



the wyoming game & fish department

CASPER REGION newsletter

October Hunting

Thank You to Outdoor Adventures for the Physically Challenged

Recently, Newcastle resident Debbie Hamilton was given the opportunity to hunt thanks to Outdoor Adventures for the Physically Challenged. Pictured here with her 4x4 mule deer buck and hunting guide Chris, Debbie was able to hunt for the first time in 10 years. Outdoor Adventures for the Physically Challenged made it possible thanks to Brad Hammermeister and also local landowners Ron and Barb Brunner.



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On the Ground

Guzzlers, Shrub Transects, Black Hills Wild Turkey Survey

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD), the United States Forest Service (USFS), and the South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks (SDGFP) worked together to install two large wildlife guzzlers on Elk Mountain, southeast of Newcastle WY. The guzzlers are part of a large water development project that the WGFD, USFS, and SDGFP have been working on collaboratively. These guzzlers will be piped into a waterline that the USFS and SDGFP installed on Elk Mountain. Once the waterlines are shut off for the winter, the guzzlers will remain full, providing a year round water source for a variety of wildlife on Elk Mountain. The guzzlers are also strategically placed to use solar radiation to thaw out during the winter months and provide water even in the winter. In addition to providing year-round water for wildlife, these guzzlers will hopefully reduce the transmission of epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) and Bluetongue disease. These diseases are spread to big game by a midge that breeds in mud left behind from drying stock ponds. By adding watering facilities on Elk Mountain, hopefully we can reduce wildlife's use of dirt stock dams, thus reducing disease transmission. WGFD, SDGFP and the USFS plan on installing two more guzzlers either at the end of the summer of 2017 or 2018, depending on when the associated pipeline in the area can be completed. Funds for this project came from the Water For Wildlife Foundation, the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation, the Wyoming Governor's Big Game License Coalition, and the Black Hills Mulies Chapter of the Mule Deer Foundation.



Installing a protective fence around the newly placed guzzler



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Above, completed guzzler; left, USFS, SDGFP, and WGFD crew posing for a photo after newly installed guzzler

Shrub Transects

Casper Wildlife Biologist Heather O'Brien and Terrestrial Habitat Biologist Keith Schoup conducted production transect surveys on mountain mahogany. Plant growth is measured annually every fall and used as a measure of habitat productivity. The new growth on these shrubs is a favorite food of mule deer and helps sustain them over the winter months. This past summer has been so dry that the deer have already started to eat some of the shrubs. Fortunately, growth on the shrubs appears to be above average, and recurring rains in September have started to provide a fall green-up and alternative food sources for deer fattening up for the winter.



Mountain mahogany already browsed in September



Measuring annual growth on a mountain mahogany stem

Wild Turkey Surveys

Wild turkeys in the Black Hills begin to lay their eggs during the last week of April and the first week of May. Hens build simple nests on the ground, usually under brushy cover of some type, and normally lay an egg a day until all their eggs are laid. Researchers have found the average clutch size for wild turkeys in the Black Hills is nine eggs. Hens begin incubation after their last egg is laid, and typically sit on their nest for 28 days, leaving only occasionally to forage and drink.

Normally, the midpoint of hatching in the Black Hills is June 1, but it can be delayed if cold wet weather persists in the late spring. This is because older hens that are not successful with their first nest attempt will often breed and attempt to nest a second or even third time. However, research has found a high percentage of yearling hens only attempt to nest once and, are not successful at raising a brood. In fact, only about 25% of yearling hens even hatch a single egg. Once hatched, the juvenile wild turkeys are known as poults.





