

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. We approach habitat conservation and management on a landscape/watershed scale based on the needs of all fish and wildlife and citizens who either enjoy and/or depend on wildlife, and the land and water resources of the State. This requires a great deal of teamwork and a broader view of our responsibilities. 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 provides an opportunity to meet many of these challenges. Potential impacts to fish and wildlife continue to expand, 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 one species at a time is expensive and maybe impractical over the long-term. To effectively answer these challenges, the Department is actively pursuing habitat-related management actions on a landscape level partnering with public land managers and private landowners throughout Wyoming. In recognition of this need, The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission (WGFC) adopted a Strategic Habitat Plan (SHP) in 2001. 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 and; 3) Increase or maintain wildlife habitat and associated recreation on WGFC owned and managed lands. The SHP and priorities habitat areas identified can be viewed on the WGFD website at <http://gf.state.wy.us/habitat/StrategicPlan/index.asp>. Lastly, we have initiated process to revise and up-date the SHP with completion scheduled in 2008.

This report highlights the on-the-ground activities and strategies accomplished by personnel from Terrestrial Habitat, Aquatic Habitat, and the Habitat and Access Maintenance programs of the WGFD as well as associated portions of the Lands Administration program and Water Management Section toward implementation of the SHP goals during the year. Many other field personnel, including wildlife biologists, fisheries managers, game wardens, information coordinators, non-game biologists, trophy game biologists, brucellosis-feedground-habitat biologists, private land/public wildlife personnel, and waterfowl biologists among others contributed time and effort to many of these activities. The information was compiled from WGFD expenditures from the WGFD Trust Fund Account, Walk-In Area Habitat Enhancement Program, maintenance and operation budgets used for habitat development and maintenance (less personnel and equipment costs), Farm Bill Program funds that include incentive payments and 10 to 15 year annual rental/lease payments from U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Security Agency (FSA), funds from other federal, state or local governmental agencies, Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust (WWNRT), Wyoming Governor's Big Game License Coalition (WGBGLC), Wyoming Wildlife Heritage Foundation (WWHF), funds from non-governmental organizations (NGO's) and finally funds from private donors, and private landowners or managers, including in-kind services.

In addition to the programs cited above, statewide programs related to the SHP are included in this years compilation of information relative to on-the-ground habitat management activities. 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, a GIS cumulative impact analysis system for the WGFD, in-stream flow habitat protection, and a statewide aquatic GIS database development. Using funds received from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Landowner Incentive Program, the Department is also working with private landowners to implement on-the-ground projects on prairie stream systems, cutthroat trout streams, and grass-

These expenditures resulted in on-the-ground accomplishments during calendar year 2007 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	142 projects
Stream/watershed fishery assessments	142.3 miles
Stream fishery miles treated	2.8 miles
Stream structures (revetment, barbs, diversions, etc)	7 installed
Stream bank enhanced	600 woody plants; 1,300' sod
Statewide GIS aquatic databases developed	3
Standing water fishery treated	850 trees for underwater cover
Stream assessment input into database (USFS and WGFD)	264.0 miles
Prescribed burns (uplands, farm stubble, and CRP enhancement)	24,746 acres
Bureau of Land Management Resource Management Plan State Cooperators	3 Plans
Conservation easements	10 acquired totaling 8,309 acres; 6 being actively pursued
Information and Education efforts (presentations, articles, booths, radio, television and hosting workshops)	84 formal programs
Herbicide vegetation treatments and bug bio-control	5,761 acres
Mowing, chopping, and Lawson Aerator treatments	3,937 acres
Mechanical conifer removal from aspen stands, juniper removal, and Russian olive and saltcedar removal	3,948 acres
Upland tree and shrub planting	1,360 planted
Upland grass, forb and food plot seeding	330 acres
Wheat stripper header treatments	2,000 acres
Water guzzlers installed	3
Spring developments and fencing	1
Water tanks installed	10
Water pipelines installed	40,590 feet
Fences installed to protect treatment areas	35,835 feet
Wetland developments	5 acres
Riparian habitat protection, enhancement and management	199 acres
Farm Bill Program contract involvement for 2007	CCRP-12; EQIP-37; GLI-2; WRP-2; AMA-20; WHIP-2
Livestock grazing management plans	105,441 acres
Allotment reserves and management with federal agencies and permittees	89,000 acres closed; 89,000 acres under forage reserve
Upland habitat inventory (landscape analysis scale)	6.8 million acres
Upland habitat inventory (intensive project level scale)	320,293 acres
Habitat monitoring sites (annual monitoring)	233 sites monitored
Field research projects	12 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
Wetland developments and major repairs	512 acres
Mowing projects	78 acres
Fence removal	3 miles
Grass, forb and food plot seeding	250 acres
Beaver transplants	4
Range pitting projects	375 acres
Intensive irrigation enhancements	796 acres; 2,640 feet pipe; 11 rock sills; 1 headgate
Herbicide application for weed control	257 acres
Biological weed control with bug releases	1,670 released
Intensive livestock/forage reserve grazing	128,358 acres
Water guzzlers installed	2

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 recreational opportunities for the public.

We hope this SHP annual report provides the general public, interested constituents, landowners, partners, and cooperators with meaningful and useful information relative to habitat projects completed locally and on a statewide basis. Without their cooperation, input, collaboration and support, and the support of WGFC and WGFD Administrators and State elected officials, 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>.