



# Wyoming Game and Fish Department

## Jackson Region

## January 2016 Newsletter



### Mountain Goat Research Continues

For the fourth straight year, local Game and Fish personnel, along with researchers from Montana State University, captured and collared mountain goats in the Snake River Canyon near Alpine. The research was initiated in 2013 with four collared in December and a total of 16 goats captured and collared in the area to date. The goal is to learn more about the health of the herd, their seasonal movements and survival.

The local effort is also part of a larger research project called the Greater Yellowstone Mountain Ungulate Project being led by Montana State University in conjunction with wildlife managers of Wyoming, Idaho and Montana.

Mountain goats were first introduced in the Snake River Range by the Idaho Fish & Game Department over a three year period from 1969-1971. Since that time, the goats have slowly, but steadily, expanded their range into Wyoming. An aerial survey completed in 1996 noted 24 goats in Wyoming. The latest survey completed in August of 2014 recorded 165. The goats have not only increased in number, but also their distribution, with animals (primarily billies) now being sighted in the Wyoming and Salt Ranges and both sexes in the Teton Range.

In order to provide a recreational opportunity, and help curb the growth, the WGFD implemented a hunting season for the Palisades herd in 1999, offering four licenses. The number of licenses was increased to eight in 2005 and again to 12 in 2015.



Photos: (Clockwise from left) 1) Blake Lowery (MSU) and Jackson Brucellosis Biologist Ben Wise fasten a GPS collar 2) Fralick gets standard measurements 3) Fralick and crew prepare to dart a roadside goat 4) Ben Wise draws a blood sample 5) A collared billie is stabilized by Alpine Game Warden Jordan Winter as it regains its feet.



Photos by Mark Gocke, WGFD



### Bison Hunters Finish Strong

Some hunts the Game and Fish Department administrators require more time and effort than others and the bison hunt is definitely one of those. It is the longest big game hunting season in the region running from August 15-January 15, although most bison are often not in an open hunt area, primarily the National Elk Refuge, for much of that.

Nearly all of the Jackson Region Wildlife Division become involved in the hunt to some degree, starting with the office managers. Starting in June, office managers mail a packet of information to all successful draw applicants. After that, they assist many hunters in applying for their access permits for the National Elk Refuge, go over hunt area boundaries, vehicle access roads, etc. Then they will take multiple calls from hunters throughout the season as to



Jackson office manager Nicole Hornberger collects a successful hunter's harvest report and listens to his story on the final day of the hunt season.

whether the ani-

mals are migrating, in a legal hunt area, the weather forecast, etc. And finally, they collect each hunter's mandatory harvest report and bison teeth. It is mandatory for all hunters to report their harvest within 72 hours after the hunt season ends.

Jackson Region game wardens and biologists spend countless days throughout the season monitoring bison movements, assisting hunters and generally managing the hunt. The workload becomes especially busy later in the season. If winter conditions are mild, like this year, bison often remain in Grand Teton National Park and unavailable to hunters. This can make for some disgruntled hunters. After a very low harvest, some groups of bison did finally make their way onto the National Elk Refuge late in the season this year. Violations haven't been excessive, but hunters harvesting a young bull on a cow license remains the most common, which generally results in the confiscation of the animal.

The Jackson Bison herd has been well above the 500 animal population objective for many years, estimated at roughly 800 in 2015. This season, hunters harvested just under 200 bison, which should nudge the

population a little closer towards the population objective, even when considering there will probably be about 175 calves born this coming May.



Jackson Game Warden Jon Stephens visits with a successful father-daughter hunt team.



Craig Burhoop, of Sioux Falls, SD, is all smiles after finally connecting on his second trip out to Jackson Hole.



# Jackson Region Monthly Newsletter

## January 2016

Conserving Wildlife, Serving People



### Moving Elk

In January, all three Jackson Region game wardens responded to reports of elk damage associated with livestock. In some cases several regional personnel were gathered to try and move elk away from private lands, and in some cases to establish elk feedgrounds.

North Jackson Game Warden Jon

(Above) Jackson Game Warden Jon Stephens hurries to open a gate and get ahead of a group of elk (below) before they get to a nearby pocket of timber. Ideally, the elk need to be moved a good distance away from private land hay so that they are less likely to return.



Stephens responded to a report of a group of elk frequenting private lands in the Buffalo Valley. He and regional personnel have made multiple attempts to haze them away from private land to native winter range on the nearby Bridger Teton National Forest and Grand Teton National Park to the south and west.



Warden Stephens attempts to push elk a little further away from private lands by firing a few whistling cracker shells.

### Assessing the Groceries



National Elk Refuge biologist Eric Cole measures forage pounds per acre and snow conditions at a monitoring site on the National Elk Refuge.

Aly Courtemanch, North Jackson wildlife biologist, monitored snow and forage conditions on the National Elk Refuge with Eric Cole, refuge biologist. Every year, snow and forage conditions are monitored from late December into January to determine when to initiate elk supplemental feeding. Biologists measure snow depth and density, as well as forage lbs/acre. Typically, Aly and Eric recommend that supplemental feeding begins when available forage declines below 300 lbs/acre. As of late December, forage conditions were well above this threshold. Past observations indicate that elk are likely to leave the Elk Refuge once this threshold is reached. When elk leave the Elk Refuge, they often move to private lands in Spring Gulch where livestock comingling and damage concerns exist.



### Elk in a What?

Jackson Wildlife personnel received an unusual call that an elk had fallen into a concrete cistern near Alpine. Game Wardens Jordan Winter, Kyle Lash, Todd Graham and Wildlife Management Coordinator Doug Brimeyer responded to the scene to find just that. The team decided the safest option was to immobilize the elk. Once the animal was down, wardens Lash and Winters crawled into the cistern, wrapped a tarp around the elk and the team was able to hoist it out. After removing the elk, managers relocated the young cow to the Alpine elk feedground where it was released no worse for the wear. I'm guessing the elk will be more careful where it steps from here on out.



### Safety First

Several Wildlife Division personnel from both the Jackson and Pinedale regions attended a two-day training on avalanche awareness and winter survival provided by the Bridger Teton National Forest. (Right) Personnel use their transceivers, probes and shovels to conduct a mock rescue effort to uncover four buried backpacks, three containing beacons.





### A Beaver Predicament

On December 12, Afton Game Warden Todd Graham received a report of a beaver trapped in the Lower Swift Creek Reservoir spillway. Warden Graham responded to the scene and sure enough, there was an adult beaver in the spillway. The high concrete walls and the layer of ice on everything were preventing the beaver from getting out. A couple of logs were placed in the spillway to assist the animal's escape, but a check the next day revealed that the beaver was still there. The beaver was removed from the spillway the following day.



### Ice On! Fish on!

Ice had finally formed on Jackson Lake by mid-December and anglers wasted no time in trying their luck. Most anglers have had good luck catching lake trout. Slide lake in the Gros Ventre drainage has had ice much longer and several nice lake trout have been reported being caught there already.



(Left) Jackson Game & Fish Office Manager Nicole Hornberger is pretty jazzed with a beautiful lake trout she pulled from Jackson lake on January 17. Nicole joined the Jackson Game and Fish front office staff at the end of October 2015. After growing up a "city girl" in Riverside, CA, Nicole has taken a liking to all things hunting and fishing. This was her first time ice fishing- Congrats, Niki!



the wyoming game and fish department

January 2016

# CODY REGION newsletter

## Vigil family recognized



**The Vigil family of Manderson.**

The Vigil family of Manderson was recently recognized as one of four recipients of this year's Access Recognition Program. The program honors landowners who provide access to or through their lands to hunters and anglers.

Each year, the Wyoming Board of Agriculture, the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission, and Wyoming Wildlife Foundation, partner together to recognize four landowners who contribute significantly to the hunting and fishing tradition of the Cowboy State. The Vigil family was recognized at the winter Stock Growers Association luncheon in December and will receive a check for \$2,000.

The Vigil family is one of the most prominent landowners in the Manderson/Worland area of the Big Horn Basin. They currently have 800 acres including 1.5 miles of river access enrolled in the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's Private Land Public Wildlife Access Program as three different Walk-In Areas (WIA). These areas provide some of the best hunting and fishing access found in the Big Horn Basin. The Vigil family has been a great partner to the Department and a strong contributor to sportsmen's access.

### Inside This Month's Issue:

#### On the Ground

Cody deer surveys  
Deer classifications  
Season setting meeting schedule

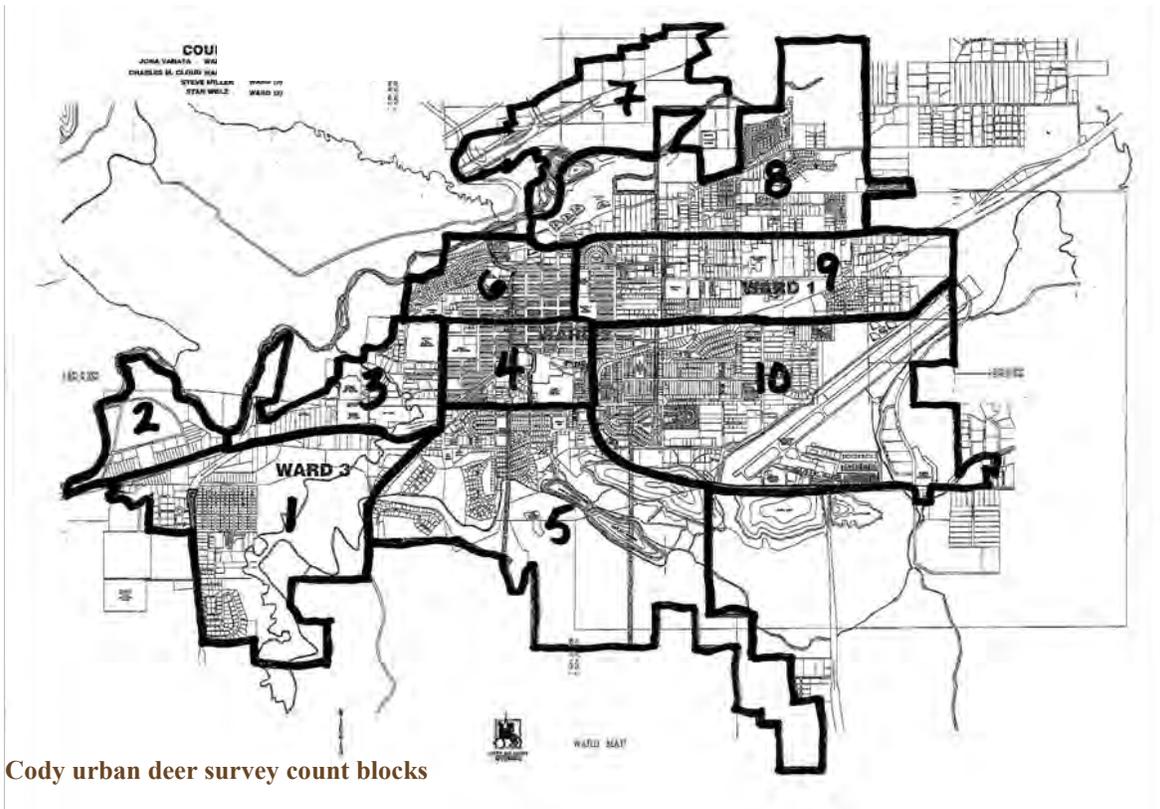
#### Of Interest

Drivers reminded of wildlife on Northfork Highway



# On the ground

## Cody deer population surveyed



**Figure 1. Cody urban deer survey count blocks**

Last month, Game and Fish personnel conducted a classification/trend survey of deer within the city limits of Cody. The survey has been conducted annually since 2011 for the purpose of monitoring deer numbers within the city to help inform city managers and the Urban Deer Task Force.

The city was broken out into ten count blocks (Figure 1), and all deer encountered were classified into sex/age categories (adult buck, yearling buck, doe, fawn). Areas out of, but adjacent to the City Limits of Cody were surveyed as well. These areas included the County Road 2ABN area immediately north of Cody, and the Cooper Lane and Sage Creek areas immediately to the east of Cody.