Wild turkey nest after hatching

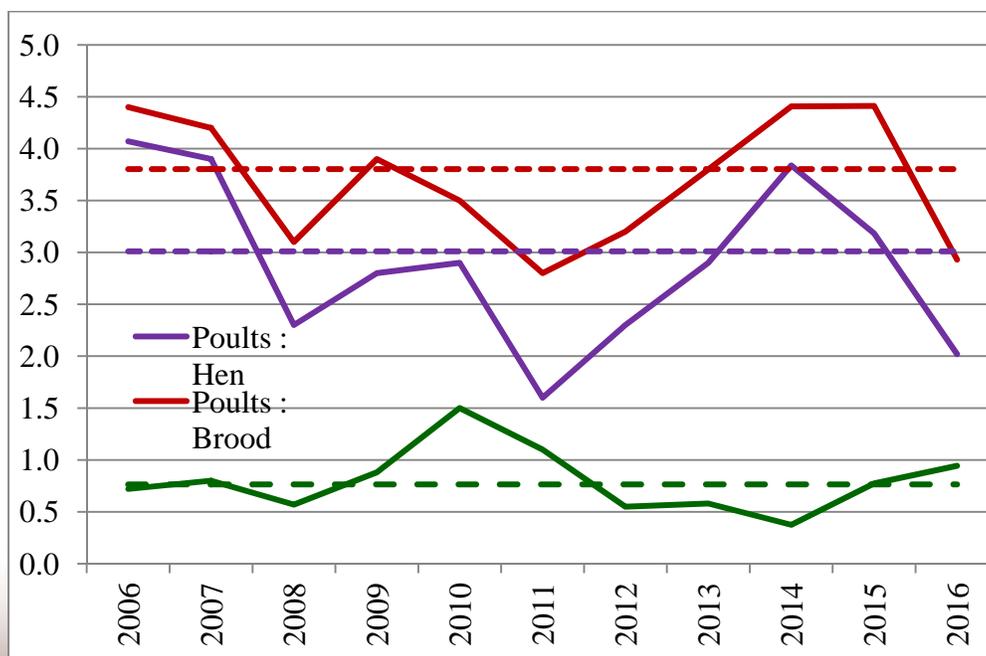
WGFD field personnel have made an effort to gauge wild turkey productivity in the Black Hills using late summer brood counts since at least 1967. Brood counts are designed to give managers a window into poult production and survival each year. The average number of poults per hen, and poults per brood are calculated following data collection.

Surveys are completed in August after the majority of poult mortality has occurred and the data tabulated in September. These data provide a good insight into future population trends. Summer brood counts are fairly well correlated with hunter success the following fall and spring in many areas; and in the Black Hills, spring wild turkey harvest is linked to poult production two years prior (because most successful spring turkey hunters harvest two-year-old toms).

During the month of August, our personnel classified over 1,300 wild turkeys in the Black Hills with help from local landowners along with USFS, BLM and State Forestry personnel.

In 2016, a 25% increase in the total number of wild turkeys was observed compared to last year, which was 25% above 2014. This was to be expected, as poult production the past couple of years finally rebounded to long-term averages after six years of low productivity and survival. That long stretch of increased mortality and decreased reproduction resulted in a significant decline in wild turkey numbers in the Black Hills. Thankfully, this population is beginning to rebound – a trend that has now continued for two years.

This year we observed an average of 2.0 poults per hen and 2.9 poults per brood. These figures are a “poult per hen” less than the long-term averages of 3.0 and 3.8, respectively. A significant part of the reduction this year is thought to be from high survival coming one-year-old turkeys over last winter. This resulted in a greater than normal percentage of yearling hens in the population – hens that typically do not raise young. The rise in the tom to hen ratio this year is also thought to be linked to the greater than average number of Jakes, or yearling male turkeys we observed compared to most years. This is good news for spring hunters, as the number of tom turkeys observed has been increasing. This year’s classification effort yielded a figure of 0.94 toms per hen (or 94 males per 100 females), which is nearly 25% higher than the long-term average of 76 toms per 100 hens.



Behind the Badge

Pronghorn Poaching

On the afternoon of September 15, 2016, a stop poaching report was made by a concerned hunter who found a yearling buck antelope that had been shot and left to waste. "This is one of the most senseless and disturbing violations that we have to deal with," said Game Warden Adam Parks.

The poaching took place on the 33 Mile Road, ½ of a mile south of the informational kiosk in Antelope Hunt Area 73. "Considering that this occurred on opening day when many hunters are in the field, we are hopeful that someone may have witnessed this event." If you have any information regarding this event, please contact Game Warden Adam Parks at 307-473-3420 or Game Warden Dylan Bergman at 307-473-3447.



