



# Wyoming Game and Fish Department

## Jackson Region

## February 2016 Newsletter



### Counting the Herds

Winter is typically the time when wildlife managers conduct their big game surveys because animals are concentrated on their winter ranges, making them easier to count. Counts are conducted from both the ground and the air. Managers not only count the total number of animals, but also classify them as males, females and young of the year.



The Jackson elk herd is the largest in the state at

around 11,000 animals and the annual count always generates a lot of interest, from both the public and the media. The National Elk Refuge winters the largest concentration of elk in the herd making it both impressive and challenging. It is usually an interagency effort involving some 20 people to complete. This year, there were approximately 7,300 elk counted on feed on the National Elk Refuge, with another

3,400 or so counted on the Gros Ventre feedgrounds, adjacent winter ranges and the Buffalo Valley, bringing the total counted to 10, 700. The population is estimated at 11,200 elk.



Jackson Habitat & Access Coordinator Matt Miller and Pinedale Habitat Biologist Jill Randall count elk on the National Elk Refuge.



### Additional Big Game Surveys

Big game classification counts were conducted on bison, moose, and bighorn sheep. After a slow bison hunt for much of the 2015 season, harvest picked up towards the end with a total of 206 animals taken. This was down a bit from last year's 299, but still good enough to keep the growth of the herd in check. Managers have struggled to bring the Jackson bison population down toward the objective of 500 animals. This winter there was a total of 666 animals counted in the herd, down slightly from last year's 691. That number is expected to climb to approximately 800 once the calves are born this spring.

Approximately the same number of moose were counted this year at 213, for an estimated population of 450 in the Jackson Herd. On a positive note, the number of calves was up at 41 per 100 cows, as compared to 33 last year.

Similarly, approximately the same number of bighorn sheep were counted this year at 375, for an estimated population of 425 in the Jackson Herd. Also of note, the number of lambs was up a bit from last year at 42 per 100 ewes. It was 36 last year.

Managers will present all the current big game numbers along with their proposed hunting seasons at upcoming public meetings scheduled for 6-8pm, **March 15th at the Thayne Elementary School and March 17th at the Jackson 4-H Extension Building at 255 W Deloney Avenue next to Miller Park.**

Photos: (Upper left) Moose in the Gros Ventre drainage (Left) Jackson Wildlife Biologist Aly Courtemanch classifies bison on the elk refuge while Kate Wilmot from Grand Teton NP records the numbers. (Below) Bighorn rams observed in the Gros Ventre Wilderness east of Jackson.





A portion of captured elk are herded into a smaller holding pen before animals are marked and biological samples are collected.

### Elk Brucellosis Surveillance

Jackson and Pinedale personnel in the Game and Fish Department's Brucellosis-Feedgrounds-Habitat (BFH) program continued their multi-year study to monitor long-term brucellosis trend data in area elk.

Elk were captured for the first time in 40 years in the corral trap at the Fish Creek feedground in the upper Gros Ventre drainage. Approximately 100 elk were tagged and blood samples were collected from 31 yearling and older cows to measure the presence of brucellosis antibodies.

Brucellosis personnel also trapped elk at the Alpine (Grey's River) feedground, bleeding 66 yearling and

older cows for brucellosis surveillance and again at the Muddy Creek feedground south of Boulder for the 12th year in a row.



Brucellosis prevalence among elk attending Muddy Creek fell from 37% in 2006 to 5% in 2010 after 107 seropositive elk were killed during a pilot project to determine if incidence of the disease could be reduced by test and slaughter methods. Brucellosis seroprevalence rose during 2012, the first year following a year with no elk removed, and had risen to 21% in 2015.



Photos: (Above) A few elk are coaxed into a chute to be bled and collared. (Above right) A blood sample is collected from a cow elk to test for elevated antibodies to the brucella bacteria. (Below left) Jackson Wildlife Biologist Aly Courtemanch assists Jackson Hole High School intern Lexi Daugherty apply an ear tag. (Below right) A cow elk is released back to the Fish Creek Feedground after being handled.





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Conserving Wildlife, Serving People

### Fish On!

Ice fishing is in full swing across the Jackson Region. The most popular ice fishing spot in the Jackson Region is Jackson Lake and February was pretty slow out on the lake. However, one angler did pull a 25 pound lake trout through the ice and then released it back into the lake. Every year there are some really nice lake trout caught.

Fish managers note that the slower fishing in February isn't unusual and catch rates typically improve as winter wears on, which is what they have been seeing lately. On average, managers like to see a catch rate of .5 fish per hour for ice anglers. February's creel data showed a catch rate of .4 fish per hour. Last year, the catch rate bumped up to .74 trout per hour in March, so now is a good time to go fishing.



At right, Jan Brimeyer of Jackson lands a nice lake trout from Phelps Lake in Grand Teton NP.

## FIVE ICE TIPS

### 1. CHECK THICKNESS

Contact a local bait shop or sporting goods store to ask about ice conditions and then check once you get there. The rough guidelines for clear, new solid ice are:

- 2 inches – Stay off
- 4 inches – OK for ice fishing or other activities on foot
- Check the thickness of the ice every 10 to 150 feet.
- Never take any vehicles, snowmobiles or ATVs onto the ice.

### 2. BE SURE IT'S SAFE

- Avoid pressure ridges in the ice and large cracks that can emerge in a lake
- Clear ice is stronger than white ice, which has frozen, thawed and refrozen and is not always stable
- White ice can also be from air bubbles or frozen snow and is much weaker than clear ice. For white ice, double the recommended thickness.

