

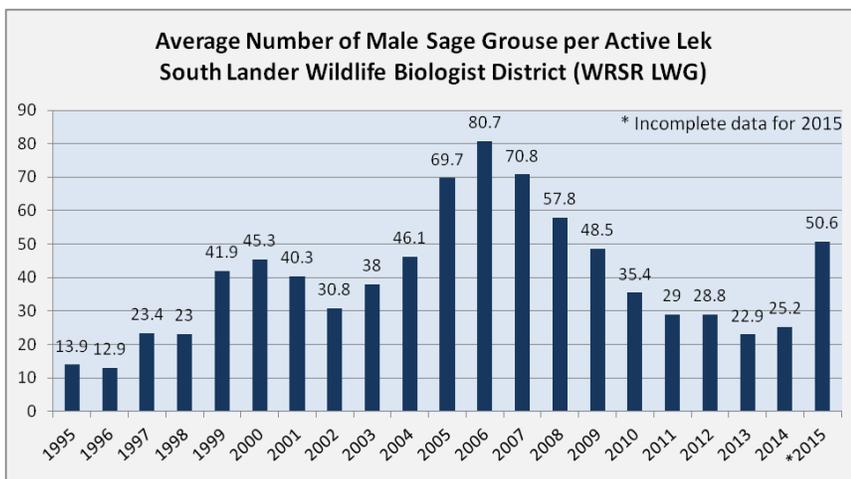


the wyoming game & fish department

LANDER REGION newsletter

In the sagebrush

Sage grouse lek data



Sage grouse lek monitoring was recently completed for spring 2015 in the Lander Region. Data for the majority of leks in the South Lander district have been entered so far, and this year is on track to see a doubling of male sage grouse attendance compared with 2014. A few leks reached all time high numbers since leks were discovered (some over 30 years ago). So far, the average number of males on leks in 2015 is 50.6, compared with 25.2 last year and 80.7 in 2006.

Although this is likely to change some as the remainder of lek data is entered, there have only been four years (2005-08) with higher average male attendance since intensive lek monitoring began in the South Lander district in 1995 (see chart above). At least seven new leks were discovered in 2015 and 109 are known as of 2015. In 2014, no lek in this district exceeded 100 males, while at least seven leks have exceeded 100 males this year, one of which was 245 males.

Most of the increase in sage grouse numbers can be attributed to greatly improved habitat conditions across the region and Wyoming, the result of timely and above average precipitation since fall 2013. Thus, chick survival was much improved in 2014. So far in 2015, the areas around Lander and Jeffrey City have seen nearly a year's worth of precipitation in the first five months of each calendar year, with May reaching 240% of average – so the outlook for sage grouse is bright!

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On the Ground

Habitat management spring work

May was beautifully wet and significantly helped Lander region habitat & access. They managed to time the weather and get the seed in the ground prior to the moisture and then saw the grass turn on in wholesale fashion.

Between rain events, Derek Lemon installed an Agril-Drain at Pond 6 at Ocean Lake WHMA. This followed the prescribed burn he coordinated early this spring. Derek also disced some remaining cattail growth post-fire in order to suppress new growth and stimulate alternative vegetative production around the pond. He spruced up the outhouses and picnic shelters at Bass Lake prior to the heavy summer use too.



In Dubois, the majority of Miles Proctor's time in May was spent turning on irrigation water and chasing water. When the fields were dry enough, gated pipe was installed on Bain Meadow on Spence & Moriarity Wildlife Management Area. Pipe was also laid on the Basin Meadow at Whiskey Basin following winter use by CM Ranch horses.

A substantial amount of time was spent at the Whiskey Mountain Conservation Camp also. In addition to managing the Region's WHMAs, habitat and access folks are charged with management and maintenance of the Conservation Camp. Following last September's early freeze, quite a bit of plumbing repair was required in addition to normal spring projects at the Camp.

