

INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest challenges facing the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) in the 21st century will be our ability to maintain sustainable fish and wildlife populations and meet the expectations and desire of our citizens. This challenge can be met by addressing habitat needs and issues that seek to maintain open spaces, non-fragmented quality habitats and the ability of fish and wildlife to utilize these areas. Many areas of the state are imperiled or at-risk. Potential impacts to fish and wildlife are expanding, with some of the most noticeable being energy development, increasing demands for water, other land uses, and urban sprawl. The long-term drought, fire suppression and conflicts in public expectations have caused impacts as well. At the same time, we are being asked to take a far more active role in the conservation of all wildlife species, including many considered to be at-risk. Conserving them one species at a time is impractical over the long-term. To effectively answer these challenges, the Department is actively pursuing habitat-related management decisions at a landscape level with public land managers and private landowners on lands throughout Wyoming. In recognition of this need, The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission (WGFC) adopted a Strategic Habitat Plan (SHP) in 2001. This SHP and priorities habitat areas can be viewed on the WGFD website at <http://gf.state.wy.us/habitat/StrategicPlan/index.asp>. The plan's three primary goals are:

1. Manage, preserve and restore habitat for long-term sustainable management of wildlife populations.
2. Increase wildlife based recreation through habitat enhancements that increase productivity of wildlife.
3. Increase or maintain wildlife habitat and associated recreation on Wyoming Game and Fish Commission owned and managed lands.

This is a report of the activities and strategies we implemented this past year to address the goals of the SHP. It is of paramount importance that habitat conservation in Wyoming be extended to the landscape/watershed level, working cooperatively across organizational lines within and outside the Department, and across political and legal boundaries on the ground. This requires a great deal of teamwork and a broader view of our responsibilities. The report includes a compilation of funding sources, expenditures and a summary of on-the-ground activities accomplished during 2006.

In addition, several statewide programs related to the Strategic Habitat Plan are included in this years analysis. These programs involved technical assistance and education regarding fish and wildlife habitat condition and health relative to livestock and/or big game grazing via workshops for private landowners and managers. Also included are programs for sagebrush management including land cover information derived from remote sensing satellite imagery, riparian, aspen and tall forb community management, development and refinement of a geographic information system (GIS) decision support system and GIS cumulative impact analysis system for the WGFD, in-stream flow habitat protection, and a statewide aquatic wildlife GIS database development. Using funds received from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Landowner Incentive Program, the Department is working with private landowners to implement on-the-ground projects on prairie stream systems, cutthroat trout streams, and grassland and sagebrush habitat for sensitive fish and wildlife species on private lands. These efforts are designed to enhance sensitive wildlife species populations and distribution and to negate the need for potential listing under the Endangered Species Act administered by the USFWS. The Water Management Section is actively involved in water management efforts and evaluation of in-stream flows to protect and enhance aquatic wildlife resources.

Program performance in terms of expenditures on projects is summarized on a statewide basis in the following sections.

I. Approximate WGFD funds (figures rounded to the nearest \$1,000) expended for Strategic Habitat Plan Goals 1, 2, and 3 during calendar 2006 (These include funds expended for on-the-ground projects. It does not include expenditures for salaries or equipment for routine maintenance and operation functions).

Department Funds Expended for Goals 1, 2 and 3: \$ 1,913,000

II. Non-Department fund allocated/expended for Strategic Habitat Plan Goal 3 during 2006. Funding derived from a variety of sources including; a) Farm Bill Government Funds; b) Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resources Trust Board; c) Other Federal Government Funding Sources; d) Other State and Local Government Funding Sources; e) Non-Governmental Organizations and Groups; f) Wyoming Wildlife Heritage Foundation; g) Wyoming Governor’s Big Game License Coalition; h) Private Landowners Contribution (Includes in-kind) among others.

Non-Department Funds Expended for Goals 1 and 2: \$2,481,000

III. Non-Department funds allocated/expended for Strategic Habitat Plan Goals 1, 2 and 3 during calendar year 2006. Funding derived from a variety of sources including: a) Farm Bill Government Funds; b) Other Federal Government Funding Sources; c) Other State and Local Government Funding Sources; d) Non-Governmental Organizations and Groups; e) Wyoming Wildlife Heritage Foundation; f) Wyoming Governor’s Big Game License Coalition; g) Private Landowners Contribution (Includes in-kind); and h) Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resources Trust Board among others.

Non-Department Subtotal for Goal 3: \$ 45,000

IV. SUBTOTAL NON-DEPARTMENT FUNDS: \$2,526,000

V. GRAND TOTAL FOR GOALS 1, 2, and 3 \$4,439,000
Project Funds not including WGFD (M&O):

In other words, the Department was able to secure funding from outside sources amounting to approximately \$2.32 for each Department dollar expended for on-the-ground fish and wildlife habitat activities. This outside funding is a critical element for implementing the Strategic Habitat Plan and conserving our wildlife resources in collaboration with the many dedicated partners throughout the State.

