The Antler Opener

May 1 has become known as the “antler hunting opener” here in western Wyoming. It is the date state law again permits the gathering of antlers or horns after a Jan 1-April 30 closure on all public lands west of the Continental Divide. It is also the date big game winter range closures are lifted on many federal and state lands. Regional game wardens actively patrol big game winter ranges to ensure everyone is playing by the rules and not harassing wintering big game. After a busy year last year, wardens report the number of citations handed out this year was considerably less.

Access to forest service lands adjacent to the National Elk Refuge near Jackson continues to be a focal point for many antler hunters with 200 or more vehicles typically waiting to cross the refuge at 12:01 am when all closures are lifted. With the midnight opener, antler hunters use powerful lights and headlamps, which light up the hillsides adjacent to the National Elk Refuge. This year Wyoming Public Radio came to Jackson to do a story on the event and Jackson game Warden Kyle Lash was one of those interviewed for the story. You can check it out online here: https://goo.gl/7WN3xh

Photos taken by Mark Gocke at the Flat Creek Trailhead on the boundary between the Bridger Teton NF and the National Elk Refuge.

(Right) Jackson Game Warden Kyle Lash issues an interstate game tag to an antler hunter. All antlers still attached to the skull must be reported to a game warden and tagged to show it was legally harvested.
Flat Creek Work Continues

Jackson Region Aquatic Habitat Biologist Anna Senecal continued her multi-faceted fish habitat improvement project for Flat Creek on the National Elk Refuge. In addition to more than three stream miles of channel improvements completed last fall, Game and Fish has constructed a six-foot high exclosure fence to protect 1600 feet of stream channel from ungulate browsing. Riparian browsing and grazing can limit the potential for streamside vegetation to regenerate and grow to maturity. Streams lacking thriving riparian communities are typically wider, shallower and warmer than their verdant counterparts. The fence was initially constructed last fall and modified early this spring, utilizing reclaimed drill stem pipe paid for with a grant from the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust Fund.

Senecal has also enlisted the help of local Trout Unlimited staff and volunteers, including 200 Jackson Hole seventh-graders, to help jumpstart the regrowth of the riparian plant community within the exclosure along Flat Creek. This spring, volunteers assisted Game & Fish by harvesting willow saplings that will be held dormant in cold storage until June, when the seventh graders will assist in planting them. When Flat re-opens to fishing this coming August, anglers can expect to encounter the fence and pole plantings, but are welcome to fish the section of stream. Wading anglers should have no trouble getting through the fence, which is intended to keep elk out, but not people. While the plantings may not look like much this summer, in a couple years the area should once again support a thriving riparian zone, including many songbirds.

Spring Black Bear Season

The spring black bear hunting season runs May 1-June 15 in the Jackson Region, unless the allotted female mortality quota is reached. Hunters must regularly check the Black Bear Mortality Hotline at 1-800-264-1280. Regional game wardens spend considerable time visiting bait sites before, during and after the hunt season to make sure all hunters are following the rules. Afton Game Warden James Hobbs had to cite one individual for leaving a bait out from last fall. At right, Jackson Game Warden Jon Stephens checks in a successful hunter’s bear taken in the Gros Ventre.
Fishing’s Good

South Jackson Game Warden Kyle Lash decided to get a little exercise by biking (right) into Jenny Lake in Grand Teton National Park while the road was still closed to motorized vehicles in April. Lash found these two youngsters (Left) having a good day through the ice. Lash also reports good fishing by anglers trying their luck on the Snake River (Lower Right).

Habitat & Access

Jackson Habitat & Access Crew Leader Derek Lemon has been busy getting the Region’s Wildlife Habitat Management Areas (WHMA) in shape whether it be replacing poles on fences at the Horse Creek WHMA or putting up the nature trail signs at the South Park WHMA, both south of Jackson.
New Hatchery Hand

Jay Foland has recently been hired as a new fish Culturist at the Auburn Fish Hatchery in Star Valley. Jay is a Grand Island, Nebraska, native and attended the University of Nebraska where he received his B.S. degree in Fish and Wildlife Management in 2009. Foland started his Game and Fish career soon after in 2010 as a seasonal nongame fish biologist in the Green River Region. He then worked with the Department’s statewide spawning crew in 2012 and 2013. Foland then moved on to the Tillett Fish Rearing station before landing his first permanent position as a Fish Culturist at the Clark's Fork fish hatchery. Jay looks forward to getting out, hunting, fishing and camping in the Star Valley area.

Antler Patrol

All the Jackson Region game wardens spent time patrolling elk feedgrounds and winter ranges prior to the May 1 antler collection season opener. (Right) Antler hunters line up at the gate of the South Park elk feedground waiting for it to open at midnight on April 30. (Below) An antler stash found by South Jackson Game Warden Kyle Lash. Unfortunately, this has become a more common tactic of illegal antler hunters wanting to get a jump on the rest who do it legally. Wardens, along with federal officers, are working harder to thwart this practice.
Checking for Aquatic Invasives

With the warmer days and the ice now off most area lakes, the 2016 boating season has commenced in Jackson Hole and Star Valley. Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) check stations are up and running for the 2016 season. Wyoming state law requires all watercraft entering the state by land from March 1st through November 30th to be inspected for AIS before launching in a water of the state.

Check station locations in Star Valley include the Salt Pass check station on Highway 89 south of Afton/Smoot, which will run 8am – 6pm Thursday through Sunday. The check station located at the Port of Entry on Highway 26 in Alpine will run 7 am – 5 pm Monday through Wednesday and 7 am – 7 pm Thursday through Sunday.

Check stations at the Moose and Moran entrances of Grand Teton National Park will be operated seven days a week by the National Park Service.

Boaters can also stop by the Game & Fish regional office in Jackson (420 North Cache St.) to receive an inspection. A check station on Highway 22 at the top of Teton Pass will also begin operation as the summer gets under way.

Boaters are reminded that all watercraft must have a valid 2017 AIS decal before launching on Wyoming waters.

From everyone at the Wyoming Game & Fish Department, have a safe and fun boating and fishing season!

Aquatic Education

Education and outreach events have begun with the Jackson Fish crew running booths at the annual River Sports Boat Swap and the Jackson Hole Wildlife Expo for Teton County 4th graders. A watercraft/AIS inspection class for the public was held May 6th in Pinedale at the regional office.
Alpine Antler Rendezvous

Each year, antler buyers and sellers gather in the town of Alpine to sell their wares the week prior to the annual antler auction in Jackson. Office managers from the Jackson office will team up with regional game wardens, as well as wardens from other regions, making themselves available at the event to tag the various wildlife parts being brought in. Some of the items game wardens will tag include all antlers on the skull, mounted shed antlers, trophy game hides and skulls, etc. Putting an Interstate Game Tag on these items allows them to be legally transported. Game and Fish employees will typically issue upwards of 300 Interstate Game tags to antler merchants from all over the country over the course of the week.

Bears are Out!

The Wyoming Game and Fish Large Carnivore section is busy working to prevent and manage human interactions with bears, lions and wolves. In the way of prevention, Game and Fish personnel Dan Thompson, Mike Boyce and Mark Gocke, joined by Bridger Teton National Forest Biologist Kerry Murphy and Grand Teton National Park Bear Biologist Kate Wilmot, teamed up to put on their annual “Living in Large Carnivore Country” seminar in Jackson. The event continues to be popular with 75 people in attendance. Biologists are reporting fewer bear conflicts so far this season in the Jackson Region.
Photos taken in the Jackson Region over the past month by Regional Information & Education Specialist Mark Gocke