



May 2015

the wyoming game & fish department

CASPER REGION newsletter

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May Fishing

Rain, Rain, and then More Rain

May turned out to be one of the wettest on record. Although all the moisture did wonders for some waters, like Goldeneye and the 33 Mile Ponds, spawning in the North Platte River suffered below Gray Reef. When the rain began, the expected call for irrigation water did not happen and the Bureau of Reclamation was required to reduce flows from Gray Reef. The reduction in flow left most trout eggs dry and what was not dry, was likely smothered by the silt from tributaries as a result of the rain.

In order to lessen the potential negative impact from the loss this year's age class of rainbows, the Game and Fish regional fisheries personnel have requested fish be stocked in the North Platte River this year. Game and Fish stopped stocking the North



Platte River from Gray Reef to Casper in 2002 due to the success of the flushing flows and improved natural reproduction. Stocking this year will help mitigate the expected dismal spawning success and help maintain the exceptionally high trout population that makes this reach so popular. This reach was last stocked in 2009 to address a similar situation that occurred in 2008 when flows were reduced from 2000 cubic feet per second to 500 cubic feet per second in June due to spring rain.

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On the Ground

Young Wildlife, Mallards Ducklings, Transects

Orphaned baby wildlife reports started coming into the Casper Regional Game and Fish office during the month of May, including several calls of “injured” owls that turned out to be juveniles that had left the nest but hadn’t quite figured out what to do next since they haven’t developed full flight feathers. This stage is very typical for owls, and the owls that live in urban areas get a lot of attention since they end up in unlikely and sometimes highly visible places.



Wildlife Biologist Heather O’Brien and Law Enforcement Coordinator Aaron Kerr have dealt with several juvenile owls in alleys, roads or just on the ground at local city parks. The youngsters are usually moved into a tree to get them off the ground and then are left alone. Adults will still find them (they make a lot of noise) and feed them regularly. People are reminded to leave baby wildlife alone unless they appear to be in danger. It is a strategy of mothers to “leave” them during the day as to not draw attention to young in case predators are in the area. People often misinterpret this as they have been abandoned.



Wildlife Management Coordinator Justin Binfet encountered an example of when wildlife really does need help. A gaggle of mallard babies had fallen down a cement tube and were unable to get out. Binfet was able to retrieve the ducklings and return them to a happy mother.



Wildlife Biologist Heather O’Brien spent part of May measuring shrub transects. Information is collected from key shrub species to study how well they grow and how much browse they receive from big game species like deer, elk and antelope. Wyoming big sagebrush was measured at eight different sites in the North Natrona Pronghorn Herd Unit, and use was light to moderate on all sites. Being out in the sagebrush also gives biologists the opportunity to observe other species, like the horned toad, as they emerge in the spring and early summer months.



Behind the Badge

White-Tailed Deer

A Pennsylvania man entered into a plea agreement in Crook County. Emil J. Silvi was charged with intentionally taking four buck white-tailed deer without a license and wasting two deer. He paid a total of \$14,080 in fines and restitution, will be on unsupervised probation for five years, and has forfeited all license privileges for a period of 26 years.



In the Water

Gizzard Shad, Stocking

Casper Region Fisheries Biologist Gordon Edwards and Sheridan Fisheries Biologist Andrew Nikirk assisted Nebraska Game and Parks Commission biologists to collect gizzard shad to bolster this important forage fish at Glendo and Keyhole reservoirs, two of Wyoming's most prominent walleye fisheries. Gizzard shad cannot tolerate long winters and their numbers in the reservoirs were greatly reduced during the winter of 2013 and 2014. The assistances from Nebraska Game and Parks employees, both biologists and fish culturists, in North Platte made the effort a success. Nebraska Game and Parks personnel have been Wyoming's "gizzard shad connection" since the experimental introduction into Seminoe Reservoir nearly 30 years ago. We value our longstanding collaborative relationship with our neighbors in Nebraska. The collaborative relationship has been critical to establish and maintain the quality walleye fisheries in Wyoming.



Over 2,000 trout were stocked in Yesness Pond for the 20th Annual Kids' Fishing Day. Statewide Response Specialist Adam Leiferman worked with local kids to enjoy a day of stocking. Over 300 kids are expected at this highly popular event in Casper for Free Fishing Day. Watch for an update on the event in the June Newsletter.