A total of 290 deer (283 mule deer and seven white-tailed deer) were observed within the City Limits of Cody, and an additional 331 deer (237 mule deer and 94 white-tailed deer) were observed in adjacent areas. Mule deer fawn:doe ratios were 76:100 in the City Limits and 39:100 outside the city limits. Total buck ratios were 30:100 in the city limits and 31:100 out of the city limits. Yearling buck ratios were 10:100 in the city limits and 19:100 out of the city limits.

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Total deer	307	261	296	272	290

**Figure 2. The total number of deer observed in Cody City Limits from 2011 to 2015 has not varied substantially.**



## On the ground

### Deer classifications

Each year, biologists collect ratio data on deer populations through ground and aerial observations. In a given area, biologists observe deer and record the total number of deer and the age and sex class of each deer. From the total number of deer sampled, biologists evaluate the number of fawns per 100 does, the number of adult bucks per 100 does and the number of yearling bucks per 100 does. Tim Woolley Wildlife Management Coordinator said that this provides biologists with a “snapshot” of the population. “This information allows us to see how the population is doing and is used (in combination with other data) to evaluate hunting seasons, assess herd productivity and determine survival,” Woolley said. “The information, along with harvest and population data will be available in the 2015 Big Game Job Completion report at [wgfd.wyo.gov/Hunting/Job-Completion-Reports](http://wgfd.wyo.gov/Hunting/Job-Completion-Reports) in early summer.”



**Greybull Biologist Leslie Schreiber observed this mule deer buck north of Shell in Hunt Area 51 during a ground classification survey.**

### 2016 Cody Region Season Setting Meeting Schedule

**Get Involved!**

Powell Open House	March 10, 2016	Park Co Fairgrounds	6-8 p.m.
Cody Open House	March 14, 2016	Bighorn Federal Bank	6-8 p.m.
Greybull Open House	March 15, 2016	Town Hall	6-8 p.m.
Meeteetse Open House	March 15, 2016	Senior Center	6-8 p.m.
Thermopolis Open House	March 16, 2016	Bighorn Federal Bank	6-8 p.m.
Lovell Open House	March 17, 2016	Fire Hall	6-8 p.m.
Worland, Final meeting	March 21, 2016	Washakie Co Fairgrounds	6-8 p.m.

## Of interest

### Drivers reminded of wildlife on the roadways



North Cody Game Warden Travis Crane snapped this photo of a bison traveling along the North Fork Highway right after the messaging signs were placed.

The Wyoming Department of Transportation recently installed two dynamic messaging signs on the Northfork Highway to remind motorists of the presence of bighorn sheep and other wildlife on the roadway. This is a good reminder for motorists to slow down to avoid potential wildlife-vehicle collisions.

During the fall and winter these large animals migrate to lower elevations where they often find themselves negotiating highways and the associated traffic. Motorists should be aware that while the frequency of wild animals crossing highways is more notable at dawn and dusk, some wildlife are foraging and crossing the highway at all times of the day and night.



Bighorn sheep on the shoulder of the Northfork Highway near Sweetwater Campground.



# Wyoming Game and Fish Department

## Sheridan Region

### January 2016 Newsletter



#### Sheridan Region

##### Regional Wildlife Supervisor:

Joe Gilbert

##### Regional Fisheries Supervisor:

Paul Mavrakis

##### Office Managers:

Lori Roe  
Kathy Boyles

##### Clerical Specialists:

Wendy Balkenbush  
Stephanie Bomar

##### Game Wardens:

Dayton: Dustin Shorma  
Sheridan: Bruce Scigliano  
Buffalo: Jim Seeman  
Kaycee: Grant Gerharter  
N. Gillette: Jackie Otto  
S. Gillette: Dustin Kirsch  
Moorcroft: J.D. Davis  
Investigator: Scott Adell  
Damage Tech: Joe Weyant

##### Public Information Specialist:

Bud Stewart

##### Wildlife Biologists :

Wildlife Management Coordinator:  
Lynn Jahnke  
Sheridan: Tim Thomas  
Buffalo: Dan Thiele  
Gillette: Erika Peckham  
Terrestrial Habitat: Todd Caltrider

##### PLPW Program Coordinator:

Troy Tobiasson

##### Fish Biologists:

Bill Bradshaw  
Andrew Nikirk  
Aquatic Habitat: Travis Cundy

##### Habitat and Access Coordinator:

Seth Roseberry

##### Aquatic Invasive Species:

Greg Downey

##### Story Fish Hatchery:

Superintendent: Steve Diekema  
Senior Fish Culturist: Brad Hughes  
Culturist: Jennifer Meineke

##### Sheridan Bird Farm:

Supervisor: Darrell Meineke  
Biologist: Nate Brown  
Technician: Kurt Heiser

## Poaching in Northwest Sheridan County Remained High In 2015

The number of deer and elk illegally killed in northwest Sheridan County continued to increase during 2015, despite efforts by Game and Fish to boost enforcement efforts in the area. Game wardens from Dayton and Sheridan spent an inordinate amount of time investigating reports of poached animals. Game wardens from other parts of Wyoming were brought in to enhance patrols of problem areas.

In an area along the Wyoming-Montana state line, 17 elk (nine bulls and eight cows) and eight deer (two buck mule deer, one doe mule deer, three buck white-tailed deer and two doe white-tailed deer) were illegally killed in 2015. Game wardens were able to make cases on five of the poached elk with four individuals being issued citations resulting in fines of \$6,130. The remaining cases are still being investigated.



*A white-tailed buck deer shot and the head removed in northern Sheridan County.*



*Bull elk shot and left along Pass Creek Road in March 2015*



*Illegally killed bull elk with head and some meat removed.*



*A mule deer buck was killed and only its head removed.*



# Sheridan Region Monthly Newsletter

## January 2016

### Bald Eagle Captured, Rehabilitated, and Released



*Sheridan Region Wildlife Management Coordinator Lynn Jahnke captures the eagle with a fish landing net.*



*John Woller (on right) holds the door open on the transport cage as Wildlife Management Coordinator Lynn Jahnke prepares to place the eagle into the cage.*



*The released bald eagle takes flight.*



*The crowd that gathered to watch the bald eagle being released listens to Wildlife Management Coordinator Lynn Jahnke describe the eagles capture and recovery history.*



*Sheridan College employee John Woller (foreground at right) opened the door on the transport cage to release the bald eagle he had reported one month earlier.*

On December 11, John Woller, an employee at Sheridan College, notified the Sheridan Regional G&F office that a bald eagle on the college campus could not fly. The eagle was captured and transferred to Ironside Bird Rescue in Cody where it was determined it had intestinal parasites and a bacterial infection. After a month of rehabilitation at Ironside, the eagle was transferred back to Sheridan. On Friday January 8, John Woller had the honor of opening the door on the transport cage and letting the bald eagle fly free again. Approximately 30 people from the Sheridan area came to watch the bald eagle being released.



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## January 2016

### **Pheasant Releases in 2015 From the Sheridan Bird Farm**

From November 3 until December 24, 2015, Sheridan Bird farm personnel along with other game and fish personnel and volunteers sorted, loaded and released 14,519 pheasants onto 12 publicly accessible hunting sites in Sheridan, Johnson, Campbell, Bighorn and Fremont counties. During that period, 100 individual stocking events, or about 2.5 events per weekday took place. Vehicles used to haul and release birds logged approximately 11,800 miles during the months of November and December. The vehicles traveled an average 1,475 miles per week to release an average of 1,815 pheasants per week. The total pheasant production at the Sheridan Bird Farm in 2015 was 15,869, of which 1,200 hens and 150 roosters were kept at the farm for breeding purposes to produce pheasants for the 2016 season.



*Bird Farm Supervisor Darrell Meineke releases pheasants onto a hunting area in Johnson County.*



*Veterans from the VA facility in Sheridan spent an afternoon volunteering at the bird farm.*

### **Biologists and Game Wardens Complete Deer Classification Surveys**



*Sheridan Region Biologists and Game Wardens spent a lot of time looking at deer through spotting scopes in December.*

Deer classification surveys were completed in the four Sheridan Region mule deer herd units in December. In the Powder River Herd Unit (HU) there were 50 bucks per 100 does and 79 fawns per 100 does, while in the Upper Powder River HU there were 43 bucks per 100 does and 67 fawns per 100 does. The Pumpkin Buttes HU had 45 bucks per 100 does and 71 fawns per 100 does. The Sheridan Region contains only the hunt areas on the east side of the North Bighorns HU where 31 bucks per 100 does and 83 fawns per 100 does were classified. The fawn ratios ranged from 53 fawns per 100 does in Hunt Area 32 to 92 fawns per 100 does in Hunt Area 17. While the fawn to doe ratios were down slightly this year compared to 2014, the ratios observed are still considered good.

Almost the entire Sheridan G&F Region is considered one white-tailed deer herd unit. The Powder River White-tailed Deer HU had 41 bucks per 100 does and 71 fawns per 100 does.



# Sheridan Region Monthly Newsletter

## January 2016

### **Moose in Hunt Area 34 Counted From Helicopter**

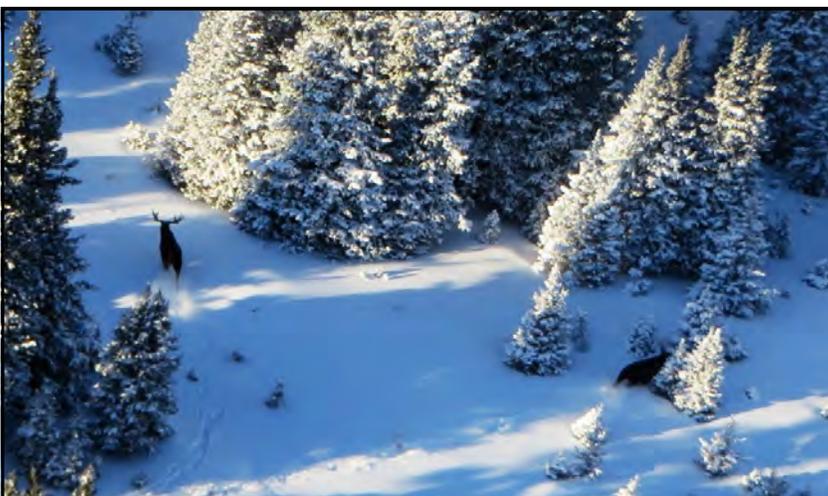


*A Bell Jet Ranger helicopter was used to conduct a winter moose survey in Hunt Area 34 west of Buffalo.*

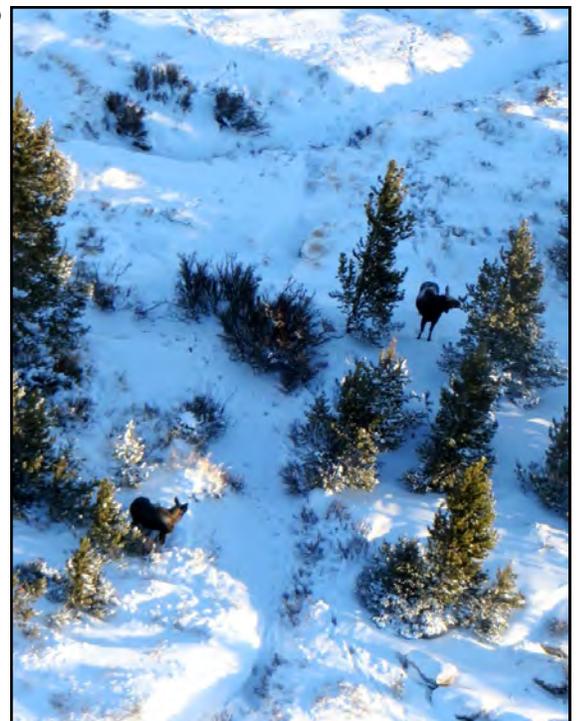


*Moose observed were classified as cows, bulls or calves.*

A Bell Jet Ranger helicopter was used to conduct a winter moose survey in Hunt Area 34 west of Buffalo. The survey was done to gather information on current moose numbers and herd composition. Herd composition, or classification surveys, provides information on calf production and survival as well as the proportion of bulls in the herd. A total of 24 moose were counted and classified during the survey, including 9 bulls, 9 cows and 6 calves. These totals compared to 33 moose in 2014 and 32 moose in 2013. The lower counts this year could be due to a combination of lower moose numbers and a lower detection rate. Moose often occupy conifer habitat adjacent to willow habitats which makes them difficult or impossible to observe. Survey results and other data will be used when setting the 2016 fall hunting season. Management direction has strived to decrease moose numbers to a level compatible with available habitat. Willow habitat is generally in poor condition, thereby providing reduced moose carrying capacity.



