



WYOMING GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT



LARAMIE REGION

JANUARY 2016

"Conserving Wildlife - Serving People"

COUNTING *the* HERDS



Wildlife biologists in the Laramie Region recently completed annual flights to survey big game herds.

Laramie Wildlife Biologist Lee Knox said the Sheep Mountain mule deer herd appears to be in good condition with fawn ratios indicating the herd is growing. He said the Snowy Range elk herd is also doing well, with high calf crops and good bull numbers.

Wheatland Wildlife Biologist Martin Hicks reported high fawn production and good buck ratios for both the Laramie Mountains and Goshen Rim mule deer herd units. He saw a lot of young bucks, but few bucks greater than four years old.

In the Platte Valley, Game Warden Biff Burton reports an increase in mule deer fawn and buck ratios. All species' young grew well in size their first year and adult animals entered the winter in good physical condition.

Lion hunters should only release dogs during legal hours

Wheatland Game Warden David Ellsworth said mountain lion seasons are well underway in Hunt Areas 5 and 6 this year.

Many tracks have been seen along the Laramie Peak roads, and with every new snow, lion hunters are rushing to the hills to try their luck.

Unfortunately, Warden Ellsworth said he has received several reports of hunters releasing dogs well before legal shooting hours.

"This is understandable with the lack of snow that we have had. Hunters are beyond eager with each new weather front, but hunters must remain ethical and legal in their pursuits, remembering to only release dogs on a track during legal hunting hours," he said.

As of mid-January, lion harvest in Areas 5 and 6 has not yet met quotas, so there continues to be plenty of lion hunting opportunity in these areas.



Several big game animals hit on Interstate 80



Elk Mountain Game Warden Ryan Kenneda said the weather in the Elk Mountain game warden district has been tough on big game this year. Interstate 80 has been closed several times due to snow and blowing snow. When the roads are closed, big animals start traveling on the roadways. Unfortunately, this results in more animals being struck by vehicles when the roads reopen.

After the first closure, 12 animals were hit by vehicles on both Interstate 80 and Highway 30. After the second closure, nine pronghorn were hit at the same time by a tractor-trailer combination west of the Hanna intersection. Several more deer and two elk were also hit on Interstate 80.

On Dec. 28, an elk was hit by a tractor-trailer combination. A highway patrolman conducted the traffic accident report and left the scene. Within 30 minutes of his departure, the back straps were taken from the elk.

Warden Kenneda said it is not only illegal to take wildlife parts, but it is also extremely dangerous to stop on Interstate 80.

Motorists: It's illegal to dispatch wounded game animals

Wheatland Game Warden David Ellsworth received a report of several pronghorn antelope carcasses along Highway 313 in Goshen County.

When he arrived, he discovered four pronghorn carcasses, most of which appeared to have suffered a vehicle collision. A fifth carcass had been drug off by coyotes. Warden Ellsworth then found four rifle casings along the highway. With tips from neighboring farmers, he contacted the driver of the vehicle that had been involved in the collision.

A woman and her son were returning home from Cheyenne around midnight on Dec. 18 when they encountered more than 100 pronghorn that were bedded along the highway. With little warning and icy road conditions, the woman was unable to stop and struck 5 pronghorn as the herd was dispersing across the roadway. The woman driver then dispatched the mortally wounded animals.

The woman was informed that she must contact law enforcement to report any instance where wildlife needs to be dispatched outside of a legal hunt. Charges can include taking a game animal without a license and shooting from/along a public highway.

Cronk family recognized for providing hunting access



Access Coordinator Jason Sherwood attended the Stock Growers Association conference banquet to help present Access Recognition Program awards.

The program is a joint venture between the Board of Agriculture and the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission to recognize landowners in each of the four quadrants of the state who provide exceptional access opportunities.

The Southeast Wyoming winners for 2015 are Morris and Jeanie Cronk, who own the Harmony Springs Ranch near Fort Laramie. The Cronk family has continuously enrolled their entire property into the Walk-In Area program since they purchased it.

The Walk-In Area is open for a variety of species and provides diverse features from rolling grasslands to steep, timbered canyons.



It is illegal for dogs to chase or harass game animals

Access Coordinator Jason Sherwood recently handled two calls involving dogs chasing antelope near the city of Laramie.

In one case, a hiker called to report an injured animal near the Ford dealership. When Sherwood arrived at the scene, the reporting party's dog was biting the paralyzed antelope. While on the phone to the poaching hotline, the woman's dog had apparently ran back to the antelope and attacked it.

Dog owners are reminded to keep their dogs under close watch at all times. Just because there is no "leash law" in an area, it doesn't make it less harmful or legal for dogs to harass wildlife. Peace officers are authorized to shoot dogs attacking wildlife or livestock and the owner can be issued a citation.

