



Wheatland Game Warden named Citizen of the Year

Wheatland Game Warden David Ellsworth was recently named Citizen of the Year by the Wheatland Masonic Lodge. Ellsworth received a certificate of recognition and was honored during a banquet in early May.

“It was a very humbling event, but also moving to be recognized for actions that all of my coworkers do on a daily basis, that most of us think nothing about, but clearly mean something to our public constituents,” Ellsworth said. Also honored at the banquet were several widows in the community and the Masonic lodge presented a certificate to the Teacher of the Year.

Ellsworth is a native of Fort Collins, Colo. He graduated from the University of Alaska Fairbanks with a degree in Natural Resources and Wildlife Management.

He began his career with the Game and Fish Department as a game warden trainee in April 2013. Following graduation from the Wyoming Law Enforcement Academy he was stationed in Laramie as a game warden trainee. He later transferred to Cheyenne where he assisted the department with interviews for future game wardens and worked with falconers to ensure they had the proper permits. He began his position as a Senior Game Warden in February 2015.

Ellsworth lives in Wheatland with his wife Elisabeth. He enjoys hunting, fishing, fly fishing, mountain biking and backcountry snowboarding.



Annual bird migration heralds spring

The mass movement of birds toward their breeding grounds is known as spring migration and it happens with predictable timing each year. The precise local timing varies with latitude, elevation and, of course, by species. Wyoming’s state bird, the Western meadowlark, generally returns to the area in late March or early April.

May is an excellent time to see many migrant species as they pass through Wyoming to their breeding grounds in the north.

Bird watching is a fun outdoor activity that the entire family can enjoy. Grab your binoculars and field guide and see how many species you can spot this spring!



Wheatland fishing workshop

Laramie Region Fish Biologist Steve Gale presented information on fishing at the “Tacklin’ the Basics of Fishing” workshop in Wheatland on May 7. Participants learned about the species of fish stocked in local waters, where the fish can often be found, and tactics to catch them. After an indoor session, some anglers joined Game and Fish staff to fish at Wheatland Reservoir #1. Despite the cold front that moved into the area, Steve Gale (shown at right) was able to demonstrate successful methods for catching smallmouth bass.

Fisheries supervisor retires

Laramie Region Fisheries Supervisor Mike Snigg retired May 6 after 40 years with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.

Snigg began his Game and Fish career in 1973 as a seasonal biologist in Pine-dale. He later served as a seasonal biologist in Green River until September 1977, when he was hired as the fisheries biologist in Green River. While in Green River he led an ambitious 20-mile trout habitat enhancement project on the Green River below Fontenelle Reservoir that still may be the largest instream habitat improvement project ever completed in Wyoming. He transferred to a fisheries biologist opening in Laramie in 1985 and accepted a promotion to regional fisheries supervisor for southeast Wyoming in 2003.

Among the many accomplishments Snigg is known for are developing oxygen systems to help prevent winterkill in Laramie Plains lakes, using remote video cameras to monitor fishing pressure on the North Platte River, and being an outstanding ambassador with the public, including recruitment of an army of volunteers to assist with stocking Pole Mountain beaver ponds.

Snigg was recognized as Employee of the Year for the Fish Division in 2000. He will retire in Laramie.



Nice catch!

Fishermen waited impatiently for winter to end in the Saratoga area. Saratoga resident Boyd Smith found a pleasant morning to dust off his fishing tackle and head out to Saratoga Lake. He caught a nice female rainbow trout off the dam after just a few minutes of fishing. (Photo by Biff Burton)

The ever-changing Laramie Plains Lakes

Laramie fish biologists have some recent news to relay to anglers after conducting their annual surveys on the Plains Lakes near Laramie. The Plains Lakes surveyed were Gelatt, Meeboer, Alsop and Twin Buttes, all of which are located within about 15 miles of Laramie. Other Laramie Plains Lakes include Leazenby Lake and Lake Hattie, which will be sampled in the next few months.