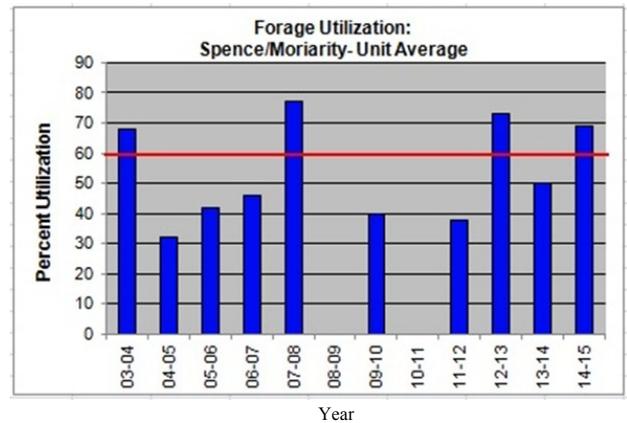
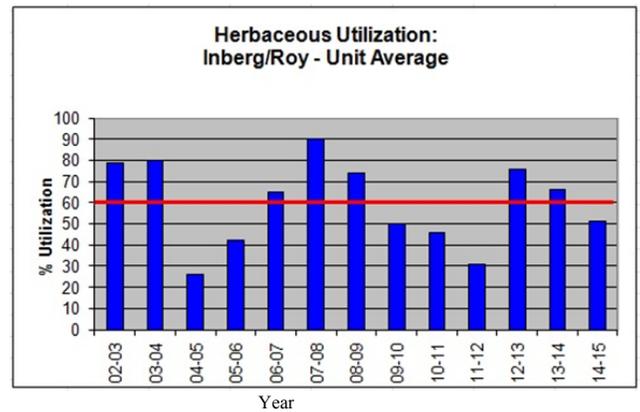
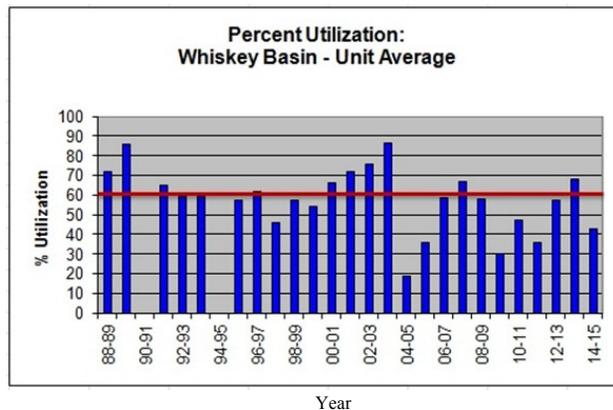
Finally, the Lander Region welcomes Zack Gregory to the Habitat and Access team in Dubois. Zack is a zoology graduate of Weber State University and has worked for the Game and Fish in numerous capacities over the past few years. We are excited to have Zack back in the Lander Region and look forward to him helping move things forward in Dubois.



Big game forage utilization

Annual forage utilization clipping on bighorn sheep and elk winter ranges was completed this spring. The areas were free of snow and beginning to green up a whole month ahead of last year due to warm temperatures coming on in late February and throughout March. Overall, the forages appeared to have relatively light use over the winter. This is likely due to the fact that last year was an excellent year for production, and there was much more forage for the animals to choose from. The graphs on page 3 show the annual percent of forage utilization for the past several years.

This year's clipping was completed with the help of volunteers from the National Bighorn Sheep Interpretive Center (NBSIC) in Dubois, Sue Oberlie from the Bureau of Land Management, and Brandon Houck from the U.S. Forest Service. Thank you so much to Sara Domek and her crew of volunteers from the NBSIC, and as always, Sue and Brandon for their assistance!



Behind the badge

Trapping violation

Teal Joseph completed part one of a trapping investigation in the Rawlins area. It was discovered through an initial investigation that a trapper committed multiple violations including: fail to check traps within the 72 hour check period, attempt to take bobcats during a closed season, and attempt to take furbearers without a license. Teal issued the trapper citations for fail to check traps and attempt to take furbearers during a closed season as well as a warning for attempting to take furbearers without a license.

When Teal asked the trapper why he had not attempted to check his traps or pull his traps at the end of the bobcat trapping season he said it was because his trapping partner was "thrown in jail." It turned out that his trapping partner had committed several violations with his trap sets as well. The first individual pled guilty to fail to check live traps within 72 hours. He pled not guilty to attempting to take bobcats during the closed season. In court he stated that he was attempting to catch coyotes with the traps and therefore could leave them open after March 1. The Judge charged him \$220 in fines and suspended his trapping privileges for two years for failing to check his traps, and the individual is expected to come to court for a bench trial for the other charge in June.

Teal also followed up with his trapping partner, who was currently in the Natrona County Jail. The trapping partner admitted to not checking his bobcat trap sets during the season because his driver's license was revoked. Teal issued him citations for several trapping violations as well.



