

2012 Annual Report Strategic Habitat Plan Accomplishments



**Aquatic Habitat
Terrestrial Habitat
Habitat and Access Maintenance
Lands Administration
Information, Education and Publication Branches
Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative**

Wyoming Game & Fish Department

April 2013

*Conserving Wildlife
Serving People*



Wyoming Game and Fish Commission 2012 Strategic Habitat Plan

Habitat Vision

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department is the steward of all Wyoming's wildlife, dedicated to the conservation of sustainable, functional ecosystems capable of supporting wildlife populations at least as healthy, abundant and diverse as they were at the dawn of the 21st century. The WGFD will promote a holistic approach to habitat management, integrating management and various land uses through collaborative efforts with the general public, conservation partners, private landowners and land management agencies. The WGFD will increase public awareness of the need for managing for quality wildlife habitat today to help ensure healthy and abundant wildlife populations in the future. Wyoming Game and Fish Commission lands will be managed to emphasize and maintain wildlife habitat and public access values for which they were obtained.

Mission

Promote and maintain the availability of high quality habitat to sustain and enhance wildlife populations in the future.

Goals

Goal 1. Conserve and manage wildlife habitats that are crucial for maintaining terrestrial and aquatic wildlife populations for the present and future.

Goal 2. Enhance, improve and manage priority wildlife habitats that have been degraded.

Goal 3. Increase wildlife-based recreation through habitat enhancements that maintain or increase productivity of wildlife.

Goal 4. Increase public awareness of wildlife habitat issues and the critical connection between healthy habitat and abundant wildlife populations.

Goal 5. Promote collaborative habitat management efforts with the general public, conservation partners, private landowners and land management agencies.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AHAB – Aquatic Habitat Biologist
AIPA – Area Improvement Project Agreement
AMA – Agricultural Management Assistance
AMP – Allotment management plan
AUM – Animal Unit Month
BPS – Budget Planning System
BEHI – Bank Erosion Hazard Index
BLM – Bureau of Land Management
BNF – Bighorn National Forest
BOR – Bureau of Reclamation
BOW – Bowhunters of Wyoming
BTNF – Bridger-Teton National Forest
CCRP – Continuous Conservation Reserve Program
CE – Conservation Easement
CMR – Cokeville Meadows Refuge
CRM – Coordinated Resource Management
CPR – Conservation Reserve Program
EA – Environmental Assessment
EIS – Environmental Impact Statement
EQIP – Environmental Quality Incentive Program
FSA – Farm Services Agency
GIS – Geographic Information System
GPS – Global Positioning System
GVID – Greybull Valley Irrigation District
HEB – Habitat Extension Biologist
I&E – Information and Education
JIO – Jonah Interagency Office
JCWPD - Johnson County Weed and Pest District
L-D – Live-Dead
LCWP – Lincoln County Weed and Pest
LD CD – Lake DeSmet Conservation District
LSRCD – Little Snake River Conservation District
MDF – Mule Deer Foundation
MIM – Multiple Indicator Monitoring
NEPA – National Environmental Policy Act
NHD – National Hydrography Dataset
NRCS – Natural Resources Conservation Service
NWR – National Wildlife Refuge
OSLI – Office of State Lands and Investments
PAA – Public Access Area
PAPA – Pinedale Anticline Project Area
PAPO – Pinedale Anticline Project Office
PIT – Passive inductive transducer
RMEF – Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
RMP – Resource Management Plan
ROD – Record of Decision
SAFE – State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement
SCCD – Sublette County Conservation District
SCWPD – Sublette County Weed and Pest District

SEO – State Engineers Office
SERCD – Saratoga-Encampment-Rawlins Conservation District
SGI – Sage Grouse Initiative
SHP – Strategic Habitat Plan
THB – Terrestrial Habitat Biologist
TNC – The Nature Conservancy
TSS – Teton Science School
TU – Trout Unlimited
UCC – Utah Conservation Corps
UCWP – Uinta County Weed and Pest District
USFS – US Forest Service
USFWS – US Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS – US Geological Survey
UW – University of Wyoming
VIT – Vaginal Implant Transmitter
WFARP – Wyoming Front Aspen Restoration Project
WGBGLC – Wyoming Governor’s Big Game License Coalition
WGFC – Wyoming Game & Fish Commission
WGFD – Wyoming Game & Fish Department
WHAM – Watershed Habitat Assessment Methodology
WHMA – Wildlife Habitat Management Area
WIA – Walk-in Area
WID – Watershed Improvement District
WLCI – Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative
WMA – Wildlife Management Area
WRP – Wetland Reserve Program
WSA – Wilderness Study Area
WSGALT – Wyoming Stock Growers Agricultural Land Trust
WWDC – Wyoming Water Development Commission
WWNRT – Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust
WWSF – Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation

PERSONNEL DIRECTLY IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGIC HABITAT PLAN

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INTRODUCTION

Maintaining sustainable fish and wildlife populations in the face of complex and competing demands is one of the fundamental challenges facing the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission (WGFC) and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD). Biologists, conservationists, land managers, and private landowners have long recognized that habitat is one of the keys to answering the challenge. However, except for ownership and management of WGFC-held lands, the WGFC has no direct statutory authority for protecting, restoring or enhancing wildlife habitat. Since the management of wildlife is inseparable from the habitat that sustains it, we must work in concert with private landowners and public land managers, conservation organizations, elected officials, local, state and federal governmental agencies and the public. These partnerships are crucial to maintaining abundant wildlife now and into the future.

The WGFD has positioned itself to address habitat issues by assigning habitat-related duties to personnel in multiple Divisions and regions and developing, in 2001, its first Strategic Habitat Plan (SHP). The SHP was subsequently updated, revised and accepted by the WGFC in 2009 (see inside cover). The mission of the revised SHP is to “Promote and maintain the availability of high quality habitat to sustain and enhance wildlife populations in the future.” Our goals can be simply and generally summarized as: maintaining high quality existing habitats (goal 1), addressing issues on degraded habitats (goal 2), remembering the value of local enhancements for fish and wildlife populations (goal 3), communicating effectively with the public on habitat issues (goal 4), and working effectively with a myriad of partners (goal 5). An important component of this SHP and WGFD habitat efforts is the recognition of wildlife habitats that are “crucial” for wildlife under goal 1 and those habitats that have been degraded and have potential for “enhancement” under goal 2. Crucial priority areas for maintaining habitat values and enhancement priority areas for addressing habitat issues were identified when the SHP was revised in 2009. The priority areas also include WGFC managed lands.

This is the eleventh annual report for the WGFC, elected officials, governmental agencies, the public and our conservation partners since the first SHP report in 2001. The purpose of this report is to highlight the 2012 activities and SHP accomplishments of the Terrestrial Habitat, Aquatic Habitat, and Habitat and Access programs of the WGFD, as well as associated portions of the Lands Administration, Water Management, Information, Education and Publications and the Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative (WLCI). It is structured to reflect accomplishments and work activities as they relate to achieving SHP goals, which are referenced in project titles throughout the report. Many other WGFD personnel from all Division and Sections were involved in many aspects of the habitat program. Their involvement is critical to accomplishments reported herein.

The entire SHP along with priority areas and objectives can be viewed on the WGFD website at <http://wgfd.wyo.gov/web2011/wildlife-1000651.aspx>. This will guide our efforts and direct funds over the next several years. For additional information, please contact any of the personnel listed. Also, please share this report with anyone interested in the Department and Commission’s habitat efforts.

