

Wyoming Game & Fish Department



2022 Annual Law Enforcement Report



Table of Contents

Message from the Chief	3
Introduction	4
Law Enforcement Organizational Chart	5
Region & Warden District Boundaries	6
Regional Law Enforcement Highlights	7
Jackson	7
Cody	8
Sheridan	10
Green River	11
Laramie	13
Lander	14
Casper	15
Pinedale	17
Region Notable Cases	18
Wildlife Investigations Unit	27
Large Carnivore Section	31
Watercraft Safety Program	33
State Land Enforcement	34
Regional Law Enforcement Statistics	33
Jackson	36
Cody	37
Sheridan	37
Green River	38
Laramie	38
Lander	39
Casper	39
Pinedale	40
Administration Law Enforcement Statistics	40
Wildlife Investigations Unit Statistics	40
Statewide Law Enforcement Statistics	42
Top Ten Violations	45
Wildlife Forensics Lab	47
Game Warden Applicant Testing	48
Game Warden Training	49
Stop Poaching Program	50
Wyoming Wildlife Protector's Association	50
Wildlife Violator Compact	51
New Legislation	52
Awards & Recognition	52
Retirements	53
Promotions	53

State of Wyoming

Governor Mark Gordon

Wyoming Game and Fish Commission

President Kenneth D. Roberts, Kemmerer

Vice President Ralph Brokaw, Arlington
 Gay Lynn Byrd, Glenrock
 Peter J. Dube, Buffalo
 Mark Jolovich, Torrington
 Richard Ladwig, Manville
 Ashlee Lundvall, Powell

Wyoming Game and Fish Department

Director Brian Nesvik

Deputy Director John Kennedy

Deputy Director Angi Bruce

Chief Game Warden Rick King

Deputy Chief Game Warden Craig Smith

Law Enforcement Supervisor Mike Choma

Law Enforcement Coordinator Aaron Kerr



Visit our web page: <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/law-enforcement>

Message from the Chief

This report summarizes the law enforcement activity of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department during the 2022 calendar year. In reviewing this compilation of statistics and case summaries, two things stand out to me. First and foremost, the men and women wearing the badge of the Wyoming Game Warden are talented, hard-working professionals with unquestionable dedication to the conservation of our state's wildlife resources. Second, they need your help to protect and conserve Wyoming's wildlife more now than any time in recent history.

In 2022, one of the largest poaching cases in Wyoming history was brought to a close thanks to the collaborative efforts of multiple state and federal law enforcement partners. This case began in 2015 when a Gillette game warden received a request from a hunter for an interstate game tag to accompany a head as it was shipped out of state for taxidermy work. A bit of intuition prompted the game warden to check some facts and dig a little deeper into the request. The result of this hunch, combined with a heavy dose of hard work and persistence, uncovered more than 100 wildlife violations committed by 3 individuals who plundered Wyoming's wildlife over the course of a decade. In the end, the three criminals faced charges in four different Wyoming counties, concluding in Park County in September 2022. Their crimes included the illegal killing of bighorn sheep, pronghorn, elk, mule deer and other species as well as fraudulent application for resident licenses. This case highlights the skills and abilities of our Wyoming Game Wardens and their incredible ability to team up with others in the protection of your wildlife resource.

While 2022 saw one of the largest poaching cases in history brought to a close, our report reveals a steep drop in the number of documented wildlife, fishing, and watercraft violations from previous years. This should not be interpreted as an increase in compliance with state laws and regulations. Rather, it should serve as a stark reminder of our on-going recruitment and retention challenges facing most agencies. While many law enforcement agencies across the country have experienced these challenges for a decade or more, we were largely immune until recent years. Unfortunately, we have not been able to hire, train, and deploy game wardens to the field fast enough to off-set retirements and voluntary departures from service. At times in 2022, we had a law enforcement position vacancy rate of nearly 20%. During the fall hunting season, several senior game warden districts were vacant. Your Wyoming Game Wardens are working hard to serve you and conserve wildlife, but they are stretched thin. Now more than ever, your eyes in the field and reports of suspicious activity are needed.

As of this writing, the Department has recently hired 8 new prospective game wardens. I am encouraged by their potential. I am confident our new Recruitment, Retention, and Training work unit will help prepare them for a rewarding career in conservation law enforcement. Nearly 50 years ago, then Chief Game Warden Rex Corsi wrote, "Through all the challenges presented during the past eras our teams have rallied to manage and conserve this state's wildlife..." Chief Corsi's words are as fitting today as they were then. We face many challenges, but together we can rally together for the conservation and wise use of Wyoming's wildlife.

Thank you for your interest in Wyoming's wildlife and helping conserve these treasured resources.



Rick King, Chief Game Warden
Wyoming Game and Fish Department

Introduction

The Wyoming Game & Fish Department (Department) is responsible for the conservation and management of over 800 species of wildlife found in the state. Residents and visitors alike value Wyoming's world-class opportunities for hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing. The Department is dedicated to conserving and protecting Wyoming's wildlife to ensure these opportunities for future generations. Enforcement of wildlife laws and apprehension of wildlife violators are critical components of the Department's overall wildlife management efforts.

The Wyoming public has consistently supported the Department's law enforcement officers and programs, giving high marks to game wardens and wildlife investigators for their professionalism and dedication to their work. Department law enforcement officers investigate all types of wildlife crimes and work through the court system to ensure the successful prosecution of violators. Annually, officers dedicate thousands of work hours, hundreds of thousands of vehicle miles (patrol vehicles, all terrain vehicles and snowmobiles), thousands of watercraft hours and hundreds of horseback days patrolling Wyoming's vast landscapes to enforce the state's hunting, fishing, trapping, boating and general wildlife

laws. They also spend countless hours interacting with members of the public to gain support for and ensure compliance with wildlife and watercraft safety laws.

In 2022, Wyoming's game wardens were challenged with heavy workloads due to several factors. Since 2020, Wyoming has experienced an increased number of people coming into or traveling around the state to enjoy the outdoors. In addition, several game wardens retired or left the Department for other reasons, reducing the staffing level in many areas of the state. As with many law enforcement agencies around the country, the Department has experienced difficulties recruiting interested, qualified individuals who would be a good fit for the job as well as the agency.

The following report details Department law enforcement efforts and highlights for calendar year 2022. It includes an organizational chart of law enforcement personnel, regional summaries, violation statistics, new game warden testing/hiring results, game warden training and new legislation affecting the law enforcement program. It also discusses Wyoming's Stop Poaching Program, Wildlife Investigations Unit efforts and other aspects of wildlife law enforcement in Wyoming.

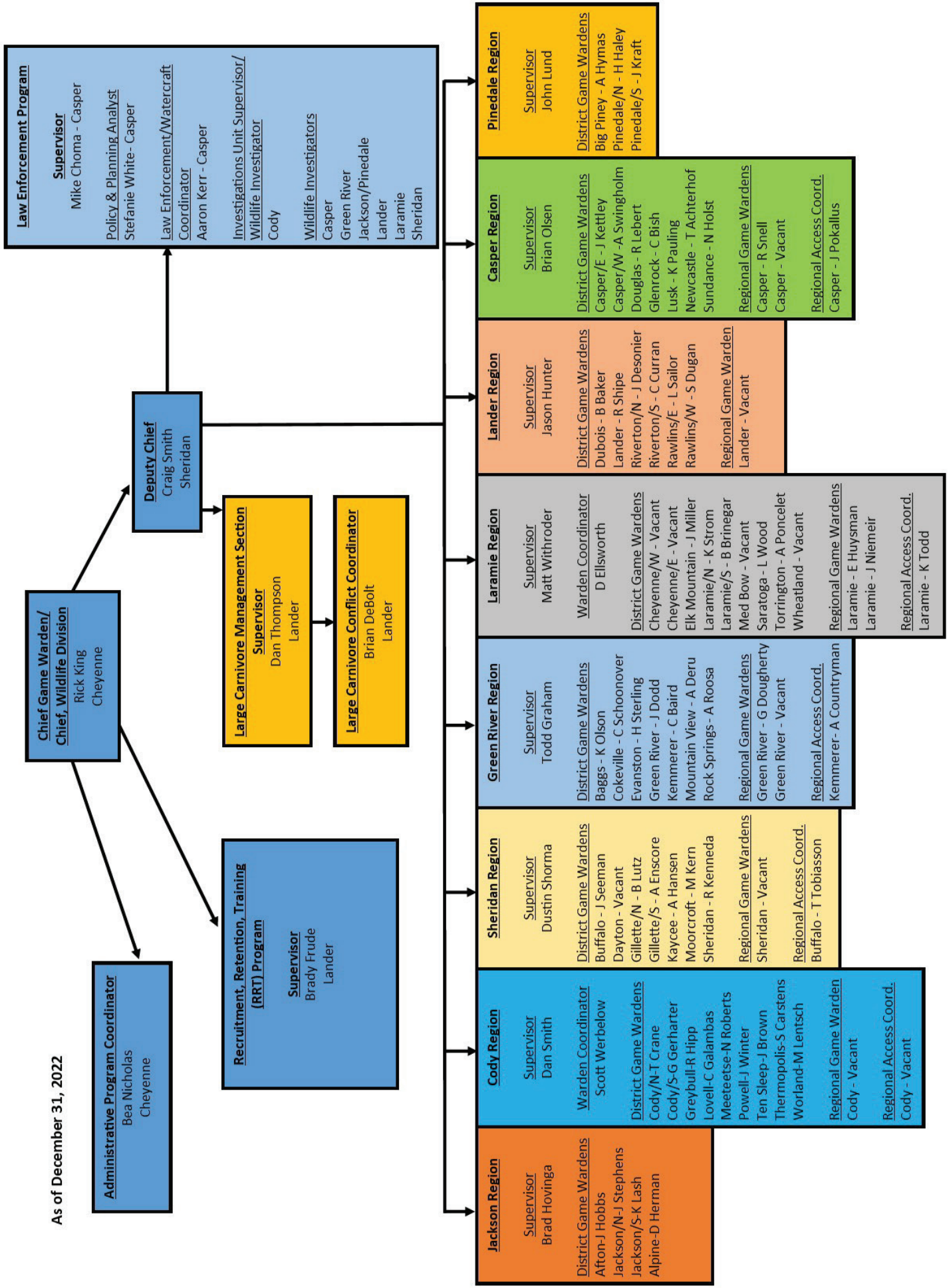


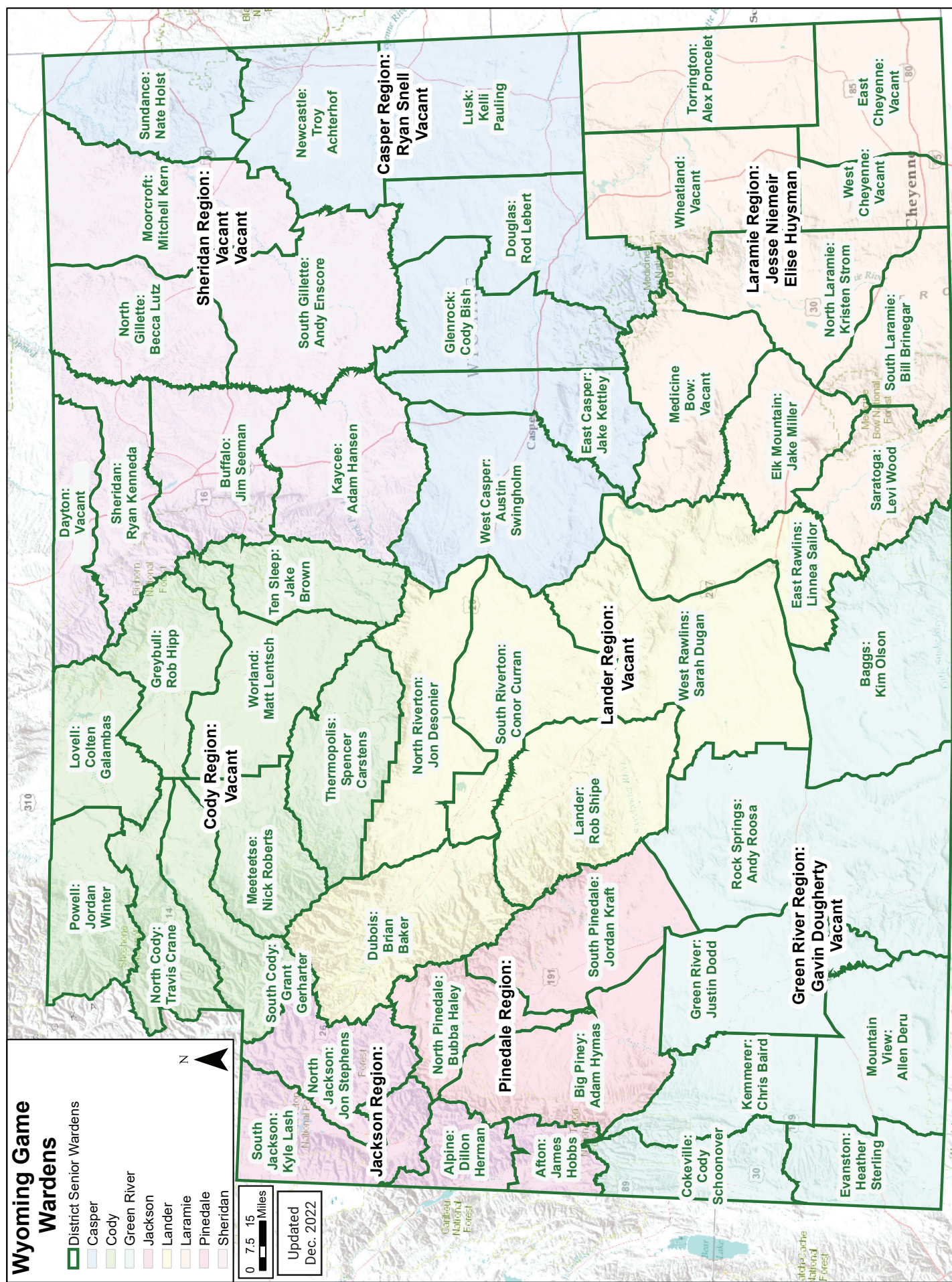
Warden Dugan - seized overlimit antelope



Wardens executing a search warrant

As of December 31, 2022

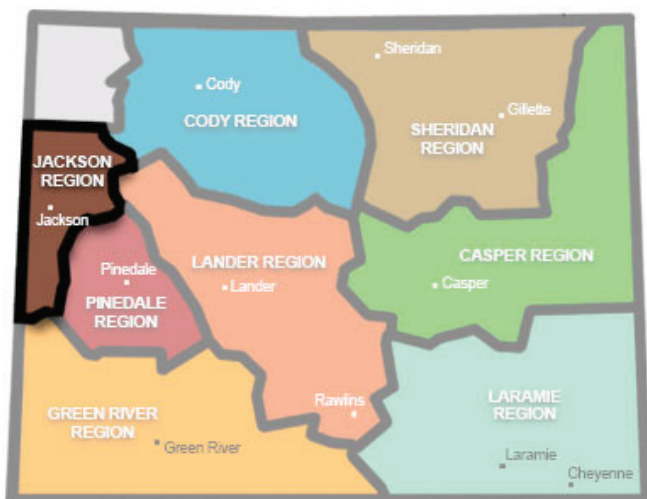




JACKSON REGION

WORK UNIT OVERVIEW

The Jackson Region has five law enforcement officers, including four district game wardens and one regional wildlife supervisor. In the fall of 2022, the Jackson Region gained a district game warden assigned to the Alpine game warden district and adjusted the boundaries to accommodate the new warden district. The Jackson Region is located south of Yellowstone National Park and game wardens patrol the Jackson Hole Valley, Gros Ventre Range and Star Valley, along with the Hoback and Greys River drainages. The district game wardens cover the North Jackson, South Jackson, Alpine and Afton game warden districts.