Heavy snow cover and a malfunctioning aeration system on Gelatt Lake caused oxygen levels to drop below levels needed to support trout in January. "We got the aeration system fixed within a few days, but suspected it might have winter killed," said Fish Biologist Steve Gale. "That was confirmed in March with the discovery of dead fish around the shoreline." Still, some fish survived and a few anglers have reported catching 18- to 20-inch rainbow trout. However, abundance of fish of this size is likely to be very low. "It's safe to say we lost a large portion of fish in Gelatt Lake," Gale said.

On the bright side, Gelatt Lake was recently stocked with 3,500 rainbow trout and 3,500 Snake River cutthroat trout. The seven-inch fish stocked in March should reach 14 to 16 inches by late September, providing nice catches for anglers.

Winter conditions also affected Alsop Lake, where despite the fact that oxygen levels in the lake remained good throughout the winter, we lost a good portion of the fish. "It isn't clear why fish died in Alsop Lake and we are investigating it further," Gale said.

However, anglers should not despair because Alsop Lake was also recently stocked with fish. About 5,000 rainbow trout and 2,500 Yellowstone cutthroat trout hit the water in April at about seven inches in length. These fish should grow to nearly 16 inches by this fall. Anglers are reminded that fishing at Alsop Lake is by artificial flies and lures only and all trout less than 16 inches must be returned to the water immediately. There is a two-fish daily creel limit and possession limit for trout at Alsop Lake.

An aeration system installed at Meeboer Lake in 2013 has been doing a great job of keeping parts of the lake ice free. Meeboer Lake has not winter killed since the system was installed. There is an abundance of rainbow trout between 13 and 15 inches, and most of these fish will grow to about 18 inches by late September. Biologists also report some rainbows in the 23-inch range. Meeboer Lake is stocked annually and was stocked with 25,000 rainbow trout in April and is looking promising for anglers this summer.

Twin Buttes Reservoir is also doing well. "This is the Plains Lake that has been fishing the best this spring," Gale said. There are plenty of rainbow trout between 13 to 24 inches, with the average size greater than 18 inches. Brown trout have shown good growth in Twin Buttes, with the average fish also greater than 18 inches. To maintain the population and size structure, the Game and Fish Department annually stocks 10,000 rainbow trout and 2,500 brown trout into Twin Buttes every April.

All in all, the Laramie Plains Lakes should offer good fishing opportunities for anglers this summer and into the future.



Truck in Wheatland #1

Wheatland Game Warden David Ellsworth responded to assist a Platte County Sheriff Deputy haul a bed mounted fuel tank out of the water at Wheatland Reservoir #1.

The deputy left after loading the fuel tank into the truck, and Warden Ellsworth then checked fishermen along the shore. He then noticed what appeared to be a vehicle submerged in the water not far from where he had assisted the deputy.

After kayaking to the vehicle, Warden Ellsworth discovered it was a pickup truck. He called the undersheriff, who promptly returned to the scene along with the deputy and sheriff.

After a brief investigation it was determined that the vehicle had been driven into the lake, but that the driver was able to escape without injury. A dive recovery wrecker was called and the truck was removed.



Seeking info on eagle death

Saratoga Game Warden Biff Burton investigated a juvenile bald eagle that was found dead near Encampment in early March.

Warden Burton said this bird was dropped at the location after its feet were removed. Anyone with information about this crime should contact the Wyoming Game and Fish Department at 1-877-WGFD-TIP.

In their five year development to adulthood, bald eagles go through one of the most varied plumage changes of any North American bird. In its first year, the mostly dark-colored juvenile can often be mistaken as a golden eagle. However, the bald eagle progressively changes until it reaches adult plumage at five years. Its beak also changes from gray-black to a vibrant yellow.

Sheep facility gets first trial

The crew at the Thorne/Williams Wildlife Research Center at Sybille did a trial run of the new sheep handling facility to trim hooves and take respiratory disease samples from captive bighorn sheep.

Biologists said the new accommodations aided them in handling the bighorns with minimal stress to the sheep and to the people working with them!

The Sybille staff would like to thank all of the department employees who helped lend a hand during the construction of the facility, particularly the Laramie region Habitat and Access section.

Also, a special thank you to Dr. Temple Grandin and Mark Dessing for donating their time to help develop a fantastic design.



Two ewes can be treated simultaneously in our new facility.