### 3. REMEMBER

No matter your preparation and ice conditions, ice should never be considered 100 percent safe. Be prepared and cautious at all times.

### 4. BUDDY SYSTEM

Anglers should never fish alone. Always fish with someone else and be certain to let a friend know where you are going.

### 5. STAY WARM

To prevent hypothermia if an ice fishing accident does occur, pack an extra set of clothes and hot liquids.

## PRACTICE ICE SAFETY



## What else should I know?

Fluctuating water levels in reservoirs and wind impact ice conditions and can create dangerous ice conditions. Be aware of recent weather conditions and temperatures and scout out the lake you wish to fish for overflow, wet areas, and open water. With variable ice conditions across the state and rapidly changing conditions, anglers are urged to call their regional office to inquire about ice conditions.

Game and Fish discourages driving any motorized vehicle on a frozen lake as well as ice fishing on rivers and or other

moving water that has frozen over. Remember to wear a lifejacket or personal flotation device and carry ice safety picks. Ice cleats are also a good idea. Keep a throw rope handy in case someone falls in.

Anglers venturing on fishing trips this winter should also keep in mind the Fishing Regulations and the Special Winter Ice Fishing provisions, available on the Game and Fish website at [wgfd.wyo.gov](http://wgfd.wyo.gov), regional offices and Cheyenne Headquarters.

### Contact Game & Fish

Cheyenne Headquarters: 1-800-842-1934

Casper Regional Office: 1-800-233-8544

Cody Regional Office: 1-800-654-1178

Green River Regional Office: 1-800-843-8096

Jackson Regional Office: 1-800-423-4113

Lander Regional Office: 1-800-654-7862

Laramie Regional Office: 1-800-843-2352

Pinedale Regional Office: 1-800-452-9107

Sheridan Regional Office: 1-800-331-9834





### Elk Ecology Research Continues

Jackson and Pinedale personnel in the Game and Fish Department's Brucellosis-Feedgrounds-Habitat (BFH) darted elk on the Fish Creek feedground in the upper Gros Ventre drainage east of Jackson. Adult cow elk were tranquilized from the hay sled and fitted with GPS collars to document fine-scale movements and Vaginal Implant Transmitters to identify elk parturition, or calving areas.

In addition, blood samples were collected to continue long-term brucellosis seroprevalence trend data. This

information is also useful for developing elk seasonal range maps, determining areas of high brucellosis transmission risk and providing land managers with additional information to make better resource management decisions.

The collars are continually recovered and refurbished with new batteries and drop-off mechanisms and redeployed to continue to collect GPS data on elk. The Game and Fish Department's BFH program personnel, with collaborators from Iowa State University and the University of Wyoming, have collected a total of over 600 years of GPS collar data from elk captured on 20 feedgrounds and seven native winter range sites adjacent to feedgrounds from 2007 to 2016.



Jackson BFH Biologist Ben Wise lands a tranquilizer dart in the rump of a cow elk at the Fish Creek feedground in the Gros Ventre.



Photos: (Left) BFH Biologist Ben Wise fastens a GPS collar to an adult cow elk. (Lower left) BFH Biologist Eric Maichak performs an ultrasound to ensure a cow elk is pregnant before inserting a Vaginal Implant Transmitter. (Lower right) A cow elk scrambles to its feet after the reversal drug takes effect.





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### Eager Antler Gatherer

On January 22<sup>nd</sup>, South Jackson Game Warden Kyle Lash cited an individual (below) for picking up a shed moose antler in the Gros Ventre drainage northeast of Jackson during the seasonal closure. Wardens would like to remind the public

that all public lands west of the Continental Divide are closed from January 1<sup>st</sup>- April 30<sup>th</sup> to the collection or stashing of shed antlers or horns.



## ATTENTION ANTLER HUNTERS

**COLLECTION OF SHED ANTLERS AND HORNS IS PROHIBITED FROM JANUARY 1ST - APRIL 30TH ON PUBLIC LAND WEST OF THE CONTINENTAL DIVIDE**

**COLLECT MEANS TO SEARCH FOR, OR ATTEMPT, TO LOCATE, STOCKPILE, OR POSSESS SHED ANTLERS/HORNS ON PUBLIC LAND.**



Anyone witnessing a violation can call the Game and Fish Department STOP POACHING hotline at 1-877-943-3847

### Back to the Wild

Jackson Wildlife Coordinator Doug Brimeyer came upon this great horned owl standing in the middle of Highway 89 south of Jackson on the evening of January 6. The owl was not flying away despite the traffic, so Brimeyer picked it up and took it to the Teton Raptor Center in Jackson for possible rehabilitation. Luckily, the owl didn't have any broken bones and after a couple weeks under their care, they determined the owl was ready to be released back to it's original home.

*Watching the owl take flight are Sarah Ramirez from the Teton Raptor Center (left), Doug Brimeyer with WY Game & Fish (right) and his daughter Ashley Brimeyer.*



Don't forget to put in for the Super Tag raffle!

**Super Tag** - One winner for each of nine species – Tickets \$10 each.

**Super Tag Trifecta** - One winner chooses from any three species offered - Tickets \$30 each.

Raffle includes Wyoming's premier big game and trophy game species: bighorn sheep, moose, elk, mountain goat, mule deer or white-tailed deer, wild bison, antelope, mountain lion and black bear.

