



June 2016

the wyoming game & fish department

CASPER REGION newsletter

photographs © Trent Tatum

On the Ground

Thanks to Converse County SFW

Douglas Wildlife Biologist Willow Steen, Lusk Game Warden Brady Vandenberg and Game Warden Dylan Bergman partnered up with the Converse County



Sportsman for Fish and Wildlife to plant 300 chokecherry plants at the Hat Creek Breaks, near Manville. The area currently lacks fruit-bearing shrubs, which provide palatable and nutritious sources of food for wildlife such as wild turkeys, and high-quality browse for deer. Game and Fish would like to thank the Converse County crew for all their help, without them the project would not have happened. They not only donated time, but also equipment and the passion to get the job done.

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Pronghorn Line Transect Surveys

Casper Wildlife Biologist Heather O'Brien and game wardens Cody Bish, Adam Parks and Dylan Bergman conducted pronghorn line transect surveys during mid-May. These surveys provide a population estimate that is separate from the computer model, which helps "truth" or anchor the population estimate from the ground every few years. Conditions were very good during the survey flights, with low winds, good sunlight, and a nice green backdrop of vegetation so pronghorn were easy to spot. Information from the survey will be analyzed over the summer and integrated into the overall population estimate for this herd.



Casper Wildlife Biologist Heather O'Brien conducted sagebrush and true mountain mahogany transect surveys of shrub use by big game. Use of sagebrush over the winter went down in the North Natrona area overall, while big game use on mahogany in the Chalk Mountain and Hat Six areas increased. Some sagebrush stands in North Natrona appeared to be mostly or completely dead – possibly due to the early fall freeze two years ago. Other sagebrush communities were in better condition, showing good leader growth from the previous year. Mountain mahogany stands in the Hat Six area were heavily browsed by big game – in large part by big groups of elk that frequented the area this last fall and winter. O'Brien and East Casper Game Warden Cody Bish conducted surveys on Chalk Mountain via horseback. They were able to observe of range conditions along the way, noting excellent moisture and growth conditions in the region so far this spring and early summer.



In the Water

Gizzard Shad, Miracle Mile



Casper Fisheries Biologist Gordon Edwards and Sheridan Fisheries Biologist Andrew Nikirk assisted Nebraska Game and Parks Commission biologists in collecting gizzard shad to bolster this important forage fish at Glendo and Keyhole reservoirs, two of Wyoming's prominent walleye fisheries. Glendo received 800 and 300 were stocked in Keyhole this spring. Gizzard shad cannot tolerate long winters and the numbers of adult shad were greatly reduced during the winter of 2013 and 2014 in both reservoirs. The gizzard shad that were stocked in 2015 and again this spring will provide adults to rebuild the population.

Miracle Mile

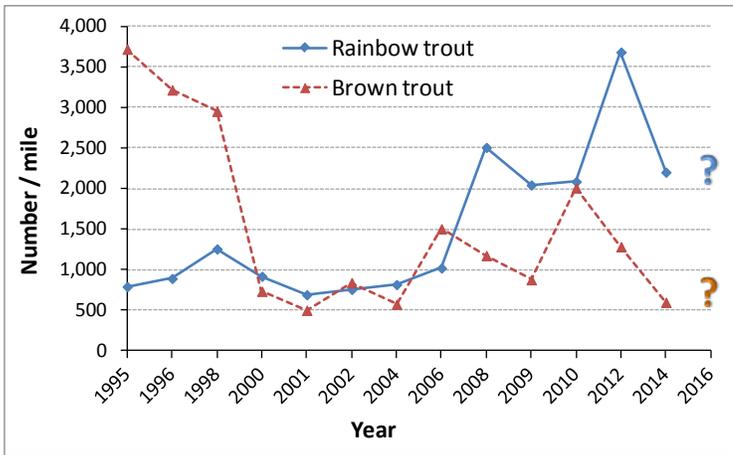
This amazing trout fishery officially lies on about six miles of the North Platte River between Kortez Dam and the confluence of Sage Creek, just upstream of Pathfinder Reservoir. Anglers can fish with bait, lures or flies and harvest three trout per day, or have three fish in possession, one of which may measure 16 inches or larger. Remember to be cautious of stream flows when wade-fishing at the Mile! Operational changes at the power plant can result in rapid increases in water release from Kortez dam.