HABITAT PROGRAM EXPENDITURES

I. Approximate WGFD trust, fish passage and non-recurring funds (figures rounded to the nearest \$1,000) expended for on-the-ground projects primarily directed at implementation of SHP goals and management of WGFC managed lands during calendar year 2012 (these figures **do not** include personnel salaries, supplies, materials, equipment used for routine WGFD maintenance and operation and WGFC property tax and lease payments):

Department Funds Expended on SHP Goals:

\$ 3,145,000.00

II. Non-department funds expended for implementation of SHP goals for calendar year 2012 from or in collaboration with various sources including: a) Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resources Trust Fund (WWNRT), b) USDA Farm Bill federal government funds, c) other federal government funding programs, d) other state and local government funding sources, e) nongovernmental organizations, f) Wyoming Governors Big Game License Coalition (WGBGLC), g) private landowner contributions (including in-kind), h) corporations and businesses, i) private donors, and Wyoming State Legislative Capitol Construction funds:

Non-Department Funds Expended on SHP Goals:

\$ 6,774,000.00

Grand Total for SHP Goals:

\$ 9,919,000.00

The WGFD applied funding from outside sources amounting to approximately **\$2.15** for each WGFD dollar expended for on-the-ground fish and wildlife habitat activities. This outside funding is critical for implementing the Strategic Habitat Plan and conserving our wildlife resources. Overall, personnel directly involved in implementing SHP goals oversaw spending of approximately **\$7,551,000** of WGFD regular maintenance and operating funds, State Wildlife Grants from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and WGFD Trust Fund monies. This figure includes wages, benefits, equipment operation expenses, supplies and on-the-ground improvement material expenses allocated as follows: approximately **54%** for personnel, which includes habitat inventories, monitoring, project contact oversight, project design and implementation and promoting collaborative habitat management efforts with the general public, conservation partners, private landowners and land management agencies. Without the dedication and passion of field personnel, none of these habitat projects would happen. The remainder of the funding was allocated as follows: **4%** for vehicles and heavy equipment and **42%** for materials and supplies. Personnel overseeing the WGFD Education, Information and Publications Programs spent approximately **12.5%** of their time in 2012 on SHP goal 4 "habitat" activities totaling approximately **\$271,000** of regular WGFD maintenance and operating funds. Information and education are critical for maintaining current and long-term future, social, political and financial support for wildlife habitat program related efforts. Lastly, personnel within the Lands Administration Branch conduct annual WGFC property rights monitoring, property right acquisition and disposal, oversee payment of WGFC property taxes in each county and lease payments to the Office of State Lands and Investments (OSLI) among others. Property taxes paid to counties by the WGFD in 2012 totaled approximately **\$103,350**. These taxes included WGFC owned state offices, fish hatcheries, bird farms, houses, Wildlife Habitat Management Areas (WHMA), and Public Access Areas (PAA). During 2012, WGFD costs for leases totaled approximately **\$415,550**. The majority of lease payments were made to the OSLI involving State Land leases associated with WHMAs and PAAs.

HABITAT PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS: THE NUMBERS

Those activities resulting in on-the-ground accomplishments, promotion of collaborative habitat efforts, and information and education efforts directed toward the habitat program during calendar year 2012 are summarized below:

Activity	2012 Accomplishments	* Average Accomplishments
Detailed stream assessments	8 streams totaling 11,107 ft	7 streams totaling 13,479 ft
Riparian habitat assessments	26 on over 33 miles of streams or wetlands	11 on 65 miles of stream or wetlands
Watershed stream assessments	34 on 155 miles	23 assessments on 91 miles
Stream bank enhancements	12 totaling 5,860 ft	8 totaling 7,012 ft
Instream structures	24 installed	70 installed
Instream flow segments	14 on 61 stream miles	6 on 23 stream miles
Fish screens installed	6	3
Fish passage structures installed	8	7
Fish passage upstream miles	65 miles connected	166 miles connected
Fish passage structures monitored, maintained	15 monitored, 12 maintained	10 monitored, 7 maintained
Project monitoring - detailed stream channel	1 totaling 1,850 ft	3 totaling 10,630 ft
Management monitoring - detailed riparian	19 totaling 4,194 ft	25 totaling 10,534 ft
Project monitoring - photo, other	39 streams or sites	27 streams or sites
Aspen/cottonwood browse monitoring	41 sites	34 sites
Stream habitat monitoring	57 sites	57 sites
Fish tracking or entrainment investigations	6	5
Beaver transplanted	1	18
Riparian habitat protection, enhancement, management	13 projects on 174 acres	18 projects on 484 acres
Private landowner contacts	281 contacts yielding 101 projects	290 contacts yielding 128 projects
Technical assistance requests	213	292
Conservation easements being worked on and coordinated with partners	11 easements totaling 12,189 acres	12 easements totaling 53,553 acres
Public Fishing Access Projects	24 totaling 24 miles	14 totaling 14 miles
Public Hunting Access Projects	8 totaling 4922 acres	5 totaling 2,496 acres
BLM RMP or USFS Cooperator Status	12 projects	5 projects
Trees or shrubs planted	6,081	8,765
Herbicide treatments to control noxious or invasive weeds primarily including cheatgrass, prickly pear, Russian olive and salt cedar	80,259 acres	24,843 acres
Upland grass, forb and food plot seeding	2,104 acres	2,490 acres
Mechanical tree removal mainly conifers from aspen stands; juniper, Russian olive and salt cedar	3,691 acres	5,821 acres
Mowing, chopping, and Lawson aerator treatments mainly in sagebrush and grassland communities and on meadows	385 acres	1,943 acres
Water wells drilled	2	4
Water guzzlers or water tanks installed	18	15

Activity	2012 Accomplishments	* Average Accomplishments
Water pipelines installed	61,600 ft	61,244 ft
Spring developments	6	4
Fences installed or modified to manage treatment areas, facilitate livestock grazing management, and address wildlife movements	40 miles	39 miles
Wetland development or major renovation	5 projects totaling 75 acres	7 projects totaling 129 acres
Prescribed burns	3,395 acres	14,454 acres
USDA Farm Bill Program contract involvement	207 contracts	185 contracts
Livestock Grazing Management Plans	13 plans, 178,475 acres	18 plans, 255,181 acres
Upland habitat inventory on a landscape evaluation scale	336,724 acres	2,718,663 acres
Upland and rangeland inventories on an intensive scale	69,757 acres	337,200 acres
Upland vegetation/habitat treatment monitoring sites	167	183
Annual vegetation production/utilization sites	158	133
Field cooperative research projects	11	9
WGFC managed lands intensive livestock/forage reserve/meadow rejuvenation and grazing administered	84,563 acres on 19 areas	112,153 acres on 10 areas
WGFC managed lands fence maintained	644 miles	612 miles
WGFC managed lands irrigated	5,838 acres	3,814 acres
WGFC managed lands noxious weed control	2,746 acres	1,201 acres
WGFC managed lands water control structures	127 installed	44 installed
WGFC managed lands meadow mowing	560 acres	232 acres
WGFC managed lands farming contracts	2,643 acres	2,128 acres
WGFC property right monitoring	94,451 acres	81,291 acres
Number of funding sources/contracts/grants administered	136	137
Major information and education efforts	54	110
Funding applications prepared for other entities	64	39
Unique items include monitoring 850 acres of weed treatments, installing a Baggs Highway deer underpass, helicopter dropping 75,000 lbs of aspen for beaver, collaborating in Pinedale Region for post-Fontenelle fire management, monitoring 136 reclaimed wells for compliance, and participating in the Rock Creek noxious weed CRM.	6	

*Averages calculated over a two to six year period between calendar years 2007 and 2012.