2022 LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS

Jackson Region law enforcement officers documented 208 violations within the region in 2022, an increase of 5 violations from 2021. Officers issued 91 citations, 112 warnings and investigated five cases in which a suspect was never developed. Although the Jackson Region is relatively small, the game wardens in the region are extremely busy from a law enforcement perspective. In addition to fall hunting seasons, fishing enforcement, bear baiting and dealing with winter range/antler collection violations, game wardens respond to many calls for service from a diverse public with varying wildlife interests.

Game wardens in the Jackson Region spent a considerable amount of time working horseback in remote backcountry areas and by boat/kayak on the Greys, Salt and Snake rivers. The high public use in these areas keeps wardens busy in their law enforcement efforts. Each year, game wardens detect several fishing violations in some very remote areas of the Jackson Region.



Kayak patrol on Buffalo Fork

Game wardens were able to spend a significant amount of time conducting watercraft enforcement on Jackson Lake, Palisades Reservoir and the Snake River. Watercraft enforcement on Palisades Reservoir in past years was typically limited as the water level dropped and the reservoir essentially left Wyoming. However, in recent years, the Bureau of Reclamation has maintained higher water levels in the reservoir later into the summer. Game wardens were able to conduct compliance checks throughout the summer and their efforts seem to be having an impact on watercraft violation rates occurring on the reservoir. Palisades Reservoir is currently the region's most significant watercraft enforcement workload.

Game wardens spent time working trapping enforcement and responding to public concerns when traps were encountered along major recreational trails on the Bridger-Teton National Forest. This year, the region saw less conflict with traps being set near trailheads and walking paths.

Fortunately, due to increases in workload related to population growth in the northern Star Valley, the region was able to have a game warden permanently stationed in Alpine in September of 2022. The addition of this officer is extremely valuable in workload relief for other regional personnel. Having a game warden stationed in Alpine will increase enforcement presence in the region and allows all district game wardens to diversify work tasks. The position also provides a significant workload relief for game wardens in dealing with damage issues in the Star Valley and the public at large on a daily basis. The community of Alpine is growing rapidly and the calls for service there are increasing.



Warden Stephens patrolling Togwotee Pass

The Grand Teton National Park (GTNP) elk reduction program and the elk/wild bison hunting season on the National Elk Refuge (NER) continue to be a considerable workload for law enforcement personnel in the region. This year, elk harvest in GTNP and the NER increased substantially due to the early onset of snow and cold weather in the region. Wild bison harvest was good and increased in 2022 due to early winter weather conditions. The bison season ended in early January due to the need to begin feeding elk on the NER about three weeks earlier than usual.

Game wardens continued to invest significant effort into the enforcement of the shed antler and horn collection regulation. Game wardens detected several violations of this regulation and local winter range closures. In 2022, all agencies aligned with the 6 a.m. May 1 opening time for winter range use and antler collection. This resulted in an uneventful antler collection season opener and the public was very satisfied with the consistency.

TASK FORCES

The region conducted its annual Antler Rendezvous task force in Alpine from June 18-26. In 2020, the antler sale was rescheduled from the standard date in May due to COVID-19 and the NER/Scout antler auction in Jackson was canceled. The date change for the Alpine Antler Rendezvous was so beneficial to antler dealers in terms of increased business traffic that they maintained this date change for 2021. However, in 2022, antler dealers also held an event in May in conjunction with the first NER/Scout antler auction since the COVID-19 cancellation. These two events nearly doubled the enforcement effort for antler sales in the Region. Many dealers are now staying the entire summer to sell antlers and wildlife parts in Alpine.

This enforcement effort is designed to monitor the sale and transfer of antlers, heads, taxidermy mounts and other wildlife parts in the region. It is an excellent opportunity to work closely with participating antler dealers/vendors while issuing interstate game tags (IGT) for antlers/horns on skull plates prior to and during these events. A modest number of minor violations centering on IGT requirements were documented during the rendezvous. No major violations were detected.

CODY REGION

WORK UNIT OVERVIEW

The Cody Region has 12 law enforcement officers, including nine district game wardens, one access coordinator, one game warden

supervisor, and one regional wildlife supervisor. The Cody Region is located in northwest Wyoming. Wardens patrol from the Montana state line south to Boysen Reservoir and

from Yellowstone National Park east to the west slope of the Bighorn Mountains. The region includes the North Cody, South Cody, Powell, Lovell, Meeteetse, Greybull, Ten Sleep, Thermopolis and Worland game warden districts.

2022 LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS

Cody Region law enforcement officers documented 283 violations within the region in 2022, a decrease of 9 total violations from 2021. Officers issued 94 citations, 184 warnings and investigated five cases in which a suspect was never identified. During 2022, the most common citations issued in the Cody Region were for hunting on private property without permission, failing to properly tag big or trophy game animals and fishing without a license. Wardens spent the majority of their time patrolling their districts and assisting neighboring wardens with locating suspects and conducting several search/arrest warrants.

The Cody Region has a great deal of rugged backcountry with a diverse amount of both trophy game and big game animals. Wardens spent considerable time patrolling these areas with horses and pack animals. Although often rewarding, patrolling backcountry areas can be difficult and dangerous. In addition to the dangers of law enforcement duties, there is potential for

inclement weather, downed trees across trails, grizzly bear, moose, and bison encounters, horse accidents and other hazards. Wardens must be thoroughly prepared and ready to respond to these hazards as they arise.



The Cody Region continues to utilize late-season antlerless elk hunting seasons for population management. These late antlerless elk seasons are needed to obtain harvest in areas that are over population objectives and where hunter

access is limited due to large numbers of elk congregating on private properties that allow no public access. Most elk seasons close on December 21, however, two hunt areas remained open until January 15. In these late-season hunts, wardens typically deal with trespassing calls, over-limits of elk and shooting the wrong sex of elk violations. Several hunt areas around Cody have large numbers of elk congregated on private property with little to no cover. Long-

range shooting in these situations is common. These circumstances can lead to hunters wounding and killing over-limits of elk and killing spike bulls on licenses valid only for cow or calf elk.



Biologist Kroger and Warden Carstens on patrol

In general, deer and elk hunting was difficult across the region in 2022, especially during the month of October. Early spring and summer moisture allowed for an increase in

grass production across the region, especially at higher elevations. Lack of snow and warmer-than-normal temperatures made for tougher hunting conditions for deer and elk hunting during the month of October. Higher elevations received snow accumulations during early November, making elk hunting more successful for some hunters later in the season.

TASK FORCES

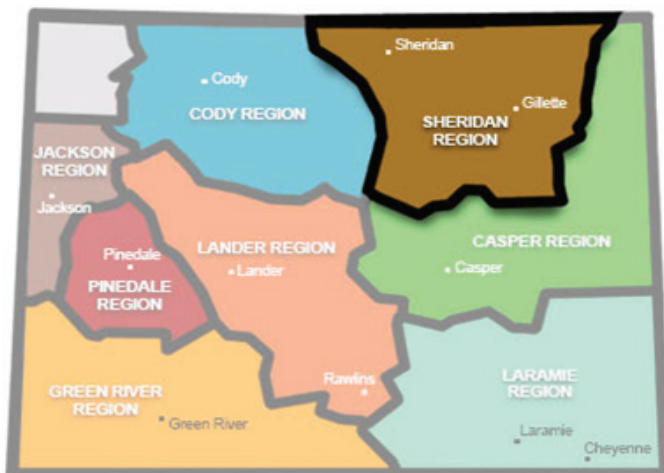
During late October and early November, a task force was put together utilizing three wardens from other parts of the state to patrol the area of the lower South Fork of the Shoshone River. This area has seen an increase in trespassing over the past several years. Trespassing has been

primarily from nonresident deer hunters hunting large migratory buck mule deer and shooting them on private property without permission. Weather conditions were very mild this year and not many mule deer had migrated to lower elevations while the task force was in place. Wardens still made some great contacts with hunters and issued two citations to hunters for failing to stop at an established check station. Another hunter was cited for shooting from a public road, failing to wear fluorescent orange and failing to properly tag his deer. Hunters were surprised to be checked by several different wardens over several days in the area. The additional law enforcement effort and presence certainly gained the attention of many hunters.

SHERIDAN REGION

WORK UNIT OVERVIEW

The Sheridan Region has nine law enforcement officers, including seven district game wardens, one access coordinator and one regional wildlife supervisor. This year, the region also had one game warden who attended the Wyoming Law Enforcement Academy and spent two months patrolling Keyhole Reservoir prior to being promoted to a district game warden position in Torrington.



The Sheridan Region encompasses the east slope of the Bighorn Mountains, the Powder River Basin, the Rochelle Hills, portions of the Little Missouri River drainage and the western edge of the Black Hills. The region includes game warden districts in Dayton, Sheridan,

Buffalo, Kaycee, North Gillette, South Gillette and Moorcroft. The regional access coordinator is stationed in Buffalo and conducts law enforcement throughout the region.

2022 LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS

Sheridan Region game wardens documented 725 violations within the region in 2022, a decrease of 57 (-9%) from 2021. Officers issued 229 citations, 422 warnings and investigated 74 cases in which a suspect was never developed. Due to the large amount of private land in the Sheridan Region, trespassing to hunt, fish, trap or collect antlers was the most common violation encountered, with 39 documented violations. Failure to properly tag big game (33), take big game during a closed season (28), waste or abandon big game animals (25) and take wrong sex (24) round out the other top five.

The region had a dedicated watercraft/fishing enforcement game warden for a part of the 2022 summer, which resulted in an increase in watercraft violations. Keyhole Reservoir in Crook County and Lake DeSmet in Johnson County received the majority of watercraft enforcement in 2022. The Moorcroft, Buffalo and Gillette game wardens account for the majority of watercraft law enforcement efforts

within the region. Game wardens documented 173 watercraft violations, with 123 warnings and 50 citations issued. Failing to provide life jackets (66) was the most common violation followed by operating an unnumbered watercraft (18), failure of children under 12 to wear a life jacket (18), failure to provide a throwable flotation device (17) and failure to provide a fire extinguisher (11). Due to the discovery of zebra mussels in Pactola Reservoir in the Black Hills of South Dakota, aquatic invasive species (AIS) enforcement became increasingly important. Wardens documented 58 AIS violations in 2022, up from 39 the previous year (an increase of

32%). Most of those violations (31) were for failing to stop at an AIS check station and 22 were for failure to purchase an AIS decal.

TASK FORCES

One task force was conducted in the region again this year to address the problem of illegal take of elk and deer in the vicinity of the Kerns Wildlife Habitat Management Area (WHMA) and is referred to as the State Line Task Force. Two-officer teams were assigned to the area during January and February of 2022. Operations were focused on nighttime and early morning hours.

Wardens drove 10,072 miles and worked 701 hours during this task force. Their efforts resulted in the detection of several violations including taking wildlife with artificial light, hunting while under the influence of alcohol, taking elk without a license, trespassing and DUI. Two citations were issued resulting in \$1,307 in fines. Information gathered and contacts made during this task force are worth the effort in order to identify and deter violations. Based on public comment, area landowners and the sporting public appreciate the Department's work to address the historic illegal killing of elk and deer.



Warden Shorma on patrol

GREEN RIVER REGION

WORK UNIT OVERVIEW

The Green River Region has 11 law enforcement officers, including seven district game wardens, two regional game wardens stationed in Green River, one access coordinator and one regional wildlife supervisor. The Green River Region covers southwest and south central Wyoming and includes the Baggs, Rock Springs, Green River, Mountain View, Evanston, Kemmerer and Cokeville warden districts. The region had one regional game warden for part of the year.

2022 LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS

Green River Region law enforcement officers documented 282 violations in 2022. This is an increase of one from 2021. Officers issued 82 citations, 204 written warnings and investigated 13 cases in which no charges were filed or a suspect was never identified.

Flaming Gorge Reservoir (FGR) is the largest and busiest body of water in the region. During the summer of 2022, the district game wardens, access coordinator and regional wildlife

supervisor conducted watercraft, fishing and aquatic invasive species (AIS) enforcement on the reservoir. In August, the regional game warden also assisted with enforcement on the reservoir after graduation from the Wyoming Law Enforcement Academy. The majority of this workload fell on the Green River, Mountain View and Rock Springs game wardens. Wardens documented 33 fishing violations across the region, with the most common violations being fishing without a license (19) and the use of illegal bait for fishing (5). This is down 10 fishing violations from the previous year. Wardens documented 10 watercraft violations in the region with the most common violations encountered being failing to provide life jackets (5) and failing to provide a throwable flotation device (3). Game wardens observed a continued reduction in use on FGR during 2022 and an increase on Fontenelle Reservoir. This could be related to lower water levels on FGR and a full Fontenelle Reservoir for most of the summer.

Green River Region game wardens continued to



Warden Dodd working at FGR



focus their efforts on AIS violations. In particular, there has been a collective effort to prevent people who are transporting watercraft from failing to stop at AIS check stations. There are four primary AIS check stations in the Green River Region. These are located at the Evanston Port of Entry (POE), Kemmerer, Anvil Draw and Firehole. In 2022, game wardens documented 67 AIS violations, 65 of which were failing to stop at an AIS check station. Most of these violations occurred at the Evanston POE, the busiest check station in the state. A task force was also used to increase enforcement at the Evanston POE check station.

Violations of the shed antler and horn collection regulation continued to be a focus for wardens in the region. Wardens in the region responded to several reports and worked a considerable amount of time patrolling for violators. The number of violations remained low with four violations documented in 2022, the same number as the previous year.

DECOY OPERATIONS

The Mountain View Game Warden utilized an elk decoy to document violations of hunting elk during a closed season near the Utah state line. During this time, the Utah elk season is open, but the Wyoming season is not. One violation of taking elk during a closed season was documented during this decoy operation.

TASK FORCES

During the summer of 2022, Green River Region game wardens and AIS personnel planned and conducted a task force aimed at apprehending watercraft failing to stop at the Evanston POE AIS check station. The task force utilized one out-of-region officer on Memorial Day Weekend, the Fourth of July Holiday weekend and the Pioneer Holiday weekend. During the three weekends, officers documented 51 violations for

failure to stop at an AIS check station. Overall, the task force went very well, with a large number of public contacts made and violations documented. The public in the area expressed appreciation for the extra effort put in by the Department to protect the state from aquatic invasive species.

Green River Region game wardens planned and conducted a task force aimed at monitoring shed antler gathering activity in the Baggs area April 28 – May 2. The task force was conducted utilizing assistance from out-of-region officers to apprehend violators collecting shed antlers

before the May 1 opening date, along with documenting off-road violations on Forest Service and BLM lands. During the task force, one violation for operating off-road in a state section was documented as well as one off-road violation on BLM land. The BLM violation was passed on to the local BLM ranger. Overall, the task force went very well with 80 public contacts made, and the public in the area expressed appreciation for the extra effort put in by the Department to enforce the shed antler regulation.

