

Annual Report 2013

Strategic Habitat Plan



Wyoming Game and Fish
Department

April 2014

*Conserving Wildlife
Serving People*

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

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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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 Department addresses habitat issues by assigning habitat-related duties to personnel in multiple Divisions and regions under a Strategic Habitat Plan (SHP) first published in 2001. The SHP was subsequently updated, revised and accepted by the WGFC in 2009 (see inside cover). Our habitat mission 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 Department 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.

This is the twelfth annual report for the WGFC, elected officials, governmental agencies, the public and our conservation partners since the first SHP report in 2002. Its purpose is to highlight 2013 Department habitat activities and SHP accomplishments. 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. A survey of SHP report recipients conducted in 2013 revealed that project partners and commissioners value and use the report. Following an analysis of survey data and comments from over 50 respondents, the annual report will continue to be produced and distributed in a manner similar to the past. The report will include on-the-ground achievements, short project summaries heavy on photos, and a comprehensive treatment of efforts across the department.

The Strategic Habitat Plan and associated priority areas can be viewed on the WGFD website at <http://wvo.gov/habitat/StrategicPlan/index.asp>. 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 2013 (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:

\$2,575,000

II. Non-department funds expended for implementation of SHP goals for calendar year 2013 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:

\$3,839,800

Grand Total for SHP Goals:

\$6,414,800

The Department applied funding from outside sources amounting to approximately **\$1.49** for each Department 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 \$7,033,000 of WGFD regular maintenance and operating funds, State Wildlife Grants from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Department Trust Fund monies. This figure includes wages, benefits, equipment operation expenses, supplies and on-the-ground improvement material expenses allocated as follows: approximately **60%** 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 **36%** for materials and supplies.

Personnel overseeing the WGFD Education, Information and Publications Programs spent approximately 12.5% of their time in 2013 on SHP goal 4 “habitat” activities totaling approximately **\$258,000** 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 2013 totaled approximately **\$428,212**. These taxes include

WGFC owned state offices, fish hatcheries, bird farms, houses and Wildlife Habitat Management Areas (WHMA) and Public Access Areas (PAA). During 2013, WGFD costs for leases totaled approximately **\$152,431**. 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 2013 are summarized below:

Activity	2013 Accomplishments	5 Year Average Accomplishments
Detailed stream assessments	7 streams totaling 5,381 ft	7 streams totaling 11,455 ft
Watershed stream assessments	17 on 39 miles	22 on 75 miles
Stream bank enhancements	48 totaling 6,884 ft	18 totaling 8,475 ft
Instream structures	18 installed	77 installed
Instream flow segments	14 on 65.6 stream miles	9 on 40 stream miles
Fish screens installed	1	3
Fish passage structures installed	9	8
Fish passage upstream miles	75.3 miles connected	148 miles connected
Fish passage structures monitored, maintained	11 monitored, 5 maintained	10 monitored, 6 maintained
Fish tracking or entrainment investigations	6	5
Project monitoring - detailed stream channel	3 totaling 4,900 ft	3 totaling 9,198 ft
Management monitoring - detailed riparian	30 totaling 3,468 ft	26 totaling 8,768 ft
Stream habitat monitoring sites	66	59
Project monitoring - photo, other (sites/streams/segments)	45 on 15 sites or stream miles	31 on 14 sites or stream miles
Aspen/cottonwood browse monitoring	40 sites	36 sites
Beaver transplanted	3	18
Riparian assessment	4 on 30.5 miles	9 on 56 miles
Riparian protection, enhancement, management	19 on 1,607 acres	19 on 877 acres
Private landowner contacts	209 yielding 84 projects	273 yielding 122 projects
Technical assistance requests	147	256
Conservation easements in process and coordinated with partners	3 easements totaling 7,680 acres	13 easements totaling 38,262 acres
BLM RMP or USFS Cooperator Status	4	6