A Huge Thank You to Our Partners!

We believe habitat is one of the keys to maintaining and sustaining wild and healthy populations of aquatic and terrestrial wildlife. Without the support and partnerships of private landowners, public land managers, conservation groups, elected officials and the public, these habitat management and enhancement projects would not be possible. We greatly appreciate the financial assistance and project support and look forward to continue working with you to ***'Conserve Wildlife and Serve People'*** in the years ahead.

The following lists major funding partners and approximate amounts the WGFD received and/or that WGFD personnel were heavily involved with in the oversight or verification of expenditures during 2012. This is not a complete list, nor does it reflect all partner contributions and we apologize for anyone who may have been inadvertently missed.

Funding Partner	Approximate amount for 2012 (rounded to nearest \$100)
Federal USDA Farm Bill Program Funds (NRCS and FSA)	\$3,212,200.00
Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resources Trust Board	\$1,808,600.00
Bureau of Land Management	\$324,700.00
Private Landowners	\$308,500.00
Wyoming State Legislative Capital Facilities Funds to WGFC	\$220,400.00
Bureau of Reclamation	\$109,000.00
Peabody Energy	\$88,900.00
Wyoming Governor's Big Game License Coalition	\$79,900.00
Sage Grouse Local Working Group – State of Wyoming Funds	\$54,600.00
Wyoming Governor's Sensitive Species Fund	\$47,600.00
Pheasants Forever	\$44,000.00
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Private Lands Program	\$42,500.00
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation	\$41,000.00
The Nature Conservancy	\$40,500.00
U.S. Forest Service	\$40,000.00
Washakie County Weed and Pest District	\$27,000.00
Converse County Conservation District	\$22,500.00
Hot Springs County Weed and Pest District	\$22,300.00
Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality 319 Funds from EPA	\$22,000.00
Park County Weed and Pest District	\$21,500.00
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Fish Passage	\$19,200.00
Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative	\$17,000.00
National Park Service	\$12,900.00
Devon Energy	\$12,000.00
Water for Wildlife Foundation	\$11,500.00
Mule Deer Foundation	\$10,800.00
Converse County Weed and Pest District	\$10,000.00
Ducks Unlimited	\$10,000.00
Pinedale Anticline Project Office (BLM)	\$10,000.00
Trout Unlimited	\$10,000.00
Muley Fanatics of Wyoming	\$9,500.00
Teton County Conservation District	\$8,100.00
Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation	\$7,500.00
Wyoming Office of State Lands and Investments	\$7,400.00
Bighorn County Weed and Pest District	\$5,000.00

Funding Partner	Approximate amount for 2012 (rounded to nearest \$100)
National Wild Turkey Federation	\$5,000.00
Platte County Weed and Pest District	\$5,000.00
Shoshone Conservation District	\$5,000.00
Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory	\$4,000.00
Lake DeSmet Conservation District	\$3,100.00
Thunder Basin Prairie Grassland Ecosystem Association	\$2,900.00
Wyoming Department of Agriculture	\$2,500.00
Northern Plains River Restoration Initiative	\$2,100.00
Laramie Rivers Conservation District	\$2,000.00
Platte County Resource District	\$1,500.00
Teton Science School	\$1,400.00
Bighorn County Conservation District	\$1,000.00
Grand Total	\$6,774,100.00

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

This report can be viewed on the WGFD website at: <http://wgfd.wyo.gov/web2011/wildlife-1000708.aspx>

AQUATIC HABITAT PROGRAM

Staffing for the aquatic habitat program was unchanged in 2012. It consisted of 12 permanent full time employees: six regional aquatic habitat biologists (AHABs), a statewide fish passage coordinator, a Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative (WLCI) coordinator, an aquatic habitat supervisor, an aquatic habitat program manager, a water management supervisor and a water management instream flow biologist. Two at-will contract employees worked for the section: one in Cody assisted the fish passage coordinator primarily collecting and compiling information about passage obstructions; and one in Casper, determining monitoring needs for Bates Creek watershed vegetation treatments and developing projects to remedy channel head cuts in the Bates Hole area southwest of Casper. Finally, seasonal biologist technicians assisted in the Lander, Laramie, and Jackson Regions.

During calendar year 2012, the aquatic habitat section was involved in **50 projects** involving funding from the Game and Fish trust fund, Department fish passage, Director's planning funds, the WWNRT, the USFWS, or Landowner Incentive Program funding. These sources provided over **\$1.2 million** toward on-the-ground expenditures for aquatic projects. WGFD aquatic habitat dollars spent on contracts or grants in calendar year 2012 totaled **nearly \$500,000**. The various partners and their contributions toward these projects are highlighted in the regional sections of this report.

Regional AHABs and statewide personnel also worked on SHP actions not directly related to funded projects. These actions included habitat protection, inventory and assessment work, monitoring project function and habitat response, and habitat education efforts and training. Section personnel spend tremendous time planning, coordinating and developing habitat project funding applications throughout the year. These projects and the funding oversight may be led by the WGFD or a partner.

Fish passage efforts are highlighted in the statewide section of this report. Of additional note, Trout Unlimited (TU) received a grant for installation of the Upper Sunshine Diversion fish ladder on the Greybull River, and a new grant agreement for the North Fork Canal fish screen on the North Fork of the Shoshone River. WGFD obtained two vertical traveling screens from the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) Hydraulics Lab in Denver, CO. Screen efficiency and durability were tested in the lab under various conditions and will now include actual field use. The screens are scheduled to be a permanent part of the Timber Creek screening project within the Greybull River watershed. This is a cooperative project with TU and private landowners.

A challenge for the aquatic habitat section is lack of personnel capacity in the Casper and Cody Regions even before the current budgetary concerns. The Casper aquatic habitat biologist position was lost to the agency during the state government hiring freeze of 2009-2010. The Cody AHAB position was lost due to being reclassified into a fish passage coordinator in recognition of the importance of this work statewide. While the establishment of an annual contract employee in Casper has provided project help, the ability to establish long-term relationships with landowners and managers and develop long-range projects is hampered without a permanent aquatic position. There are numerous opportunities and needs to benefit the fishery resources of the Casper and Cody Regions that we remain unable to achieve due to lack of permanent biologists.

In-Stream Flow Fishing Articles (Goal 4) - Tom Annear

Four educational articles were written and appeared in the WGFD's *Wyoming Wildlife News* publication. These articles direct readers to instream flow segments, make them aware of

department actions in the instream flow program, and encourage support for instream flow water rights in general. Articles focused on introductions to the X-Stream angling program (2 articles), Sand Creek, and Roaring Fork Little Snake.

Bear Creek Diversion Fish Passage (Goal 2) – Lewis Stahl

Bear Creek is a tributary to the East Fork Wind River and located on the Spence and Moriarity Wildlife Management Area (WMA) near Dubois in Fremont County. In 2010 and 2011, the Bear Creek Diversion fish passage project consisting of two instream structures, new water control headgates, and a fish screen with bypass was completed. The 2012 irrigation season demonstrated that irrigators needed to divert more water into the irrigation ditch than previously anticipated due to percolation loss and the head needed to meet irrigation needs at the end of the ditch. This resulted in the fish screen being too small and the screen could not operate properly when overtopped by water. In late 2012, the 22 inch diameter by 60 inch long fish screen was replaced with a new 30 inch diameter by 60 inch long screen (Figure 1). The new screen is rated to freely pass up to 13.3 cfs compared to the 8.4 cfs rating of the previous screen. The smaller screen was removed and stored for use at an appropriately sized site in the future.