LARAMIE REGION

WORK UNIT OVERVIEW

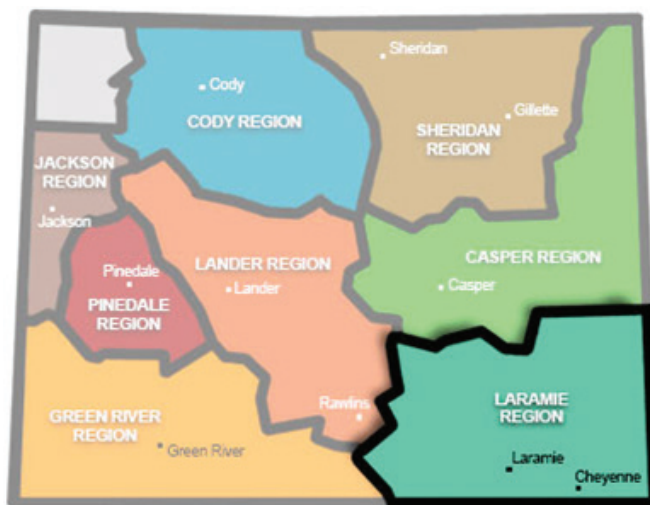
The Laramie Region has 14 law enforcement officers, including nine district game wardens, two regional game wardens, one access coordinator, one game warden supervisor and one regional wildlife supervisor. The Laramie Region covers southeast Wyoming, including the eastern Sierra Madre Mountains, Snowy Range, Shirley Basin, Laramie Range and eastern plains to the Nebraska state line. The region includes game warden districts in East Cheyenne, West Cheyenne, Torrington, Wheatland, Medicine Bow, North Laramie, South Laramie, Elk Mountain and Saratoga. In addition, the two regional game wardens have regional responsibilities while stationed in Laramie and Cheyenne.

In 2022, the Laramie Region experienced significant turnover in personnel, specifically in the Torrington, West Cheyenne, East Cheyenne and Wheatland game warden districts. There was a 23% reduction of enforcement personnel for much of the year.

2022 LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS

Laramie Region law enforcement officers documented 371 violations, a decrease of 36% from last year. 133 citations and 217 warnings were issued, and 21 violations were investigated in which a suspect was never developed or charged. The region's game wardens have a diverse enforcement workload demonstrated by the array of violations documented. Laramie Region officers recorded 39 watercraft and 42 AIS violations. Fishing opportunities abound in the region, as evidenced by the 54 total documented sport fish related violations. Of the documented sport fish violations, 56% (30) were fishing without license violations.

Big game populations in the region are generally stable to increasing and wardens remained busy during the lengthy big game seasons. In 2022, 28 violations were associated with pronghorn, 38 violations were associated with elk, 51 violations were associated with mule deer and six violations were associated with white-tailed deer. These four big game species accounted



for 33% of violations, sport-fishing violations accounted for 17%, AIS violations accounted for 12%, and watercraft violations accounted for 10% of the region's total violations. In addition to these violations, Laramie Region game wardens and wildlife investigators continue to investigate several open cases involving big game animals and multiple suspects. Charges are pending in several of these cases.



Medicine Bow Peak fishing patrol

TASK FORCES

Officers from outside the region assisted with fishing enforcement in the Snowy Range Mountains. The Snowy Range contains dozens of high mountain lakes and receives significant fishing pressure during the short summer season. In addition, two mountain reservoirs, Lake Owen and Rob Roy Reservoir, are popular summer fishing destinations. The Snowy Range Task Force focused on these lakes and reservoirs for five weekends in June & July, beginning targeted enforcement Friday-Sunday. During each weekend, one officer patrolled from a pickup and on foot, working primarily in plain clothes.

The task force officers documented 37 violations, including 24 violations for fishing without licenses, four violations for making a false statement to procure a fishing license, four violations for failure to purchase a conservation stamp, two violations for failure to purchase an AIS program decal and three violations for failing to provide life jackets.

The Laramie Region is home to several high profile mule deer herds. Effective law enforcement is a key component of managing these herds. Again, this year, the Laramie Region requested assistance from officers outside the region to patrol mule deer winter ranges in the South Laramie and Saratoga game warden districts. Patrols were focused in November and December when mule deer are most susceptible to illegal harvest. These officers concentrated their patrol efforts on winter ranges near the Wyoming/Colorado border. Task force officers documented one violation for the intentional take of a deer during a closed season and another case that remains an open investigation. The region considers the task force a valuable deterrent and worth the investment in time and personnel to protect wintering wildlife.



Warden Poncelet checks hunting camp

LANDER REGION

WORK UNIT OVERVIEW

The Lander Region has seven law enforcement officers, including six district game wardens and one regional wildlife supervisor. District game wardens are stationed in Dubois, North Riverton,

South Riverton, Lander, West Rawlins and East Rawlins. The Lander Region is located in central Wyoming and game wardens patrol from the Red Desert north to the Owl Creek Mountains and from the Gas Hills west to the Wind River Range and southern Absaroka Mountains.



water and high mountain lakes. Regional game wardens coordinated patrol efforts and worked with the Lander wildlife investigator to effectively prosecute several cases.

On May 15, 2022, the region opened the Spence/Moriarity WHMA and Inberg/Roy WHMA a day early for 40 lucky permit holders. A helicopter was used as part of the Department's enforcement efforts again this year. No violations were detected from the air or ground and regional personnel felt this was due to last year's patrol efforts and word spreading about the use of the helicopter.

2022 LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS

Lander Region law enforcement officers documented 256 violations within the region in 2022, down just 2 from last year. Officers issued 54 citations, 124 warnings and investigated 78 cases where a suspect was never developed or charged. The Lander Region focused its efforts on issues ranging from illegal antler collection in Dubois to deer shot and left near Lander. The region also focused on watercraft and fishing enforcement on Boysen and Seminole reservoirs as well as several other smaller bodies of



Warden Desonier on wilderness patrol

CASPER REGION

WORK UNIT OVERVIEW

The Casper Region consists of 10 law enforcement officers, including seven district game wardens, one access coordinator, one regional game warden, and one regional wildlife supervisor. The Casper Region is in east-central Wyoming with game wardens patrolling from the Rattlesnake



Hills and southern Big Horn Mountains, east to the Nebraska and South Dakota state lines, along with a portion of the Thunder Basin National Grasslands and the Black Hills. The Casper Region has district game wardens stationed in Glenrock, Douglas, Lusk, Newcastle, Sundance and two in Casper.

2022 LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS

In 2022, Casper Region law enforcement officers documented 522 violations, a decrease of 20% from 2021. Officers issued 183 citations, 333 written warnings, and investigated

six cases in which they were unable to identify a suspect. The Casper Region continues to place emphasis on watercraft safety, fishing violations, and boating under the influence (BUI) enforcement on Alcova, Pathfinder, and Glendo Reservoirs, and on the North Platte River. Enforcement efforts on these bodies of water have the goals of increasing safe boating practices and reducing the potential for boating-related injuries and deaths.

Game wardens documented 184 violations in the region through their watercraft and fishing enforcement efforts. Of these, 72 were watercraft violations, 76 were fishing violations and 36 were AIS violations. Game wardens made three arrests for BUI during the boating season. Although game wardens frequently detected alcohol



Warden Swingholm on Pathfinder

during boating safety contacts, most boats utilized a sober operator. Because of the potential for a deadly boating accident, BUI enforcement remains a high priority for Casper Region game wardens.

Game wardens provided informal on-site watercraft safety awareness during contacts with the public. Game wardens also participated in the cooperative children's life jacket awareness program sponsored by the Department, Alcova Marina, and Sloanes General Store. Sloanes provided children 12 years of age and under a free ice cream cone when they were "caught" wearing their life jackets. Additionally, the Respect Our River organization donated life jacket loaner stands that were placed along the North Platte River and at Alcova and Pathfinder Reservoirs. The Department, along with other organizations, donated numerous life jackets to each stand. These stands appeared to be beneficial as recreationists borrowed many life jackets each weekend.

TASK FORCES

The Casper Region conducted its annual Alcova July 4 task force, which included eleven game wardens. These game wardens worked Alcova and Pathfinder Reservoirs, as well as the North Platte River over the July 1-5 holiday weekend. The task force recorded approximately 1,450 public contacts and 68 violations, including two arrests for BUI. This was a significant increase in contacts (over 3 times as many as 2021), but only 1 more violation. Game wardens on the task force also assisted local law enforcement officers on several occasions, including rescuing stranded boaters on the North Platte River.



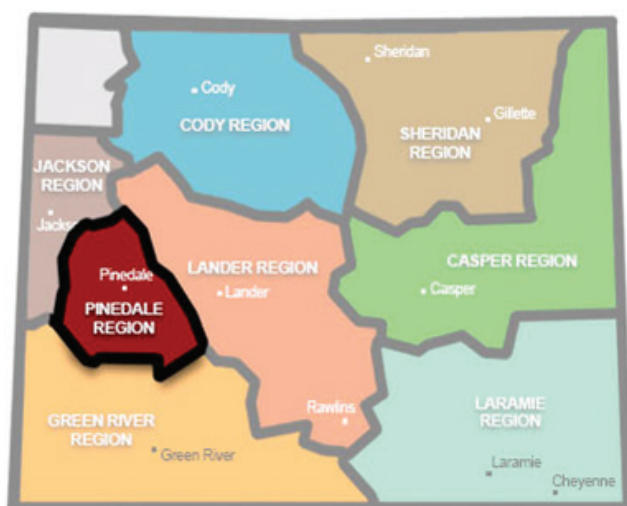
July 4th task force on Alcova

The Casper Region also conducted a July 4 task force at Glendo Reservoir. This task force documented numerous violations again this year. Six game wardens recorded 26 violations with 107 boat contacts. Task force operations seem correlated with greater awareness of safe boating practices by the public. Since the first task force operation on Glendo Reservoir in 1996, the annual number of BUI arrests has decreased dramatically. The increased law enforcement presence during the July 4th holiday has contributed to fewer boats with alcohol on board and more boats having designated sober operators.

PINEDALE REGION

WORK UNIT OVERVIEW

The Pinedale Region has four law enforcement officers, including three district game wardens and a regional wildlife supervisor. The region is in western Wyoming and covers Sublette County from the west slope of the Wind River Range to the east slope of the Wyoming Range. The Pinedale Region includes the North Pinedale, South Pinedale and Big Piney warden districts. The regional wildlife supervisor and the Green River access coordinator also assist with enforcement efforts in the region.



2022 LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS

Pinedale Region law enforcement officers documented 141 violations in 2022, two more than 2021. Officers issued 55 citations, 82 warnings and investigated 4 cases in which suspects were not identified. The region is home to a very diverse wildlife and aquatic resource with high desert habitat as well as three major mountain ranges and several cold-water lakes, streams and river systems. Law enforcement efforts vary depending on the season. Typical enforcement duties include desert and front country small and big game enforcement, watercraft, fishing and backcountry patrols.

Late fall and winter enforcement efforts include mule deer winter range patrols, monitoring

trapping activity, and patrolling the antler hunting season closure and WHMA closures. Game wardens receive many reports of illegal antler hunting activity every year but many of the reports are vague and only report suspicious activity. Apprehending violators can be difficult and wardens continue to explore new ways to effectively and efficiently detect and apprehend violators. A team approach involving the region's entire enforcement staff as well as the assistance of other local agencies has proven effective and as a result, compliance was improved in 2022, although three violations were documented.

Regional personnel spent several days assisting Tip-Top Search and Rescue in searching for a drowning victim at Fremont Lake, providing area security, watercraft traffic control and logistical assistance.



Supervisor Lund assists with the search for a drowning victim

Several cases resulted from hunters reporting themselves after accidentally harvesting the wrong sex or over-limits of big game animals. This trend in self-reporting is encouraging. Compliance with Elk Special Management Permits seems to fluctuate annually. In 2022, nine violations were detected, which is a slight improvement from 2021.

REGION NOTABLE CASES

ILLEGAL BAITING OF BIG GAME

On August 26, 2021, a Jackson game warden received a report of an illegal big game bait/salt site in the Beaver Mountain Area, located southeast of Hoback Junction in the Willow Creek Drainage. On September 2, 2021, the warden rode horseback into the illegal bait site and found a suspect hunting out of a ground blind with a crossbow over salt and what appeared to be a molasses deer attractant.

The warden called the hunter out of the blind and explained he was hunting over an illegal bait. The suspect questioned the warden, saying he thought it was okay to bait black bears and he didn't think he was committing any violations. The warden explained that he has never seen a black bear hunter use salt to bait bears. However, salt bait is highly attractive to both deer and elk. The commercial deer attractant the suspect was using, molasses Stump Likker, is commonly used for attracting deer because of its sweet smell and taste. If the suspect was trying to use this as a black bear bait site the molasses would need to be properly placed in a barrel, not poured onto a stump as in this case. In combination, the location and bait used was only practical for targeting deer and elk.

The suspect provided an Oregon driver's license, nonresident Region H deer Commissioners license, nonresident elk license for the area and a nonresident black bear license to the warden.

The suspect was issued two citations. The first was for the violation of black bear baiting regulations (not registering his bait site, not having the bait inside a closed container, no name, etc.). The second citation was for illegal baiting of big game. In April of 2022, the suspect was found guilty in Teton County court of illegally hunting over bait for the purposes of taking big game animals. He was fined \$2,070 and lost his hunting, fishing and trapping privileges for two years.

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

In the fall of 2022 there was an incident of a yearling bull moose killed in Mill Creek in Elk Hunt Area 88 by an elk hunter. The hunter, from California, stated this was his first ever big game hunt and the first time he had pulled the trigger on an animal. He had heard some commotion through the trees across a draw, and when he saw a large-bodied animal and a set of antlers, he aimed his rifle and squeezed the trigger. The hunter immediately knew he had killed a moose instead of an elk as soon as it moved out of the trees. The hunter and his brother did the right thing and called to report the incident as soon as they reached cell service back in Alpine. They packed half of the moose out and the Alpine game warden went in the next day with horses to take a CWD sample from the moose and pack the other half out.

The meat was donated through The Block in Thayne to the Food from the Field Initiative. The hunter was issued a citation for taking the wrong species of big game and fined \$250.

TOO MANY BIGHORN SHEEP

In August of 2022, the Lovell game warden received a call from the Greybull wildlife biologist. The biologist was calling to inform the warden that a GPS collar on a bighorn sheep ram was giving off a mortality signal on the Moss Ranch. The two made a plan to investigate the mortality and collect disease samples from the ram and determine the possible cause of death.

Later that day, the warden and two other Department employees headed up the John Blue trail on ATVs. On their route, they met a man who was bringing out a bighorn sheep head and cape. The man said he was a friend of the sheep hunter who had harvested the ram. The warden checked the sheep license and confirmed everything appeared to be correct and legal. He made a mental note of the hunter's name and they continued up the trail.



Collared ram

After they reached the Spring Creek area of the ranch, they found the collared ram several hundred feet above the trail on a ridge. Upon his approach to the ram, the warden observed that the ram appeared to have been shot. He surveyed the scene and collected what evidence was present, including the entire carcass of the dead ram. From the ridge line, he spotted what appeared to be a gut pile at the bottom of Spring Creek, approximately 200 yards away. The gut pile turned out to be from the ram he had checked earlier in the day.

A Moss Ranch employee told the warden that one sheep hunter had permission to hunt on the ranch that week. Throughout the following days, the warden conducted interviews with the hunter and members of his hunting party. Through these interviews, the timeline of events and the collar's GPS data, he was able to piece together the story. With all of the facts in hand, he determined that the hunter had shot the collared ram unknowingly when he shot his harvested ram. The hunter was issued a citation for taking an over-limit of bighorn sheep. He paid a fine of \$450.