Activity	2013 Accomplishments	5 Year Average Accomplishments
Trees or shrubs planted	7,056	9,076
Herbicide weed treatments	20,846 acres	31,287 acres
Herbicide vegetation to thin sagebrush	350 acres	1,585 acres
Mechanical tree removal	2,313 acres	4,662 acres
Mowing, chopping, and Lawson aerator treatments	78 acres	1,415 acres
Upland grass, forb and food plot seeding	815 acres	2,302 acres
Water wells drilled	1	4
Water guzzlers or water tanks installed	10	14
Water pipelines installed	7,303 ft	58,276 ft
Spring developments	1	4
Water wells converted to solar pumps	3	2
Fences installed	22.12 miles	46 miles
Wetland development or major renovation	5 totaling 17 acres	6 totaling 129 acres
Prescribed burns	3,038 acres	8,973 acres
USDA Farm Bill contract involvement	37 contracts	192 contracts
Livestock Grazing Management Plans	11 plans, 158,447 acres	16 plans, 265,801 acres
Wildlife Habitat Stewardship Plans	5 plans, 3,500 acres	3 plans, 30,073 acres
Upland habitat inventory, landscape evaluation scale	362,542 acres	1,554,904 acres
Upland and rangeland inventories, intensive scale	12,004 acres	214,222 acres
Upland vegetation/habitat treatment monitoring sites	100	156
Annual vegetation production/utilization sites	136	134
Field cooperative research projects	10	9
WGFC managed lands intensive livestock/forage reserve/meadow rejuvenation and grazing administered	9 on 40,152 acres	10 on 81,028 acres
WGFC managed lands fence maintained	670 miles	627 miles
WGFC managed lands irrigated	4,639 acres	4,020 acres

Activity	2013 Accomplishments	5 Year Average Accomplishments
WGFC managed lands noxious weed control	2,753 acres	1,842 acres
WGFC managed lands meadow mowed/farmed	1,250 acres	551 acres
WGFC managed lands farming contracts	2,601 acres	2,247 acres
Public Fish Access projects	7 projects on 2 miles	11 projects on 10 miles
WGFC property right monitoring	132 on 179,907 acres	110 on 104,945 acres
Funding sources/contracts/grants administered	139	137
Funding applications prepared for other entities	52	42

KUDOS 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 2013. 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 2013 (rounded to nearest \$100)
Bighorn County Conservation District	\$1,000
Bighorn County Weed and Pest District	\$2,000
Bureau of Land Management	\$213,700
Central Utah Project	\$15,000
Converse County Weed and Pest District	\$30,000
Federal USDA Farm Bill Program Funds (NRCS and FSA)	\$1,325,300
Hot Springs County Weed and Pest District	\$67,500
Lake DeSmet Conservation District	\$20,000
Mule Deer Foundation	\$14,000
National Wild Turkey Federation	\$5,000
Patagonia World Trout Initiative	\$8,000
Pheasants Forever	\$2,300
Private Landowners	\$304,000
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation	\$98,400
Sheridan County Weed and Pest District	\$1,400

Funding Partner	Approximate amount for 2013 (rounded to nearest \$100)
Shoshone Conservation District	\$3,900
Simplot	\$25,000
Snake River Fund	\$25,000
Teton County Conservation District	\$43,900
Trout Unlimited	\$79,300
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Fish Passage	\$15,000
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - LIP	\$350,000
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Challenge Cost Share	\$10,000
U.S. Forest Service	\$113,200
Washakie County Weed and Pest District	\$49,300
Wyoming Department of Agriculture	\$30,000
Wyoming Governor’s Big Game Coalition	\$33,700
Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative	\$46,600
Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation	\$1,200
Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resources Trust Board	\$1,313,600
Grand Total:	\$3,839,800

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 the 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

The aquatic habitat program works to protect, restore and enhance Wyoming’s water, watersheds, and waterways. The program consists 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 (AWECs) worked for the section in 2013: one in Cody assisted the fish passage coordinator primarily collecting and compiling information about passage obstructions; and one in Casper addressed 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 2013, the aquatic habitat section was involved in 38 projects involving funding from the Game and Fish trust fund, Department fish passage budget, the WWNRT, USFWS, Landowner Incentive Program (LIP), WLCI and other sources. These partners provided over **\$1.25 million** toward on-the-ground expenditures for aquatic projects. Department aquatic habitat dollars spent on contracts or grants in calendar year 2013 totaled

nearly \$500,000. The various partners and their contributions toward these projects are highlighted in the regional sections of this report.