Figure 1. The Bear Creek fish screen was replaced with a larger screen of the same type when it was discovered that the ditch required more water than anticipated due to percolation and needed head to reach the end of the ditch.

Clear Creek Watershed Fish Passage Inventory (Goal 2) – Erin Sobel, Tim Paul, Patrick Geraghty, and Lewis Stahl

To aid in prioritizing statewide fish passage efforts, a database was developed in the mid-2000's to house information on various obstructions and diversion in waterways throughout the state. Field verification of potential obstructions has constituted an ongoing effort in developing the inventory. In 2012, efforts focused on the Clear Creek and the Paintrock Creek watersheds.

The Clear Creek watershed is located in northwest Johnson County and southeast Sheridan County stretching from Buffalo to the Montana border, and includes federal, state, and private land ownership. This watershed was prioritized for fish passage inventory because it is home to a diverse community of cool and cold water fish species and there is much potential to expand connectivity over many stream miles given the many irrigation diversions. The stream was identified as both a crucial and enhancement priority area in the WGFD Strategic Habitat Plan (SHP) and over the last several years block grants have been provided to the NRCS and landowners for multiple cooperative fish passage projects in the Clear Creek watershed. The Kendrick Dam fish bypass channel was completed in 2010, reconnecting 36 miles of Clear Creek. Points of diversion, primarily along Clear Creek's main channel, were identified during initial compilation of diversion information from various sources. In 2012, data were collected on 13 diversions bringing the total inventoried to 72 (Figure 2). Additional diversions were identified using improved geographic information system (GIS) mapping processes and assistance from local landowners. A GIS layer of canals and ditches, developed from the National Hydrography Dataset (NHD), was cross referenced with the Wyoming State Engineers Office (SEO) data to identify an additional 109 irrigation diversions to be inventoried (Figure 3).

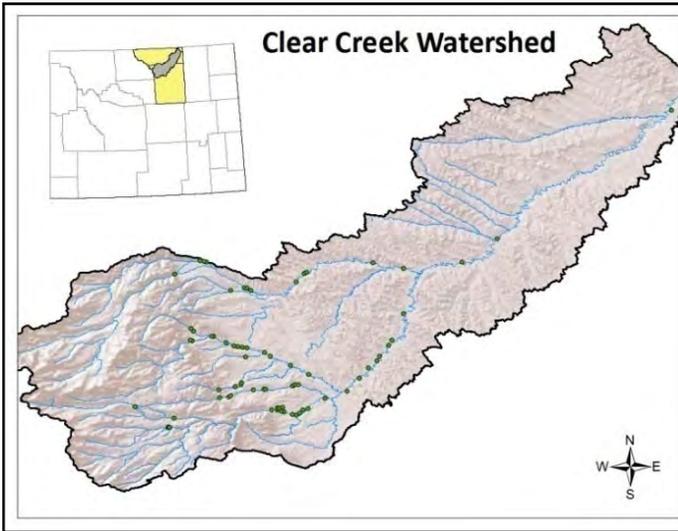


Figure 2. Green dots represent 72 diversions within the Clear Creek watershed where fish passage and screening data were collected.

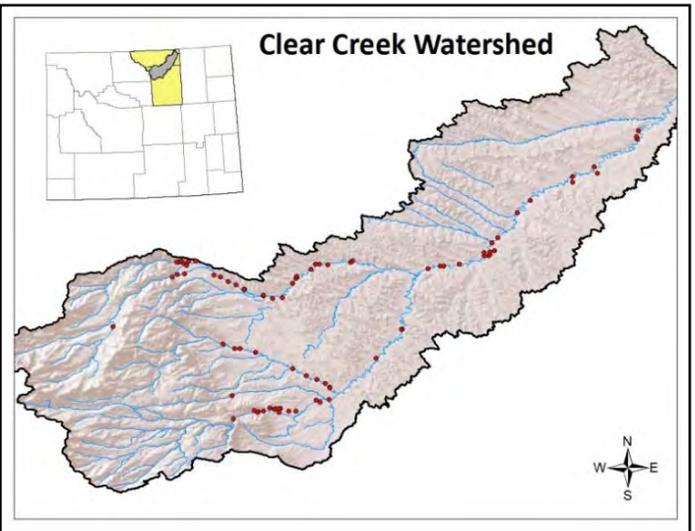


Figure 3. Red dots represent 109 additional diversions within the Clear Creek Drainage needing inventory, according to data from the National Hydrography Dataset and the Wyoming State Engineer's Office.

Water Management (Goal 1) - Tom Annear

Final actions were taken to purchase 25 shares and lease 80 shares of storage water in Bump Sullivan Reservoir near Yoder. Negotiations continued toward developing a long-term lease for water in DeSmet Reservoir. The Water Rights Management team met several times to identify a viable resolution for dealing with the commission's water right in Douglas Fishing Lake. At year's end this matter remained unresolved though a list of realistic solutions was developed.

Paintrock Creek Watershed Fish Passage Inventory (Goal 2) - Erin Sobel and Lewis Stahl

The Paintrock Creek Watershed is in the southeast portion of Bighorn County near Hyattville and includes federal, state, and private land ownership. Paintrock Creek, Medicine Lodge Creek, and Alkali Creek are the main waterways making up this sub-watershed of the Nowood River. Cross checking known diversions with the NHD and the Wyoming State Engineer's office points of diversion indicated at least 33 irrigation diversions within the Paint Rock watershed (Figure 4). Most diversions are located on private land at lower elevations. In 2012, data were collected on 12 diversions bringing the total inventoried to 21. A twenty-second site could not be completed because of denied access. Geographic and landownership maps were utilized to

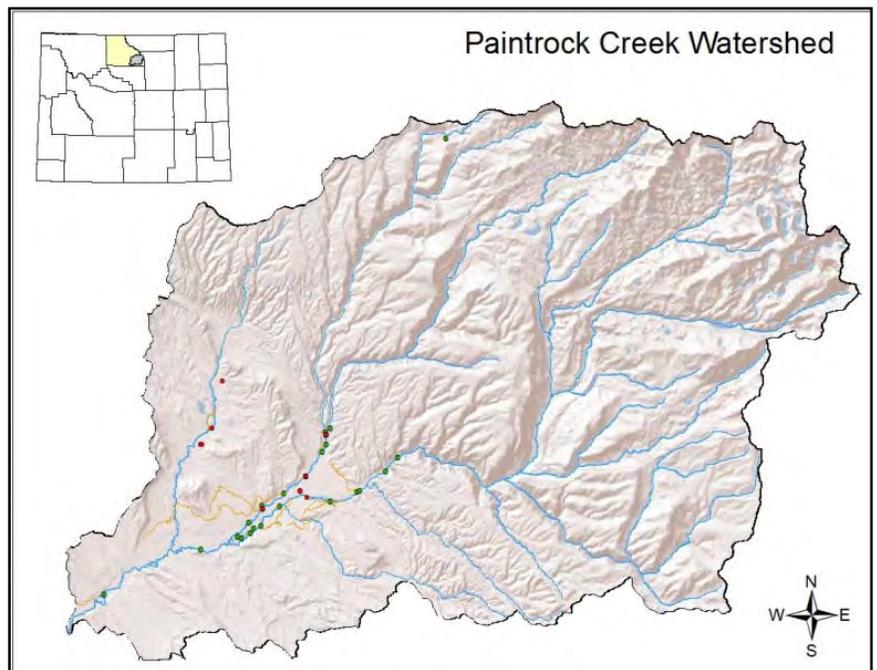


Figure 4. Green dots represent 21 diversions within the Paintrock Creek watershed where fish passage and screening data were collected, and the red dots represent 12 known diversions still needing inventory.

identify landownership for the remaining diversions in preparation for continued access requests and inventory efforts.