ELK OVER-LIMIT

On October 15, 2022, the Meeteetse game warden was informed that a family of hunters were allegedly using their elk licenses in the wrong area. Their type 1 license was only valid in the Wilderness portion of area 61 which requires horses and more effort to access those "backcountry" bulls. There is also a type 2

license in that area which allows hunter access to more accessible "front country" bulls. The warden spent several days interviewing hunters and locating gut piles and uncovered several violations.

The warden issued four citations in total. Two for taking elk in the wrong area, one for taking an elk without a license and one for the unlawful transfer of a license. All four family members pled guilty, paid a total of \$2,190 in fines and forfeited the skulls of the harvested bulls.



Elk seized in over-limit case

ELK IN CLOSED AREA

In October of 2019, the South Gillette game warden received a report of a bull elk that was suspected to have been killed prior to opening day. A concerned landowner made the report, claiming that he had encountered two high school age males in two separate pickups with a very large bull elk in the bed that he believed they had killed in Elk Hunt Area 113. Using vehicle descriptions given by the landowner, the warden located one of the pickups at the high school in Wright, which had fresh blood and elk hide in the bed. The second pickup was identified by the high school resource officer. The resource officer was able to identify the suspects that drove each vehicle.

For the next several days, multiple game wardens searched the area where the elk was believed to have been killed. After three days of searching, the warden located a large pool of blood that appeared to be a kill site. A sample

of the blood was collected and sent to the Wyoming Game and Fish Wildlife Forensics Lab for DNA analysis.

Based on evidence obtained through the investigation, game wardens obtained search warrants for the cell phones belonging to each suspect. While executing these search warrants, both suspects admitted that the elk had been killed in Area 113 during a closed season and the bull elk was seized as evidence. The forensics lab later concluded that the blood found at the kill site was a match to the bull seized from the suspects.



Bull elk killed during closed season

While reviewing the contents of the seized cell phones, the warden discovered several other violations throughout 2018 and 2019 involving both initial suspects as well as several other individuals spanning across Converse, Campbell and Sweetwater counties. These violations included the following;

- Eight antelope bucks taken without a license
- One antelope doe taken without a license
- One antelope buck killed with illegal caliber
- Five false statements to obtain resident hunting and fishing licenses
- Fishing without a license

After three years of investigation, this case was fully adjudicated in 2022 and resulted in the following guilty findings:

- Six of intentional take of a big game animal during a closed season or without a license. (one elk and five antelope)
- One accessory to the intentional take of a big game animal during a closed season or without a license (elk)
- One of wanton destruction of a big game animal (antelope)
- One of waste of a big game animal (elk)
- One of taking an antelope without a license
- One of false statement to obtain a resident game bird license
- One of false statement to obtain a resident fishing license
- One of fishing without a license
- One of hunting big game (antelope) with an illegal caliber
- One of hunting big game in the wrong area (antelope)

Sentences totaled \$27,150 in fines, \$11,000 in restitution and 23 years suspension of hunting, fishing and trapping privileges.

DAYTON DEER POACHER

On October 20, 2021 The Dayton Game Warden received a tip that a Dayton man had shot a 3x3 buck mule deer and left it to rot. The warden was able to locate the deer and collect evidence at the scene.

Five search warrants later, the warden was able to piece together a pattern of poaching that went back several years. He discovered the suspect had shot and killed several trophy buck white-tailed deer and mule deer and had used deer licenses purchased by others to cover up these animals.

Despite efforts made by the suspect to get rid of much of the evidence, he was charged with five counts of taking an antlered big game animal without a license, two counts of taking a deer without a license, one count of waste of big game and one count of failing to tag big game.

A woman who was an accessory was also charged with taking a deer without a license and transferring a license.



Shot and left white-tailed deer

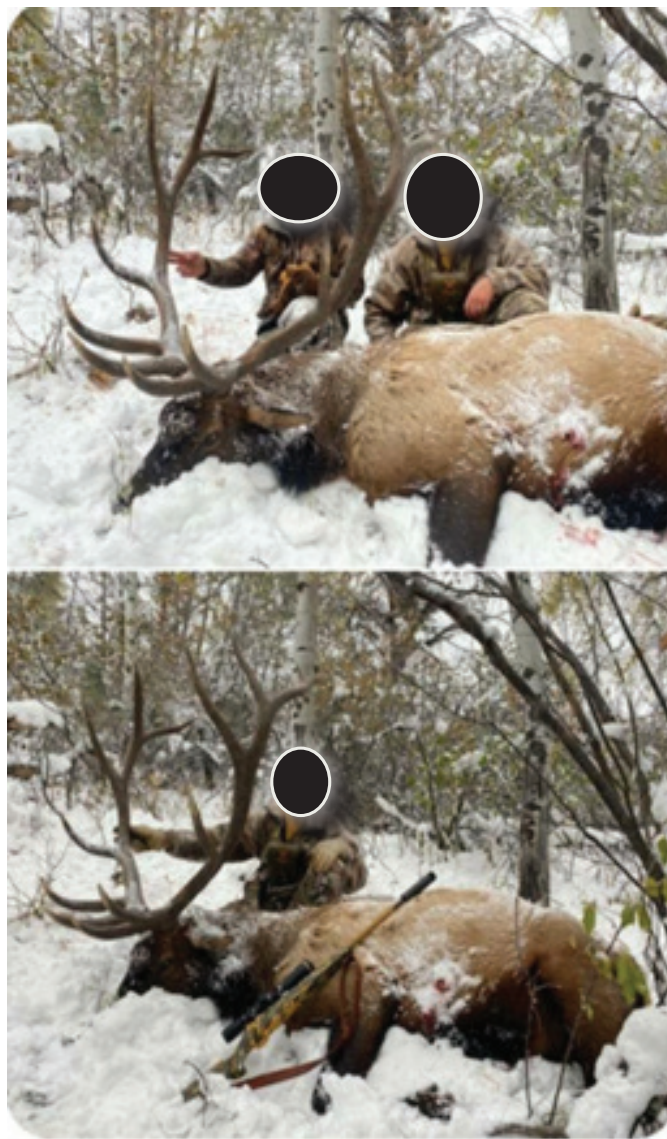
The suspects appeared in Sheridan Circuit Court on March 8, 2022 and pled guilty to all the charges. The man paid \$30,070 in fines, was sentenced to 90 days in jail, forfeited a Weatherby .270 rifle and lost his hunting, fishing and trapping license privileges for 30 years. The woman was fined \$1,170.

DEER AND ELK POACHING

In October of 2020, Sheridan Region personnel were made aware of a possible trespass on private property between Sheridan and Story. The Sheridan Game Warden looked into the situation and discovered there were more violations than a single trespass. Sheridan Region game wardens learned of multiple elk and deer shot on several landowners' properties in the area, the use of a suppressor while trespassing and transfer of licenses among other violations.

The main suspect, a Montana resident who had been renting a house on a ranch for the preceding three years, had been given limited permission to hunt deer on the landowner's property. The suspect shot a buck white-tailed deer without a license and purchased a license to cover his crime a couple days after the fact.

The only licenses available were for a different hunt area valid for doe/fawn only. He also invited a couple friends to hunt elk, where an over-limit of elk was taken, while trespassing on the adjacent private property and doing so with a suppressor. During the investigation, Sheridan Region personnel also discovered many potential wildlife crimes that had taken place in Montana. They passed this information to game wardens with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, who have begun their own investigation into the suspect's activities.



Suspects with illegally taken bull elk

Adjudication for the suspect's Wyoming violations was completed in 2022, with a total of \$15,250 in fines, \$10,000 in restitution and 13 years of hunting and fishing privileges being suspended.

GAME BIRD VIOLATION REPORT LEADS TO NUMEROUS BIG GAME VIOLATIONS

During the course of an investigation into a wasted game bird report, Department game wardens learned of numerous violations committed by two men from Rock Springs. The investigation revealed that between October 1 and October 6, 2019, the two men each illegally killed mature bull elk within Elk Hunt Area 100 during the closed season, which they tagged with general elk licenses. Wardens were able to determine the locations where the elk were killed and collected DNA from one bull elk illegally killed on October 1, 2019. DNA analysis conducted by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department Forensics Laboratory confirmed the carcass at the kill site was a match to the skull and antlers one suspect had in his possession.

which included five counts of intentionally taking antlered big game without a license or during a closed season; two counts of transferring a license; two counts of intentionally wasting edible portions of game birds and big game back straps; and five counts of transporting game without a Wyoming Interstate Game Tag, related to five skulls with antlers attached that he had illegally collected. The suspect pled guilty to three counts of intentionally taking antlered bull elk without a proper license, one count of taking a buck mule deer without a license, and one count of transferring a license. In October of 2021, his hunting and fishing privileges were suspended for 15 years and he was ordered to pay fines of \$1,585 and restitution of \$7,000. All wildlife seized was forfeited to the State of Wyoming. All other charges were dismissed.



Illegally taken elk and mule deer skulls

On October 4, 2020, the two men were hunting deer in Sublette County when one illegally killed a buck mule deer and the other illegally tagged it. Later that same day, while returning from the Pinedale area to Rock Springs, the two men hunted elk in Elk Hunt Area 100 with general elk licenses. Elk Area 100 is a limited quota area and did not open until October 8, 2020 for properly licensed hunters. One of the suspects shot and killed two mature bull elk and the other tagged one of the illegally killed bull elk with his general elk license.

One suspect was charged with ten violations,

The second suspect was charged with five counts of intentionally taking antlered big game without a license or during a closed season and two counts of transferring a license. He pleaded no contest to one count of taking a buck mule deer without a license and two counts of intentionally taking a bull elk without the proper license. In January of 2022, the suspect's hunting and fishing privileges were suspended for two years, he was ordered to pay \$5,640 in fines, restitution of \$1,500 and to forfeit the Browning .338 rifle used in the commission of these crimes to the State of Wyoming. All other charges were dismissed.

CRASH LEADS TO WILDLIFE CHARGES

Two men from Texas were involved in a vehicle crash in the early morning hours of October 16, 2022. A concerned citizen called the Department after seeing blood and hair in the bed of their truck and observing blood on the men's clothing at the scene of the crash. In a subsequent investigation, game wardens spoke to the responding Wyoming Highway Patrol troopers, who said the suspects told them the blood was from a coyote they shot.



Game wardens later discovered that the men had killed three antelope in three separate locations in Sweetwater County between 1 a.m. and 4 a.m. on October 16, prior to their vehicle crash.



WHP dash camera images from the crash

One man was charged with 11 counts, including wanton destruction of big game (two counts), taking a big game animal with an illegal caliber firearm (two counts), shooting outside legal hours (two counts), use of artificial light for hunting (two counts), use of a silencer or suppressor to take big game (two counts) and accessory before/after the fact. The second man was charged with wanton destruction of big game, accessory before/after the fact, taking a big game animal with an illegal caliber firearm, shooting outside legal hours, use of artificial light for hunting and use of a silencer or suppressor to take big game.

The men pled guilty to all of the charges, resulting in over \$31,000 in fines and restitution. Each man was sentenced to and served 30 days in jail and 11.5 months of unsupervised probation.

The men also lost their hunting, fishing and trapping privileges for five years. Because Wyoming is a member of the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact, the men are suspended from hunting, fishing and trapping in 48 states. The men also were ordered to forfeit the firearms used in committing these crimes, which included two .22LR rifles with homemade suppressors.



Warden Dougherty executing a search warrant



Suspect with poached antelope

INTENTIONAL ILLEGAL TAKE OF MULE DEER [LARAMIE]

In January 2022, the north Laramie game warden received a call about a suspect intentionally killing a deer west of Laramie. There were no open seasons for mule deer during this timeframe. Two suspects were identified that had taken the 5x4 mule deer buck,

which was taken illegally with a .22 rifle. The suspects processed the mule deer and gave it to another family under the guise that it was taken legally as roadkill. When wardens approached the suspects, they were attempting to dispose of the 5x4 mule deer antlers to misdirect the wardens.

Two suspects were charged, with one suspect referred to a diversion program and the other suspect receiving \$1,070 in fines, \$250 in restitution, and all hunting, fishing, and trapping privileges were suspended for five years.

INTENTIONAL ILLEGAL TAKE OF MULE DEER (ELK MOUNTAIN)

While this case occurred in October 2021, the investigation and prosecution continued into 2022. The Elk Mountain game warden received a call from a local landowner who saw two individuals load a harvested mule deer into their vehicle and start to leave the area. The mule deer season had closed the week prior. The warden was on personal time hunting elk in the area and decided to try to locate the vehicle before they left the area. He located the group and talked with the suspects, asking them about hunting in the area. The two suspects bragged about the giant deer they had just killed, not realizing who they were speaking to. The warden identified himself as a Wyoming game warden and presented the suspects with his badge and lawful authority. He then requested assistance from the Medicine Bow and Saratoga wardens who were on duty and working nearby.



Warden Wood with a seized mule deer

The two suspects were arrested for the intentional take of an antlered mule deer out of season and transported to the Carbon County Detention Center. Game wardens obtained multiple warrants to collect biological and digital evidence. The evidence collected resulted in both suspects entering into guilty pleas in March 2022.

One suspect was sentenced to \$1,270 in fines, \$2,000 in restitution, and five years suspension of hunting and trapping privileges. The other suspect was charged as an accessory and sentenced to \$820 in fines, \$2,000 in restitution, and two years suspension of hunting and trapping privileges. The Weatherby Mark V 7mm rifle used to take the deer was forfeited to the state.

CLOSED AREA MULE DEER BUCK

On October 14, the Dubois game warden received a call about someone shooting a big buck mule deer in a closed area. The caller watched two individuals drag the deer to the highway and put it in the back of a maroon SUV. The warden received another anonymous report later in the day with information about the vehicle he was looking for. This caller said the vehicle likely belonged to a local man from Dubois.



Social media post of suspect with deer

The caller also said that the suspect had posted

pictures on Facebook about a deer he had killed in the Togwotee Pass area that morning.

The warden contacted the suspect, who told him that his wife shot at the deer twice and missed in the open hunt area just across the highway. The suspect went on to say that he shot once and hit the deer and it ran into the closed hunt area where it died. During the course of the investigation, the suspect's story changed and he admitted to shooting the deer in the closed area, but said he didn't know it was closed at the time. He didn't tell the truth initially because he got scared when the game warden came to his house to ask questions about the deer. The suspect was cited for taking a deer during a closed season and paid a \$250 fine.

DRUNK DRIVER ARRESTED FOR POACHING

In January of 2022, the east Casper game warden came across a truck parked along the highway east of Edgerton and noticed a large buck mule deer in the bed of the truck. The driver was unconscious/sleeping in the truck. The warden notified the Natrona County Sheriff's Office and a deputy arrested the driver for DUI. The suspect had a history of DUI charges and as a result had a felony conviction. He was charged with another felony DUI and with being a felon in possession of a firearm.



Illegally taken wildlife

The warden discovered the suspect had shot and killed the mule deer buck out of season. Further investigations resulted in pending wildlife violations in four counties in Wyoming. In Johnson County, the suspect killed five bull elk and two mule deer bucks in 2021 and 2022 without licenses. The Johnson County court found him guilty and he lost his hunting and fishing privileges for 55 years. He was ordered to pay \$8,000 in fines and \$28,000 in restitution. In addition, he will serve one year in jail. Investigations continue in the three other counties.