In the Water

Population Estimates

The Casper Region fisheries management crew completed annual fall gillnetting in Seminoe, Pathfinder and Alcova to evaluate walleye populations in the reservoirs. Conditions in all three reservoirs in recent years have resulted in increasing walleye numbers and size. While the increases in walleye populations are very good for anglers interested in walleye, the increases in number and size of walleye are causing challenges to provide quality trout fisheries.



The tenth Platte River Revival volunteer day had 24 partners involved in the event. An estimated 500 volunteers showed up for a very wet and cold Saturday morning work session and removed 8,000 pounds of debris along the North Platte River corridor through Casper. The Revival has helped focus interest on the North Platte River through Casper and has been the springboard for the river restoration master plan and designs for extensive habitat improvements. The third phase of in-water habitat improvement construction has recently started.

Of Interest

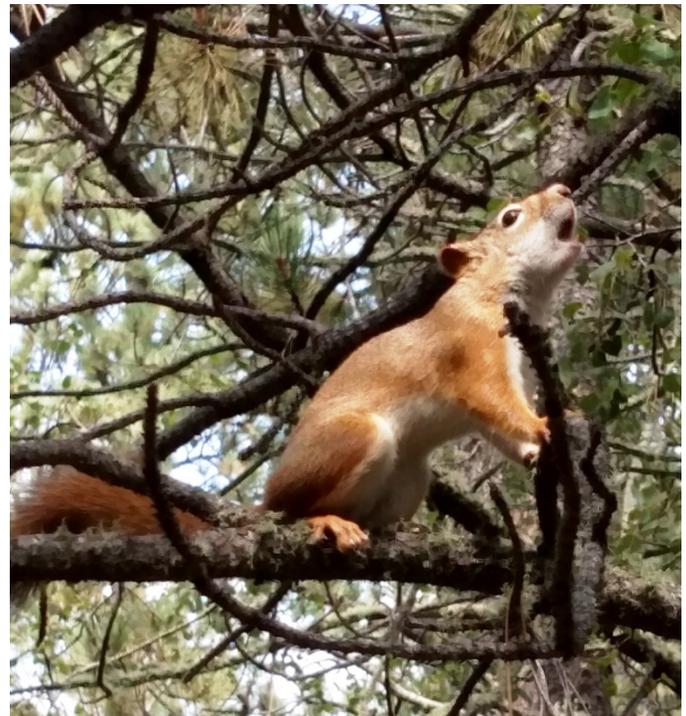
Red Squirrel, *Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*

By Joe Sandrini, Newcastle Wildlife Biologist

Scampering about in forested habitats across Wyoming, the red squirrel is a fairly common sight. However, it is often their chatters, growls and screeches that betray their position.

These members of the tree squirrel family are quite ubiquitous. They are found throughout the Rocky Mountain west, up into Alaska and Canada, and south and east from to Illinois, Indiana and Ohio to northern Virginia.

This small forest dweller is easily identified with reddish to reddish-gray fur on top and a white or cream colored underside. They have white around their eyes and a tail that is shorter and less bushy than most other tree squirrels. With powerful legs and curved front claws they're a spunky climber and jumper!



Red squirrels will eat most anything: insects, seeds, bark, nuts, fruits, mushrooms and pine seeds or cones; and sometimes they even prey on young birds, mice or small rabbits, but mostly they eat are pine seeds.

To ensure enough to eat during the winter, these squirrels will cut green pine cones from trees and bury them. They also create "middens," which are stores of nuts and seeds in piles under logs, at the base of trees and underground. Because red squirrels are better at hiding seeds than finding them, they play an important role in spreading and planting seeds throughout the forest.

Red squirrels sometimes nest in burrows made by other animals, or other holes in the ground; but more commonly they nest in tree hollows, logs or crotches in trees. Typically mating occurs in the winter, and after about a one month gestation females give birth to a litter of three to seven. Juvenile squirrels are weaned at around seven or eight weeks of age, and leave their mother's care after 18 weeks. Except for mothers with young, they are solitary critters, noisily defending their territories from each other.