Upper Sunshine Diversion Fish Passage (Goal 2) – Lewis Stahl

The Upper Sunshine Diversion is located on the Greybull River near Meeteetse in Park County. The Greybull Valley Irrigation District (GVID) and the Wyoming Water Development Commission (WWDC) replaced this large, concrete irrigation diversion, and TU, WGFD, WWNRT, and nearly a dozen total funding partners cooperated with GVID to add a step pool fish ladder (Figure 5).



Figure 5. The upper Sunshine Diversion fish ladder during post-construction testing in 2012.

The project was completed in spring 2012, except for a few items such as a small bypass gate and a working electronics system to run all the gates automatically. A low water year resulted in a call on the river so the diversion and ladder were not used during the 2012 irrigation season except to test the system. Everything is expected to be operational and running during the 2013 irrigation season.

Design and Development of Fish Passage (Goal 2) – Lewis Stahl

The Thunderhead Diversion is located on Bear Creek downstream of the Bear Creek Diversion but still within the Spence and Moriarity WMA near Dubois in Fremont County. This upstream passage and canal screening project is intended to benefit Yellowstone cutthroat trout while also improving irrigation water delivery to wildlife forage areas on the WMA. It is located several miles downstream of the previous diversion rehabilitation and screening project at the Bear Creek Diversion. In fall 2012, a consultant engineering firm was selected and toured the site to discuss issues and goals. Preliminary design options with associated costs and benefits were provided in December 2012. Final designs are scheduled for completion in January 2013.

The Harmony Ditch upstream fish passage and canal screening project is located on the Nowood River near the town of Manderson in Bighorn County. Studies completed in 2006 and 2007, found 16 species of fish being entrained at an estimated rate of 55,415 fish annually. Entrained fish included four species of greatest conservation need: burbot, flathead chub, mountain sucker, and sauger. Preliminary designs were nearly complete in March 2011 when the contracted engineering firm reorganized and no longer worked on fish passage. The project was put on hold until products produced during the original contract were obtained, the remaining contract was cancelled, and new consultant engineers could be contracted. The new design engineers were finally selected and toured the site to discuss issues and goals. At the end of December, WGFD was processing the consultant's contract and final designs are expected in 2013.

The Encampment / Platte Valley Diversion on the Encampment River, is approximately 1/2 mile upstream of its confluence with the Platte River, near the town of Encampment in Albany County.

Fish movement studies proved the diversion is a barrier to large numbers of Platte River brown and rainbow trout migrating upstream to headwater habitats. Large numbers of fish are also entrained into the irrigation canal. Preliminary design options developed by consultant engineers were discussed with the landowner board and irrigation cooperative members in March 2012, but final agreements have not been reached.

Instream Flow Water Rights (Goal 1) - Mike Robertson and Tom Annear

Fourteen new filings for instream flow water rights were made in early 2012 on four streams in the Snake River drainage. Applications were prepared using data collected from study sites on Little Muddy Creek (2.0 miles), Littlefield Creek (7.0 miles), McKinney Creek (1.9 miles), Muddy Creek (5.4 miles), Dell Creek (0.25 miles), Granite Creek (8.5 miles), Lower Hoback River (6.3 miles), Upper Hoback River (1.8 miles), Willow Creek (8.3 miles), Lower Cliff Creek (2.3 miles), Upper Cliff Creek (6.2 miles), North Fork Fisherman Creek (4.7 miles), and Shoal Creek (6.4 miles).

Four new instream flow studies were initiated that focused on native Yellowstone cutthroat trout habitat in the Bighorn River drainage including Soldier, Buckskin Ed, Cedar, and Trout creeks (Figure 6).

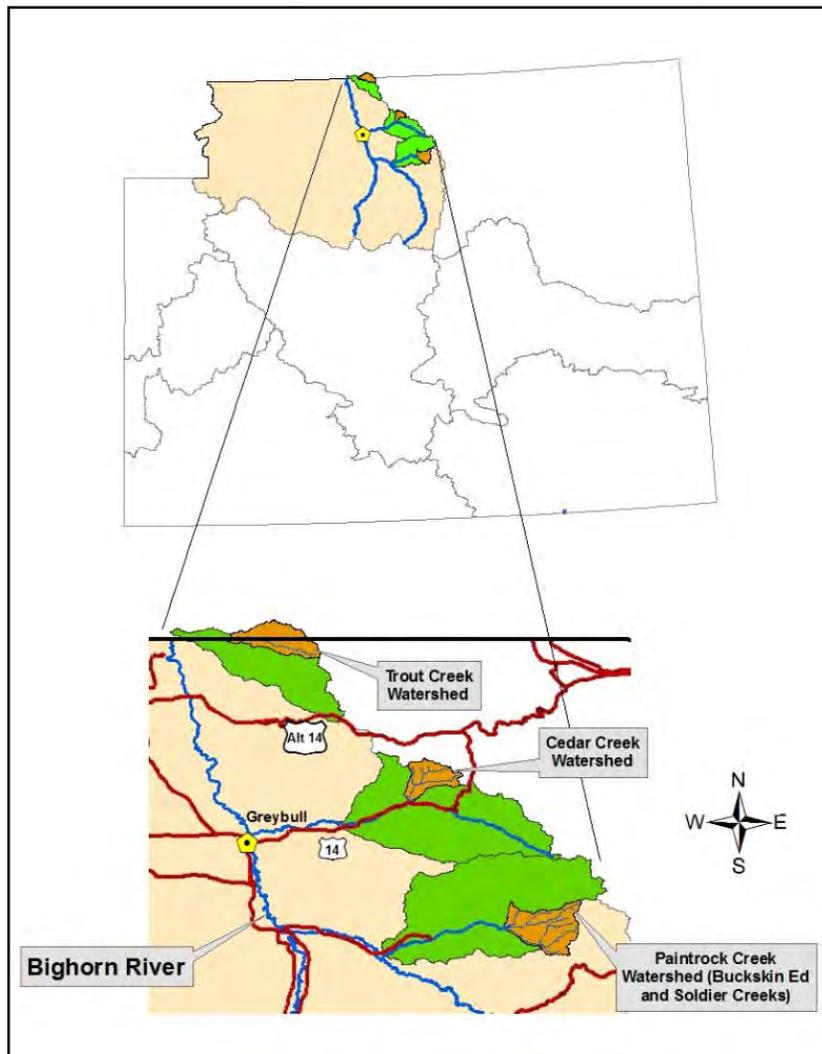


Figure 6. Instream flow studies were initiated on native Yellowstone cutthroat trout streams in the Bighorn River drainage.

HABITAT AND ACCESS MAINTENANCE BRANCH

The habitat and access maintenance program in 2012 consisted of four regional supervisors, three coordinators, one statewide supervisor, six crew leaders, three specialists, branch chief, assistant branch chief, and seven temporary positions stationed across the state.