CASPER FAMILY LUCKY TO SURVIVE BOAT CRASH

A Casper man, his wife and their three dogs had been fishing for several hours on Pathfinder Reservoir when they decided to head back to the boat ramp. The husband was driving the boat heading toward the boat ramp at full throttle with an estimated speed of 35 mph. He was not paying attention while talking to his wife about the reservoir's high water line. He looked forward and saw they were about to crash into the rocks. At the last second, he turned the wheel hard to the left and the boat made contact with the rocks. After hitting the rocks, everyone and everything except for one of the dogs was ejected. The boat flipped twice before landing upright in the water. Both the husband and wife were able to walk but suffered bruises and lacerations due to landing on the rocks. Their dogs were not injured.



Boat and contents after crash

Game wardens conducted field sobriety tests on the driver of the boat, which resulted in no indications of drugs or alcohol in his system. The husband said he had driven boats all his life and was very familiar with Pathfinder Reservoir. Life Flight transported the wife to Casper, where she received numerous stitches. The hospital released her the same day. The husband refused medical treatment and drove to the hospital to be with his wife. During interviews, he told the game warden the crash occurred due to his negligence and failure to pay attention while operating his boat. He was cited for careless operation of a watercraft and paid a \$250 fine.

TRESPASSING TO COLLECT ANTLERS

Antler hunting has become extremely popular throughout western Wyoming, especially in the Pinedale Region, with its abundance of elk and mule deer. Occasionally the desire to collect antlers leads to violations, including illegal trespassing on private property.

On the evening of May 4, 2022 the south Pinedale game warden received a call regarding a trespassing event on a ranch east of Boulder. During the investigation of this case, the warden learned that three adults and two juveniles had been trespassing on several properties to collect antlers. The warden was able to obtain photos on social media showing a truck with multiple



Social media photo of illegally collected antlers

elk, deer and moose antlers in the bed, parked in an area where the event occurred. A ranch employee identified the vehicle in the photo, and the location was confirmed to be the same area they had been seen in earlier. Following several interviews, the men admitted to crossing private property and antler hunting on several ranches.

The three adults were subsequently cited for collecting antlers on private property without landowner permission. All three men were found guilty in court and each paid fines of \$300.

PRE-SEASON ELK HUNTING

Early on the opening morning of the general elk season in area 92, the Big Piney game warden received a call from an elk hunter who had been hunting near Merna Butte. At daylight, the hunter found a quartered carcass of a bull elk, which immediately made him suspicious, as there was no way it could have been legally killed that morning. The warden met with the hunter, who took him to the kill site to investigate and collect evidence. In the meantime, the Pinedale regional supervisor patrolled camps in an area nearby looking for suspicious activity that may lead to a suspect.



Bull elk killed out of season

While talking to some hunters, the supervisor learned of a man who had been hunting cow elk the previous evening, in the area the bull was found, and that he had returned to his vehicle very late that night. The individual's camp was located and was unoccupied at the time.

Wardens later returned to the camp and interviewed two hunters who had just returned. They were interviewed separately and ultimately confessed to killing a 6X7 bull the previous night just before dark. The suspect had been hunting for cow elk, which was open at the time. He claimed that he had shot at a cow but missed and hit the bull behind the front shoulder. He

was cited for hunting elk during a closed season and failing to tag a big game animal. He was fined \$1,420 in fines and restitution and lost his hunting privileges for three years.

This case was a direct result of a concerned sportsman promptly reporting a violation. Due to his quick report, wardens were able to identify and locate the suspect before he left the area. Without the report, this case would likely have gone undetected. The hunter who reported this violation received a cash reward from the Wyoming Wildlife Protectors Association in appreciation for his help.

WILDLIFE INVESTIGATIONS UNIT

WORK UNIT OVERVIEW

The Wildlife Investigations Unit (WIU) is comprised of six wildlife investigators stationed at the Casper, Green River, Lander, Laramie, Jackson and Sheridan regional offices and one supervisor/investigator stationed at the Cody regional office.

The WIU is responsible for investigating large-scale, complex, lengthy, overt and covert cases. The WIU places its highest priority on cases with commercial involvement, multiple suspects, multiple violations and wildlife violations taking place across several jurisdictions. Investigators also assist game wardens with larger enforcement cases, task forces and other special projects. The WIU maintains several intelligence databases. WIU members operate with unmarked vehicles and typically out of uniform. The WIU is equipped with digital media forensics, modern evidence collection and equipment for surveillance, tracking and covert operations. The WIU also works closely with other states'

wildlife investigators and with several federal agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

2022 LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS



The WIU initiated at least 12 major investigations in 2022 and assisted game wardens throughout Wyoming and officers from other jurisdictions across the country with over 100 other cases. Investigators spent significant time working on ongoing investigations across Wyoming. A significant number of hours were spent working cases through hearings and trials in court for numerous investigations.

The WIU continues to explore new technologies related to tracking suspect activity, covert operations and digital forensics. The WIU analyzes all cell phones, computers and other electronic devices seized from wildlife violators in Wyoming. A total of 31 cell phones, four SD cards/flash drives, two computers, and several GPS units seized by game wardens and investigators as evidence

were forensically examined by WIU personnel in 2022. The WIU also coordinated forensic extractions of additional cell phones for other Wyoming law enforcement agencies in several cooperatively worked cases. Investigators wrote and executed cell phone, Google geofence and social media preservation letters and search warrants as well as search warrants for premises and property in 2022.

NOTABLE CASES

DECADES OF CRIME PUNISHED

On May 27, 2022, a Buhl, Alabama resident (Suspect 1) was sentenced to 20 to 24 months in state prison for poaching a bighorn sheep ram near Cody in 2012. The suspect made his court appearance via video link from the Sheridan County Detention Center, where he was serving a one-year sentence for poaching four bull moose. The court appearance was the final in a four-county legal procession Suspect 1 has made for his involvement in a multi-year poaching spree in northern Wyoming. Additionally, an Oklahoma resident (Suspect 2) was charged in the case as an accessory for failing to tag a bighorn sheep and accessory to the illegal killing of a bighorn sheep ram and over-limit of bighorn sheep by Suspect 1. Because of their previous misdemeanor convictions for wildlife crimes in other Wyoming courts, the Park County charges against the pair were felonies. A jury trial for Suspect 2 began on September 12. At its conclusion on September 20, he was found not guilty on all three counts.

The two suspects' appearances in Park County were the culmination of a seven-year, multi-agency investigation spanning four states and involving thousands of hours of investigation and effort by state and federal wildlife law enforcement officers, county and federal prosecutors, Department forensic laboratory personnel and others.

These two suspects, along with the Oklahoma suspect's adult son (Suspect 3), were charged with more than 100 wildlife violations in one of

the largest poaching cases in Wyoming history.

The case began in October 2015 when a Gillette game warden received a request from a hunter for an interstate game tag to accompany a deer head as it was shipped to Suspect 1 for taxidermy work at an Alabama address. However, a database search showed him having a Wyoming address and that he had purchased Wyoming resident hunting licenses for several years. With this conflicting information, the warden began to unravel the case that would eventually identify dozens of wildlife violations in Campbell, Weston, Sheridan and Park counties. With the conclusion of the case, the three suspects were sentenced to the following:

Suspect 1

Weston County – On June 10, 2020, Suspect 1 pled guilty to illegally killing two bighorn sheep and was levied \$20,070 in fines, \$10,000 restitution, and a 10-year hunting, fishing and trapping suspension.



Illegally taken bighorn sheep in Weston County

Campbell County – On June 22, 2021, Suspect 1 pled no contest to eight counts of illegally taking wildlife. The remaining 36 charges were dismissed. He received an 80-day jail sentence, of which he served 60 days, and was ordered to pay \$40,320 in fines and \$32,000 restitution. His hunting and fishing privileges were also revoked for life. He forfeited four bull elk mounts, one buck antelope mount, three buck mule deer mounts and a Winchester rifle used in the illegal killings. He additionally abandoned three

bighorn sheep, three moose, seven elk, eight antelope, one mule deer, a walrus mask and one gull mount to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service after the November 2017 search warrant.

Sheridan County – On August 31, 2021, Suspect 1 pled guilty to two charges. He made an Alford plea on the other two charges. Defendants in criminal cases can make an Alford plea in which he or she maintains innocence, but recognizes that prosecutorial evidence is likely to result in a conviction. Suspect 1 was sentenced to one year in the Sheridan County Detention Center, with seven days credited as served. He was ordered to pay \$40,160 in fines, \$30,000 restitution and began his incarceration that day.



Illegally taken moose in Sheridan County

Park County – Suspect 1 pled guilty to illegally killing a bighorn sheep and no contest to the accessory charges on December 22, 2021, with sentencing on May 27, 2022. In addition to his 20-24 month prison sentence, Suspect 1 was ordered to pay \$12,575 in fines and \$15,000 in restitution. This prison sentence began at the Rawlins State Penitentiary in August 2022 after he completed his one-year sentence in the Sheridan County Detention Center.

Suspect 2

Weston County – On May 27, 2020, Suspect 2 pled no contest as an accessory to Suspect 1's illegal killing of two bighorn sheep. He was sentenced to \$20,070 in fines and \$10,000 restitution and a 10-year hunting, fishing and trapping suspension.

Campbell County – On June 19, 2020, Suspect 2 pled no contest and was convicted of illegally killing two bull elk and a buck mule deer and serving as an accessory to Suspect 1's illegal killing of a buck mule deer and a bull elk. He was ordered to pay \$25,990 fines and \$26,550 restitution. He was sentenced to 50 days in jail and forfeited a bobcat mount. His hunting and fishing privileges were also revoked for life.

Park County – Suspect 2 was charged for failing to tag a bighorn sheep ram and as an accessory to the illegal killing of a bighorn sheep ram and over-limit by Suspect 1 in 2012. As noted earlier, a jury found him not guilty on all charges.

Suspect 3

Weston County – On May 27, 2020, Suspect 3 appeared in court and pled guilty as an accessory to the killing of the bighorn sheep. Three other counts were dismissed. He was ordered to pay \$5,035 in fines, \$5,000 restitution and his hunting, fishing and trapping privileges were revoked for five years.

Campbell County – On June 15, 2020, Suspect 3 appeared in court and pled no contest to eight charges and the other eight charges were dismissed. His plea deal outlined \$7,010 in fines and \$3,000 restitution. His hunting privileges were suspended for 15 years, beginning at the end of his five-year suspension from Weston County. He forfeited a bighorn sheep shoulder mount, three buck antelope, eagle parts, elk antlers, elk meat and two buck mule deer.



Collection of illegally taken wildlife

As required by state statute, the \$171,230 in fines imposed by the judges in these wildlife poaching cases will be distributed to the public school funds in the counties where the violations occurred.

As required by state statute, the \$131,550 in restitution imposed by the judges in these cases will be deposited into a Wyoming Game and Fish Department account that is used for the purchase of access easements to public and private land.

NO HUMAN PRESENCE CONVICTIONS

Three related suspects from Dubois, Wyoming were found guilty by a jury following a three-day trial in Fremont County. The suspects followed this trial by agreeing to a plea deal in Teton County on additional charges there. The charges in the two counties were for violation of human presence on Department Wildlife Habitat Management Areas (WHMA), collection of shed antlers or horns in a closed season, and false statements to obtain resident Wyoming licenses. The investigation revealed the extreme measures this one family engaged in to obtain elk and deer antlers and the monetary incentive present in the sale of shed antlers to drive their behavior. The WIU led the case with assistance from Department game wardens and officers from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, United States Forest Service (USFS), United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Fremont County Attorney's office, Teton County Attorney's Office, and the U.S. Attorney's Office.

Department WHMA and USFS winter range closures and the shed antler season were implemented for the purpose of protecting wintering wildlife from human harassment and to insure the public has an equal opportunity to participate in the collection of shed antlers on these state and federal lands. The collection of shed antlers by the public is extremely popular and the monetary value of shed antlers continues to increase as new and different markets for them are developed.

The investigation began with evidence obtained

by a USFS Law Enforcement Officer (LEO) that showed two of the suspects violating a winter range closure on the Bridger-Teton National Forest near Jackson. The evidence showed the suspects on the closed forest on April 30, 2021, hiking with frame packs. The Forest did not open to the public until the early morning of May 1, 2021. On the morning of May 1, 2021, USFWS/ National Elk Refuge LEO observed the two suspects trespassing on the closed National Elk Refuge (NER), and exiting the area loaded with antlers on their frame packs. The suspects were contacted by the USFWS LEO. The USFWS and USFS officers confirmed that the suspects were the same two males documented in the USFS evidence. Later that morning, the third suspect picked up the boys and transported them and their shed antlers back to their vehicles as the boys had backpacked and camped overnight to access the closed areas and collect antlers in the closed season.

On December 10, 2022, a jury returned a verdict of guilty on 10 of 11 charges on the suspects in Fremont County. On December 12, the judge sentenced the suspects as follows:

Suspect 1 – Found guilty on four counts of violation of human presence closure on WHMA. Ordered to serve 12 days in jail, pay \$3,070 fines and court costs, two years unsupervised probation, ordered not to enter for any purpose any Department WHMA and license privileges were suspended for 12 years.

Suspect 2 – Found guilty on five counts of violation of human presence closure on WHMA. Ordered to serve 10 days in jail, pay \$2,570 fines and court costs, fifteen months unsupervised probation, ordered not to enter for any purpose any Department WHMA and license privileges were suspended for five years.

Suspect 3 – Found guilty on one count of procuring a deer license by false statement. Ordered to pay \$1,070 fines and court costs, one year of unsupervised probation and license privileges were suspended for two years.

For charges in Teton County, the suspects

agreed to a plea deal where they would plead to one count each and other counts would be dismissed. On December 30, 2022, the judge sentenced the suspects as follows:

Suspect 1 – Entered a plea of no contest to accessory before or after the fact to the illegal collection of antlers. Assessed \$470 fines and court costs, six months unsupervised probation and ordered not to enter for any purpose a Department WHMA.

Suspect 2 – Entered a plea of no contest to conspiracy to commit a violation of Commission order for illegal collection of antlers. Assessed \$470 fines and court costs, six months unsupervised probation and ordered not to enter for any purpose a Department WHMA.

Suspect 3 - Entered a plea of no contest to conspiracy to commit a violation of Commission order for illegal collection of antlers. Assessed \$470 fines and court costs.

LARGE CARNIVORE SECTION

WORK UNIT OVERVIEW

The Large Carnivore Section (LCS) is responsible for the management and conflict resolution of mountain lions, black bears, grizzly bears and wolves (where classified as trophy game animals) in Wyoming. The high-profile nature and inherent controversy associated with large carnivores requires a working knowledge of the species and their interactions with humans and other wildlife. One game warden is assigned to the LCS, stationed in Lander and serves as the LCS Conflict Coordinator. The LCS Conflict Coordinator is also responsible for reviewing all trophy game damage claims in the Pinedale, Lander, Cody, and Jackson regions as well as assisting district game wardens and supervisors with trophy game damage claims throughout Wyoming.

The LCS Conflict Coordinator focuses on managing conflicts between humans and large carnivores as well as law enforcement situations with these animals. In addition, the LCS Conflict Coordinator serves as the lead of the Department's Predator Attack Team (PAT) and conductive electrical weapons (CEW) trainer. The LCS Conflict Coordinator works cooperatively with regional wardens and investigators, federal agency law enforcement officers, and LCS personnel on all human attacks by carnivores. The LCS Conflict Coordinator provides an advisory and investigative role in statewide trophy game law enforcement activities and trophy game damage investigations.



