most funding discussion focused on the need to find alternate sources of funding in order to avoid becoming overly reliant on sportsmen to fund Game and Fish. A smaller portion of conversation about funding focused on public desire for transparency in funding sources.

Discussions of Game and Fish performance, which represented the second most addressed topic, indicated that most interactions with Game and Fish staff were very positive. Most attendees expressed a high approval rating of Game and Fish, as well as a high level of trust in decision-making associated with the 5-year strategic plan.

Equity was one of the greatest themes throughout the entirety of the public meeting process. Issues in regard to licensing, access, consumptive vs. non-consumptive users, and habitat all seemed to relate to the public’s desire to have all constituents equally represented by Game and Fish.
PUBLIC FORUM RESULTS
The public forum was a website comprising a homepage and six discussion pages. The six forum
discussion categories were wildlife and wildlife viewing; hunting; fishing; boating; hunter
education, educational programs, and communication; and “other” Wyoming Game and Fish
topics (the “other” allowing any pertinent topic that forum contributors felt was not covered in
the five established categories).

PUBLIC FORUM RESULTS: GAME AND FISH FUNDING
Contributors to the online public forum wanted Game and Fish to explore funding sources
that include non-consumptive outdoor recreationists.
They promoted this concept in terms of Game and Fish adjusting to the changing outdoor
recreational activities; many forum contributors said that people are increasingly interested in
wildlife viewing, wildlife photography, hiking, camping, and other kinds of non-consumptive
outdoor recreation. Such wildlife consumers wanted better representation in Game and Fish
management and regulatory decision-making.

Many forum contributors wanted Game and Fish to increase nonresident hunting fees.
While some were wary that a steep nonresident fee increase could discourage nonresidents from
hunting in Wyoming and therefore decrease Game and Fish funding, many advocated for it
nonetheless.

Some in the fishing and hunting forums advocated for nonresident guide fees that would
allow Wyoming guides to remain competitive and provide another income stream for
Game and Fish.

PUBLIC FORUM RESULTS: ACCESS
Contributors across multiple forum sections discussed access. Anglers were concerned for
the access of streams in which the state owns the waters but landowners own the stream
beds and banks.

Hunters were concerned that large tracts of public land are inaccessible because they are
landlocked by private land that landowners will not permit hunters to pass through to
access public land.

Non-consumptive outdoor recreationists such as hikers and wildlife viewers were
concerned about the apparent increases in road and trail closures on public land due to a
perceived lack of maintenance.
Their concern was heightened by having observed some recreationists who use motorized
vehicles (such as ATVs) to breach closed public trails and roads and have created ruts and
changes in geography that are difficult to restore.
PUBLIC FORUM RESULTS: LARGE PREDATOR MANAGEMENT—WOLVES AND BEARS

Many contributors, especially in the hunting and wildlife viewing forums, discussed the management of wolves and grizzly bears; however, there was no consensus.

Reasons for supporting the hunting of wolves included that wolves were felt to thin elk herds too much, that wolves were felt to change elk migration patterns, and that landowners could lose money because hunters would not lease land on which the wolves had depleted the elk and deer.

Those who advocated for hunting grizzly bears tended to view the species with greater amicability than they did wolves, but they still believed that grizzlies need to be re-educated as to acceptable boundaries between themselves and human populations. Nobody seemed to argue that grizzly populations are too high (as many advocates for wolf hunting argued was the case with wolf populations), but they often noted that grizzly populations have stabilized and that a hunting season can be opened on them.

One reason for opposing the hunting of both wolves and grizzlies was the perceived economic incentive of wildlife viewing related to these species specifically. Thinning their populations could result in less tourism, meaning less funding within the state.

Some opposition to hunting wolves and grizzly bears was expressed as a rights issue—essentially, the right to view wolves and bears is just as valid as the right to hunt them. Some participants claimed that the rights issue can be resolved by giving wildlife viewers and other non-consumptive recreationists a “seat at the management table.”

Another reason to oppose hunting wolves that was expressed is that human encroachment into wildlife habitat does not necessarily mean the species should be extirpated in that area.

Those who opposed hunting grizzlies thought it is poor management to allow a hunting season just because the species has achieved a self-sustaining population.

As for bears presenting a threat to Wyoming neighborhoods and more rural human populations, some opposed to hunting grizzlies advocated for more bear-friendly community efforts, noting that human encroachment onto grizzly territory has been increasing.
PUBLIC FORUM RESULTS: TRAPPING

Multiple contributors to the hunting and wildlife viewing forums commented on trapping. The vast majority of these contributors opposed the current state of trapping in Wyoming, on the grounds that trapping causes undue and prolonged suffering to wildlife.

Some contributors who opposed trapping expressed concern about family pets.

Those in the forum who opposed trapping generally suggested one of two preferred outcomes: a total statewide ban on trapping, or new restrictions to make current Wyoming trapping regulations and laws more stringent.

PUBLIC FORUM RESULTS: EDUCATION

Contributors to the hunting, boating, and other issues forums all commented on the need to increase educational and training opportunities for young and inexperienced hunters and non-consumptive outdoor recreationists.

Boaters’ comments regarding education/instruction centered on boating etiquette and proper behavior, especially for boating and non-boating anglers and other recreationists on or near the water.

Some felt education on hunter ethics has not kept pace with the rise in hunting technology: this was commonly mentioned in terms of crossbows and scopes, especially as the latter may encourage hunters to take shots from too far away.

Some comments advocated for updating hunter safety instruction to reflect considerations of such hunting technology. It was thought that increased attention to this technology would be particularly meaningful to younger and less experienced hunters, who may be the most intent on harvesting game.