The branch is responsible for the management of WGF D managed lands that include 37 WHMA, 192 PAA, and 22 feedgrounds. In addition, there is a statewide crew that assists with habitat development projects. The WHMAs are managed for specific wildlife habitat purposes and are

included within the SHP. The branch incorporates specific objectives and strategies from the SHP into regional work schedules.

As part of the SHP, the branch manages and maintains approximately 413,000 acres, 95 wetlands, 140 miles of ditches/drains, 5,100 acres of irrigated meadows, 2,400 acres of farmland, 250 acres of food plots, and more than 1,000 miles of fence for wildlife habitat purposes. To assist hunters and fisherman, another 1,100 miles of road, 390 parking areas, 67 boat ramps, 25 docks, 198 outhouses, and more than 6,000 signs are maintained.

During 2012, the branch also worked on other habitat development projects, including sagebrush rejuvenation, guzzler developments, meadow improvements, wetland developments and riparian projects. Included in this were the involvement and administration of one project involving the WGFD Trust Fund, two projects involving capitol facilities, and four projects involving the WWNRT and five other funding sources. These projects provided \$347,288 in on-the-ground project expenditures. The habitat development projects are highlighted in the regional sections of this report.

INFORMATION, EDUCATION AND PUBLICATIONS BRANCHES

Wyoming Wildlife Magazine

Wyoming Wildlife magazine is one of the department's oldest and most important communications tools. This monthly, four-color publication has a subscription of approximately 35,000 with a pass-along rate much higher. The publication focuses on natural history, habitat, and other wildlife issues in Wyoming. The following feature and news articles dealt with habitat in 2012:

- *January* - Mighty mite: pronghorns and their habitat needs; Travels of trout: aquatic habitat.
- *February* - Arctic snows: lesser snow geese and habitat relation; Conservation easement (CE) protects migration bottleneck; Kleenburn mine recognized for reclamation.
- *March* - Striking the new balance: mule deer and habitat; Cooperative project provides water for sage grouse; Habitat and research for sage grouse.
- *May* - A warm welcome: climate, bark beetles, and Wyoming forests; Biologists investigate declining desert minnow; Gray Reef releases water to clean trout habitat; New Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) initiative focuses on grasslands and wetlands.
- *June* - Another dry run: drought and habitat; The long trail: pronghorn migration; Biologists gauge impact of pine beetles.
- *July* - Rednecks: red-necked grebe ecology and habitat; Waves of grain: cereal grains and prairie ducks; Plans for Platte Valley mule deer habitat; X-stream anglers and Wyoming's instream flows.
- *August* - Water in the desert: Muddy Creek wetlands; Return of the Mile: Miracle Mile recovers from drought; Leave waterholes for wildlife.
- *September* - On little cat's feet: bobcat ecology and habitat; Tall cotton: cottonwood gallery forests; The lethal days of summer: summer cover for game birds; Farm Bill programs help ranchers through drought; Survey shows farmer support for conservation programs.
- *October* - On the ragged edge: winter and wildlife habitat; Going with the flow: Instream flow; How do beetle-killed pines affect elk and hunters?
- *November* - The beginning of the end: elk habitat.
- *December* - Irresistible force: bison in winter; Like cats and dogs: interaction between wolves and lions; Ocean Lake ponds drained to improve habitat; Federal funds expand protection for 100,000 acres of wetlands.

Wyoming Wildlife News

The WGFD also produces a bimonthly newsprint publication—*Wyoming Wildlife News*—available free at license selling agents and other outlets across the state. This publication is primarily directed at Wyoming’s hunters and anglers. The following features and news articles dealt with habitat issues in 2012:

- *January-February* - Director’s Opinion on Mule Deer; WGFD addresses declines in Black Hills deer herds; X-Stream Fishing on Pine Creek; Ocean Lake HMA Ponds Drained.
- *March-April* - Study to determine success of highway underpasses: Adventures at Ocean Lake WHMA; Sage grouse projects receive funding; X-Stream Fishing on Roaring Fork Little Snake.
- *May-June* - Director’s Opinion on Fish Passage: Hoback moose research expanded; Elk movement monitored in beetle-killed forests.
- *July-August* - Habitat partnership plan to benefit mule deer; Red Shirt Journal: Think Habitat; X-Stream Angling on Sand Creek.
- *September-October* - How has the drought affected your wildlife?; Drought conditions affecting pronghorn.
- *November-December* - Keep mule deer wild; X-Stream Angling on Bear Creek.

Regional Information and Education Specialists

The WGFD has an Information and Education (I&E) Specialist assigned to each of the eight regional offices around the state. Each Regional I&E Specialist is responsible for communicating with the public in his or her respective region about important wildlife issues, much of which includes habitat-related messages. These activities are reported in the Regional narrative report section of this document.

Video and Television

The WGFD has two in-house videographers who work on a variety of projects designed to educate and inform audiences about wildlife issues in Wyoming, including a weekly news spot broadcast on two TV stations. New internet outlets are making these videos available more widely than ever before.

- X-Stream Angler (3 videos: Sand Creek, East Fork Wind River, Middle Fork Powder River).
- Uinta Mule Deer: Study Update.
- Bat Survey.
- Platte Valley Draft Plan.
- “Commitment to Habitat” - Announcing WGFD money for Platte Valley habitat work.
- “Habitat in Trouble” - Platte Valley Habitat Tour.
- “Fighting Cheatgrass” - Cheatgrass Spraying at Squaw Mountain near Wheatland.

Habitat-Related Radio Shows

The WGFD also produces a weekly radio show heard on stations across the state.

- *January* - 3rd round of public meetings on Platte Valley Mule Deer Initiative; Sage Grouse projects receive funding.
- *February* - Draft Platte Valley Mule Deer plan now on website.
- *March* - WGFD works on Platte Valley Mule Deer plan following meetings.
- *June* - WGFD announces habitat partnership plan to benefit Platte Valley Mule Deer.
- *August* - Drought conditions affecting pronghorn; Drought hard on wildlife; Natural resource mapping tool to be launched in Wyoming; X-Stream Angler program.
- *December* - Closures noted for WGFD WHMAs.

LANDS ADMINISTRATION BRANCH

During 2012, Lands Administration personnel continued to focus on addressing WGFC objectives involving property rights functions for habitat conservation, public access, and property rights monitoring. Branch personnel worked on a variety of habitat related projects around the state pursuant to the goals and objectives of department regulations, WGFC policies, SHP priority areas, and other administrative directives. Branch performance was greatly enhanced with the addition of a third permanent employee to the staff. Lands Branch personnel continued to work on CEs, special use permits, land exchanges, public access easements, OSLI access acquisitions, and other projects. The Branch continues to receive outstanding support and assistance from local biologists and game wardens in pursuit of all lands projects. Personnel participated on Habitat Technical Advisory Group, Water Rights Team, Wyoming Association of Land Trusts, federal aid property rights audit, and the Snake River Task Force.

Badwater Ranch (Goal 3) – Kerry Olson

Permanent public recreational access was acquired on a portion of the Badwater Ranch in western Natrona County. More than 4,500 acres of private lands along Badwater Creek will be available for public hunting, fishing, hiking and other recreational pursuits following development activities in the spring (Figure 7). The easement, donated by landowner Ace Spratt, will also enhance public access to approximately 5,000 acres of adjacent state and federal lands.



Figure 7. Badwater Ranch Public Access Area.