With the Families

New forever wild families



Forever wild families in the Lander region had their first event for the four new families (23 people) at Pilot Butte Reservoir. In addition to Game and Fish staff, three volunteers from North Platte Walleyes were there to help and to donate fishing poles, tackle and advice.

Families were able to practice casting, see how to gut and filet a fish as well as explore the reservoir by canoe. Future summer events for these families will include fly-fishing instruction and a hunter education course.

The Forever Wild Family program is in its fourth year in Lander. This program is geared toward teaching families how to hunt and fish in Wyoming, with the philosophy that if the entire family is involved, there is a much better chance that the participants will continue with the activities after the exposure and training phase has ended. Hunting and fishing become a family activity, with all members supporting each other.

With the Carnivores

Bears

In May, large carnivore section personnel responded to multiple verified livestock depredation events throughout north-west Wyoming and to multiple instances of bears acquiring unsecured attractants. There was a fair amount of activity around Dubois, primarily related to a grizzly bear family group that was exploring the area to acquire garbage. Throughout this time, a great deal of public contacts and education occurred, reminding residents and visitors of the importance of properly storing attractants.



Black bear

Also in May, crews captured and marked five grizzly bears for monitoring. This will allow for assessment of range expansion and survival of grizzly bears on the edge of their current distribution. As grizzly bears move beyond biologically and socially suitable habitats, it is critical for the Game and Fish to maintain a pulse with what is occurring on the landscape. All information is used to evaluate the overall status of the Greater Yellowstone area's grizzly bear population as we maintain our goal of grizzly bear recovery and look to the future of long term conservation and management.

While black bear hunting opened in April, the majority of harvest this year didn't start occurring until May and into June, likely due to late rains and snows. The data provided from mandatory check of harvested individuals allow a look at the sex and age ratio of take and an evaluation of the trajectory and trend of black bear populations across the state. Over the next few years through genetic monitoring Game and Fish will further quantify density of black bears and evaluate the current methods used to assess the state's populations.

Under the Water

Sauger



*Jim Barner and Kevin Johnson arti-
ficially spawning sauger*

A successful sauger spawning operation was conducted at the Little Wind and Popo Agie rivers. This marks the third year of successfully collecting fertilized sauger eggs for rearing and stocking back into the system. The need for intervening on behalf of this native fish was prompted by over a decade of declining sauger populations in the Wind River drainage. The current plan calls for a total of five years of artificial spawning and stocking with the hopes that the population can be bolstered to the point that it can again maintain a sustainable and stable population on its own.

Eggs were collected and fertilized from 53 females before being transferred to Speas Hatchery for hatching. The fry will be raised at Garrison National Fish Hatchery in North Dakota before being stocked back into the Wind River, Little Wind River, and Boysen Reservoir as fingerlings later this summer.

The entire operation is a cooperative project between the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho tribes, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.

Serving Dubois, Rawlins, Lander, Riverton and places between

Of Interest

Winter fair history

Lander Region personnel have been a part of the State Winter Fair for several years. We have enjoyed talking to everyone in attendance each year and our Large Carnivore Section has won the “Best Government Booth” for the past several years. During a recent visit with several Game and Fish retirees we were given a photo of regional personnel participating in the event in 1965. The Department has seen several changes over the past 50 years, but some things still remain the same.



1965 Wyoming State Winter Fair (Bill Helms and Bob Engstrom)



2015 State Winter Fair (Dusty Lassiter and Dan Thompson)



1995-Dave Moody, Andrea Orabona, Joe Nemick, J.D Darnell (Fremont County Sherriff's Office), Tom Ryder, and office managers Shirley Smith and Marge Linnell. Photo by Kent Schmidlin.

Office building history

The Lander Regional Office celebrated its 20th birthday in May. The new office was built in May of 1995 and upon completion, a short dedication ceremony was held and the flags were lowered at the old office building and raised at the new one. This year we invited Game and Fish retirees back to replace the flags at the office and celebrate the 20 year anniversary with conversations about then and now with several of the folks who worked in this area over the years.



2015- Dave Dufek (retired), Kevin Johnson (now retired), Dennis Oberlie (retired), Kent Schmidlin (retired), Bob Trebelcock (retired), Bob Engstrom (retired), Dan Thompson, office managers Shawonda Fontaine and Kelsey Beck as well as other Lander Region employees looking on. Photo by Jason Hunter.



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