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

The number of on-going aquatic habitat projects involving significant funding dipped in 2013 to 38 compared to 50 in 2012. We are beginning to see the effects of reduced funding in FY14 combined with an ongoing lack of personnel capacity in Casper and Cody. Relatively low funding from the WGFD trust fund in FY15 is planned and will continue to translate into fewer aquatic habitat achievements on the ground. Fewer and smaller projects are anticipated for the next several years as a result of the last couple years of limited funding.

WATER MANAGEMENT

X-Stream Angling Articles (Goal 4) – Tom Annear

Five educational articles were written and appeared in the Department’s Wildlife News publication. These articles direct readers to instream flow segments, make them aware of Department actions within the instream flow program, and encourage support for instream flow water rights in general. Articles were written on instream flow segments on the Salt River, Douglas Creek and tributaries in the Snowy Range, Deer Creek, the Sweetwater River, and the New Fork River.

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

Three new filings for instream flow water rights were made in 2013 on streams in the Bighorn Mountains. Applications were prepared using data collected from study sites on Dry Medicine Creek (1.98 miles), North Beaver Creek (3.3 miles), and South Beaver Creek (0.85 miles). All three filings have a priority date of July 30, 2013. Three new instream flow studies were initiated that focused on native Yellowstone cutthroat trout habitat in the Bighorn River drainage including Porcupine Creek (*Figure 1*), Lodge Grass Creek, and West Fork Little Bighorn River.

Water Management (Goal 1) – Tom Annear

Actions were taken to temporarily change the use of recently leased and purchased water rights in Bump Sullivan Reservoir near Yoder. Negotiations continued toward developing a long-term lease for water in the DeSmet Reservoir. The Water Rights Management team met several times to discuss the status of various water right related issues, but no specific actions were necessitated. No



Figure 1 – Instream flow study site on Porcupine Creek.

progress was made to resolve a water right ownership issue for Douglas Fishing Lake near Douglas, though a list of solutions was developed requiring discussion with the owner of lands around the lake.



In 2012, WGFD terrestrial and aquatic managers initiated a variety of practices to document and improve fish, wildlife, and land management practices within the WGFD Spence/Moriarity Wildlife Habitat Unit. One element of that effort involved programmatic flow monitoring at several locations on the East Fork Wind River and Bear Creek and associated irrigation delivery systems. Monitoring water availability and use patterns continued in 2013 as part of a cooperative effort between the Water Management Section in Cheyenne and the Lander Aquatic Habitat crew that was begun in 2012 (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Downloading Stream flow data on Bear Creek.

Flow data collection began on April 30 and was terminated on October 9. A

draft summary for this year is being written and will be incorporated with data from 2012 and 2014 into an administrative report.

FISH PASSAGE PROGRAM

Upper Green River Watershed Fish Passage Inventory (Goal 2) – Erin Sobel and Lewis Stahl

The Upper Green River Watershed is located in western Sublette County and northern Lincoln County encompassing the towns of Daniel, Big Piney and La Barge with land ownership consisting of 46% state, 31% federal, and 23% private land. The 1,880,330 acre watershed was selected for inventory because it contains Tier 1 and 2 priority species listed in the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) and houses multiple WGFD Strategic Habitat Plan (SHP) crucial and enhancement priority areas. At the start of the inventory 166 known points of water diversion were known, but another 97 previously unknown sites were identified during the year (Figure 3).