Conservation Easement Funding (Goal 1) – Butch Parks

WGFD funds were granted to help fund CE and lands acquisitions projects throughout the state. A total of \$388,929 helped fund CEs on eight CE projects sponsored by The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Jackson Hole Land Trust, Wyoming Stock Growers Agricultural Land Trust (WSGALT), and the Wyoming Land Trust. The grants helped to acquire easements on the Double A Ranch, 3 Bar X Ranch, Diamond G Ranch, HF Bar Ranch, Thornock Place, V Ranch, Wunder Ranch, and the 67 Ranch. In addition, \$300,000 was granted to help The Conservation Fund acquire more than 300 acres along the North Platte River near Gray Reef.

Bear Trap Access Easement (Goal 3) – Brian Rognon

Public access to 80 acres on the Beartrap Ranch in Johnson County was acquired for hunting, fishing, hiking, nature study and other recreational purposes. The Beartrap Ranch public access easement was a companion project to a larger CE coordinated by WSGALT. The easement provides access to a quarter-mile stretch of Beartrap Creek, and enhances access to hundreds of acres of adjacent state and federal lands.

Barnes Ranch (Goal 1) – Kerry Olson

Efforts to acquire a CE on approximately 2,000 acres of private lands along Fontenelle Creek



continued in 2012 (Figure 8). Tours of the Barnes Ranch were held for Wyoming Game and Fish Commissioners Klouda and Price, and for WWNRT Board members. Both tours highlighted the importance of habitat values on the ranch, and the importance of adding Barnes Ranch lands to completed CEs on the Diamond H Ranch and the V Cross Cattle Company.

Figure 8. Barnes Ranch CE on Fontenelle Creek.

Deer Creek Public Access Area (Goal 3) – Butch Parks, Brian Rognon

In 1986, the WWDC obtained a permanent public fishing easement on Deer Creek south of Glenrock as part of the mitigation efforts for the Deer Creek Reservoir. The WWDC never constructed the reservoir, but the fishing, road, and parking area easements still exist. The WWDC agreed to allow the WGFD to develop the site into a public access area. Branch personnel completed necessary requirements to develop and administer the area.

Fall Creek Public Access Area (Goal 3) – Butch Parks

High Meadow Ranch Property Inc., granted an easement to a lot in the Barger Subdivision near Pinedale. Access to the lot provides access to fishing opportunities on an adjacent section of State Trust Land. The state land includes approximately one-half mile of Pole Creek and almost two miles of Fall Creek.

Middle Fork Powder River – Ellis (Goal 3) – Butch Parks

A permanent public fishing easement of approximately one-half mile along the Middle Fork Powder River was acquired from the Ellis Sheep Company with Voluntary Public Access – Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program. The Program administered by the NRCS provided one-time funds to acquire public access throughout the state. The easement also provides connectivity to several miles of stream on public lands.

Ocean Lake (Goal 3) – Kerry Olson, Butch Parks

Utilizing the Voluntary Public Access – Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program administered by the NRCS, public access to 118 acres of private lands adjacent to the Ocean Lake WHMA was acquired in 2012.

Fish Creek Flying W Ranches (Goals 1 and 3) – Kerry Olson, Butch Parks

Lands Administration completed acquisition of two CEs on Fish Creek Flying W Ranches, and a public fishing easement to the Green River near Big Piney in Sublette County (Figure 9). The Fish Creek Place (949 acres) and the Johnson Place (581 acres) CEs will conserve quality moose, deer, elk, and pronghorn habitat in areas under extreme development pressure. The public fishing easement will enhance fishing opportunities on the Green River, and will connect to existing WGFC-owned public access areas.



Figure 9. Fish Creek Place Conservation Easement.

OSLI Inventory (Goal 5) – Brian Rognon, Butch Parks

Pursuant to the Governor's Office requirement for a single inventory of all state owned property rights, Lands Administration assisted in creation of an inventory database and initiated data input with the OSLI. The inventory will eventually become a GIS based system that will enhance access to property rights information for use by WGFD personnel, the public, and state and federal agencies.

OSLI Leases (Goal 3) – Brian Rognon, Butch Parks, Kerry Olson

Permanent public fishing, parking, and vehicle access easements were acquired from the Office of State Lands and Investments throughout Wyoming. These included public access at Sodergreen Lake, Elk Mountain Reservoir, Encampment River at Baggot Rocks, Idaho Lakes, Shoshone River - Big Creek, New Fork River - Airport, and Shoshone River - Cooper Lane.

Richie Ranch (Goals 1 and 3) – Kerry Olson, Butch Parks

Two CEs and a public access easement to the East Fork River were completed on Richie Ranch lands near Boulder. Lands Administration Branch coordinated acquisition of the CEs which are held by the Wyoming Stock Growers Agricultural Land Trust. The public access easement, held by the WGFC, will provide parking, a boat launch site, and access to approximately two miles of the East Fork River.

Other Lands Administration Projects – Butch Parks, Kerry Olson, Brian Rognon

- Easements for construction and maintenance of fish barriers were acquired at Dirtyman Creek and Hell Canyon Creek.
- Check station leases were acquired for Aquatic Invasive Species boat inspection and cleaning sites near Glendo and Keyhole Reservoirs.
- Public access to the Salt River on the Perkes Hereford Ranch was maintained by exchanging parking lot and access road locations.

V Cross Cattle Company (Goals 1 and 3) – Kerry Olson

The V Cross Cattle Company conservation and public access project was completed during the summer of 2012. Approximately 2,128 acres of high quality wildlife habitat located along Fontenelle Creek are permanently conserved. A crucial link between US Forest Service (USFS) roads was also connected for public travel, and a trail head to access several thousand acres of federal lands were also acquired (Figures 10 and 11).



Figure 10. V Cross Cattle Company Public Access Road.