Warden DeBolt investigating an illegal bear bait site

2022 LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS

LCS and regional law enforcement personnel were active in investigating multiple reports of aggressive grizzly bear encounters, including investigations into four different grizzly bear-caused human injuries. The LCS Conflict Coordinator served as the lead assistance contact to USFWS agents and game wardens in 14 ongoing grizzly bear enforcement cases. In addition to grizzly bear investigations, LCS personnel assisted with multiple wolf, mountain lion and black bear investigations. The LCS provided localized assistance to game wardens with a variety of cases involving watercraft safety, big game, fishing and other wildlife-related incidents (six big game or fishing enforcement cases). Although most cases are referred to local game wardens, the LCS Conflict Coordinator cited several individuals for misdemeanor wildlife violations.



PAT Training for Department Personnel

PAT personnel responded to several grizzly bear-caused human injuries this year in Wyoming. These conflicts, when they occur, require an immediate response by trained, equipped law enforcement personnel. The LCS Conflict Coordinator provided a week-long Predator Attack Training for the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries in August of 2022. The LCS Conflict Coordinator also provided a statewide three-day PAT training for Department personnel in June of 2022. He also provided PAT training for Teton County Search and Rescue personnel in Jackson in May of 2022.



PAT Training with Teton County Search & Rescue

The Department will continue to prioritize reducing conflicts between grizzly bears and humans and maintain an immediate and efficient response in all wildlife/human attack situations. CEW deployments were conducted on one mountain lion, one white-tailed deer, and one bison in 2022.

NOTABLE CASES

The LCS Conflict Coordinator spent significant time monitoring unethical bear roadside viewing near Togwotee Pass. "Traffic jams" of 50 cars or more with photographers outside of their vehicles were not uncommon. Several wildlife watchers were vocal, verbally abusive and confrontational to the LCS Conflict Coordinator and other law enforcement officers. Multi-jurisdictional efforts between the Department, USFWS, USFS, WYDOT and WHP to manage the unethical behavior of people are ongoing.



Warden DeBolt looking for grizzly hair and blood inside a den

One interesting case for the LCS Conflict Coordinator involved a reported grizzly bear attack in the Pinedale Region. He coordinated the investigation with USFWS agents due to shots being fired. The investigation determined that a hunter surprised a grizzly bear at a freshly excavated den site. As the grizzly bear attempted to leave the den, the hunter was startled and fell backward. During the encounter, he shot himself in the lower leg with his handgun. His hunting partner and search and rescue personnel were able to extract the injured man with horses and ATVs and provide medical attention. There were no bear-caused injuries inflicted on the hunter and no evidence of the grizzly bear being shot. The investigation concluded that the grizzly bear and the man were startled by the close encounter with each other. The bear attempted to flee using the only available escape route and showed no overt aggression toward the man.

WATERCRAFT SAFETY PROGRAM

The Department is the state agency primarily responsible for watercraft safety education and enforcement. In a typical year, game wardens spend much of their time patrolling Wyoming waters. From major reservoirs to small ponds and streams, they enforce fishing and boating safety laws and regulations and promote safe boating activities. Although many waterways were not as busy as they were during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, game wardens throughout Wyoming continued to see high participation by the public in watercraft-related activities. These included high numbers of non-motorized watercraft like kayaks, canoes and standup paddleboards.

Game wardens worked 4,350 hours and contacted thousands of boaters during their watercraft safety enforcement and educational efforts. At full staff, the Department has 8 regional game warden positions assigned primarily to watercraft duties between Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends. However, most of these positions were unfilled for much of the summer boating season due to turnover and retirements. District game wardens in many parts of the state worked additional watercraft safety enforcement along with their other duties to ensure an enforcement and safety presence on Wyoming waterways.

To accomplish the Department's boating safety mission, game wardens work in partnership with county sheriffs' offices, municipal police departments, local fire departments and volunteer search and rescue organizations. The Department also partners with the United States Coast Guard (USCG) and other boating safety organizations throughout the country to work toward consistent regulations and education messaging among the states. According to USCG statistics, on average, drowning accounts for nearly 70% of all boating related fatalities nationwide in a given year. In approximately 85% of these cases, the victims were not

wearing life jackets. Many of these deaths could have been prevented with life jacket wear. For this reason, game wardens emphasize the importance of carrying and wearing properly fitting life jackets aboard watercraft when contacting the boating public.

Casper area game wardens assisted a local volunteer organization, "Respect Our River," with maintaining several life jacket loaner stations along the North Platte River and at Alcova and Pathfinder reservoirs. Wardens observed many people taking advantage of this program, especially in the area of the Casper Whitewater Park on the North Platte River, which has been the scene of several drowning fatalities in the past few years.



In 2022, there were five reportable boat incidents investigated by game wardens, down from seven in 2021. These included one boating-related fatality on the Gros Ventre River near Jackson in June. In this incident, four experienced whitewater rafting guides went rafting together on their time off. The rafters were all wearing dry suits, life jackets and helmets. They paired up on small rafts and one of the rafts capsized in a stretch of rough water. The two occupants were thrown overboard and one of them drowned before he was able to surface. Two other incidents: one on Pathfinder Reservoir and one on Boysen Reservoir, resulted in injuries to three individuals. The other two incidents involved boats that suffered damage in excess of \$500.

Alcohol and drug use have been contributing factors in many of the most serious watercraft accidents in Wyoming over the past several years. Game wardens keep a watchful eye for boat operators under the influence of alcohol or drugs, with the goal of intervening before an accident occurs. In 2022, three boat operators were arrested for BUI, all related to alcohol use

at Alcova Reservoir. The Department again participated in Operation Dry Water, a nationwide effort to educate the public about the dangers of BUI and encourage boaters to designate a sober operator.

The Department continues to improve the training of game wardens related to boating safety, including specialized boating law enforcement and water survival techniques. The initial training that all new game wardens receive includes general boat operations, review of Wyoming boating laws and regulations, boat-to-boat arrest tactics, BUI detection and enforcement, an officer survival pool session and training on the effects of cold water immersion. Wardens also routinely participate in scenario-based training to evaluate their

skills and decision-making abilities in various situations they may encounter on the water.

The Department remained involved in national and regional associations dedicated to safe boating. Law Enforcement Coordinator Aaron Kerr served on the executive board of the Western States Boating Administrators Association, which is dedicated to collaboration among western states in the interests of recreational boating safety enforcement and education. He also sits on the executive board for the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators and works on the association's Enforcement and Training Committee, which is dedicated to developing and providing training resources to marine law enforcement officers nationwide.

STATE LAND ENFORCEMENT

In addition to wildlife and watercraft law enforcement, the Department assists the Wyoming Office of State Lands and Investments by enforcing certain statutes applying to Wyoming State Trust Land (state land).

Department game wardens have the authority to enforce prohibitions of off-road travel, overnight camping, open fires and littering on state land. Most state land enforcement was incidental to hunting and fishing patrol duties. On many state land parcels throughout



Off-road travel damage

Wyoming, off-road travel is an ongoing issue and has caused considerable resource damage to some areas. Much of this off-road use occurs in the early spring or fall when soils are wet or when roads are blocked by snow and people attempt to drive around the drifts.



Remnants of illegal fire on state land

Illegal overnight camping on state lands occurs throughout the year and can contribute to resource damage and littering. Open fires, typically associated with overnight camping, were of particular concern this year due to very dry conditions in most of Wyoming.

Many of the state land violations discovered by game wardens were handled with verbal or written warnings to educate the violators, although several more serious violations causing resource damage were addressed with citations.

State Land Violations			
Violation	Written Warnings	Citations	Total
Off-Road Travel	9	11	20
Camping	9	6	15
Open Fires	5	5	10
Littering on State Land	2	0	2
Total 2022	25	22	47
Total 2021	32	27	59
Total 2020	36	27	63



REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS

The Department utilizes an electronic case management system (CMS) to document wildlife violations and create individual law enforcement case reports. The CMS allows for the compilation of wildlife violation data and associated law enforcement action. Personnel work hours are tracked through a Daily Activity Report database. Both of these Department databases were utilized to compile the statistics included in this report.

Some law enforcement positions were vacant for part of the year due to retirements and personnel moves. The number of law enforcement positions listed for each region or work unit represents the total number of positions that documented law enforcement activity while assigned to a region or work unit.

JACKSON REGION – 4 ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL

Activity	Hours	Watercraft Hours	Miles
Wildlife Enforcement	2,556	0	29,675
Watercraft Enforcement	232	30	2,224
Total	2,788	30	31,899

Program Enforcement	Warnings	Citations	Unknown Suspect	Total Law Enforcement Actions
Terrestrial Wildlife	58	48	5	111
Sport Fish	33	39	0	72
Non-Wildlife	16	4	0	20
Aquatic Invasive Species	5	0	0	5
Total	112	91	5	208



Winter firearms training

CODY REGION – 12 ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL

Activity	Hours	Watercraft Hours	Miles
Wildlife Enforcement	5,899	0	89,816
Watercraft Enforcement	390	36	5,766
Total	6,289	36	95,582

Program Enforcement	Warnings	Citations	Unknown Suspect	Total Law Enforcement Actions
Terrestrial Wildlife	123	56	5	184
Sport Fish	16	20	0	36
Non-Wildlife	19	8	0	27
Aquatic Invasive Species	26	10	0	36
Total	184	94	5	283

SHERIDAN REGION – 9 ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL

Activity	Hours	Watercraft Hours	Miles
Wildlife Enforcement	5,075	19	76,059
Watercraft Enforcement	943	208	10,064
Total	6,018	227	86,123

Program Enforcement	Warnings	Citations	Unknown Suspect	Total Law Enforcement Actions
Terrestrial Wildlife	214	133	73	420
Sport Fish	41	32	1	74
Non-Wildlife	123	50	0	173
Aquatic Invasive Species	44	14	0	58
Total	422	229	74	725

GREEN RIVER REGION – 10 ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL

Activity	Hours	Watercraft Hours	Miles
Wildlife Enforcement	5,121	35	81,382
Watercraft Enforcement	380	87	4,924
Total	5,501	122	86,306

Program Enforcement	Warnings	Citations	Unknown Suspect	Total Law Enforcement Actions
Terrestrial Wildlife	119	40	13	172
Sport Fish	15	18	0	33
Non-Wildlife	7	3	0	10
Aquatic Invasive Species	63	4	0	67
Total	204	65	13	282

LARAMIE REGION – 14 ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL

Activity	Hours	Watercraft Hours	Miles
Wildlife Enforcement	3,680	7	54,118
Watercraft Enforcement	677	86	11,787
Total	5,927	100	104,992

Program Enforcement	Warnings	Citations	Unknown Suspect	Total Law Enforcement Actions
Terrestrial Wildlife	127	89	20	236
Sport Fish	21	33	0	54
Non-Wildlife	32	6	1	39
Aquatic Invasive Species	37	5	0	42
Total	217	133	21	371

LANDER REGION – 8 ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL

Activity	Hours	Watercraft Hours	Miles
Wildlife Enforcement	3,680	7	54,118
Watercraft Enforcement	439	80	5,166
Total	4,119	87	59,284

Program Enforcement	Warnings	Citations	Unknown Suspect	Total Law Enforcement Actions
Terrestrial Wildlife	75	36	76	187
Sport Fish	25	18	2	45
Non-Wildlife	23	0	0	23
Aquatic Invasive Species	1	0	0	1
Total	124	54	78	256

CASPER REGION – 9 ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL

Activity	Hours	Watercraft Hours	Miles
Wildlife Enforcement	4,325	56	57,226
Watercraft Enforcement	748	229	7,988
Total	5,073	285	65,214

Program Enforcement	Warnings	Citations	Unknown Suspect	Total Law Enforcement Actions
Terrestrial Wildlife	234	98	6	338
Sport Fish	31	45	0	76
Non-Wildlife	41	31	0	72
Aquatic Invasive Species	27	9	0	36
Total	333	183	6	522

PINEDALE REGION – 4 ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL

Activity	Hours	Watercraft Hours	Miles
Wildlife Enforcement	1,590	0	21,313
Watercraft Enforcement	106	29	7,988
Total	5,073	285	65,214

Program Enforcement	Warnings	Citations	Unknown Suspect	Total Law Enforcement Actions
Terrestrial Wildlife	61	40	4	105
Sport Fish	8	12	0	20
Non-Wildlife	10	3	0	13
Aquatic Invasive Species	3	0	0	3
Total	82	55	4	141

LAW ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION

Activity	Hours	Watercraft Hours	Miles
Wildlife Enforcement	914	0	6,446
Watercraft Enforcement	435	31	1,634
Total	1,349	31	8,080

WILDLIFE INVESTIGATIONS UNIT – 7 ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL

Activity	Hours	Miles
Wildlife Enforcement	10,044	66,424



LAW ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION/ WILDLIFE INVESTIGATIONS UNIT

Program Enforcement	Warnings	Citations	Unknown Suspect	Total Law Enforcement Actions
Terrestrial Wildlife	26	5	1	32
Sport Fish	2	0	1	3
Non-Wildlife	9	6	0	15
Aquatic Invasive Species	0	0	0	0
Total	37	11	2	50



STATEWIDE LAW ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS

Activity	Hours	Watercraft Hours	Miles
Wildlife Enforcement	44,454	131	575,664
Watercraft Enforcement	4,350	816	50,711
Totals 2022	48,804	947	626,375
2021	51,537	998	574,171
2020	52,906	1,292	636,730

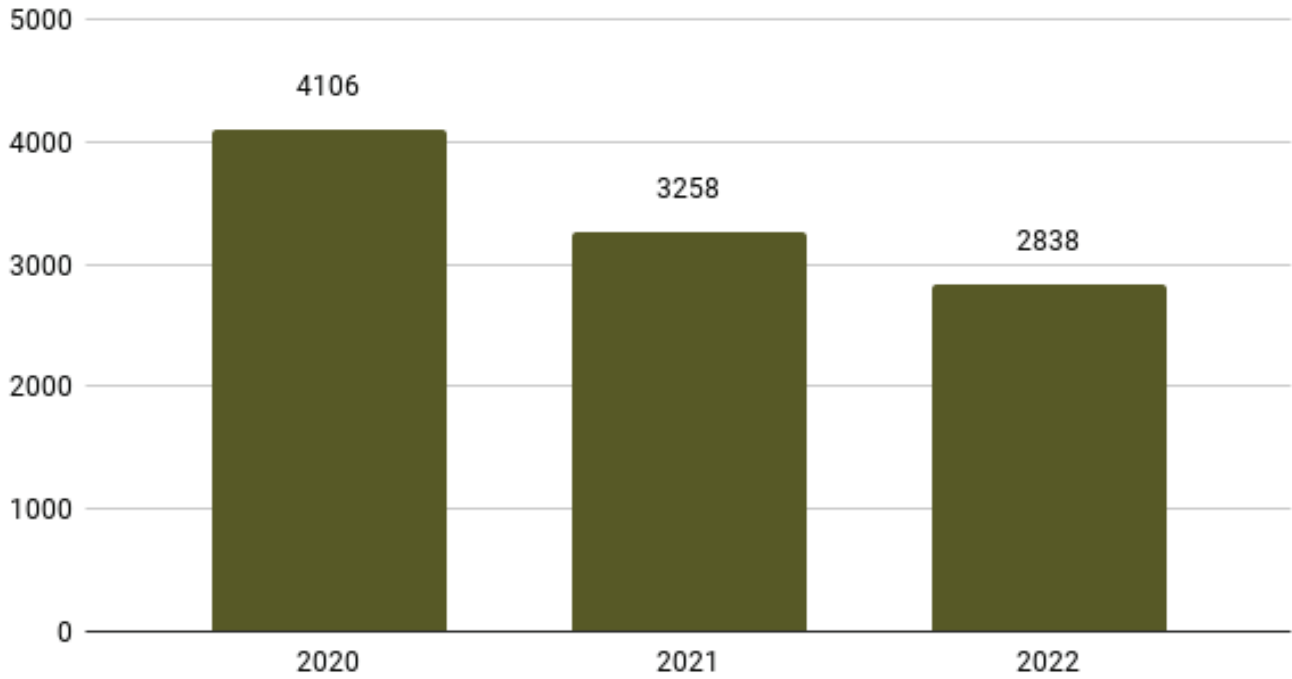
Program Enforcement	Warnings	Citations	Unknown Suspect	Total Law Enforcement Actions
Terrestrial Wildlife	1018	564	203	1,785
Sport Fish	192	217	4	413
Non-Wildlife	277	114	1	392
Aquatic Invasive Species	206	42	0	248
Totals 2022	1,693	937	208	2,838
2021	1,957	1,089	212	3,258
2020	2,342	1,485	279	4,106