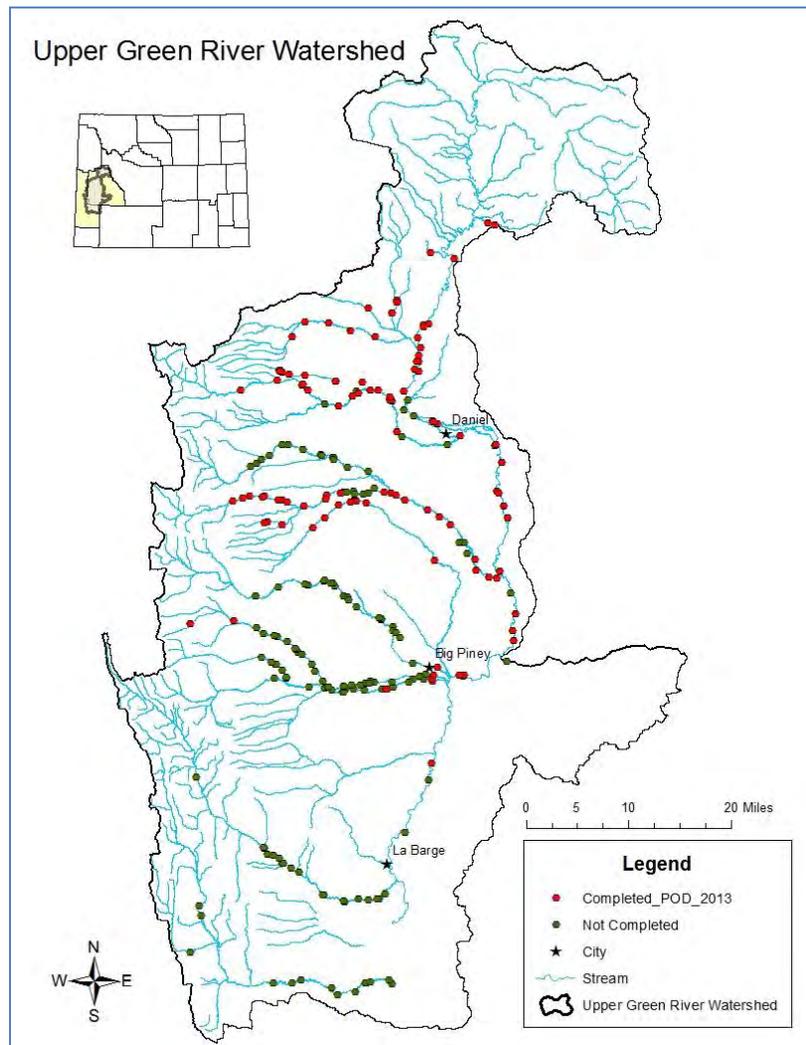


Figure 3 – Points of diversion in the upper Green River drainage visited in 2013 or planned for 2014 to evaluate if they block fish movement or entrain fish into a ditch.

Data collected at these sites will allow prioritization of fish passage improvement projects in order to obtain the highest number of miles of reconnected habitat in key areas. The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and Trout Unlimited (TU) are also undertaking fish passage projects within the watershed to eliminate barriers (Figure 4). Access was obtained and 109 points of diversions were inventoried in 2013 within the Beaver Creek, Cottonwood Creek, Horse Creek, Piney Creek and Upper Green River drainages. Landowner contacts were made for an additional 20 points of diversions where no access was permitted. The remaining points within the watershed are scheduled for inventory in 2014.



Figure 4 – A push-up irrigation dam in the Upper Green River Watershed is a fish passage barrier.

Clear Creek Watershed Fish Passage Inventory (Goal 2) – Erin Sobel and Lewis Stahl

The Clear Creek watershed is located in northwest Johnson County and southeast Sheridan County stretching from Buffalo, WY to the Montana border, and includes 26% federal, 12% state, and 62% private land ownership. This 738,233 acre 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 re-connect many stream miles given the many irrigation diversions present. The stream is 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 within the watershed. Data were collected on 13 diversions in 2013 bringing the total inventoried to 89 and completing the inventory of this watershed (Figure 5).