Spring snowstorm strands game birds at the UW Hansen Arena

Laramie Game Warden Kelly Todd responded to a call about some game birds that were left unattended on a truck at the University of Wyoming Hansen Arena.

Warden Todd contacted Warden Bill Brinegar for assistance and the two men went out to investigate the birds, which turned out to be Hungarian partridge and pheasants. After checking the plates on the vehicle and making some phone calls, Warden Todd contacted the driver and asked him to meet him at the arena. When the driver arrived, he told Warden Todd that he picked the birds up that morning and was heading to Oregon when the roads were closed due to winter conditions.

Warden Todd checked the driver's receipts and health certificates for the birds and determined they had not gone very long without food or water. He also informed the driver that he must stop at the port-of-entry to get a travel permit to cross Wyoming with live birds. He then talked to one of the University of Wyoming employees and got permission for the driver to leave the birds there overnight until the highway reopened.



Grouse numbers have improved

Wildlife biologists say sharp-tailed grouse numbers appear to be up in southeast Wyoming based on April lek route surveys. The birds are surveyed each spring as they gather on their mating grounds, which are known as leks.



Large carnivore workshop to be held in Cheyenne May 21



The Wyoming Game and Fish Department is encouraging people to attend a free public workshop titled "Living in Large Carnivore Country." The workshop will be held at 10 a.m. on Saturday, May 21, at the Game and Fish Department headquarters in Cheyenne, 5400 Bishop Blvd. Anyone who spends time in bear and lion country is encouraged to attend.

"We've found that there are a lot of people who may not be sure how they should react if confronted by a bear or mountain lion," says Robin Kepple, public information specialist with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. "These workshops provide people with practical information on how to prevent conflicts and what to do in an encounter with one of these large carnivores."

The workshop is designed to focus on how to avoid conflicts with large carnivores while recreating. There will be presentations on topics such as: bear and mountain lion food habits, where one would expect to encounter a bear or mountain lion, food storage regulations, understanding bear and lion behavior, what to do in an encounter and the proper use of bear spray.

For more information contact Robin Kepple at (307)777-4523 or at robin.kepple@wyo.gov.

Ample precipitation good news for wildlife



At left, Saratoga Game Warden Biff Burton collects a tissue sample from a moose that died during the winter in the Barrett Ridge area southeast of Saratoga. While winter can often be deadly to some game animals, wildlife managers still rejoice in the abundant precipitation.

Wheatland Wildlife Biologist Martin Hicks said the April snow and rainfall will result in a good supply of vegetation for all wildlife species this summer. Hunters can expect numbers to be above average for mule deer and white-tailed deer fawns, bighorn sheep lambs, elk calves and upland game bird broods.

The Medicine Bow area has also seen a wet spring and late snow storms, which brought plenty of moisture. This, along with warm days, has the country looking green. Spring runoff has started throughout the region and is keeping staff at the Thorne Williams Wildlife Research Center busy clearing debris and maintaining fences each day to deal with the high flow on Sybille creek (photo above).

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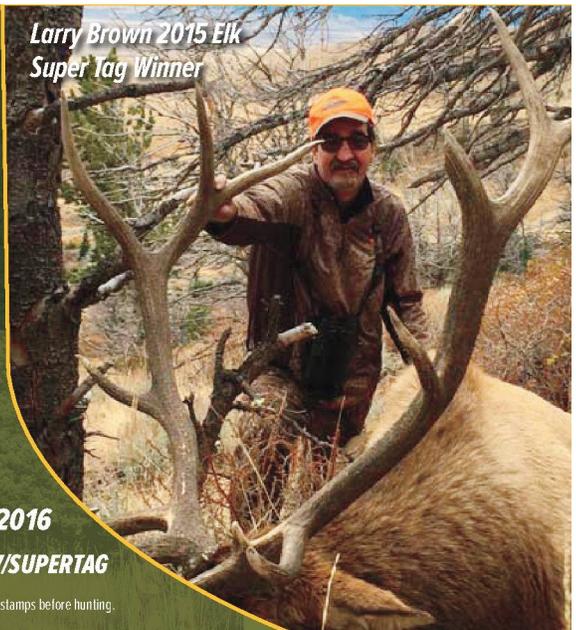
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Larry Brown 2015 Elk Super Tag Winner

Wardens receive training

On April 18 the Field Training Officers (FTOs) took newly hired game wardens to Alcova Reservoir to train them in a number of scenarios on contacting people, watercraft operations and doing paperwork.