You can hunt red squirrels in Wyoming, but you'll need a small game license if you are 14 or older, or a non-resident. However, non-residents under 14 can hunt without a license if accompanied by a licensed adult, but what they harvest applies to the adult's bag limit. Please check the current Upland Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Seasons Regulation brochure to check season dates, bag and possession limits.

Information from <http://www.nhptv.org/natureworks/redsquirrel.htm>



Chronic Wasting Disease

CHEYENNE — Chronic wasting disease (CWD), a fatal disease caused by prions that impacts deer, elk, and moose, has been documented across much of the state. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department is reminding hunters that they play a significant role in monitoring the further spread of this disease and providing valuable information for managing CWD. One example is in western Wyoming where the CWD management plan lays out actions based on results of surveillance efforts; and this fall hunters can help with this.

“Game and Fish really appreciates all members of the public who submit samples or report unhealthy looking animals. The CWD testing is used to determine distribution and prevalence rates in cervids—elk, deer and moose. It also can inform further management actions, like at our elk feedgrounds. The public plays a very important role in taking on this disease,” said Scott Edberg, deputy chief of the Wildlife Division.



With the expansion of CWD into western Wyoming, Game and Fish is putting extra focus on that area by asking hunters to bring in their harvest for sampling to get a better understanding of CWD presence by species and prevalence rates. “This in turn will provide the department the needed data to make proper management decisions,” said Edberg. Specific areas of the state where Game and Fish would like more samples are Teton, Park, Sublette, Lincoln, Fremont, Sweetwater and Uinta counties. Game and Fish is also asking for samples from deer hunt areas 1,2,3,4,5,6 (Black Hills) 59,64,65 and 66 and elk hunt areas 7 and 19.

To submit a sample, hunters have several options:

- Game and Fish check stations—these are established throughout the state during big game seasons.
- In the field—when in contact with a game warden, wildlife biologist, or other employee who are collecting CWD samples.
- Wyoming State Veterinary Lab—Hunters wishing to have their animal tested outside the Department’s monitoring program may contact the Wyoming State Veterinary Lab in Laramie for details and cost. The telephone number is (307) 766-9925.
- Select meat processors and taxidermist—in certain locations during opening day or a few days after seasons open, a Game and Fish employee is present at some of these businesses. Availability varies greatly across the state.
- Game and Fish regional offices—in many cases if a hunter stops at a Game and Fish office to get a CWD sample collected, the hunter will have to leave the head at the office until such time a warden or biologist is available to take the sample as they are in the field a majority of the hunting season. But, stop by to check or call first to see what arrangements can be made.

Game and Fish cautions that the testing program is not focused on ensuring the quality of the meat of hunters. Game and Fish does follow the Centers for Disease Control recommendations that the public not eat any animal that is obviously ill or tests positive for CWD. Game and Fish also urges hunters to wear rubber or latex gloves as a general precaution against all diseases when field dressing an animal.

“There are some tips that Game and Fish offers on the best ways to make sure hunters submit a usable sample,” Edberg said. “We need need the unfrozen and unrotten—fresher the better—head of any deer, elk or moose with the upper portion of the neck attached. The sampling process takes about 5-10 minutes.” Game and Fish will also ask for the hunt area and a specific location where the harvest occurred. If a sample submitted to Game and Fish’s CWD surveillance program tests positive and adequate contact information is provided, the hunter will be notified of the positive test result.

Hunters who participate in Game and Fish’s CWD surveillance program by providing deer, elk, or moose tissue samples and provide adequate information, can obtain test results at:

<https://wgfd.wyo.gov/services/education/cwd/surveillance/frmllookup.aspx>.

For more information about CWD in Wyoming, visit the WGFD website at: <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/Wildlife-in-Wyoming/More-Wildlife/Wildlife-Disease/Chronic-Wasting-Disease>. For more information about CWD in North America, visit the CWD Alliance website at: <http://www.cwd-info.org/>.