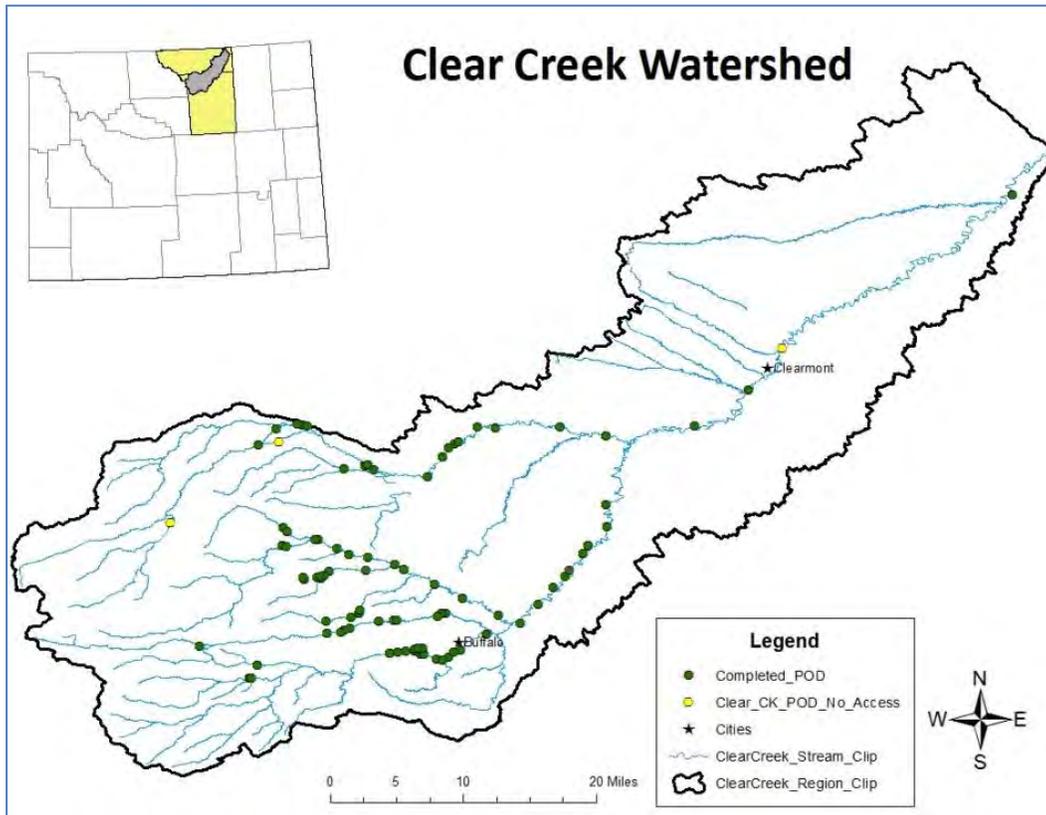


Figure 5 – Points of diversion in the Clear Creek watershed visited in 2013 or earlier to evaluate if they block fish movement or entrain fish into a ditch.

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

Harmony Ditch is located on the Nowood River near the town of Manderson in Bighorn County. Final designs were completed, funding was committed, and a contract was issued for Phase 1 of this project. Construction is scheduled to start in January 2014 and includes a new irrigation headgate structure and two cone screens to prevent fish entrainment into the irrigation system. Partners for Phase 1 are the USFWS and the private landowner. Phase 2 design is near



Figure 6 – Harmony Ditch Diversion dam and headgate scheduled for fish passage improvements.

completion and funding requests have been submitted. Phase 2 is planned for Fall 2014 and will replace the irrigation dam and add a fish ladder to provide upstream passage (Figure 6).

The Thunderhead Irrigation Diversion is located on Bear Creek within the Spence and Moriarity WMA near Dubois in Fremont County. Designs were completed for a new diversion dam consisting of boulder cross-vanes that will provide upstream fish passage, a

new irrigation headgate sized correctly for the irrigation system, and a vertical fish screen to prevent entrainment loss to the irrigation canal. Matching funds from the WWNRT were obtained and construction is scheduled for Fall 2014.

Fish Passage Grants (Goal 2) – Lewis Stahl

The North Fork Valley Ditch Screening project is located on the North Fork Shoshone River near the town of Cody in Park County. Trout Unlimited (TU) was reimbursed \$65,000 of matching funds for partial project completion. An addendum was signed with TU extending the completion date for this project due to permitting delays. Additional partners include the North Fork Valley Ditch Company, WWNRT, USFS, and USFWS (Figure 7).



Figure 7 – North Fork Valley Ditch taking water from the North Fork Shoshone River.

The Hamp #2 Diversion, located on the Seedskaadee National Wildlife Refuge, takes water from the Green River in Sweetwater County. The Green River fish managers and the USFWS desire a fish screen on the diversion canal due to the number of fish being entrained. A \$20,000 fish passage grant was awarded to TU for assistance with this cooperative project. Partners include the USFWS and the Westmorland Kemmerer Mine.