The trout population was doing well in the Mile in 2014, although abundance (2,882 fish/mile) had returned to near average numbers, following an all-time high in 2012 (4,967 fish/mile). This occurred after several years of poor recruitment despite stocking approximately 100,000 fingerling rainbows to hedge against it. Total rainbow trout abundance in 2014 was 2,203 fish/mile. On the bright side, the number of age-3+ rainbows (larger than 17 inches; 227 fish/mile) had remained strong since 2012 (132 fish/mile), and a few Snake River cutthroat trout (80 fish/mile) were establishing in the Mile from stocking in Pathfinder Reservoir.



The fishing forecast at the Miracle Mile appears good following a single-pass survey conducted in 2015 as a cursory checkup on the fishery. In 2015, both rainbow and brown trout were sampled that measured over 20 inches. A couple Snake River cutthroats were also sampled up to 17 inches. Average relative weights, a measure of how plump fish are for their lengths, were excellent for all trout species. Juvenile rainbow and brown trout were sampled in the five- to seven-inch range, which documented some recruitment from the previous year, which was good news.

Stream flows in the Miracle Mile were near average and also appeared supportive of spawning and rearing of juvenile trout – rising and staying high during the spawning period. These observations showed that habitat conditions and forage availability had remained beneficial for growth and survival of trout at the Mile since 2014. In fact, anglers contacted produced valuable data showing rates of success and overall catch rates exceeding management objectives for the Mile in 2015. A thorough update on the status of the Miracle Mile fishery will come late in 2016, after the Casper Fish Management Crew conducts biennial multiple-pass surveys in July 2016 to monitor the condition of trout and update abundance estimates.



Trout population estimates for the Miracle Mile since 1995



Of Interest Newborn Wildlife

Can you find the deer fawn in this photo? Lusk Game Warden Brady Vandenberg encountered this fawn while conducting curlew surveys this spring. See next page.





Every spring brings an array of newborn wildlife to Wyoming, and the Game and Fish wants to remind people to leave these newborns alone and walk away for the animals' sake, and for human safety.

"This has been a highly publicized year for people and newborn wildlife interactions," says Janet Milek, Public Information Specialist for the Casper Region of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. "Every day there is a new story about people encountering wildlife or wildlife and their young. We have people bringing in young cottontail rabbits, songbirds and even fawns and while we know people have good intentions, their actions often do more harm than good. They may have also put themselves in a dangerous situation," adds Milek.





People finding young animals often assume these newborns have been abandoned, but this is almost never the case. Most wildlife mothers hide their young and return periodically to feed and care for them. The mother knows where her young are, and will almost certainly return.

“This year in Casper we have great-horned owls that have nested close to Sportsman’s Warehouse and others in the rafters of the baling facility of the Casper Regional Landfill. As the owlets learn to fly many people are encountering them on the ground in the parking lot. Don’t worry, mom is close by watching, but the process of learning to fly for these birds often takes weeks,” states Wildlife Biologist Heather O’Brien.

No one likes to see an animal suffer, and we at the Game and Fish will take action if needed. However, the vast majority of the time, the best solution is to leave the young animals alone. Keep your pets away from them and talk to your children about not picking up young wildlife. When in doubt, call the Casper Game and Fish at (307) 473-3400 before handling wildlife for their safety, and yours.



In the News

Black Bear

Over Memorial Day weekend, the city of Casper was visited by a black bear. The 100- to 110-pound yearling black bear likely travelled into Casper along Elkhorn Creek, which serves as a natural corridor between town and Casper Mountain.

Game and Fish began getting calls around 3:00 a.m. stating there was a black bear was on the east side of Casper. The bear was successfully immobilized around 8:00 a.m. The male bear was relocated on the south side of Muddy Mountain over 20 miles from Casper.

It is believed that the young yearling was "kicked out" by his mother who likely had a new cub this spring and he worked his way into town from the Elkhorn Creek drainage looking for food or a new home.

The WGFD would like to thank the public for notifying them as well as the Casper Police Department for their response to the situation.



Education

A Few Photos from Game and Fish Community and Education Events