Fines Levied by Courts	
Fines for Violations	\$359,540
Restitution to the Department	\$67,639
Totals 2022	\$427,179
2021	\$597,739

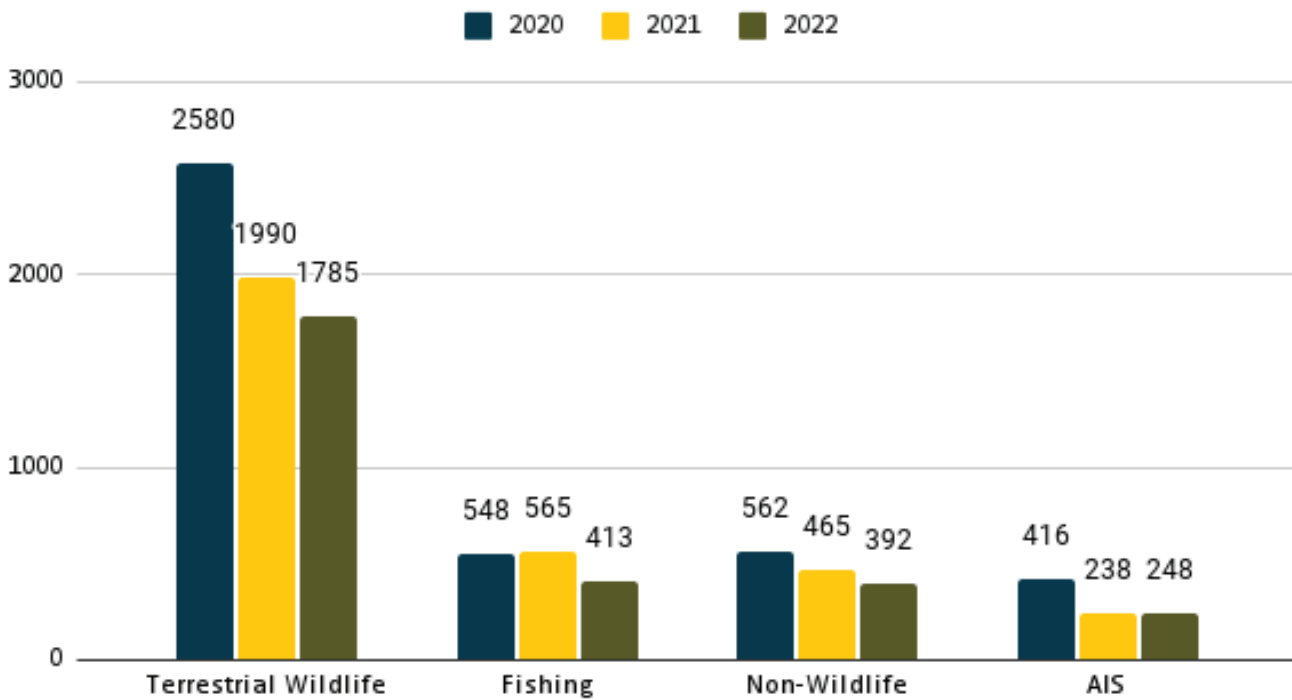


Warden Curran contacting a hunter

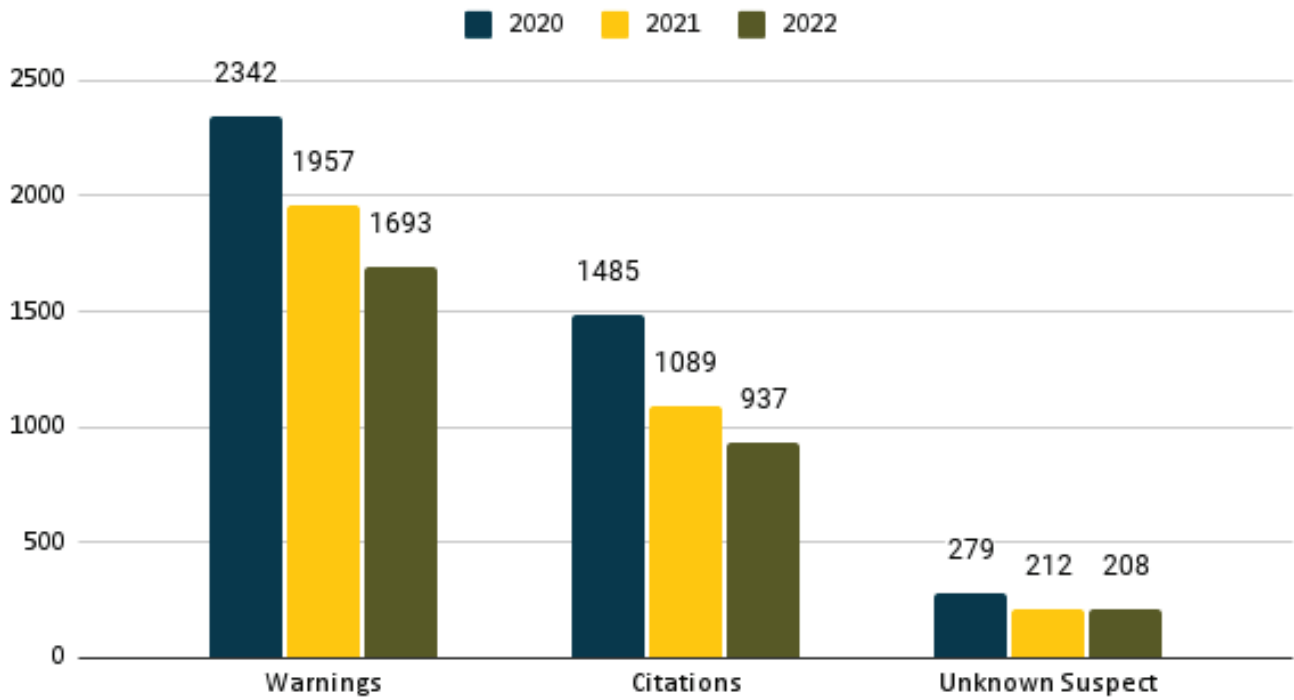
Total Violations by Year



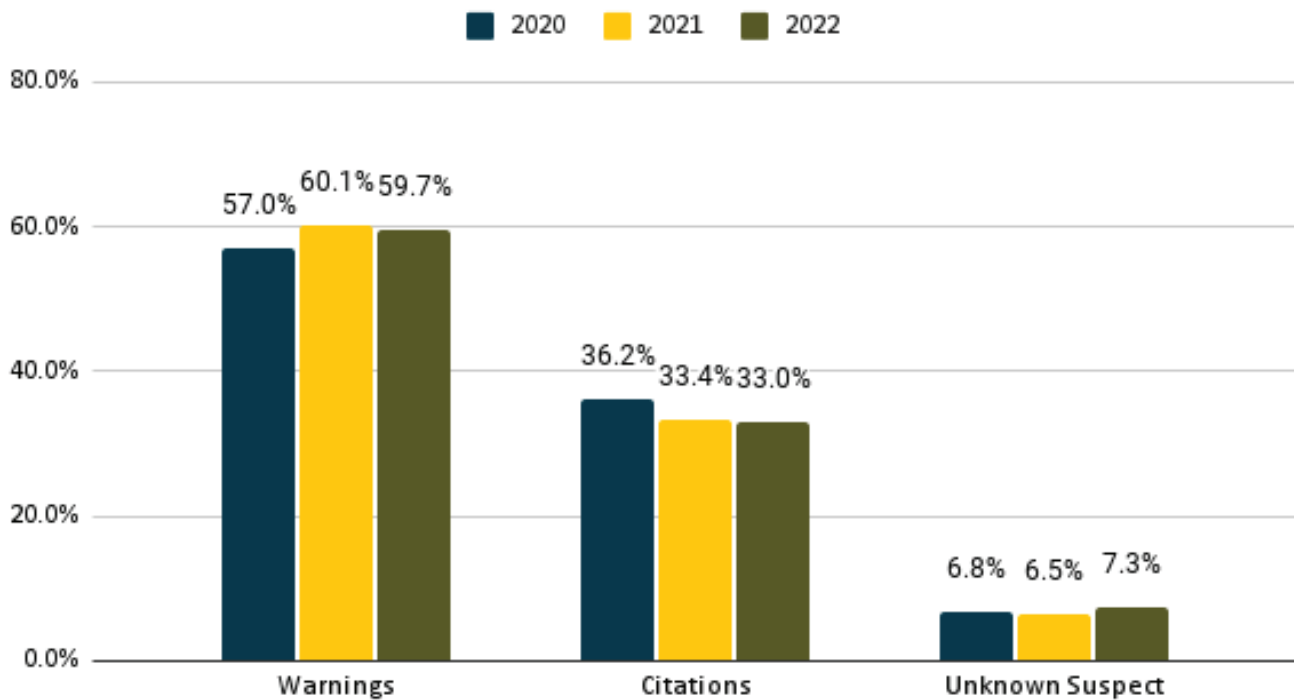
Violations by Category



Law Enforcement Actions



Percentage of Law Enforcement Actions



Top 10 Violations

In 2022, the top ten violations documented by Department law enforcement officers accounted for approximately 45% of all violations encountered. With few exceptions, the most common violations do not change from year to year and much of the Department's enforcement effort is geared toward these violations.

Fishing without a license is consistently the most common violation in the state and was again this year. This is due to recreational anglers being the largest user group that game wardens contact in the field during the year. Many of these violations are committed by individuals who simply forgot to purchase a license, while others fish without licenses intentionally and take their chances on getting caught. Even with the ease of obtaining fishing licenses online with a smartphone, fishing without a license accounted for approximately 9% of all violations detected.

Responding to hunting, fishing, trapping and shed antler collection trespassing complaints is a major part of the job for many game wardens. Several of the trespassing violations wardens respond to are unintentional by a suspect, but in many instances, the violators knew they were trespassing. Trespassing incidents accounted for approximately 7% of all violations.

Preventing AIS such as zebra and quagga mussels in Wyoming waters continues to be a high priority for the Department. Violations of the AIS regulations remained high in 2022. The Department continued increased enforcement efforts at AIS check stations this year and stopped over 150 boaters who failed to stop as required. These violations accounted for approximately 6% of violations.

The most common boating safety violation continues to be having inadequate life jackets aboard watercraft. Game wardens patrolling the water emphasize the enforcement of this requirement due to the life-saving potential of proper life jacket wear. Many of these violations occur early in the boating season. Additionally,

game wardens encounter many watercraft with an adequate number of life jackets, but lacking jackets of the proper size for everyone aboard. Of particular concern are children provided with adult-sized life jackets, which can easily slide off them in the water or be pushed up in their faces, making it difficult to breathe. These violations made up approximately 5% of the total.

Failing to tag big game animals, trophy game animals and wild turkeys continues to be a common violation. Licenses for these species contain carcass coupons, commonly referred to as tags. When one of these animals is harvested, the hunter is required to properly fill out the tag prior to leaving the site of the kill. Proper tagging entails detaching the carcass coupon from the license, signing the coupon and cutting out the month and day of harvest to show when the animal was killed. Game wardens often encounter hunters in transit from the kill site who have failed to take one or more of the steps to properly tag their animals. In these situations, it is difficult to know whether the tagging violation was simply an oversight or if the person was trying to get their animal home without tagging it so they could go hunting again using the same license. The Department has added diagrams into the regulation brochures for these species to remind hunters of proper tagging procedures at the kill site. Fail to tag violations made up almost 4% of the total.

Hunters and anglers, with some exceptions, are required to purchase a conservation stamp in addition to their license. The revenue generated from these sales is used to fund various Department projects, including the Access Yes program and wildlife habitat improvement projects. A conservation stamp fee increase implemented in 2021 provided funding dedicated to improving access to private lands or difficult to access public lands for hunting and fishing. Failing to purchase a conservation stamp made up almost 4% of all violations.

Hunting regulations specify limitations on the sex and species of animals that can be taken

by a hunter holding a specific license. Each year, game wardens investigate incidents where a hunter has killed the wrong sex of animal. These typically involve taking an antlered or horned big game animal on a license valid only for antlerless animals. Most commonly, yearling buck antelope are taken by hunters with doe/fawn antelope licenses or spike deer or elk taken by hunters with doe/fawn or cow/calf licenses. The Stop Poaching hotline receives calls from multiple hunters each year who are reporting themselves for making this mistake in the field. Self-reported violations often result in reduced penalties imposed by the courts. Taking the wrong sex of animal made up approximately 3% of total violations.

Department administered lands include properties owned by the Wyoming Game & Fish Commission (Commission) and private lands enrolled in the Access Yes Program. Various regulations apply to these properties and are enforced by Department law enforcement officers. Several of the Commission owned lands are closed to human presence during the winter months to protect wintering wildlife. Over the past few years, several individuals have been cited for entering these properties during closures, mostly to gather shed antlers. Other common violations on Department administered lands include off road travel, open fires in restricted areas, lighting fireworks, failing to obey regulatory signs and violations of “ranch rules” on Access Yes areas. Violations on Department lands made up approximately 3% of

the total.

Failing to purchase an AIS decal for a watercraft also remained prevalent. Many AIS violations are by non-motorized watercraft users, who are not required to register their watercraft. Motorized watercraft owners tend to be more familiar with the boating and AIS regulations because they receive a watercraft regulation brochure when they register their watercraft. The Department continues to expand awareness of the AIS program and the importance of preventing these invasive species from becoming established in Wyoming waters. Failing to purchase an AIS decal charges comprised approximately 2.5% of the total.

Often, wildlife violations involve groups of people with varying levels of involvement. For example, someone who shoots a deer out of season may have help from friends getting the carcass out of the field or covering up evidence of the crime. Individuals who aid or abet someone else in the commission of a wildlife violation can be charged as an accessory before or after the fact. The penalties for an accessory charge are the same as those for the principal violation. In the example above, someone who helps the shooter of the deer out of season could be found guilty of a high misdemeanor and subject to up to \$10,000 in fines, up to one year in jail and have their license privileges suspended for up to six years. Accessory before or after the fact made up approximately 2.5% of all violations.