The Bear River / Evanston Fish Passage Project is located on the Bear River near Evanston in Uinta County. The project involves a retrofit of the old city of Evanston diversion to improve upstream passage. A \$5,000 fish passage grant was awarded to TU for assistance with this cooperative project. Partners include the City of Evanston, USFWS, WWNRT, Westmoreland Kemmerer Inc., landowners, and private donors.

HABITAT AND ACCESS BRANCH

In 2013, the habitat and access branch consisted of four regional supervisors, four coordinators, ten biologists, one technician, a branch chief and seven temporary positions stationed across the state.

The branch is responsible for the management of WGFC lands including 37 Wildlife Habitat Management Areas (WHMA), 192 Public Access Areas (PAA), and 22 feedgrounds. In addition, there is a statewide crew that assists with habitat development projects. Objectives and strategies from the SHP are incorporated into regional work schedules. WHMAs are managed for specific wildlife habitat purposes and are included within the SHP.

As part of the SHP, the branch manages and maintains approximately 410,000 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. An additional 1,100 miles of road, 395 parking areas, 67 boat ramps, 25 docks, 198 outhouses, and more than 6,000 signs are maintained to add value to hunting and fishing experiences.

During 2013, the branch also worked on other habitat development projects, including sagebrush rejuvenation, aeration, meadow improvements, wetland developments and riparian projects. The branch administered two projects involving the WGFD Trust Fund, two projects involving capitol facilities, two projects for the WWNRT and four other funding sources. These projects provided \$245,200 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 is one of the Department's oldest and most important communication tools. This monthly four-color publication has approximately 30,000 subscribers with a much higher pass-along rate. The magazine focuses on natural history, native species, habitat, recreation, and other wildlife issues in Wyoming. The following feature and news articles dealt with habitat in 2013:

- January – “Grace under pressure (trumpeter swans)”; “Yellowstone lake trout removal may be helping cutthroats”; “Wing bee gauges health of Wyoming sage grouse population”; “Federal meetings on Bear River watershed”
- February – “The land ethic: Sharing”
- March – “The land ethic: Subsidies”; “The lynx: Wyoming’s Cheshire cat”; “The Muries”
- April – “Lost and found”
- May – “Getting used to it: Since 1950 drought has become a way of life in Wyoming”; “Sand Creek”
- June – “The land ethic: Pheasant tales”; “Mapmaker”; “Native bacterium may control invasive cheatgrass”; “Two-year study of Wyoming Range deer habitat begins”; “Wetland conservation proposal introduced in Congress”
- July – “The land ethic: Monuments”; “Desert fish”; “Better access to western Wyoming’s New Fork River”; “Saving the sauger in the Wind River and Big Horn Rivers”; “Yellowtail fire destroys habitat”
- August – “White waterfowl: The harlequin is a sea duck with a taste for trout streams”; “A part or apart?”; “Call for more conservation in the potholes”
- September – “Federal marsh funding may be cut”; “Trout Unlimited concerned over climate change”
- October – “Taking inventory”; “Return of the wanderer”; “Landowners of the year”; “New federal study examines greater sage-grouse habitat”; “Controlled burn helps Wyoming toads”
- December – “Wildlife refuges benefit economy”; “Where wildlife is part of daily life”

WYOMING WILDLIFE NEWS

During part of 2013, WGFD produced a bimonthly newsprint publication, *Wyoming Wildlife News*, available free at license-selling agents and other outlets across the state. The following features and news articles dealt with habitat in 2013:

- January/February – Director’s opinion: “New year brings new challenges, opportunities”; “Migrations subject of initiative”; “Drought conditions affect hunting season”; “X-Stream Angler: A look back - and what’s ahead”
- March/April – “Wildlife crossing project wins engineering award”; “Wyoming’s balm”; “X-Stream Angling: Salt River”
- Early Summer – “Making it click”; “Bluehead sucker research reveals stable population”; “X-Stream Angling: Douglas Creek”
- Late Summer – Director’s opinion: “Getting in shape for the season”; “Wyoming’s Black Hills gold: Sand Creek”; “X-Stream Angling: Deer Creek”; “Up the crick: A fish called perfection”
- Fall – “Volunteers help WGFD manage bighorn sheep, other species”; “X-Stream Angling: Sweetwater River”

REGIONAL INFORMATION AND EDUCATION SPECIALISTS

The WGFD has Information and Education (I&E) Specialists assigned to seven of the eight regional offices around the state (Pinedale and Jackson share a specialist). 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 sections of this document.