*Two of the nine bull moose counted during the winter moose survey in Hunt Area 34.*



*Moose can occupy conifer habitats that make them difficult to detect.*



**Region Wildlife Violations ~ Illegally taken mule deer head concealed under camper trailer**

Game Wardens Andy Countryman and Nick Roberts investigated the illegal killing and waste of three mule deer north of Evanston. Two does and one fawn were shot with a .22 caliber firearm on the evening of December 18th on the east side of Woodruff Narrows Reservoir. No attempt was made to salvage any meat from the deer. No suspects have been identified as of yet. (photo below, compliments of Nick Roberts)



Evanston Game Warden Nick Roberts was able to successfully prosecute Evanston resident Bradford Watts on several game violations from the October deer season. Mr. Watts harvested two mule deer bucks on one general license. (photo below, left) At least one of the deer was shot from a vehicle and both were on private property he did not have permission to hunt. Mr. Watts attempted to hide the second deer by covering it with a coat and stashing it in the sage brush. Mr. Watts was charged \$750 in fines and had his hunting privileges suspended for two years. This case was made possible by a tip from a local hunting guide.



On October 4th Kemmerer Game Warden Chris Baird responded to a report of a wasted deer in the Coal Creek drainage in deer hunt area 135. Baird said the report was an apparent waste of edible portions of a mule deer buck. While investigating the report of the wasted deer Warden Baird contacted the suspect and found that he had not tagged the first deer and was still hunting deer.



“Over the course of three days,” Baird said, “Cokeville Game Warden Neil Hymas and I conducted interviews and collected evidence, while the suspect continued to deny any wrong doing and remained uncooperative.

Ultimately, Shawn P. Coburn, Evanston, WY, admitted to killing a four-point buck mule deer, intentionally not tagging that deer and to continuing to hunt deer, and attempting to take an over limit of big game. He also admitted to wasting edible portions of the deer in the field.”

On January 7 in Lincoln County Circuit Court, Coburn plead guilty to charges of failing to tag a big game animal, waste of edible portions of a big game animal, and attempting to take an over limit of big game.

The court and state agreed that these were very serious violations,” Baird said. “Mr. Coburn had multiple records of similar previous violations and was in violation of a previous court ordered firearms restriction from a family violence conviction in 2014.

“He was placed on unsupervised probation for 18 months, must serve six days in the Lincoln County jail, with 264 days suspended and ordered to pay \$1060.00 in fines. The court suspended Mr. Coburn’s hunting, fishing, and trapping privileges for seven years. He may not fish, trap, guide, or possess a firearm where wildlife can be taken until 2023.” Page 2

**Enforcement Happenings**  
There are unsolved poaching cases in the Green River Region. If you have any information about any wildlife violation please contact your local game warden or the STOP Poaching Hotline at:  
1-877-WGFD-TIP (1-877-943-3847 )  
• You can also report a wildlife violation at the WGFD website <http://wgfd.wyo.gov>



Photo above: Mule deer with pinkeye

“Increased snow in the area near Cokeville and Kemmerer has helped mountain lion hunters during late November and December,” Cokeville Game Warden Neil Hymas said. “Both outfitters and local hunters have taken advantage of tracking conditions, and have harvested several mountain lions in Hunt Area 14, which has a mortality quota of 15 lions. Last winter, only seven mountain lions were harvested, and the season remained open until the end of March.”

“Dogs are allowed when hunting mountain lions in Wyoming. Hunters are reminded that other regulations such as the wearing of fluorescent orange, hunting hours, legal firearms, and reporting of harvested mountain lions can be found in Commission Regulation Chapter 42 or the mountain lion hunting brochure provided by the Department.”

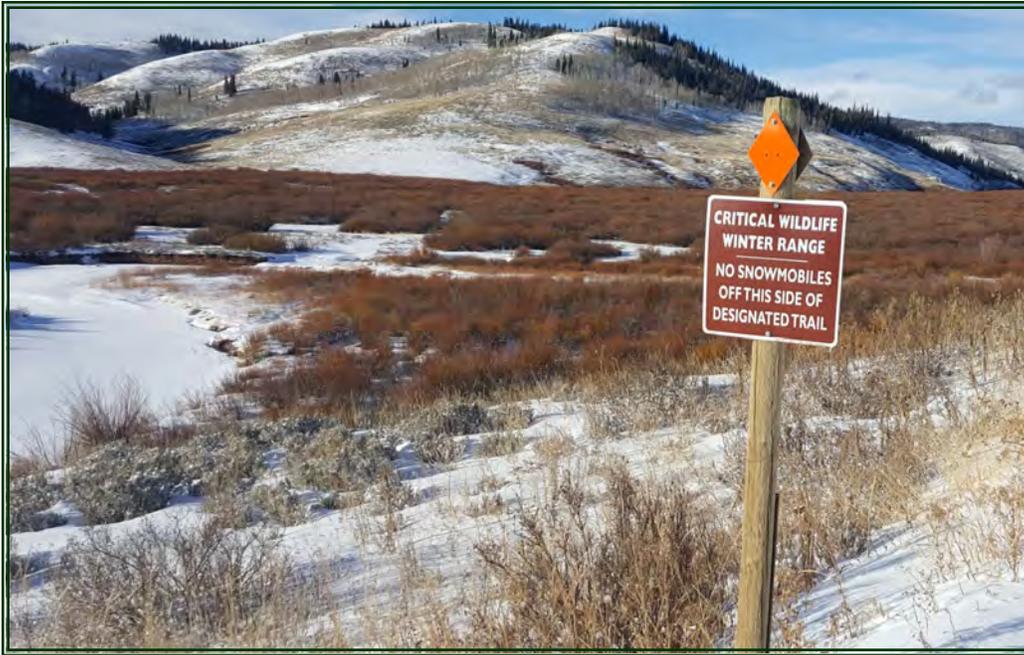
The status of the *mortality quota* for any mountain lion hunt area can be checked 24 hours per day by calling 1-800-264-1280.

(Photo, right, compliments of Neil Hymas)  
Laverne Marchione with harvested lion.

Cokeville Game Warden Neil Hymas said that four separate yearling male mule deer were reported or observed near Cokeville that were acting confused or blind within the first two weeks of December. Inspection of the young bucks by Hymas confirmed that the deer had advanced cases of infectious keratoconjunctivitis, which is known more commonly as *pinkeye*. “Deer that have advanced pinkeye often seem confused and walk in circles as blindness sets in,” Hymas said. “Drainage is often visible around the deer’s eye and the corneas may appear opaque. There is no practical way to cure the bacterial infection in wild animals, and infected deer are commonly euthanized to prevent suffering and the possibility of spreading the disease to other deer.” “The relatively high prevalence of keratoconjunctivitis in young male mule deer suggests that a behavior related animal-to-animal mode of transmission spreads the disease in this species. Reports of deer affected by “pinkeye” seem to occur more common during the late fall when deer migrations and the rut have deer concentrated and contacting each other.”



*Hams Fork snowmobile trail a success ~ Important moose and other wintering wildlife protection*



*Photo: Kemmerer Game Warden Chris Baird*

*Please observe critical wildlife winter range near the Hams Fork and on other trails.*

*"Last year WGF D Lincoln Moose herd managers met with the Forest Service and Wyoming State Park, Historical Sites and Trails to discuss grooming the Ham's Fork Road from Beaver Cr. to the West Fork of the Hams Fork thru critical moose winter range," said Kemmerer Game Warden Chris Baird. "In the past, this has been a contentious issue with concerns as to its effect on wintering moose along this river. After some good discussion all agreed that we would try grooming this trail this year with the provision that the forest service post more signs and enforce already mandated regulations prohibiting snowmobile use along the river, west of the Ham's Fork Rd., between the forest boundary and the Elk Creek campground."*

*"Some of the reasoning behind this decision was that when the trail is not groomed it becomes so rough that folks leave the trail in many places to travel the much smoother river bottom," Baird said. "This reasoning follows that if the trail was groomed, people would stay on it to access the higher country with more recreational snowmobile opportunity."*

*"I patrolled this area last Saturday," Baird said, "And there 14 vehicles at the trail head and lots of families and enthusiasts enjoying the already good snowmobiling conditions. The trail had been recently groomed and made for great traveling. I observed and documented quite a bit of moose activity all along the river and even a few moose still north of the camp ground. The trail is very well signed, informing the public about the requirement of staying on or east of the trail. I did observe a few tracks where violations had occurred, but all in all there seemed to be good compliance."*

*"Snow conditions were great, but running hard on the groomed surface was causing some overheating issues where folks need to leave the trail to get into softer snow to cool their machines down," Baird said. "I think this may have contributed to some of the tracks west of the trail. I contacted several groups that were very happy about the trail being groomed and took every opportunity to talk about the winter range issues. The end result is very positive; it is great to have the snowmobile trail groomed for people to use and enjoy, while keeping wintering wildlife in mind."*

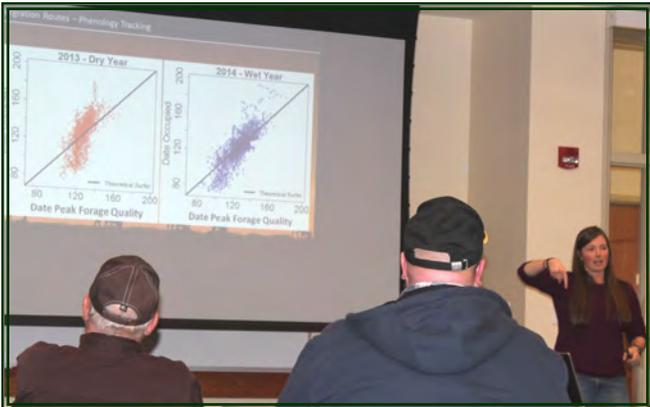
*Ermine in action ~ Very cool!*

**Baggs Game Warden Kim Olson** was fortunate to observe this long-tailed weasel, *Mustela frenata*, which had just killed a cottontail rabbit. "The weasel worked to drag the cottontail off to a safe eating location," Olson said. "The cottontail was *three times his size*, so it was so cool to see! I wish I had known where he wanted it taken to, because I would have helped him!"



**Long-tailed weasels** are brown and have a rusty orange-colored belly during the summer months. In winter, they turn totally white, except for the black tip on its tail, to blend in better with their snowy environment. This weasel eats small mammals, like voles and pocket gophers. They also eat rabbits, birds, beetles, grasshoppers, carrion, and even frogs. Weasels are classified as a furbearer in Wyoming. Wyoming's weasel trapping season in *hunt area 1 runs October 1 through March 31*. A resident furbearer hunting or trapping license costs \$44.00 and the resident youth furbearer hunting or trapping license costs \$6.00. There is *no Conservation Stamp requirement* with the furbearer animal hunting or trapping license.

*Post Hunting Season Public Meetings ~ Wyoming Range Mule Deer Research Project Update*



Personnel in the Green River Region recently held two post hunting season public information gathering meetings to gather feedback from people on how their hunting season went. (photos left, top two) An update on the Wyoming Range mule deer herd research project , which was initiated in 2013, was presented in Kemmerer and Green River by University of Wyoming graduate research student Samantha Dwinell. (photos left, bottom two)

Information on the Fontenelle Fire, planned future habitat improvement projects in the Wyoming Range, population management, and the upcoming population objective review public input process were also presented.

