Wyoming Game and Fish Department

Jackson Region

November 2015 Newsletter

Snake River Cutthroats

The Jackson fish crew conducted a fish sampling effort on a five-mile reach of the Snake River between Deadman's Bar and Moose. While the numbers haven't been analyzed yet, there was a noticeable number of Snake River cutthroats greater than 16 inches. The fish crew was joined by volunteers Leslie Steen (Trout Unlimited), Len Carlman (Snake River Fund), Jill Thompson (Buckrail writer) and Paul Bruun (JH News and Guide writer), with the latter two resulting in some nice media coverage of the effort.

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Conserving Wildlife, Serving People

Infrared Elk Count

An infrared aerial view of elk bedded in a forested area along the Snake River north of Jackson recently.

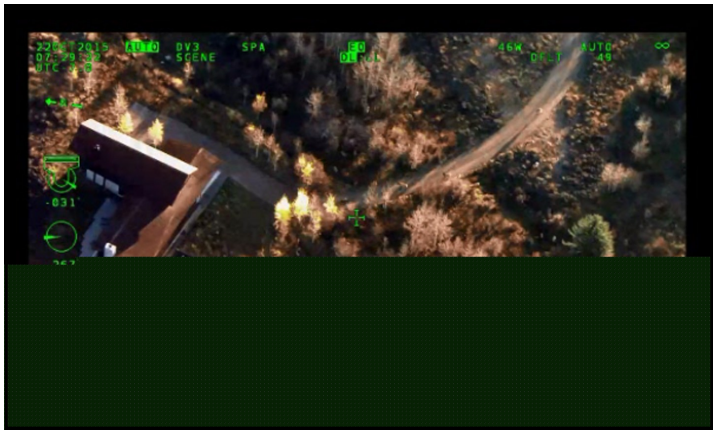
The Wyoming Game and Fish Department, in its constant effort to get the most accurate wildlife counts, recently employed using infrared cameras to count elk from the air along the Snake River corridor between Grand Teton National Park and the town of Wilson.

Game and Fish biologists and wardens have long believed this segment of the Jackson Elk Herd is rapidly growing, but it has been difficult to get a good count in the area because it is dominated by private land with many homes, making access limited from the ground and traditional aerial surveys are difficult because of a dense tree canopy. Plus, wildlife managers generally do not conduct low elevation aerial surveys in such areas to avoid disturbing private homeowners. The infrared aerial surveys are able to be flown at a relatively high elevation, approximately 3,000 feet in a fixed-wing aircraft, yet still detect animals through thick vegetation.

The recent infrared survey resulted in a count of 840 animals. The results of the survey basically confirmed what wildlife managers suspected, that there is a significant number of elk, probably between 900-1,000 animals, occupying this Snake River corridor. This high number of elk, coupled with the fact that this segment is producing calves at approximately twice the rate as the rest of the herd, causes concern for wildlife managers.

Controlling the growth of this segment of the Jackson Elk Herd is always going to be challenging since many of the elk are found on private land where hunting opportunities are limited. The only other two opportunities to apply hunting pressure on these elk are through the Elk Reduction Program in Grand Teton National Park during their migration or on the National Elk Refuge. To date, hunting has not proven effective at slowing the growth of this segment of the herd and managers predict it will continue to grow and make up a larger portion of the entire herd.

(Above) Elk living amongst private lands along the Snake River north of Jackson. (Below) A comparison of a normal aerial view and an infrared view showing how more visible animals are with infrared technology.



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Wounded Warrior Hunts

With licenses donated by other hunters, two wounded veterans realized life-long dreams of taking elk in the Jackson Region this fall.

Staff Sgt Shaun Meadows, U.S. Air Force ret, has always had a love for the great outdoors, particularly hunting and fishing. In particular, Shaun had a life-long dream of going on an old time, canvas wall tent, elk hunt. Wounded Veteran Shaun Meadows harvested an awe-some 6x6 bull elk on the first evening of his hunt.

While Sgt Maj Ray Mackey, U.S. Marine Corps ret, was serving in Afghanistan conducting Operation Enduring Freedom, he was looking forward to retiring from the Marine Corps and going on his first elk hunt. But when an IED confined him to a wheelchair, he thought his opportunity to hunt elk was likely over. Wounded Veteran Sgt Maj Ray Mackey also took a beautiful 6x6 bull elk.

Both of these men realized their dreams and made life-long memories thanks to the generosity of former Game & Fish Habitat Biologist Steve Kilpatrick, the Wyoming Wildlife Federation, the Jackson Hole Chapter of Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Mr. & Mrs. Carlton Loewer of Black Powder Guest Ranch in Alpine, WY, Timberline Taxidermy, Jackson Hole Buffalo Meat Company and Advanced Custom Electric in Jackson Hole.

(Above L&R) Jackson Game Warden Kyle Lash presents Staff Sgt Shaun Meadows with his elk license and Shaun poses with his elk. (Left) Jackson Game Warden Jon Stephens presents Sgt Maj Ray Mackey with his elk license and Ray poses with his elk (Right).

Fencing for Bears

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department in Jackson has partnered with the Bridger Teton National Forest and Teton County Integrated Solid Waste and Recycling to keep bears out of the carcass disposal area at the trash transfer station south of Jackson. Personnel from the three agencies gathered to construct a seven-strand electric fence intended to keep hungry bears from attempting to dig up the carcasses.