Hunters cited for violations

Medicine Bow Game Warden Jake Kettley contacted a hunter who was walking on Bureau of Land Management property adjacent to the Shirley Basin Hunter Management Area.

While talking with the hunter Warden Kettley said it became apparent that the man had harvested two elk. However, the man only had one tag. In addition to harvesting his own elk, the man had also shot a calf elk for a friend who couldn't keep up while walking.

Warden Kettley contacted the second man shortly afterwards and that man admitted that he had asked the first hunter to shoot an elk for him.

Warden Kettley cited the first man for over limit of big game and the second man was cited for transfer of license.

Wyoming hunters are reminded that each licensed hunter must shoot their own game and cannot have someone else fill their tag.



New signs at Mule Creek Access Area

The Laramie Region Habitat and Access crew installed 82 new signs on the Mule Creek Ranch Public Access Area. The Mule Creek Ranch PAA was made possible with help from Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. The property is located off Albany County Road 64.

Task force protects migrating big game

A task force of game wardens recently patrolled in the western portion of the Laramie Region in November and December to help protect migrating and wintering big game animals.

Five visiting game wardens patrolled winter ranges and migration corridors for five weeks. Two citations were issued for elk hunting violations. No deer violations were detected.

Saratoga Game Warden Biff Burton said trophy mule deer bucks are vulnerable to poaching during the rut and while they spend time along roads in their winter range.

Numerous contacts were made with sportsmen, outfitters, photographers, landowners, hunters and trappers. Warden Burton said public support for the operation was positive. Success was measured by the lack of poached mule deer and attributed to the presence of the wardens.

The Laramie Region thanks the wardens who traveled from their home regions across the state to help with the task force.



Photos clockwise from top: Rawlins Game Warden Teal Joseph keeps watch on wintering mule deer in the Bennett Peak area during the Saratoga winter range task force. Casper Game Warden Cody Bish took this photo of a group of bighorn sheep often seen at the Wyoming/Colorado state line. Casper Access Coordinator Matt Withroder took this picture as an example of the trophy mule deer that need protection in the Platte Valley. Casper Game Warden Cody Bish took this photo of a buck mule deer and does at Prospect Creek.



Conflicts with wildlife

By the end of December, crusted snow covered the grass in the Platte Valley and encouraged elk to seek easier meals, such as livestock feeding operations and haystacks. Four elk damage complaints were received in the Saratoga and Encampment area, requiring emergency fencing of haystacks. In the photo at right, a propane cannon helps to keep elk from approaching a hay stack for a few days near Encampment.



Annual big game migration

Saratoga Game Warden Biff Burton said mule deer took their time with their annual migration from summer range in the mountains of North Park, Colorado.

By the end of December, winter arrived with its cold temperatures and snow accumulations covering the shorter grass and shrub forage. Mule deer and pronghorn finally picked up the pace of their migration toward winter range and elk moved to lower elevations.

The herds follow the same paths each fall and spring. Hundreds of mule deer migrate north, creating trails near the Wyoming/Colorado state line in the upper Platte River valley (photo at left.)

The Platte Valley Mule Deer Plan, which was developed in 2012, is designed to guide mule deer management in the Platte Valley. Stakeholders identified migration routes as one of many factors important to healthy mule deer populations. The plan seeks to maintain or restore migration routes in the Platte Valley.

Human activity, such as fences, energy development, subdivisions and roads and highways can interfere with migration routes for mule deer and other big game animals. For more about the Platte Valley Mule Deer Plan, visit <http://wgfd.wyo.gov>.

Teen hunter harvests her first bear

Nineteen-year-old Elizabeth Wagoner comes from a family of life-long hunters and said hunting has been a big part of her life for as long as she can remember.

When she was a senior in high school, her uncle and aunt talked to her parents about taking her bear hunting on her uncle's bear bait in the Laramie Peak area for a graduation present. At the time, Elizabeth never thought she would have the opportunity to hunt a bear or even be interested in shooting one.

As she quickly learned, bear hunting isn't anything like hunting deer and elk. "You have to spend hours at a bait site waiting for a bear to come in," she said.

She spent a lot of time sitting at the bait site in the fall of 2014. It took about three weeks to actually see a bear. Unfortunately, it was a sow with two cubs and those were the only bears she saw that season. So, she had to wait until the spring season opened.

"It felt like it was such a long time away," she said. The waiting got even harder when the spring 2015 season passed without a successful harvest. "I never thought that hunting a bear would be one of the toughest things that I had done in my life. I now had to wait the fall of 2015 in September to be able to hunt again." Elizabeth said at this point she never wanted anything more in her life than to get a bear.