Of Interest

Rare Earth Mine

The Colorado based company Rare Element Resources (RER) plans to construct and operate an open pit mine north of Sundance on the Black Hills National Forest (BHNF) and on a full section of land the State traded to RER in 2012. As this proposed project moves through the environmental analysis and permitting processes, Wyoming has been granted cooperating agency status in formulating the Environmental Impact Statement. Currently the Game and Fish Habitat Protection Program and biologists, in coordination with the Governor's office, are working to assess the potential impacts of the project to the fish and wildlife resource, and hunting opportunity. Additionally, our folks are considering ideas for mitigating the impacts of the proposed mine.



The area of the proposed mine is one that historically has hosted a great deal of hunting recreation, including the State land that was traded to RER and is now under the company's private ownership and closed to hunting. The BHNF lacks specific data on hunter use of the impacted area for analysis in the Environmental Impact Statement; and so our Department is working to estimate hunter use through harvest survey data and traffic data, which we are collecting on the BHNF and providing to the Forest Service for consideration in the forthcoming environmental analysis. This is being done, not only because about 3,000 acres will be affected by the project, but an important road hunters regularly use (Whitelaw Road) will be closed when the mine project begins.

As part of the effort to determine how many hunters will be affected by the Whitelaw Road closure, wardens and biologists logged contacts with hunters on the BHNF this past fall to determine the average number of hunters in each vehicle. With nearly 500 individual vehicles encountered in about 25 patrol sessions, it turns out the average was 1.9 active hunters in each vehicle encountered. The other piece of the puzzle is actual traffic count data. Newcastle Wildlife Biologist Joe Sandrini has been working to quantify hunter vehicle use through the use of traffic counters and data analysis software supplied by the University of Wyoming's Technology Transfer Center. Traffic data are being collected along the Whitelaw Road and the Grand Canyon Road, which is adjacent to the ~400 acres the State received in the land exchange with RER. Data were collected during the fall big game and spring wild turkey seasons, and off hunting season data will be collected this summer.

Biologist Sandrini has found some interesting results so far with this effort, many which dovetail with what we notice out checking hunters. As one would expect, there is higher use of these roads on opening days and weekends, about double from weekdays. Foul weather events also slow down hunter traffic (no surprise), and use tapers off near the end of the season. There are also folks running around in the wee hours of the morning, like 2 or 3 a.m. that makes one wonder what they are doing on the forest at that time of night? It is also apparent the relatively high traffic flows on the Grand Canyon Road likely decrease the acquired parcel's wildlife and hunting value, compared to that which the State traded.



Here are some of the actual data collected in a general traffic flow report (ADT = average daily traffic):

Whitelaw Road

10/31/14 @ 0939 hrs. – 11/11/14 @ 0657 hrs.

<u>Weekday</u>			<u>Weekend</u>		
Cars :	30	(88%)	Cars :	60	(90%)
Trucks :	3	(12%)	Trucks :	6	(10%)
Total :	<u>34</u>		Total :	<u>66</u>	



Grand Canyon Rd.

10/31/14 @ 0944 hrs. – 11/09/14 @ 0825 hrs.

<u>Weekday</u>			<u>Weekend</u>		
Cars :	60	(63%)	Cars :	85	(90%)
Trucks :	34	(37%)	Trucks :	8	(10%)
Total :	<u>95</u>		Total :	<u>94</u>	

Average vehicle counts:

Location	Season	Week Day avg.	Weekend Avg.
Upper Whitelaw	Early Fall Hunt	15	24
Lower Whitelaw	Early Fall Hunt	n/a	n/a
Upper Whitelaw	Mid Fall Hunt	30	60
Lower Whitelaw	Mid Fall Hunt	30	61
Upper Whitelaw	Late Fall Hunt	23	33
Lower Whitelaw	Late Fall Hunt	18	32
Upper Whitelaw	Early Spring Hunt	8	14
Lower Whitelaw	Early Spring Hunt	6	13
Upper Whitelaw	Late Spring Hunt	6	13
Lower Whitelaw	Late Spring Hunt	6	13