Overall, personnel directly involved in implementing the Strategic Habitat Plan including routine maintenance and operation activities, oversaw spending of approximately \$4,702,250 of WGFD regular maintenance and operating funds, State Wildlife Grants from USFWS and Department Trust Funds. This figure includes wages, benefits, equipment operation expenses, supplies and on-the-ground improvement material expenses allocated as follows: approximately 55% for personnel that includes habitat inventories, monitoring, project contacts, project design and implementation. Without personnel none of these habitat projects would happen. The remainder of the funding was allocated as follows: 5% for vehicles and heavy equipment; and 40% for materials and supplies.

These expenditures resulted in on-the-ground accomplishments during 2006 as summarized below:

Strategic Habitat Plan Goals 1 and 2

<u>On-the-Ground Activity</u>	<u>On-the-Ground Accomplishment</u>
Private landowner contacts resulting in enhancement projects	189 projects
Stream/watershed inventories and assessments	54 miles 22,000 acres
Stream miles treated	162 miles
Standing water treated	173 acres
Aquatic structures installed (weirs, tress, screens, etc.)	4 barbs 1 screen 991 trees
Statewide GIS aquatic databases developed	2
In-stream Flow projects	3 application on 6.4 miles 10.4 miles surveyed
Prescribed burns	9,656 acres
Bureau of Land Management Resource Management Plan Leads	2
Conservation easements	2 acquired on 529 acres
Information and Education efforts (presentations, articles, booths, radio, television and hosting workshops)	96 formal programs
Herbicide vegetation treatments	3,730 acres
Mowing, chopping, harrower, and Lawson Aerator treatments	2,920 acres
Conifer removal from aspen stands	321 acres
Tree and shrub planting	4,100 planted
Grass and forb seeding	2,703 acres
Wheat stripper header treatments	2,000 acres
Water guzzlers installed	15
Spring developments and fencing	10
Water tanks installed	15
Water pipelines installed	26,060 feet
Fences installed to protect treatment areas	11,100 feet
Wetland developments and repairs	30 acres
Riparian habitat protection, enhancement and management	1,150 acres
Stream miles fenced for enhancement and management	327.3 miles
Livestock grazing management plans	224,151 acres
Allotment reserves	5,115 acres closed 53,560 acres forage reserve 2,726 AUMs
Upland habitat inventory (landscape analysis scale)	21.2 million acres
Upland habitat inventory (intensive project level scale)	224,992 acres
Habitat monitoring sites (annual monitoring)	217 sites monitored
Field research projects	16 projects

Strategic Habitat Plan Goal 3

<u>On-the-Ground Activity</u>	<u>On-the-Ground Accomplishment</u>
Overseeing maintenance and land management on WGFC Wildlife Management Areas and Public Access Areas	410, 692 acres of WGFC lands 36 Wildlife Management Areas 96 Public Access Areas 158 Private Sector Contracts
Conifer removal from aspen stands	28 acres
Mowing projects	245 acres
Fence removal	8 miles
Grass and forb seeding	481 acres
Prescribed burns	500 acres
Range pitting projects	550 acres
Intensive irrigation enhancements	796 acres 1,500 feet gated pipe 6 rock sills
Herbicide application	210 acres
Biological weed control with bug releases	2,350 acres
Intensive livestock/forage reserve grazing	128,358 acres
Well development	1 solar well

Not detailed in this report are numerous activities related to conservation and management that our regional personnel are involved with on a routine, continuing basis. These include attendance in numerous workshops, professional training and various working groups; educational activities involving the riparian stream demonstration trailer, habitat publications, radio programs, news releases, presentations at professional meetings and local entities (Rotary, Lion’s Club, etc.), and assistance with the annual Hunting and Fishing Heritage Expo. Numerous landowner habitat extension services, which may or may not result in tangible projects, are provided throughout the state. With the volume and intensity of development in Wyoming on federal lands, planning and coordination efforts, our personnel are deeply involved with reviewing and preparing wildlife recommendations on environmental documents and resource management agencies planning documents. While these activities tax ability to implement on-the-ground habitat projects, we feel it is an important component in providing for the management, preservation and restoration of Wyoming’s wildlife habitat and the recreational opportunities for the public.

We hope this Strategic Habitat Plan annual report provides useful information relative to habitat projects locally and on a statewide basis. Without your cooperation, input, collaboration, and support, fish and wildlife conservation in Wyoming would be impossible. We believe **“habitat”** and **“open spaces”** are the keys to maintaining wild and healthy populations of aquatic and terrestrial wildlife. We greatly appreciate your assistance and support and look forward to working with you to “Conserve Wildlife and Serve People” in the years ahead.

For additional information please contact any of the personnel listed above. Also, feel free to share this report with anyone who may be interested in the Department and Commission’s habitat efforts.

The report can also be viewed on the WGFD website at <http://gf.state.wy.us/habitat/AnnualRpts/index.asp>