The goal of the Wyoming Range Mule Deer Project is to investigate nutritional relationships and understand how they affect population dynamics, and ultimately the capacity of the current range to support mule deer in western Wyoming. Phase 1 is complete and Dwinell and fellow researchers are into Phase II of the project. Dwinell says that Phase II aimed at determining the contributions of habitat, nutrition, and predation on survival of deer fawns. You can find detailed information on these projects and more a the University of Wyoming Cooperative Research Unit at the link:  
<http://wycoopunit.org/labs/monteith-shop>

Public hunting season open houses will be held in the Green River region the week of March 14, 2016. Stay tuned for meeting dates, times and locations.

*Mule Deer Trapping near Baggs Continues ~ Now in its fifth year*



*Univ. of Connecticut volunteer Rachael Smiley drops some apple pulp*



Baggs Wildlife Biologist Tony Mong and Baggs Game Warden Kim Olson worked with University of Wyoming wildlife students and volunteers on a continuing mule deer research project. "So far, the course-scale movement data have revealed a possible difference in movement patterns and timing of migration between buck and doe mule deer within the Baggs mule deer herd," Mong said. "To date, no study has looked directly at the fine scale migratory patterns of mule deer bucks. The project is now in its 5th year and we are very thankful for funders, like the Muley Fanatic Foundation; the Southeast Wyoming Chapter contributed \$10,000 and the Southwest Wyoming Chapter contributed \$5,375 to this project.

Workers set the drop net and bait the deer capture site with apple pulp (photos left, top two). Mong watches the net with binoculars from a distance and when enough deer are under the net, he drops the net by remote control. Workers then put an ear tag and PIT tag into the leg of the deer and then release it. The PIT tag will allow Mong and other researchers the ability to go online and track the movements of the deer anytime. Mong has collared more than 200 mule deer since 2011 and now the project is focusing on fine-scale migratory patterns of mule deer bucks in the Baggs herd.



*Office manager Sheila Watts holds a fawn until it can be tagged. (photo above) Tony Mong and UCONN Professor Chad Rittenhouse release a deer. (photo below)*





*Office managers Sheila Watts (left) and Regina Dickson (right) have been busy since the new year, answering questions about current ice conditions, Life Time licenses, and boat registrations. The girls invite you to stop in and pick up your 2016 licenses and Conservation Stamps.*

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*~Critter Spotlight~  
Northern flicker  
By Mark Zornes a.k.a. Leopold*

- *The northern flicker* has two subspecies, both of which are found in Wyoming. Red-shafted flickers (the western subspecies) can be found in all parts of Wyoming, while the yellow-shafted flicker is restricted to the east. As their names imply, red shafted flickers have red wing and tail feathers (especially the feather shaft), and yellow shafted flickers have (you guessed it) yellow ones. Male yellow-shafted flickers have a red nape and black mustache mark. Red-shafted flicker males have no red nape and a red mustache mark. Females of both subspecies have no head markings.
- *Northern flickers* are the only woodpecker species that spend any significant portion of their time on the ground. This common species is often seen far from trees on the ground searching for ants and other insects. Ants make up nearly 1/2 of their diet. Other foods include fruits, nuts, and seeds.
- *This species is easily identified* to species and subspecies, especially in flight. They have a typical undulating woodpecker flight and display a white rump patch and their brightly colored underlings and tails.
- *Often called a "yellow hammer"* in the east, this species is one of the only woodpeckers that migrates. Birds in Canada leave that area for warmer climates in the south during winter. Most of the continental US have these birds year-round.
- *Flickers drum with their beaks* on trees and other hard objects, including the sides of houses and even tin buildings! This can make them unpopular with human neighbors since they can damage homes and barns, and tend to drum very early in the morning.
- *Northern Flickers nest in cavities* (as do other woodpeckers) and produce 5-8 young annually. Unlike other woodpeckers, flickers occasionally use bank burrows for nest sites.



WYOMING GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT



## LARAMIE REGION

JANUARY 2016

"Conserving Wildlife - Serving People"

# COUNTING *the* HERDS



**W**ildlife 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  
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january 2016

the wyoming game & fish department

# LANDER REGION newsletter

## In the Field

Wolverine detection



*At left: Pacific marten visiting one of the wolverine bait sites. Above: Lee Tafelmeyer skiing into rebait and check one of the camera sites.*

cameras and rebait sites once a month.

The Nongame Program is collaborating with Montana, Idaho, and Washington to survey for wolverines in the lower 48 states in order to document distribution and assess occupancy. While not for the faint of heart, the work does offer beautiful vistas and a chance to gain valuable information about Wyoming's wolverines. The project will continue through March this year and will pick up again this fall and be completed in spring 2017.

# From the Air

## Seminoe bighorns



Seminoe bighorn sheep. Photo by Gary Sundberg.

Dillon Herman, east Rawlins game warden, spent several hours in the air locating collared bighorn sheep in the Seminoe Mountains. A total of 23 of the 24 sheep were located, and none were indicating there were any mortalities. During the flight a total of 74 sheep were counted.

These sheep were transplanted over the last few years from the Devils Canyon herd to help bolster this Ferris/ Seminoe herd. Another transplant is scheduled this year as well.

# Out of the Case Files

## Mistaken identity



Swift fox. Photo by Mark Gocke.

South Riverton Game Warden Brad Gibb has documented several cases of mistaken identity or misinformation regarding swift foxes. They can be easily confused with coyote pups and red foxes. These species are sometimes hard to tease apart if



Coyote pups. Photo by USFWS

they are not next to one another and if there is nothing on the landscape to show relative size. However, they are classified differently and take of each animal differs. Swift

foxes are considered a species of greatest conservation need, are legally classified as nongame in Wyoming and are not available to harvest. Coyotes and red foxes are classified as predators and can be taken by any means, at any time. So that you don't find yourself in violation of a game law, take a minute to look at the chart below to learn more about identification of the three species.



Red fox. Photo by USFWS.

Species	Size and shape	Face	Tail	Legs
Swift fox	5-7 lbs./ house cat size	very delicate, small pointed snout, black patches on side of snout	bushy, black tip	tan front legs, very delicate looking
Coyote pup	variable size, puppy like shape	more robust, shorter snout, "puppy face"	not bushy, black tip	tan front legs, more stocky and robust than swift fox
Red fox	7-15 lbs	delicate, pointed snout	bushy, white tip	black front legs, longer legs than swift

# With the Children

## Habitats and adaptations



Education Specialist Rene Schell gave multiple education programs to Lander grade school students about animal habitats and adaptations. This month the school visits made it onto twitter and into the elementary school newsletter. And for the first time, the renovated library was used as an educational space for the students who loved seeing the new taxidermied animals on display from bats, voles, ducks, ferrets, fish, and much more.



[Come tweet with us!](#)

@WGFD



# With the Deer

It's all about the fawns



*Mule deer does and fawns. Photo by Stan Harter.*

What a difference the weather can make! Over the past two years much of Wyoming has received timely precipitation. Beginning in September and October 2013, much of the Lander Region received more than three times the average precipitation with rain and snow that soaked into the warm, unfrozen ground. This moisture created ideal conditions for a fall green-up, which helped mule deer, pronghorn and most wildlife enter the winter in optimal condition. Then again in spring and summer 2014, more rains came, creating some of the best grass growth across the state most long-time residents had seen in decades. Similar events occurred in fall 2014 and spring 2015.

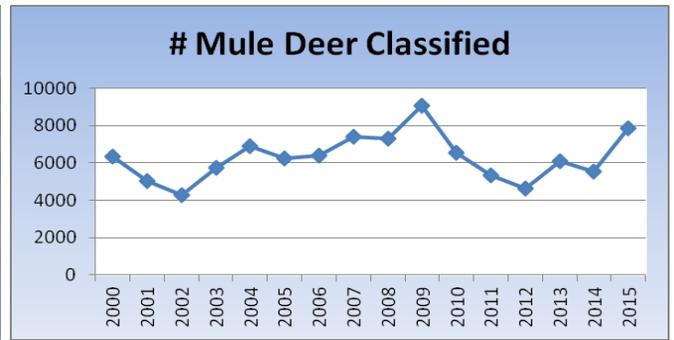
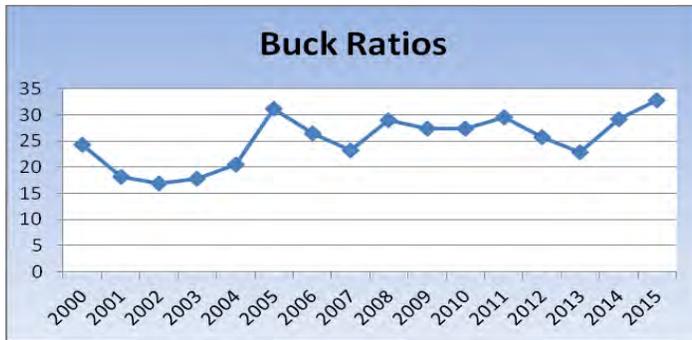
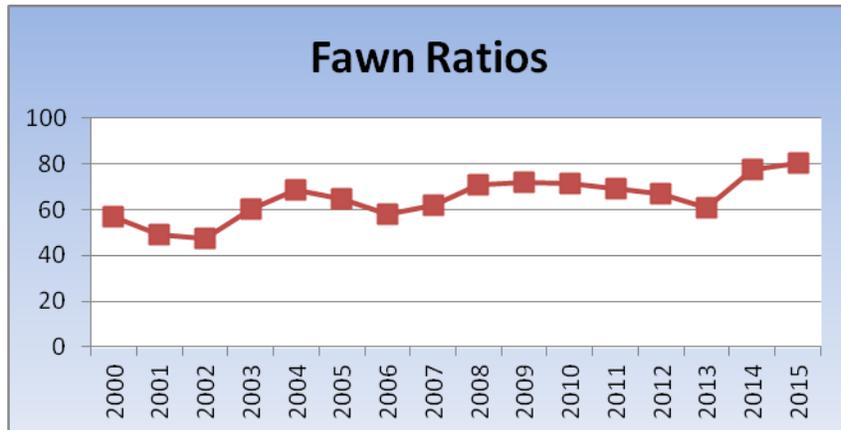
Mule deer classifications in the Lander Region were completed in November and December and thankfully observed fawn ratios were outstanding for a second year. Observed fawn ratios ranged from 56 fawns per 100 does (or 56/100) in the Beaver Rim herd unit to 90/100 in the Sweetwater herd unit. Most notable, ratios were observed to be greater than 60/100 once again in the Ferris herd unit where in 2013 a meager 29/100 were observed. To see mule deer populations grow, a minimum of 66/100 does are usually needed.

Concurrent with increased fawn production and survival, the past two years observed buck ratios have rebounded nicely and region wide were greater than 30 bucks/100 does. Buck ratios ranged from 21/100 in the Sweetwater herd unit to 49/100 in the Beaver Rim herd unit.



*Class 3 buck. Photo by Stan Harter.*

Also in late 2015 personnel counted a total 7,880 mule deer. This represents the third year of overall increased counts since the low in 2012. This observed increase in the number of mule deer is again concurrent with increased fawn production and survival, and is testament to the importance of the Game and Fish's Mule Deer Initiative's mantra "It's all about the fawns!"



Tables above show Lander Region averages over the last 15 years.



Mule deer with Crooks Peak in the distance. Photo by Stan Harter.



# On the back page



**W**est Rawlins Game Warden Teal Joseph glasses the landscape on mule deer winter range patrol. Each year game wardens from around the state work stints on winter range patrols to maintain a presence near susceptible mule deer herds to watch for poachers or suspicious activity.

**A** bobcat keeps a watchful eye on East Rawlins Game Warden Dillon Herman while he checks trap compliance.

Checking that traps are legal and marked with the identification of the trapper is just one of a game wardens many duties.