HABITAT-RELATED VIDEO, TELEVISION AND RADIO SHOWS

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.

- “Wyoming Department of Transportation Crossing Structures Conserved Wildlife”
- “Yellowstone Grizzly Bears: A Success Story”
- “WGFD Landowners of the Year- 8 Videos highlight winners by region”
- “Monitoring Mule Deer Movement and Survival”
- “Baggs Antelope Capture”
- “Sauger Spawning”
- “Mountain Whitefish”
- “Wyoming Range Mule Deer Study”

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

- February - Platte Valley Habitat Partnership Meeting February 19th
- March - Platte Valley Mule deer Initiative Meeting March 3rd
- June - Platte Valley Mule Deer Initiative Update—group agrees on criteria for selecting habitat projects
- August - Platte Valley Habitat Partnership Meeting & Tour scheduled
- November - Platte Valley Mule Deer Projects Approved

LANDS ADMINISTRATION BRANCH

Addressing WGFC objectives involving property rights function for habitat conservation, public access and property rights monitoring were a primary focus of Lands Administration personnel during the past year. Branch personnel worked on a variety of habitat and public access related projects around the state pursuant to the goals and objectives of WGFC policies and regulations, SHP priority areas, and other administrative directives. Operating efficiencies were enhanced with the transfer of Brian Rognan to Lander, to provide property rights assistance to Jackson, Cody, Pinedale, and Lander regions. In addition, Judith Hosafros was transferred to the branch to assist with inventory and federal aid coordination.



Figure 8 – Lake DeSmet.

Badwater Ranch (Goal 3) – Kerry Olson, Brian Olsen, Matt Pollock, Daniel Beach

Public access to a portion of the Badwater Ranch, in the southern portion of the Bighorn Mountains, was completed last year. As a condition of the easement donation, WGFC personnel completed a road and travel assessment for the Badwater Ranch. Details of the assessment were compiled in a report of existing conditions to be used as baseline information for future reference. It will also be used for sign and parking area developments in the area. Casper Region Wildlife Division and Habitat and Access personnel provided assistance.

Lake DeSmet (Goals 1 and 3) – Kerry Olson, Brian Rognan

Lake DeSmet water rights were offered to WGFC for a long-term lease by the Lake DeSmet Counties Coalition (Figure 8). The proposed lease of water rights would conserve and enhance fish habitat and public recreation in the lake for a minimum of 50 years. Branch personnel completed an appraisal of the value of the water rights to be used in lease negotiations.

Munger Mountain Conservation Easement (Goal 1) – Kerry Olson, Butch Parks

WGFC and the Jackson Hole Land Trust (JHLT) worked a unique agreement for acceptance and stewardship of the 350-acre Munger Mountain Conservation Easement located near the South Park WHMA in Teton County. The conservation easement will limit development on important wildlife habitat with high volume migration corridors. The easement will be purchased with Forest Legacy Program funds, which requires easement ownership by a local or state governmental entity. JHLT and WGFC will cooperatively draft the conservation easement document. The easement will be owned by WGFC and all future monitoring and stewardship activities will be completed by JHLT.

Owl Creek Conservation Easement (Goal 1) – Butch Parks, Kerry Olson, Brian Rognon

WGFC personnel were contacted by Mr. Louis Bacon’s representatives to discuss possible donation of a conservation easement on lands in Hot Springs County. The 2,520-acre property (operated as Owl Creek Ranch Holdings LLC) is located in the Owl Creek Mountains, north of the South Fork Owl Creek. The property consists of high value wildlife habitat, including crucial winter range for elk and moose, and summer range for mule deer. Mr. Bacon has been involved in habitat conservation for more than 20 years. In 2012 he donated conservation easements on 167,000 acres of his private lands in Colorado to the USFWS and Colorado Open Lands. Mr. Bacon donated the conservation easement and \$25,000.00 for future stewardship and monitoring.