The first day of the fall season, Elizabeth hunted with her uncle while her dad took her mother, Stephanie, on a bear hunt of her own. Her mother got a bear on her first night. The bear was 5' 7" inches from the tip of the nose to the end of the tail and weighed around 350 pounds.

The next morning, Elizabeth returned to the bait site with her mother. At about 9 a.m. they saw a bear walking on the side of the hill.

"I mounted my rifle on my tripod and got comfortable. When I felt ready, I pulled up my 7 mm Parker Hale with a Leupold VX-2 scope, and pulled the trigger. I saw the bullet hit the bear and saw him tumble a little bit, then he started to run. I then shot him again but he still wouldn't go down. So I shot him a third time." This time the bear fell down and did not get back up.

"After my mom and I saw him fall down for good, we were screaming, hugging, and jumping up down," Elizabeth said.

The bear measured 7' 4" long and weighed about 450 pounds. Elizabeth decided on a full body mount and took the bear to taxidermist Tom Weickum at Rocky Mountain Artworks in Cheyenne. Tom scored the bear's skull to see if it would make Boone & Crocket books. It scored 19 5/8" - not quite big enough to make the books.

"I am now 19 years old and people still do not believe me when I tell them that I shot the bear that I did," Elizabeth said. "Thank you to all of my family for helping and supporting me throughout this amazing journey. September 6, 2015, is a day that I will never forget. Just to top off my year, this October I got my first elk, which was a 6x6 bull at 400 yards. This year has been incredible and is one that I will never forget."



Be safe on the ice this winter

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department advises anglers to use extreme caution while venturing out ice fishing, especially during the early season and during warmer winter temperatures. Ice on many waters may not be safe.

For safe fishing, ice should be at least four inches thick. Anglers should take special efforts to check the thickness of the ice every 100 to 150 feet.

Avoid fissures in the ice and significant sized cracks that can emerge in a lake. Clear ice is stronger than cloudy or 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.

Wind and fluctuating water levels in reservoirs can impact ice and create dangerous 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.

While ice fishing, prioritizing safety is key to preventing accidental drownings. Game and Fish discourages driving any motorized vehicle on a frozen lake as well as ice fishing on rivers and on other moving water that has frozen over.

Anglers should never fish alone; always fish with someone else. Remember to wear a lifejacket or personal flotation device and carry an ice pick.

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

Anglers going 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 and at regional offices and the Cheyenne Headquarters. For more information, call (307) 745-4046.

Self-reporting pays off for hunters

Wheatland Game Warden David Ellsworth recently received two self-reported wildlife violations.

One was by a hunter who shot a yearling mule deer, and the other by a hunter who shot a yearling pronghorn. In both cases, the hunter was unable to see the short antlers or horns on their respective animals. They realized their mistake and made it right by contacting authorities.

Warden Ellsworth said it often takes a lot of courage for someone to admit when they have made a mistake. So when a hunter does self report, every effort is made to minimize the legal repercussions of the mistake.



The Laramie Region Habitat and Access crew installed two ice eaters at the Cadwell Slough at Saratoga Lake. The ice eaters will remove ice for adequate water supply to prevent winter die-off of fish.



Mule deer with keratoconjunctivitis.

Mule deer found with pink eye

Saratoga Game Warden Biff Burton responded to a call of an apparently blind mule deer buck walking in circles south of town.

The deer was dispatched and sent to the lab for testing. Diagnostics identified inflammation of the cornea and conjunctiva consistent with infectious keratoconjunctivitis (IKC), often referred to as pink eye.

In this case, the bacteria *Trueperella pyogenes* was cultured out of the third eyelid. IKC is typically caused by a bacterial infection in the eye. Multiple bacteria have been associated with IKC in wildlife, but in most cases some type of inciting factor must be present to allow that bacteria into the eye. Usually, this is trauma (such as UV light exposure or mechanical abrasion from dust or blowing snow) or an underlying viral infection such as a herpesvirus.

IKC occurs sporadically in wildlife throughout Wyoming and is most frequently seen in deer and moose, although pronghorn, elk and bighorn sheep may also be affected.



Five new game wardens complete firearms training

Cheyenne Game Warden Shawn Blajszczak (shown at left) developed a basic firearms familiarization and training course for the two new Laramie Region game wardens.

Sara DiRienzo, the new public outreach specialist for the department, joined the training to document and photograph how new wardens are trained. Overall the training was a success and all five new game wardens show a great deal of promise with firearms proficiency in the future. Thank you, Warden Blajszczak, for teaching these five new recruits.



**Wyoming Game and Fish Dept.
Laramie Region Office
528 S. Adams St.
Laramie, WY 82070
(307) 745-4046**