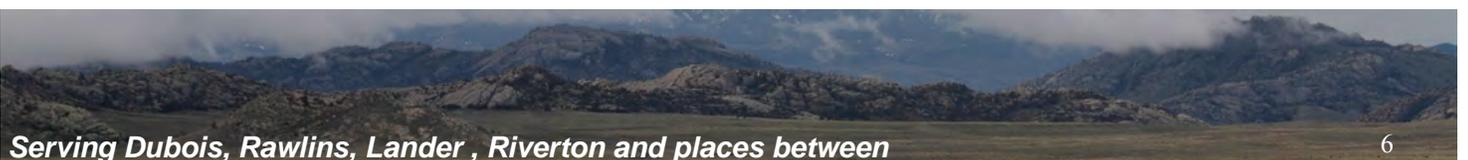


**Check out the Lander Region Webpage for more great information!**

<https://wgfd.wyo.gov/Regional-Offices/Lander-Region>

**And sign up to receive the newsletter electronically**

<https://wgfd.wyo.gov/email-sign-up>





the wyoming game & fish department

# CASPER REGION newsletter

## Hunting

### Late Season Elk and Public Meetings

Elk hunting remained open for many hunt areas in the Casper Region during December. Hunters were able to access most areas easily until significant snow fell on December 14<sup>th</sup>. Access then became limited in many areas due to deep and drifted snow. Still, hunters continued to successfully harvest cow elk in Area 19 and both cows and bulls in Area 23. Cow elk moved down in elevation and out into more open habitats and were available for harvest for those hunters with good timing.



Casper Region wildlife personnel hosted a post-hunting season public meeting in early December. The hunting public was invited to attend and provide feedback to regional wardens and biologists. Around 25 local hunters offered suggestions to improve hunting seasons that included additional youth-only hunting days for deer, recommendations for additional license types, and possible changes to season

structures and hunt area boundaries. Casper Region personnel plan to adopt some of these suggestions for the 2016 hunting season.



### Inside This Month's Issue:

#### Fishing

Ice Fishing and Ice Safety

#### On the Ground

Deer Surveys

#### Of Interest

Injured Deer

# Fishing

## Ice Fishing and Ice Safety

Anglers in the Casper Region should expect good ice fishing opportunities this winter as long as the ice remains safe. "Don't fish alone, common sense and caution are still the best defenses when ice fishing," said Janet Milek, information specialist for the Casper Game and Fish office.

Anglers are urged to use caution when trekking out onto ice. Ice conditions can vary on a daily basis due to temperature changes and wind. "If there is any question as to ice safety, it is best to avoid a situation that could result in an accident," Milek said. Be sure to check the thickness of any ice before venturing onto it, and continue checking it every 100 to 150 feet. Four inches of clear ice is usually safe for fishing. Clear ice is stronger than cloudy or white ice, which has frozen, thawed and refrozen and is not always stable. For white ice, double the recommended thickness.

Ice fishermen should never go out on the ice alone. "It can make all the difference, having somebody there to throw a rope if you do fall through," Milek said. Low water temperatures can be life threatening this time of year and hypothermia is a serious risk for anyone who does fall through the ice. Ice fishermen should learn to recognize and treat hypothermia.

If the weather and the ice cooperate, anglers should expect good walleye fishing at Glendo Reservoir this winter, with a lot of 16-18 inch fish available. Anglers are reminded of the 15-inch minimum size limit on walleye at Glendo. Perch numbers are up from last year, but remain below average. The channel catfish population is coming back with most fish ranging between 15 to 25 inches. The ice at Glendo can be unpredictable so use caution and check thickness before venturing out.

Alcova is the new hot spot for walleye, with plenty of fish averaging 15 inches. The creel limit for walleye at Alcova is 12. The limit was increased in 2014 to allow successful walleye anglers the opportunity to harvest a few more fish and hopefully alleviate some of the predation pressure on stocked trout. "Due to a very strong year class of 2-year-old walleye, anglers can expect to catch a lot of fish in the 12-13 inch range this winter," said Matt Hahn Casper, fisheries biologist. "The age 3 year class is also better than average meaning a lot of walleye in the 16-18 inch range as well." But the fun doesn't stop there as Alcova also boasts a lot of 10-pound walleye just waiting to be caught.



Despite predation by walleye, trout fishing should still be decent at Alcova Reservoir. Anglers can expect to reel in trout up to 16 inches, with an occasional 20-incher to mix things up a bit. In addition to rainbows, Game and Fish stocked 15,000 kokanee this fall. Kokanee’s tendency to suspend over very deep water will hopefully mean less walleye predation. Kokanee will give anglers something new to fish for and could grow bigger than rainbows in the future.



Seminole Reservoir holds good numbers of walleye, which average 15 inches. “Seminole currently has a strong age-4 year class meaning there are a lot of 14 inch walleye right now”. Some 30-inch (14-pound) walleye lurk in Seminole as well, although they can be difficult to catch through the ice. There are also plenty of 16-inch rainbows, with a few 23-inch lunkers hanging around as well.

If larger trout are on your agenda, Pathfinder Reservoir is the place to go. There are plenty of rainbows over 16 inches including many over 20 inches. Browns up to 23 inches and Snake River cutthroats can also be caught. Besides trout, Pathfinder also hosts a robust walleye population, but catching them through the ice can prove tricky at this popular ice fishing destination.

Don’t forget to buy your 2016 fishing license and conservation stamp prior to your first fishing trip of 2016.

Anglers should be aware of the special winter ice fishing provisions and also be aware of regulations concerning fishing with live minnows. Live baitfish shall not be transported out of the designated use area as listed by the WGFD on the live baitfish

receipt. More information about the use of live baitfish and the special winter ice fishing provisions can be found in the 2016 Wyoming Fishing Regulations and online at [wgfd.wyo.gov](http://wgfd.wyo.gov).

## On the Ground

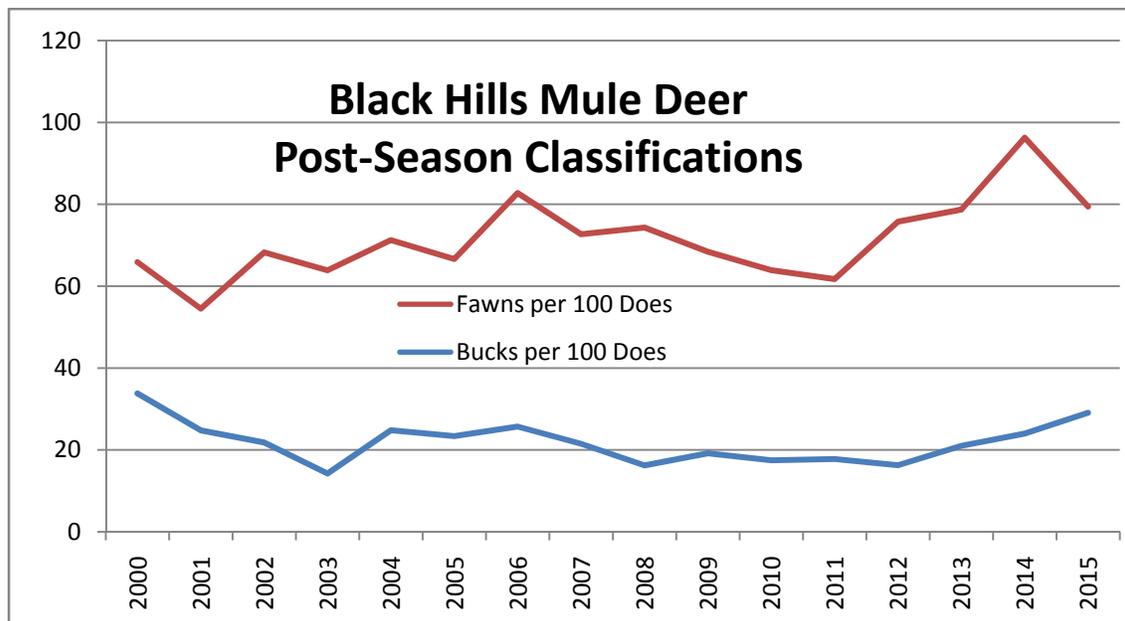
### Deer Surveys

During November and December, wildlife personnel from the Casper and Sheridan Regions worked from helicopters and the ground to conduct mule deer classifications in the Black Hills and Cheyenne River Herd Units. After hitting what was probably a 30+ year low in deer numbers in 2013, things have improved significantly the past two years, as fawn production and survival was outstanding again this year.

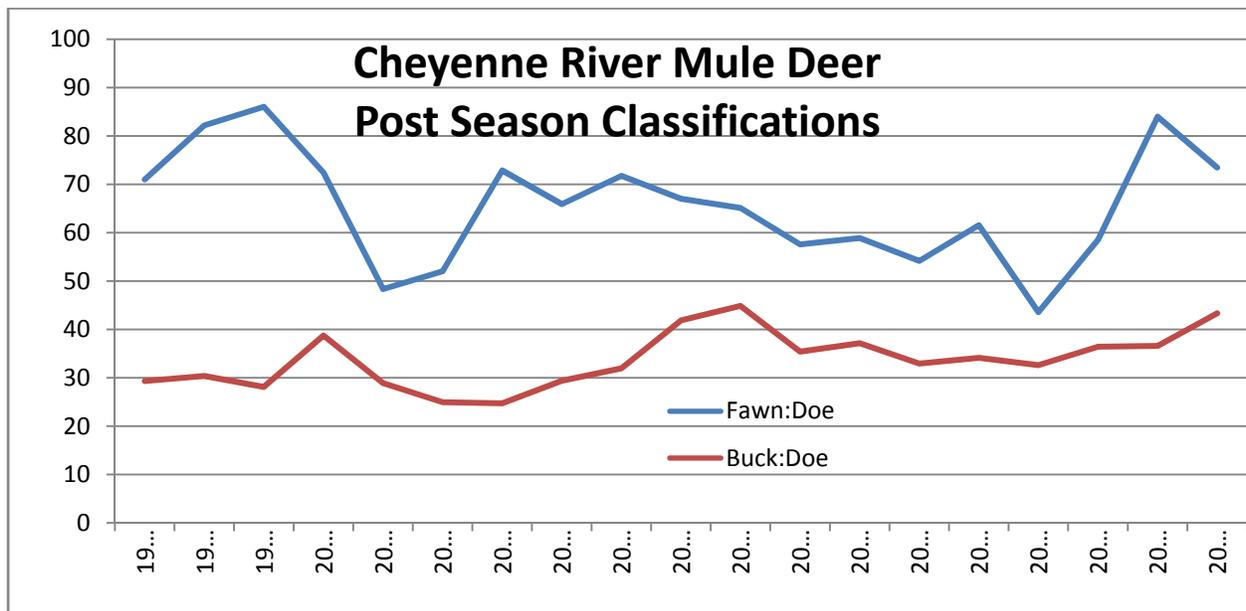




In the Black Hills, lower deer densities and pine cover continue to make locating deer difficult with fewer deer being seen than hoped. However, a follow up effort on the ground enabled us to reach classification objectives. Local game wardens and biologists classified over 1,900 mule deer from the ground and air. We found the herd had 70 fawns for every 100 does, which was down from the all time high of 96:100 last year, but still better than normal. There were also a lot of yearling does that didn't have fawns at side as they don't typically have their first fawns until they are two years old. The number of bucks observed increased from 24 per 100 last year to 29:100 this year, and with significantly more yearling bucks in the population. While low by most Wyoming standards, the buck:doe ratio has increased thanks to reduced hunting pressure and is now above the range of its historical average.



Moving south into the Cheyenne River Herd Unit, personnel classified just under 3,000 mule deer. Fawn survival was a bit lower than in the Black Hills with 73 fawns being found for every 100 does observed. This is above the long-term average of about 66 fawns per 100 does. With continued, good over-winter survival, this herd should continue to rebound in the coming year. A long-term decline in fawn productivity and survival, due to habitat and species composition changes over the past 50-years, has really inhibited this herd. Another bright spot here is that the observed buck:doe ratio was 43:100, which is 16% above the long-term average for this herd. Again, reduced harvest pressure and increased fawn production and survival in 2014 has enhanced buck:doe ratios, and some nice quality bucks were seen.