Five different scenarios helped the new wardens learn to handle stressful situations in a controlled environment. They spent about 60 hours learning their various job duties, hunting and fishing regulations, boating laws, swimming survival and equipment operations and care.

The new wardens will report to their regions to work with senior game wardens to further their knowledge and skills. In August, they will be back in class with the FTOs to learn about upcoming hunting seasons.



Kristen DaVannon



Mitch Renteria

New wardens issue first citation, make arrest

After shotgun training on April 22, Cheyenne Game Warden Shawn Blajszczak took newly hired game wardens Mitch Renteria and Kristen DaVannon out to patrol the local lakes in Cheyenne.

Once they arrived at Sloans Lake, Blajszczak demonstrated how he contacts members of the public. As the first contact with a fisherman progressed, Blajszczak discovered there was a minor fishing violation. He explained the violation to the suspect and then he, Renteria and DaVannon headed back to the trucks to write a warning. Renteria issued his first warning as a Wyoming Game Warden.

DaVannon practiced calling in a suspect to dispatch over the radio. Dispatch informed her that the suspect had an extraditable warrant out of Colorado. Renteria then arrested the suspect for the warrant, with the help of DaVannon and Blajszczak.

Game Warden positions offer a challenging career with a wide array of job duties while working with diverse and abundant wildlife resources. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department currently employs over 60 game wardens, wildlife investigators, game warden trainees and wildlife technicians all over the state.

Public meetings to address mountain lion seasons and more

A public meeting in Laramie will discuss proposed regulation changes for mountain lions, disabled hunters and herd objectives for bighorn sheep and moose in southeast Wyoming.

The Game and Fish Department reviews Chapter 42 mountain lion regulations every three years. Any changes in regulations or harvest strategies will be discussed at these meetings.

The department is also proposing to combine all regulations regarding disabled hunters into one regulation and to address specific regulations pertaining to disabled hunter season extensions. In addition, meeting participants will hear about a proposed process to make revisions or amendments to the Bighorn/Domestic Sheep Plan and simplify the Nongame Wildlife Regulation.

Specific to the Laramie Region, proposals will be presented for the Douglas Creek and Encampment bighorn sheep herds and the Snowy Range moose herd. All parties interested in these regulations are encouraged to attend the meeting at 6-8 p.m. Thursday, May 19 at the University of Wyoming Biodiversity Institute, Berry Center, Corner of E. Lewis and N. 9th Streets

All proposed regulations are posted on the Department website at wgfd.wyo.gov. Comments on all the above proposed regulations can be made through the website or by mailing: WGFD Regulations, 3030 Energy Lane, Casper, WY 82604. All written and online comments must be submitted by 5 p.m. Friday, June 3. All comments will be presented to the WGF Commission prior to their July 7-8 meeting.



Learning about wildlife

Laramie Region Office Manager Debbie Wheat and Information Specialist Robin Kepple helped people learn about wildlife with a booth at the Spring Exploration Event at the Wyoming Territorial Prison on April 25. Adults and children enjoyed seeing the furs and learning more about wild animals.



On target

Torrington Game Warden Rob Hipp taught a hunter education class at Eastern Wyoming College in April. Sixteen students attended the class and travelled to the Torrington Trap Club on a Saturday where they demonstrated safe firearms handling skills and spent the morning shooting .22 rifles at the range. Congratulations to all the graduates!



Enjoying wildlife

Saratoga Game Warden Biff Burton led an early morning field trip for students of Saratoga Elementary School and several of their parents to see a sage grouse lek and to learn more about sage grouse. Most of the people on the tour had never seen the courtship ritual of sage grouse.

The participants were fascinated by the elaborate display and energy spent by males to attract the attention of females. Forty-two males and five female sage grouse entertained the 66 dedicated wildlife lovers who got out of bed early to witness this unique event.

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