Property Rights Inventory (Goal 5) – Brian Rognon, Butch Parks, Judith Hosafros

Lands Administration personnel continued data input, file searches, and document scanning for the new property rights inventory project. Advances were made in the development of a complete inventory with associated GIS applications.

Thoman Lease (Goals 1 and 3) – Kerry Olson

Private lands on the Thoman Ranch, located at the west end of Nugget Canyon near Kemmerer, were originally leased in 2003 (Figure 9). Nugget Canyon is an area of high wildlife migration, high traffic volumes, and a narrow rail thoroughfare that resulted in tremendous wildlife losses.



As part of an overall strategy to conserve wildlife, WGFC leased grazing rights on the Thoman Ranch. The lease provided important winter forage and habitat for numerous elk and mule deer, and allowed public access for pronghorn and sage grouse hunting. The original lease term was ten years and it included a renewal option at WGFC’s discretion. A new five-year lease term was completed and additional public access opportunities were granted by the Thoman family.

Figure 9 – Mule Deer on the Thoman Ranch.

TERRESTRIAL HABITAT

Throughout 2013, coordination occurred between section managers and WGFD Regional personnel to ensure continued success of the 2011 restructure. Terrestrial Habitat Section personnel include; three habitat extension biologist (HEBs) working in Natural Resources 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. Tracking grants, agreements and expenditures for all terrestrial habitat projects remains with the Terrestrial Habitat Program managers in Cheyenne. Several vacancies existed in the THB ranks in 2013 including open positions in Green River, Sheridan, Lander and Laramie Regions.

During calendar year 2013, Terrestrial Habitat Section personnel were heavily involved with on-the-ground implementation, oversight or verification of expenditures on 101 projects concerning Game and Fish trust funds and funds granted to the Department from sources such as: Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust (WWNRT), various conservation organizations, USDA Farm Bill Programs, local, county, state and federal agencies, conservation districts, weed and pest districts and private landowners, and 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 not directly related to funded projects or 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 throughout the year planning, coordinating and developing future projects with a multitude of partners and preparing funding applications for the Department and other entities 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 136 established annual vegetation production and utilization transects. Another important task performed by section personnel was collecting vegetation and habitat monitoring data on 100 permanent transects associated with past habitat enhancements. HEBs attend area Conservation District and NRCS meetings to promote wildlife habitat management and enhancement projects and USDA 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 to address an issue of need with habitat implications.

WYOMING LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

In 2013, the Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative (WLCI), a long-term science based effort to assess and enhance aquatic and terrestrial habitats in southwest Wyoming while facilitating responsible development through local collaboration and partnerships, funded 33 projects. These activities were accomplished through numerous coordination meetings, field trips, and work sessions to help develop and implement projects. The WLCI Coordination Team members met with NGOs, permittees, landowners, other agencies, and entities to coordinate WLCI activities. The 33 projects encompassed all of WLCI's focus communities [aspen (4), aquatic (3), mountain shrub (2), riparian (6) and sagebrush (1)]. Eleven projects addressed control of invasive species. Reducing barriers to migration corridors was the objective of five other projects. One project improved southern Wyoming Range stands of whitebark pine, a candidate species. The WLCI allocated \$828,335 to the 33 projects and WLCI's partners contributed \$2,503,605.

WLCI received funding from El Paso Corp. to improve and assess sage grouse and pygmy rabbit habitats in the vicinity of the Ruby Pipeline. The Ruby Pipeline Focus Group was established to fund projects for the pipeline under the direction of the WLCI. This group approved funding for four assessments in 2013. The assessment of springs and reservoirs is a continuing project in which springs and reservoirs are mapped and assessed for potential brood rearing habitat for sage grouse. Impacts of ravens on sage grouse nests is a Utah State University research project comparing sage grouse nesting success and productivity in raven removal and non-removal study sites and identifying mitigation for adverse impacts of anthropogenic development on sage grouse. Two assessments on Pygmy rabbits were conducted. One uses remote sensing equipment to photo-document the presence or absence of pygmy rabbits. The other is relating pygmy rabbit distributions with variations in habitat, including gas field infrastructure. The data will improve a USGS model predicting current distribution and provide information on levels of gas field development that are compatible with continued pygmy rabbit site occupancy. In 2013, these four projects received \$158,000 of Ruby Pipeline Mitigation funds.