# Of Interest

## Injured Deer

Casper Biologist Heather O'Brien received a series of phone calls from Casper residents reporting a buck mule deer with an injury to its back foot. Reports varied in identifying the object as a trap, a tangle of cables, or something else. It was clear, unfortunately, the buck was suffering from an infection and likely in considerable pain. After being euthanized, it was also apparent that his body condition had deteriorated significantly. The object stuck around the buck's back foot was at first hard to identify and had to be sawed off for closer inspection. Upon removal, it became clear that the object was in fact the lid to a travel mug! The buck had somehow managed to step in the middle of the lid- lodging it around its "wrist" or fetlock joint and causing cuts and infection. It was a shame to see such an impressive deer (antlers were 31 inches wide with heavy mass and a non-typical "kicker" on one side) fall victim to injuries from a simple piece of litter.





# Wyoming Game and Fish Department

Pinedale Region

January 2016 Newsletter



## Mule Deer Counts

Every winter Wyoming Game and Fish biologists and wardens climb into a helicopter to conduct their annual deer population survey and classification. December is a good month for this as deer are usually congregated on their winter ranges, bucks still have their antlers attached and there is often snow cover making the animals more visible from the air.

In the Sublette herd, managed by Pinedale Wildlife Biologist Dean Clause and Pinedale game wardens Jordan Kraft and Bubba Haley, there

were 9,932 deer classified this year, which is about 1,000 more deer than the 10-year average. While this number does not serve as a population estimate, it does provide some indication of how many deer are out there on the ground, so it is somewhat encouraging. After a couple of relatively mild winters, managers were hoping the number of fawns would increase, but it was 65 per 100 does, just under the 10-year average of 67. However, the number of bucks was strong again at 43 per 100 does, which is the highest recorded in at least 10 years.

In the Wyoming Range herd, Big Piney Game Warden Adam Hymas and South Jackson Wildlife Biologist Fralick conducted classifications for the northern portions of the Wyoming Range with overall ratios similar to last year. Buck ratios, and especially yearling buck ratios, were again a bright spot this year. The total number of bucks in the northern Wyoming Range was again strong at 39 per 100 does. Unfortunately, the fawns ratios were a bit below the past few years at 60 per 100 does.

Managers presented the results of their annual mule deer counts, habitat projects and current research at a series of public meetings held in Marbleton, Pinedale and Thayne the first week of January.





# Pinedale Region Monthly Newsletter

January 2016

## Brucellosis Business

The Game and Fish Brucellosis-Feedground-Habitat (BFH) personnel have been busy meeting with producers and updating their Brucellosis Management Action Plans (BMAPs).

The development of BMAPs was one of the top recommendations of the Wyoming Governor's Brucellosis Coordination Team, which is a panel of cattle producers, scientists, wildlife professionals, veterinarians, and lawmakers assembled in 2004 to make recommendations related to

brucellosis in wildlife and livestock. BMAPs were first completed in 2006 for all seven elk herds containing elk feedgrounds, were updated in 2011 and are again now in 2016.

A series of five meetings were held with cattle producers in Lincoln, Sublette and Teton counties recently to gather their input on brucellosis management options for elk. Public informational meetings will be scheduled this spring and draft updated plans are scheduled to be posted to the Game & Fish website by this summer.

Brucellosis biologists teamed up with local game wardens and the department's elk feedground personnel in monitoring elk distributions around feedgrounds. With the snow and extremely cold temperatures the potential for elk getting into conflict increased and feeding was initiated at most Game and Fish administered elk feedgrounds in late December.



*Brucellosis-Feedground-Habitat Biologist Eric Maichak presents the Game & Fish Department's current Brucellosis Management Action Plans and gathers input from cattle producers at meeting in Daniel on Dec. 15, 2015.*



*Elk at the McNeel Feedground near Bondurant*



# Pinedale Region Monthly Newsletter

January 2016

## Behind the Badge

**North Pinedale Game Warden Bubba Haley** monitored elk distribution around the Soda Lake and Black Butte feedgrounds and responded to several complaints about elk in conflict situations. Warden Haley moved approximately 250 elk through the Soda Lake elk fence from private lands west of the feed ground. Haley moved another estimated 150 elk out of haystacks and feed lines along the New Fork River. Warden Haley also called hunters with a 96-4 elk license, directing them to problem elk within the open hunt area.



South Pinedale Game Warden Jordan Kraft watches a group of mule deer on winter range south of Pinedale in mid December. (Below) Kraft investigates a carcass found south of Boulder.



## Winter Range Patrol

**Warden Haley** coordinated the annual mule deer winter range task force, noting that there seems to be significantly fewer mule deer watchers on the winter ranges this year. There are numerous very large deer scattered throughout all winter range complexes and many generated calls from concerned citizens who were afraid these “Once in a Lifetime” bucks would be poached.

**Big Piney Game warden Adam Hymas** reports that even though the snow depth seems to be below average on the winter ranges, the -20 degree temps in early winter could have an impact on some deer. He reports investigating at least seven mature buck mule deer in the last month that have died of natural causes (malnutrition, old age, sparring mortalities from the rut, etc.)

Warden Hymas also has been tagging bobcats that trappers/hunters have started to take, but reports that there seem to be fewer such cats being taken this year.



# Pinedale Region Monthly Newsletter

January 2016

## Hatchery News...

**The Daniel Hatchery** crew set up eyed egg hatching baskets in the hatchery for receipt of the “fall crop” of fish from the Story Fish Hatchery. Species included brown trout, brook trout and splake.

Kris Holmes assisted two Pinedale Middle School students with a science fair project and provided fish “slime” from our fish. The students want to see if mucous from fish is a protective barrier to algae growth. These students placed second at state science fair last year on a similar topic.

**The Boulder Hatchery crew** teamed up with statewide fish distribution staff and other regional personnel to stock out a total of 3,315 fall rainbow trout brood culls in December, totaling 7,280 pounds of fish!

The annual fall rainbow trout spawning operation concluded with a total green egg take of 2.6 million.

Boulder Superintendent Chip Moller transported male fall-spawning rainbow trout to Lucky pond in Lander to make FFR cross with female FHR fish from Tillett. Fish were spawned on site and released into the pond with the assistance from Dubois Junior High School students & teachers.

The Boulder Hatchery also received 133,000 eyed Kokanee eggs from Dubois and Daniel hatcheries. These fish will be reared at Boulder and later transferred to the Flume Creek facility for release into the Green River.

Habitat & Access crews worked at McNeel feedground making emergency repairs to fix a stackyard fence that was damaged by elk. Habitat & Access Supervisor Miles Anderson and crewman Kyle Berg (below) transformed an old worn out snowmobile trailer into a much needed welding trailer.





# Pinedale Region Monthly Newsletter

## January 2016

### Talk of the Town...

The buzz in Pinedale in December was all about ice. Is there ice? Where is there ice? How thick is it? Is it fishable yet? Those were the common questions heard by office manager Lori Johnson during the mild December weather.

Fortunately for the frustrated anglers the weather turned in their favor. By end of December, most area lakes are frozen over and there's plenty of opportunity to fish for the catch of the day!

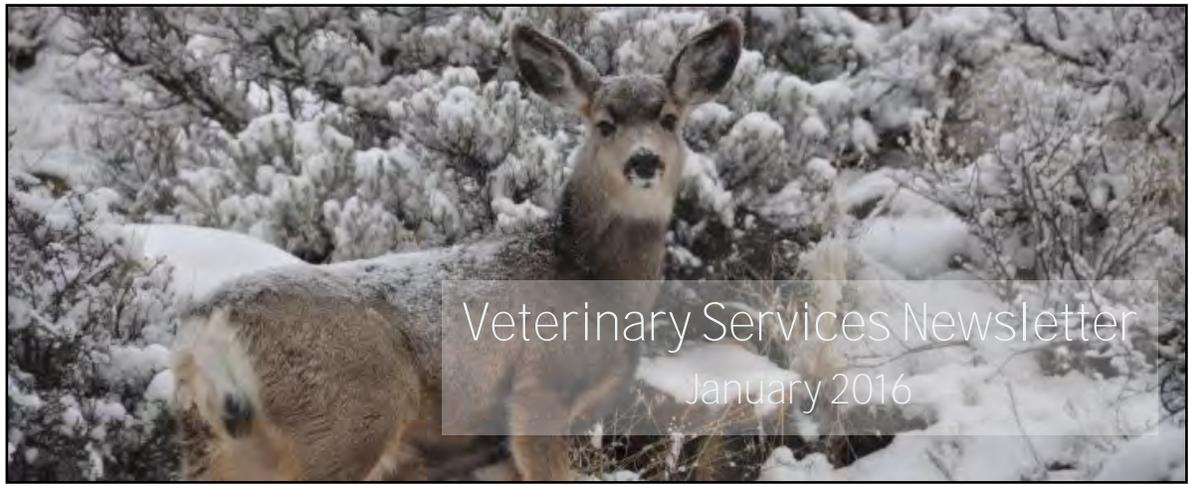
Anglers are encouraged to stop by the Game & Fish office and pick up their Anglers Diary to record their success this season. Diaries can then be turned in at the office at the end of the season. The Fisheries Division will use this data to aid in population statistics and fish management on area lakes. Happy Angling!

As always, all ice anglers are encouraged to be safe and ***Check Ice Conditions As You Go!***



Sunset on the Wind River Range

January 2016



## Wildlife Necropsy Summary

### Veterinary Services Staff

**Branch Supervisor/Wildlife Veterinarian:** Dr. Mary Wood

**Laboratory Supervisor:**  
Hank Edwards

**Senior Lab Scientist:**  
Hally Killion

**Senior Lab Scientist:**  
Jessica Jennings-Gaines

**Brucellosis Lab Assistant:**  
Kylie Sinclair

**Wildlife Disease Specialist:**  
Terry Creekmore

**TWRC Manager:**  
Matt Huizenga

**Wildlife Biologist:**  
Cole Hansen

**Biologist:** Sam Lockwood

### Case of the Month

Wyoming Game and Fish Warden Biff Burton responded to a call of an apparently blind mule deer buck walking in circles south of Saratoga. Diagnostics identified inflammation of the cornea and conjunctiva consistent with infectious keratoconjunctivitis (IKC), often referred to as pinkeye. In this case, the bacteria *Trueperella pyogenes* was cultured out of the 3rd 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.



*Mule deer with keratoconjunctivitis.*

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.

Eleven wildlife cases were submitted for diagnostics in December.

Species	Date Received	County	Diagnosis
Elk	12/3/2015	Campbell	Rib infection
Elk	12/4/2015	Carbon	CWD, bacterial infection
Goose	12/4/15	Carbon	Pending
Elk	12/8/2015	Sweetwater	Pending
Elk	12/8/2015	Sweetwater	Pending
Elk	12/8/2015	Sweetwater	Pending
Bighorn Sheep	12/10/2015	Albany	Unremarkable
Mule Deer	12/17/2015	Carbon	Keratoconjunctivitis
Bighorn Sheep	12/19/2015	Park	Pending
Elk	12/29/2015	Natrona	Pending
White-tailed Deer	12/29/2105	Albany	Pending

## Thorne/Williams Wildlife Research Center

### And more sheep facility construction....

This month found us here at the Thorne/Williams Research Center continuing construction of our new sheep handling facility. Along with fence construction we have also been building the alleyways and welding the many gates it takes to make our alleyways work. In addition, we built a 20' X 10' shelter so the sheep have a way to get out of the elements. For those of you that don't know - it tends to get a little breezy here in the canyon. Next on the list is hooking up automatic waters, building catch pens, and then finally putting sheep in the pastures at the end of January.



*View of our new sheep handling facility, holding pens, and pastures.*

### The Future of the TWRC:

We've also been spending time over the last few months discussing the future of the TWRC. Our facility has a long history of productive research and education over the past 60 years; however many parts of the facility are beginning to show their age. We are beginning the slow process of re-evaluating the facility; updating our research, management, and husbandry; and brainstorming ideas for our future. As disease becomes an increasingly complex issue on the landscape and new advances in technology for management become available, there is a strong need for captive wildlife work to research and validate new tools and techniques for management. We are currently putting together a long-term plan to prepare our facility for new research, education, and opportunities.