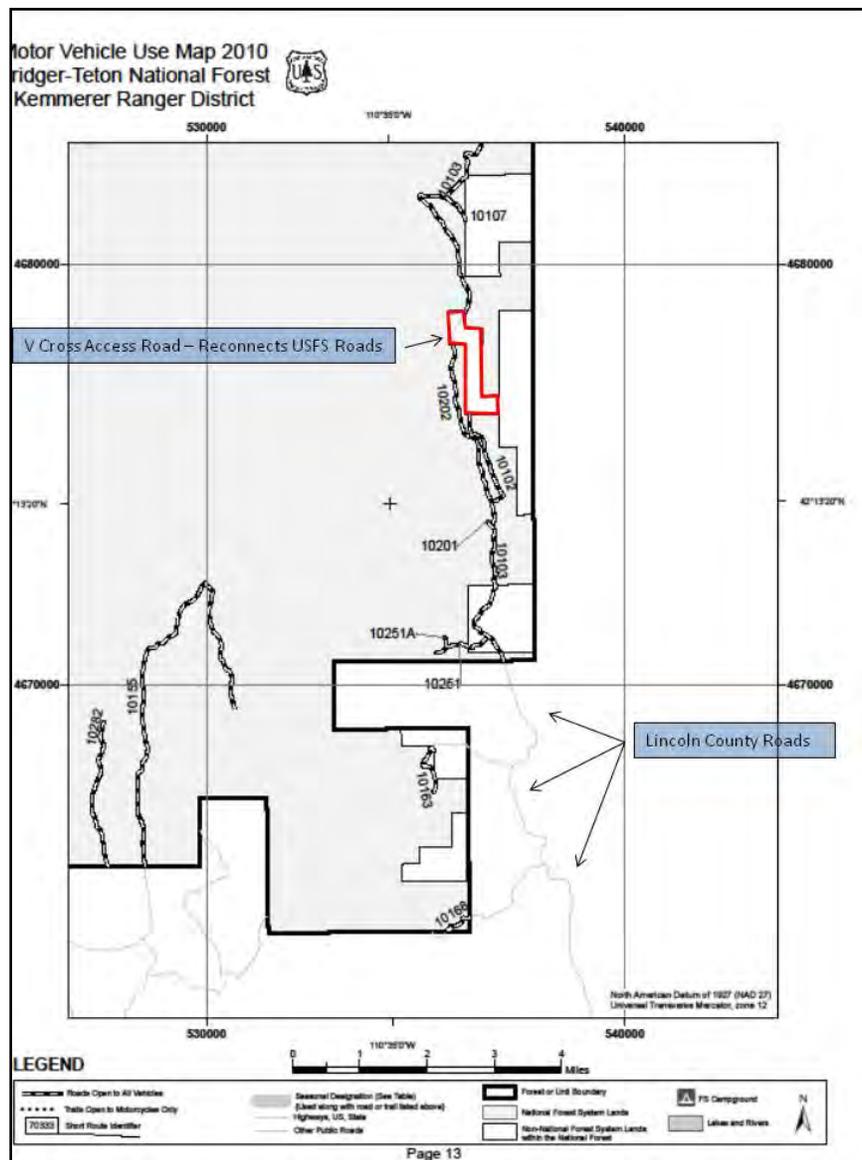


Figure 11. V Cross Cattle Company Public Access Road Map – From USFS.

TERRESTRIAL HABITAT PROGRAM

In November 2011 the terrestrial habitat program was restructured to enhance Department Regional collaboration and cooperation. Supervision of the eight regional terrestrial habitat biologists (THBs) was transferred to Regional Wildlife Management Coordinators. Throughout 2012 coordination occurred between the section and WGFD Regional personnel to ensure success of the re-structure. Terrestrial Habitat Section personnel include; three habitat extension biologists (HEBs) working in Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) District Offices as well as one working from his home office, the terrestrial habitat program manager, and the terrestrial habitat assistant program manager, located in Cheyenne. The terrestrial habitat program administrative assistant position was not refilled but was absorbed by the Wildlife Division administrative assistant. Tracking grants, agreements and expenditures for all terrestrial habitat projects remained with the Terrestrial Habitat Program managers in Cheyenne. One temporary position, approximately six months total time, assisted THBs with projects in western Wyoming associated with the Wyoming Range Mule Deer Initiative. The Laramie Region THB position was filled in September after being vacant for several months and duty location was transferred from Laramie to Saratoga. This position will be deeply involved in the Platte Valley Mule Deer Initiative and with the Platte Valley Habitat Partnership addressing mule deer habitat issues over the next few years. The Gillette HEB position was vacant for a few months before being filled and moved to the NRCS Office in Sundance.

During calendar year 2012, Terrestrial Habitat Section personnel were heavily involved with on-the-ground implementation, oversight or verification of expenditures on **85 projects** involving Game and Fish trust funds and funds granted to the Department from sources such as; WWNRT, various conservation organizations, USDA Farm Bill Programs, local, county, state and federal agencies, conservation districts, weed and pest districts and private landowners, among others. These sources provided over **\$2.5 million** toward on-the-ground expenditures for terrestrial projects. The various partners and their contributions toward these projects are highlighted in the regional sections of this report. In addition, regional THBs and HEBs worked on other SHP actions that are not directly related to funded projects or are funded through the standard maintenance and operational budgets. These actions included; habitat protection, inventory and assessment work, monitoring previous project function and habitat response, habitat related education efforts, training and addressing habitat related opportunities that arise during the year. Lastly, and most importantly, section personnel spent a considerable amount of time planning, coordinating and developing future projects with a multitude of partners and preparing funding applications throughout the year for future implementation.

Statewide, THBs closely coordinated with Wildlife Division personnel to address habitat portions of the season setting meetings. They also conducted, coordinated with and collated information collected by all Wildlife Division personnel from 138 established annual vegetation production and utilization transects. Another important task performed by section personnel was collecting vegetation and habitat monitoring data on 165 permanent transects associated with past habitat enhancements. HEBs attend area Conservation District and NRCS meetings to promote wildlife habitat management and enhancement projects and US Department of Agriculture Farm Bill programs. Section personnel are also responsible for coordinating annual meetings with federal land management agencies relative to wildlife habitat enhancement projects and larger federal projects that may affect wildlife habitat. They provided needed assistance at hunter check stations to collect tissues for chronic wasting disease analysis and other biological information from harvested animals and participated in sage grouse and sharp-tailed grouse lek surveys. Most

section personnel also serve on one or more WGFD species working groups (moose, bighorn sheep, sage grouse, pronghorn and mule deer) and routinely serve on various committees.

WYOMING LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

In 2012, the WLCI, working with partners, was instrumental in continuing development of long-term science-based efforts to assess and enhance aquatic and terrestrial habitats at a landscape scale in Southwest Wyoming, while facilitating responsible development through local collaboration and partnerships. These activities were accomplished through numerous coordination meetings, field trips, and work sessions to help develop and implement projects and identify Local Project Development Team priorities.



Figure 12. Attentive participants at the 2012 WLCI Science Workshop.

The coordinator traveled to Jackson Lake Lodge in the fall to present an introduction to WLCI to the Advisory Committee of the Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative and to hold their fall Executive Committee meeting (Figure 13). The WLCI continues to develop the Conservation Action Plan begun in late 2009.

The WLCI hosted its third Science Workshop in May in Rock Springs. The workshop included over 80 presentations within four sessions: 1) Changing Landscapes: Development and Influence of Energy and Mineral Resources, 2) Understanding the Influence of Land Use and Energy Development on Wildlife Populations and Their Habitats, 3) Assessing Landscapes and Monitoring Change (tools, approaches, and methodologies), and 4) Addressing Change through Management and Conservation Actions (Figure 12). Over 200 participants attended the workshop over a three day period.



Figure 13. WLCI presentation to the GNLCC Advisory Committee.

The WLCI financially partnered on 38 projects in 2012; with several projects being multi-year. Projects within a specific WGFD region are described in the regional sections of this report. Overall, the following bullets summarize achievements in connecting fragmented habitats, combating invasive species, and improving water quality and fish passage:

- Over 1,400 acres of prescribed burns and mechanical treatments completed, promoting a more natural vegetative community.
- Over 17 miles of wildlife friendly fencing, enclosures, or modifications were completed.
- Mule deer migration is improved with an additional underpass on Hwy 789, five miles north of Baggs.
- Over 27,000 acres were treated for invasive weed species.

- 850 acres were assessed for treatment effectiveness.
- 20,400 acres were inventoried for presence/absence of invasive weed species.
- Uinta County Weed and Pest District (UCWP) planted 266 native tree and shrub species on Black's Fork.
- Two culverts were replaced in the LaBarge Creek drainage.
- Native fish have an additional 27 miles of stream to complete their life cycles, due to culvert replacements and sheet piling improvements.

Wyoming Native Seed Collection (Goal 2) – WLCI, Jim Wasseen

This project is intended to provide a source of native seed and plant material, vegetative propagules, and native seed reserves to assist in providing native plants for restoration projects. The Chicago Botanical Gardens provided interns to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for the Seeds of Success program. Due to drought conditions across much of Southwest Wyoming in 2012, seed collections were drastically reduced this year.