*Loafing shed to provide captive sheep with shelter from the wind and sun.*

## Wildlife Health Laboratory

### Surveillance updates:

Brucellosis surveillance in hunter-killed elk is almost complete for the season. By the end of December we have received 1,107 blood samples in the laboratory with 759 (69%) of those being suitable for testing. As we mentioned in our October Veterinary Services newsletter, the focus of our surveillance is the Bighorn Mountains, from which we have received 665 samples, with 482 (72%) being testable. From these samples, 448 were from yearlings or adults (considered the most valuable for brucellosis surveillance). Brucellosis surveillance in the Bighorns is complete for 2015 and no positive animals were identified! Surveillance will continue for the foreseeable future.



*Florescence polarization (FPA) reader; one of three instruments used to test blood samples for brucellosis.*



*Collecting a retropharyngeal lymph node for chronic wasting disease testing.*

### Surveillance updates (continued):

CWD surveillance in deer, elk and moose is complete for the 2015 season. In total, we received over 1,800 samples. Sixty-seven hunter-killed samples have been identified as positive for CWD, and letters have been sent notifying the hunters of the positive test results. Nine new hunt areas have been documented as having CWD this year; deer hunt areas 1, 24, 100, 112, 171, and elk hunt areas 11, 12, 21, and 34.

### Respiratory Disease Surveillance in Bighorn Sheep and Mountain Goats

Laboratory staff and Kevin Monteith's crew from University of Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit was out and about in the field this December capturing 33 bighorn sheep for disease research. This cooperative project is designed to determine how body condition may influence what species of respiratory pathogens a particular sheep (or herd) may carry. As part of this research, bighorn ewes are captured twice a year (December and March), sampled for respiratory pathogens, and their body condition is assessed by measuring their fat depth ultrasonically. Several northern herds were selected for this research including Whiskey Basin, Jackson and Absaroka.



*Capturing bighorn sheep near Sacagawea Ridge in Whiskey Basin*

**In other happenings**, Mary and Hank attended the bighorn sheep working group meeting in Dubois and the bighorn sheep, domestic sheep interaction working group meeting in Lander. Terry Creekmore assisted with blood and tissue collection for brucellosis surveillance in the Bighorn Mountains. Hally Killion and Jessica Jennings-Gaines completed (and aced!) their courses in Molecular Biology for the fall semester.



# Wyoming Game and Fish Department Large Carnivore Section Newsletter - January 2016 -



## *The Year In Review*

### LCS Personnel:

#### Cody:

Luke Ellsbury  
Dusty Lasseter

#### Lander:

Dan Bjornlie  
Justin Clapp  
Brian Debolt  
Dan Thompson

#### Pinedale:

Zach Turnbull  
Ken Mills

#### Jackson:

Mike Boyce

As with last year, we've taken a little writer's liberty with this monthly update to look back upon the past year and highlight some of the major activities and accomplishments of the Large Carnivore Section and also refresh the collective memories within the Department and beyond as to the intent and purpose of our Section within the team of the Wyoming Game and Fish. Wyoming is one of the few places to have an intact carnivore guild, meaning that the same predatory creatures that roamed the state hundreds of years ago are also here today. With these animals, conflict and controversy are inherent. The opinions of the public throughout the state and world run the gamut from hatred to worship. Taking this fully into account, the Large Carnivore Section is responsible for managing these animals based on the best available science for the long term viability of these species and for the stakeholders of Wyoming. Personnel from the Large Carnivore Section work with regions to develop monitoring and management regimes for mountain lions and black bears across the state; taking into account population trends and public sentiment in order to develop harvest criteria. We maintain our relevance as leaders in management of carnivores through adaptive

evaluation of management criteria as well as writing and publishing information to increase knowledge of the species- both for the general public and for wildlife professionals. The LCS is responsible for dealing with conflicts between humans and large carnivores; the successful recovery of grizzly bears and wolves also leads to higher potential for conflicts with people. This is what we term the "reality of recovery," and the dogged persistence of our personnel and omnipresence in the field, allows us to accurately convey the reality of what it takes to work with large carnivores on the landscape using the data, our experience, expertise and a shared land ethic dedicated to the wildlife resource and its human cohabitants. Wildlife, both predator and prey are intricately linked to myriad influencing factors; it is our responsibility to be able to accurately convey the facts about the role and function of large carnivores in Wyoming and how they interact with other wildlife, domestic animals, and people. Success of the Department's mission requires working proactively with stakeholders to deal with situations before they become issues, and building an awareness of large carnivores for the general public. Our personnel are required to have the breadth of knowledge and experience in order to answer questions and articulate all things about bears, mountain lions, and wolves to the public, and are available in some fashion 24/7, 365 days/year in order to effectively and efficiently handle whatever may come up in the realm of large carnivores. Things can get fairly interesting . . . much of the upcoming text is repeated but valuable, we have updated annual activities and added new happenings from the Section . . . following is merely a glimpse into the lives of Large Carnivore Biologists.

## Grizzly Bear Monitoring and Management

Despite Federal protections and authority, the WGFD has taken a lead role in monitoring the population in order to ensure it's recovery through a multitude of techniques to evaluate the population and annually report on its status. The data obtained through standard monitoring efforts by members of the LCS and Department are used in an applicable fashion to determine the status of grizzly bears with the ultimate goal of demonstrating the recovery of the population and removal from federally threatened status. This past summer, crews captured 10 grizzly bears for monitoring purposes throughout northwest Wyoming. The goal of capture efforts is to maintain a representative sample of marked animals to fully assess the overall population. Collared grizzly bears provide insight into survival, mortality, reproduction, movements, distribution, body condition and genetic viability on a population level. Monitoring efforts are not limited to capture however,



with telemetry and observation flights taking up the early mornings of a majority of the summer, with 189 hrs logged across the The Greater Yellowstone Area (GYE) and 501 bears observed. GYE is unique in that portions of the system allow for aerial counts of grizzly bears; documentation of female grizzly bears with young are combined with all other verified observations in order to estimate population abundance. This year in two days of flying moth aggregation sites only, LCS personnel observed 179 individual bears. In

addition to estimating size of the population, verified occurrences are used to evaluate distribution and range expansion of the animal. All these data are synthesized and reported annually by the Large Carnivore Section and available on our website, in addition to publishing information on bear ecology and management in popular literature and peer-reviewed formats. The efforts of personnel in the Section and Department over the past several decades have brought forth the successful recovery of grizzly bears in Wyoming and the Yellowstone ecosystem; one of the more remarkable success stories of wildlife management in the world.



## Large Carnivore Conflict Management

As mentioned earlier, with success and population recovery comes challenges and controversy. The successful recovery efforts for grizzly bears and science-based management of black bears and mountain lions simply means there is potential for conflicts between these animals and humans. The LCS makes every effort to proactively and preemptively deal with situations before they become issues, but with higher densities of carnivores and people on the landscape, conflicts will occur. The Department relocates and removes black and grizzly bears as part of routine management operations. The decision to relocate or remove a bear is made after considering a number of variables including age and sex of the animal, behavioral traits, health status, physical injuries or abnormalities, type of conflict, severity of conflict, known history of the animal, human safety concerns, and population management objectives. During 2015, LCS personnel captured 45 grizzly bears in 51 capture events in an attempt to prevent or resolve conflicts. Obviously conflict resolution is not



limited to grizzly bears for the Section and Department. Due to multiple factors related to habitat, natural food abundance, and carnivore densities, 2015 was one of the highest years we've documented for conflicts with grizzly bears and black bears. The collective expertise and experience of our personnel allow them to respond to situations in the appropriate manner for the safety of Wyoming's people and long term perpetuity of our wildlife populations. As the year ended, our personnel were fervently busy processing damage claims, with more than half of Departmental damage payments being attributed to trophy game species. The art of wildlife management is on full display when dealing with conflicts between carnivores and people; realizing that controversy is inherent and that our personnel will be dealing with passionate members of the public with divisive opinions. The communication and commitment to effectively dealing with conflicts is critical to maintain public tolerance for the species. Our Section works inter and intradivisionally as part of the WGFD team with all large carnivore occurrences in our mission to *Conserve Wildlife and Serve People*.



## Mountain Lion Management and Monitoring

We have seen an increased interest from the public in mountain lions throughout the state of Wyoming. A primary driver of attention relates to mule deer populations in many areas of the state, but also from an interest in mountain lion management and ecology from houndsmen and the general public in Wyoming and beyond. LCS personnel have increased their presence at



Mule Deer Initiative meetings throughout Wyoming as well as meeting with local communities interested in mountain lions for their potential impacts to ungulates and their role in the ecosystem. We continue to analyze our harvest data in order to evaluate population status and harvest objectives of mountain lions, as well as initiating analyses related to how our management of mountain lions transcends to other wildlife species and conflict. This past month our personnel assisted the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish, and Parks with

DNA monitoring efforts in order to evaluate mountain lions in the Black Hills of South Dakota and Wyoming on an ecosystem level. Crews were able to successfully bay and sample 16 mountain lions ( $n=6$  males;  $n=10$  females) through a process called biopsy darting, where an animal is treed or held at bay with trained dogs while one of our people darts the animal. The darts are specially made to take a small tissue sample without the need to capture and handle the animal. These data will be combined with data acquired from WGFD when we initiated this work, in order to better manage and monitor mountain lions; the efficacy of these and other techniques will be evaluated for other regions in the state. We are currently in the final year of our three-year management cycle for mountain lions and will be working with other Game and Fish Regions and the public to develop management objectives this spring. In addition, this winter we will be initiating work to monitor mountain lion populations through the use of aerial infrared monitoring. We will test these methods to determine if they can be used as an applicable component of managing mountain lions in Wyoming and hopefully something that can be used for other agencies that have mountain lion populations.



## Black Bear Management and Monitoring

To better inform management decisions and more effectively monitor population trends for black bears in Wyoming, the Department began regular population monitoring efforts for these trophy game species. The initiation of new techniques to estimate population abundance, density, and habitat use can be used to more accurately assess and develop objectives for population management. Data acquired can also help address questions regarding impacts of these large carnivores on ungulate populations by providing information on predator densities. Our initial work began this summer on black bears in the Greys River area, in conjunction with an ongoing mule deer ecology study being conducted by the University of Wyoming. Over time, data gathered from this work will help to more effectively manage trophy game populations and evaluate current management strategies. Capture crews successfully captured and collared six black bears and fitted them with tracking collars these will be used to evaluate the use of DNA sampling of hair through a process where hairs are “snagged” and then used to determine abundance of bears in a given area. These data will inform better management direction and also may serve as a tool that can be used in



different areas throughout the state into the future. A big thank you goes out to Cole Hansen from the Vet Services Section; his assistance made this work possible and we appreciate his help and expertise!!



## **BEAR WISE WYOMING**

A recurring feature in our Section's monthly updates and annual reports is our "Bear Wise Wyoming Program" and the Information & Education efforts from our LCS personnel to increase awareness of large carnivores and proactively deal with large carnivore conflict resolution. Throughout the last year it seemed we were everywhere, spreading the gospel of the Bear Wise Program led by our coordinator Dusty Lasseter. One of the highlights of the past year included a bear spray giveaway, funded by local sportsmen, whereby 100 cans of bear spray were given away in the Cody Regional Office. This was a huge hit with all cans being picked up in less than one hour's time!



In addition to this, Dusty and LCS personnel spoke to more than 3,000 individuals about bear safety and being "bear aware". We gave ~35 educational presentations across the state, as well as giving our annual Living in Large Carnivore Country Workshop in all Wyoming Game and Fish Regions. We did a great deal of fencing and preemptive work to reduce conflicts on the landscape, including fencing in the Jackson, WY transfer station and multiple smaller scale projects throughout northwest Wyoming. The Carcass Management program continues in Park County, removing potential for conflicts between ranchers and grizzly bears, with a total of 746 livestock carcasses removed since inception of the work. This year we worked hard to update our Bear Wise Wyoming webpage, this is an excellent forum to get the message out to the cyber world where anyone can learn more about bears and bear safety. We continue to critique and increase our efforts to proactively deal with bear/human conflicts throughout Wyoming!



# Statewide Wildlife and Habitat Management

## Monthly Summary - January 2016

### NONGAME BIRD AND MAMMAL PROGRAM

ZACK WALKER, SUSAN PATLA, ANDREA ORABONA, NICHOLE BJORNLI

During the month of December, Nongame Biologists Lee Tafelmeyer, Clint Atkinson, and Seth Halman, with help from other Nongame and Department personnel, conducted remote camera surveys for wolverines throughout potential habitat in mountain ranges in western Wyoming. Personnel use skis, snowmobiles, and snowshoes to check cameras and rebait sites once per month.



Nongame Biologist Susan Patla attended the joint WLCI/WYTWS meeting in Lander where she presented results from the SWG Long-billed Curlew project.

Susan also participated in a bighorn sheep capture on Gros Ventre River Drainage.



*Bighorn sheep capture on Gros Ventre River Drainage.*

The Nongame Program is collaborating with Montana, Idaho, and Washington to survey for wolverines in the lower 48 states in order to document distribution and assess occupancy. While not for the faint of heart, the work does offer beautiful vistas and a chance to gain valuable information about Wyoming's wolverines. The project will continue through March this year and will pick up again next fall and be completed in spring 2017.



*Pacific marten visiting one of the wolverine bait stations.*

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## ADMINISTRATION

### BOB LANKA

Bob Lanka Statewide, Wildlife and Habitat Management Section Supervisor, and Ian Tator, Statewide Terrestrial Habitat Program Supervisor, met with the other members of the Department's Habitat Technical Advisory Group (HTAG) to consider project proposals for Wyoming Species of Greatest Conservation Need. Sensitive species funding comes almost entirely from sources outside Department license fees.

These funds include the governor's FY17-18 ESA fund, FY17-18 funds from the Wyoming legislature, funds from the USF&WS and State Wildlife Grant funds. Only the State Wildlife Grant funds require a Department match. In all, 17 wildlife projects, totaling about nine hundred seventy thousand dollars were recommended for funding. Many projects important for aquatic wildlife were also recommended. These funding proposals were forwarded to the Habitat Policy Group for further consideration. Ultimately, the amount of funding available will depend, to a large extent, upon decisions of the Wyoming legislature. More detail will be provided once all funding decisions are made.

### SAGE-GROUSE PROGRAM

#### TOM CHRISTIANSEN & NYSSA WHITFORD

Sage-Grouse GIS Analyst Nyssa Whitford attended and presented at the joint conference of WLCI/WYTWS. Nyssa presented her master's project for Penn State University, "Investigating Sage-Grouse Population Trends Amid Intense Energy Development in Northeast Wyoming." With this presentation, Nyssa completed the requirements for her Masters of Geographic Information Systems Degree and she graduated at the end of December. Congratulations!

Sage-Grouse Coordinator Tom Christiansen also presented at the WLCI/WYTWS conference in Lander discussing the background and implementation of the Wyoming Sage-Grouse Core Area Policy during a special sage-grouse session.

Tom also attended a meeting of the WAFWA Rangewide Interagency Sage-grouse Coordination Team in Fort Collins. Amongst other topics, the forthcoming ability to estimate sage-grouse population size was a major topic of discussion, as was a potential shift of focus of conservation efforts to the broader sagebrush biome, rather than a single species. Doing so would address multiple sagebrush obligate species in need of conservation. The kind of effort put into sage-grouse conservation cannot be repeated for all of the species potentially needing additional conservation efforts.

### STATEWIDE HABITAT PROGRAM

#### IAN TATOR, RYAN AMUNDSON, RACHEL NUSS

Ryan Amundson, Statewide Habitat Biologist, participated in NRCS State Technical Committee and FSA CRP sub-committee meetings this month, providing input on topics ranging from conservation easements to CRP management and seed mixes.

Ryan worked with Wexpro to solidify a donation of 12,000' of drill stem pipe that will be utilized to build portable fence enclosures. R&M Welding of Rock Springs is busy building bucks and cutting rail pieces in preparation for spring construction at the ZN Ranch and Big Creek Ranch in the Platte Valley.

Ryan attended the Wild Sheep Foundation's Winter Meeting and WGFD Bighorn Sheep Working Group meeting in Dubois on December 4-5, followed by the Bighorn Sheep/Domestic Sheep Interaction Working Group meeting in Lander on December 8. Ryan completed revisions to the SWAP - Prairie Grasslands section.

Ian Tator, Statewide Terrestrial Habitat Program Supervisor, represented the Department at the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation annual show in Las Vegas, NV where he answered questions and spoke to quite a few outdoor enthusiasts interested in planning future trips to Wyoming. Ian also attended a Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust (WWNRT) Board meeting where several Department project proposals were approved for funding.

## SWAHM STAFF BIOLOGISTS

### STEVE TESSMANN & GRANT FROST

Staff Biologist Steve Tessmann completed final editing on a draft update to the Wyoming Grizzly Bear Management Plan.

Steve began conducting an administrative review of the Laramie Plains Level II Wetland Condition Assessment final report prepared by The Nature Conservancy (TNC).

Steve coordinated with Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV) staff to begin planning the annual State Conservation Partnership (SCP) chair meeting that will be held in Jackson, WY in May, 2016. The SCPs are the project implementation arm of the IWJV. This meeting takes place in one of the 11 western states each year. Its primary purpose is to collaborate on ways to enhance project delivery under the various IWJV-administered programs. Steve will be contacting regional personnel with requests to assist with some of the presentations and a tour itinerary to showcase local projects.

Senior Wildlife Biologist Grant Frost finished updating the historic JCR files to include the most recent five years. He also updated the sandhill crane regulation map to include a new crane hunt area in Sheridan, Johnson, and Natrona counties.

## HARVEST SURVEY PROGRAM

### GAIL SHERIDAN

Harvest Survey Coordinator Gail Sheridan worked closely with Doug McWhirter to produce the bighorn sheep and Rocky Mountain goat harvest reports. 2015 WGFD antelope, deer, elk, moose and black bear harvest surveys are still active. The moose survey is nearing a close. The WGFD office managers have been a great help by making phone calls to moose hunters who have not yet responded to other methods of contact. Of the original 428 valid moose licenses, we have received response from all but 40 license holders for a 91% response rate thus far. We average 95% final response rate from moose hunters historically. The moose preliminary harvest report will be distributed in mid-January.

The black bear survey is currently at 42% response rate, already more than years past. We have seen a gradual upswing in black bear hunter response over the past few years. The fall turkey survey is scheduled to launch the second week of January. Much of the fall turkey survey programming is being updated to remain in sync with the current regulations.

Planning continues for a special survey to ask lifetime and pioneer license holders about their hunting activity. Phase I of this project will be to email surveys to license holders with email addresses on record and will likely occur in January. Phase II will be to mail a hard copy to those without email on record and will occur if funding for this phase is secured. The purpose for this project is to determine which hunters may not be using their lifetime license privileges any longer and therefore can be excluded from future mailings and harvest surveys.



*The white neck ring along with the “gently” sloping forehead on this bird helps to identify this goose as a lesser Canada goose.*

## MIGRATORY GAME BIRD PROGRAM

Migratory Game Bird Biologist Nate Huck conducted Canada goose ground classification surveys throughout Natrona County. The results from this survey are used to provide information on how many lesser Canada geese are counted during the mid-winter aerial survey. This is necessary as it is nearly impossible to determine the size of Canada geese seen from the air. Only four lesser Canada geese were detected out of over 400 Canada geese observed.



*Lesser Canada goose (left) and western Canada goose (right). Notice the generally larger size and dark throat of the bird on the right.*



# Wyoming Game and Fish Department

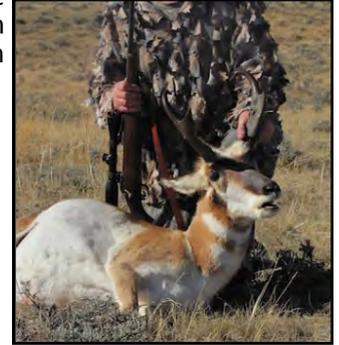
## Wildlife Investigative Unit

January, 2016

- Provided assistance to the Kaycee game warden in an investigation that took them to the State of Nebraska. Nebraska Conservation Officers and a Special Agent with the USFWS assisted. Evidence was collected and two non-resident hunters were charged with waste of a big game animal and accessory to waste of a big game animal. Only the head and cape of a large buck antelope were taken on their hunt in Johnson County. Court dates have been set in 2016. The investigation additionally revealed that a swift fox was killed illegally by members of the same party.



Illegal Swift Fox



Wasted Antelope

- Continued to work on a case involving a large non-resident hunting party suspected of wasting deer and killing over limits of deer. An investigative plan is being developed.
- Assisted the South Cody game warden with interviewing a Cody man in December who was reported to have killed an over limit of bighorn sheep. The man arrowed a small big horn ram in October only to watch it walk out of site over a pinnacle near Blackwater Creek west of Cody. He searched the area the next day and could not get to where he last saw the ram, never seeing it again. He then killed a ram up the South Fork Shoshone River the next week and was able to recover it. It appears that the first ram he shot was crippled and lost.
- Assisted Colorado Parks and Wildlife with a false oath investigation in December. A Colorado man moved to Cody in 2014 and began to work and reside there. He then applied for a highly sought after Colorado elk license in 2015, as a resident of CO, successfully drawing it. He killed a 400" bull elk in September, 2015. Individuals who heard about the hunt were suspicious of his residency. An interview of the man is planned for early 2016.
- Assisted the Greybull game warden with a waste/over limit case in December. Several dead elk were discovered east of Greybull just after Thanksgiving and several suspects have been identified.
- Continued to assist the USFWS Special Agent, the Large Carnivore Conflict Coordinator and Dubois game warden in regards to the illegal take of a grizzly bear, which is a federally protected species. The investigator spent time in the review and tabulation of evidence seized as a result of the search warrants in this case.
- Assisted wardens on various cases involving residency violations, untagged elk, over limits of elk and packaging and transferring firearms and ballistics evidence to the DCI Crime Lab in Cheyenne and the Game & Fish forensic laboratory.
- Assisted South Gillette game warden in forensically downloading a cell phone for his investigation of several wildlife violations, and transported evidence to the DCI Crime Lab for North Gillette game warden regarding several wanton destruction investigations.
- Continued work on an investigation of a Laramie individual for illegally purchasing, shipping and possessing antlers on skull plates without game tags. The investigation has expanded into illegal outfitting, and a felon in possession of a firearm, after a review of the seized evidence.
- Assisted the South Laramie game warden with his investigation of an out-of-state landowner on the CO-WY border where several nonresidents hunted big game without proper licenses in Wyoming and Colorado. The investigation is being coordinated with the Colorado Parks and Wildlife enforcement officers. A former employee of the ranch was located out of state and interviewed.
- Assisted the Wheatland game warden in submitting search warrants and nondisclosure orders to Facebook for three accounts regarding his investigation of a bull elk taken without a license by nonresident hunters.
- Continued work on a case involving stolen Wyoming licenses. The main suspect killed at least one animal without a valid license.

## Law Enforcement Coordinator

Aaron Kerr

- Met with new game wardens to issue law enforcement firearms and equipment and answer questions to prepare them for their training at the Wyoming Law Enforcement Academy.
- Completed updating Wyoming license suspensions in the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact database and reviewed a backlog of approximately 5,000 suspensions from member states for ratification. Wyoming recognizes suspensions from the other 43 compact member states and ratification of these suspensions is necessary for further charges to be pursued against individuals hunting or fishing while suspended.
- Compiled and submitted Wyoming's annual performance report to the U.S. Coast Guard. This report provides details on the Department's boating safety program and outlines plans for the next year.
- While working an interstate check station in South Dakota in November, Kerr and Cody Game Warden Bill Robertson investigated a South Dakota man who was transporting two deer with a carcass coupon from a license belonging to his cousin, who lives on a ranch outside Sheridan. Upon further investigation, the South Dakota man admitted to shooting the two deer and was charged with two counts of taking a deer without a license. In December, Kerr and Robertson traveled to Sheridan to interview the Wyoming man, who admitted to his involvement in the violations. He was charged with accessory to taking a deer without a license and transfer of license. Both individuals pled guilty to all charges.

January, 2016