Top 10 Violations Documented in 2022

1. Fishing without a license	258
2. Hunt, fish, trap, collect shed antlers on private land without permission (trespassing)	187
3. Fail to stop at AIS check station for inspection	157
4. Fail to provide life jackets aboard watercraft	136
5. Fail to tag big or trophy game animal	104
6. Fail to purchase conservation camp	101
7. Take wrong sex of animal	85
8. Violation of rules governing use of Department-administered lands	84
9. Fail to purchase AIS decal	76
10. Accessory before or after the fact	75

WILDLIFE FORENSICS LAB

The forensic section of the Department's Wildlife Forensic and Fish Health Laboratory provides law enforcement forensic services (analytical and technical) to aid Wyoming wildlife law enforcement personnel, Wyoming biologists and wildlife managers in an additional twelve states.

Wyoming's forensic lab personnel employ a variety of techniques to test evidence items collected during investigations of wildlife crimes. Species determination, sex identification and DNA analyses are performed on blood, hair, saliva, tissue and bones. Analyses also include matching of submitted samples and determining the minimum number of animals represented in submitted samples. A detailed report of each test is compiled and provided to the requesting officer. Lab personnel are often called upon to testify in court during trials of defendants charged with wildlife violations.

In 2022, various physical and biological properties were tested on 548 samples in response to 54 requests. A total of 13,763 tests were conducted on meat/tissue samples, skulls, drillings, heads, arrows, knives, saws, blood, hair, hide, gut piles, saliva, clothes and numerous other sample types. Results from forensic tests were used to obtain more than \$42,390 in fines and restitution, which does not include pending fines, restitution, or forfeitures. Other penalties included the forfeiture of firearms, ammunition, and seized evidence and 46 combined years of hunting and fishing privileges suspended.

In January 2022, Forensic Program Manager Tasha Bauman testified in a jury trial of a defendant from Mills. The defendant was investigated for poaching a mule deer during

a closed season in late 2019 and the forensic lab analyzed 12 items of evidence in the case. The items received included several unknown meat samples from a utility trailer, tissue from a leg bone, a rope with possible blood, tissue from a deer found at the dump and a known skull-capped mule deer with antlers seized from the defendant. The lab tested the unknowns for species and sex identification and ran DNA testing to see if any of the items matched the known mule deer. All of them did. At trial, the defendant was found guilty. He was fined \$5,000, ordered to pay \$4,000 in restitution and his license privileges were suspended until 2026.



Lab personnel processing evidence



Large batch of evidence from poaching investigation

GAME WARDEN TESTING

All game wardens are selected by competitive examination, per Wyoming statute. The first step to becoming a Wyoming game warden has traditionally been to earn a bachelor's degree in wildlife management, biology, zoology or a closely related field. Applicants with other degrees, such as criminal justice, are now being considered, as long as they have a minimum amount of college credits in wildlife fields. This change in the minimum qualifications allows the Department to consider applications from game wardens in other states who are looking to move to Wyoming. Many states do not require their game wardens to have a wildlife management degree as a prerequisite for hiring. Wyoming has benefitted from recruiting and hiring experienced game wardens from other states.

The game warden hiring process changed somewhat in 2022. Traditionally, the first step was a written exam consisting of general wildlife management knowledge, wildlife identification, legal terminology and questions about Wyoming wildlife statutes and regulations. The exam was moved to later in the process to be used as a baseline metric of a candidate's knowledge and a training aid if the candidate is hired. Candidates who meet the education requirements and other initial employment qualifications were invited for a preliminary online interview. This determines which candidates will complete the game warden exam, in-person interview, personality profile testing, psychological testing and polygraph examination. Candidates offered a game warden job undergo a thorough background investigation and must successfully graduate from the Wyoming Law Enforcement Academy (WLEA) 14-week, 595-hour Peace Officer Basic (POB) course prior to working as a Department law enforcement officer. Individuals who successfully complete this hiring process can take great pride in achieving the high standards required to become a Wyoming game warden.

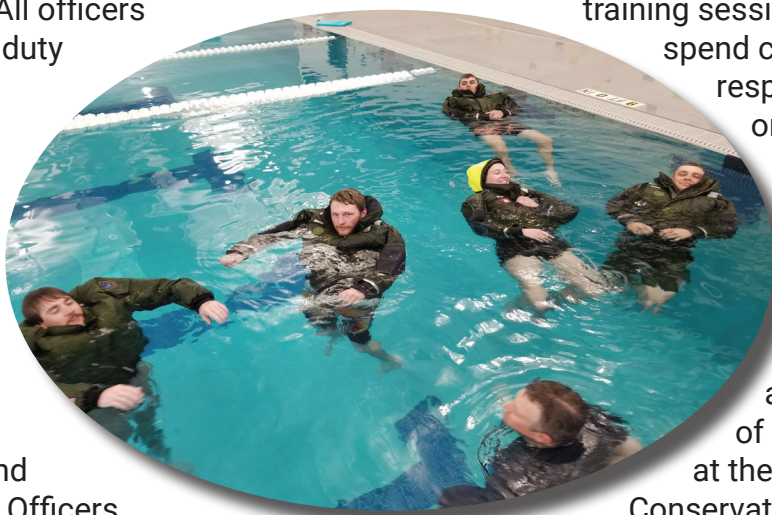
In 2022:

- 223 people submitted applications for game warden positions (134 met education qualifications based on transcripts)
- 134 online interviews conducted
- 39 attended in-person interviews
- Four candidates were hired into entry-level game warden positions



GAME WARDEN TRAINING

To maintain their status as Wyoming peace officers, game wardens must meet training requirements established by the Wyoming Peace Officer Standards and Training Commission (POST). All officers must qualify with their duty handguns, rifles and shotguns twice a year. Officers must also demonstrate proficiency with non-deadly force weapons and skills used for self-defense and controlling suspects, such as handcuffing and takedown techniques. Officers continued to utilize both online and in-person courses to complete other training and legal updates necessary to maintain their POST certification.



the Access Yes Program, general wildlife law enforcement, collection of evidence, crime scene investigation and various other game warden duties. In addition to these intensive training sessions, new game wardens spend considerable time in their respective regions receiving on-the-job training from other Department employees.

In May, Department game wardens and wildlife biologists attended two days of in-service training at the Whiskey Mountain Conservation Camp. Topics included conflict resolution, wilderness first aid, wildlife trapping techniques and updates from the Department's director and Wildlife Division administrators.

Game wardens attend two main training sessions after completing their basic training at the WLEA. Training topics include watercraft accident investigation techniques, watercraft patrol, BUI detection, fishing enforcement and watercraft/fishing statutes and regulations. They receive practical training in officer water survival, cold-water immersion, boat handling and patrol scenarios. The wardens attend a second training session to prepare for the fall hunting seasons. Training topics include a review of Game and Fish statutes and regulations, patrol techniques, interstate game tag guidelines and issuance, game check stations,



In order to better address the training and professional development needs of personnel, particularly new game wardens, the Department created a new unit. Lander Game Warden Brady Frude was promoted to head the Recruitment, Retention and Training Unit (RRT). He and two senior game wardens will coordinate and develop a more robust and comprehensive training program for new game wardens to prepare them for placement in game warden districts. In addition, they will work on strategies

to recruit qualified applicants for game warden vacancies and retain those employees long-term once they are hired and trained.

STOP POACHING PROGRAM

The Stop Poaching Program began in 1980 as a means to provide an opportunity for the public to help protect their wildlife resource by reporting suspected poaching activity. This program is an excellent and necessary enforcement tool for helping to identify wildlife violators throughout the state. All information on the reporting party is kept strictly confidential.

In 2022, 323 tips were received from members of the public via the Stop Poaching Hotline, a

text tip line and the Department website. Game wardens followed up on all of these tips, and in many cases, no violation could be determined. However, in numerous instances, wardens were able to identify wildlife violations and possible suspects. Investigations led to 34 citations and 14 warnings being issued to violators. Defendants charged as a result of tips made to the Stop Poaching Program paid \$7,540 in fines and restitution for this year, with 26 cases still under investigation or pending court disposition.



WYOMING WILDLIFE PROTECTORS ASSOCIATION

To encourage reporting of wildlife violations by the public, the Department has partnered with the Wyoming Wildlife Protectors Association (WWPA). The WWPA began in 1983 and is a registered non-profit organization. The sole purpose of the WWPA is to manage a reward account and provide monetary rewards to citizens who report suspected poaching activity. The WWPA is funded by restitution payments as ordered by the courts at sentencing of wildlife violators and from private donations.

Many of the successful investigations and prosecutions of wildlife violators in Wyoming would not

have been possible without the information provided by concerned citizens. Often, informants are turning in a friend or family member, which can be difficult and shows their genuine concern for Wyoming's wildlife resource. Department enforcement officers may submit a reward recommendation request based on a reward payment schedule listed in the WWPA Constitution. In 2022, a total of \$9,950 in rewards was paid to individuals who provided information leading to the conviction of wildlife violators.



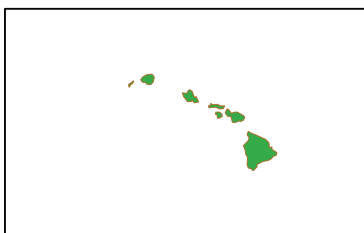
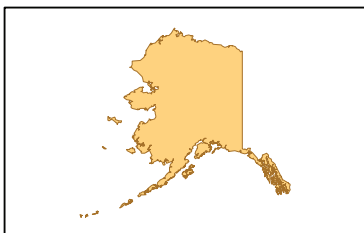
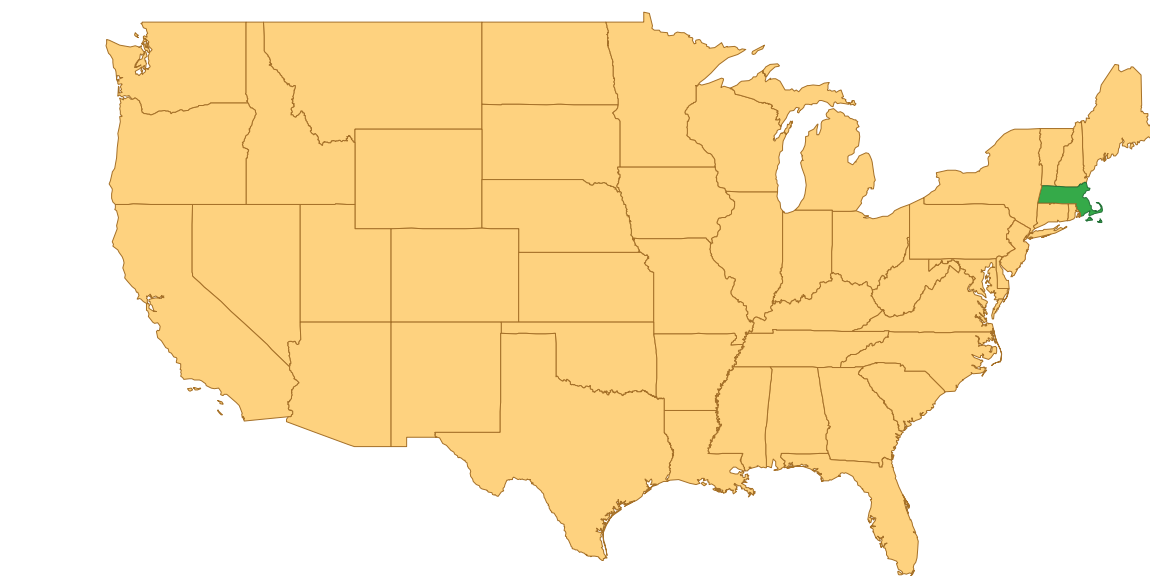
WILDLIFE VIOLATOR COMPACT

Wyoming has been a member state of the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact (Compact) since 1996. The Compact is a reciprocal agreement between member states to honor suspensions of hunting, fishing and trapping privileges for convicted wildlife violators. Individuals who are suspended in one member state may also have their privileges suspended in the other member states. The Compact acts as an additional deterrent to violating wildlife laws and strengthens the consequences of illegal hunting, fishing or trapping activities. The Compact is also an effective tool for ensuring that violators meet their court obligations, as those who fail to do so also have their privileges suspended until

their case is resolved. The law enforcement coordinator routinely fields calls from individuals asking what they need to do to have their license privileges reinstated.

There are now 48 member states and two more, Massachusetts and Hawaii, are finalizing the process of joining. Nationwide, there were 4,514 new license suspensions entered in the Compact in 2022, including 31 from Wyoming. Several cases initiated in 2022 are awaiting court proceedings and may lead to further license suspensions once completed. With nearly the entire United States having joined the Compact, the loss of privileges in one state effectively amounts to a nationwide suspension.

Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact Member States



Member States

- Member (48)
- In Process (2)
- No (0)

As of June 1, 2019

NEW LEGISLATION AFFECTING LAW ENFORCEMENT

BILLS ENACTED DURING THE 2022 LEGISLATURE:

HB0043 TROPHY GAME, BIG GAME AND WILD BISON LICENSE ALLOCATIONS

Signed into Law by the Governor 3/9/2022
Summary: This bill increases the resident license allocation in drawings for the “big five” species (moose, bighorn sheep, mountain goat, wild bison, grizzly bear) to 90% of available licenses, up from 80%. In addition, it makes most licenses for these species once in a lifetime opportunities. Hunters who draw cow/calf moose, cow/calf wild bison or ewe/lamb bighorn sheep licenses are subject to a five-year waiting period before they can apply for another one of those licenses.

SF0006 AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES INSPECTION ENFORCEMENT

Signed into Law by the Governor 3/9/2022
Summary: This bill adds additional potential penalties for failing to have a watercraft or other conveyance inspected for AIS as required (W.S. 23-4-203(k)). Individuals lawfully stopped by peace officers and found to have failed to have a conveyance inspected for AIS shall report to an AIS check station within 48 hours for an inspection and shall not enter Wyoming waters until they are inspected. Failing to report for inspection could result in a fine of up to \$5,000 and being prohibited from operating a watercraft in Wyoming for up to three years. A person operating a watercraft while prohibited under this section is guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of up to \$1,000 and 6 months in jail.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Two Wyoming game wardens were recognized in 2022 for their outstanding service to the state by the Department and other organizations.

2022 SHIKAR-SAFARI CLUB WILDLIFE OFFICER OF THE YEAR – JON STEPHENS, N. JACKSON GAME WARDEN

2021 WYOMING GAME WARDENS ASSOCIATION OFFICER OF THE YEAR – KELLY TODD, LARAMIE REGION ACCESS COORDINATOR



Jon Stephens



Kelly Todd

RETIREMENTS

Congratulations to four game wardens who retired in 2022 with a combined 122 years of service to the State of Wyoming and its wildlife. Their experience and dedication will be missed!

CHRIS TETER, SUNDANCE GAME WARDEN - 33 YEARS OF SERVICE
SCOTT EDBERG, DEPUTY CHIEF GAME WARDEN - 31 YEARS OF SERVICE
BENGE BROWN, THERMOPOLIS GAME WARDEN - 30 YEARS OF SERVICE
CHRIS QUEEN, POWELL GAME WARDEN - 28 YEARS OF SERVICE



Chris Teter



Scott Edberg



Benge Brown



Chris Queen

PROMOTIONS

BRADY FRUDE - LANDER GAME WARDEN TO RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND TRAINING (RRT) UNIT SUPERVISOR

DUSTIN SHORMA - DAYTON GAME WARDEN TO SHERIDAN REGIONAL WILDLIFE SUPERVISOR

CRAIG SMITH - SHERIDAN REGIONAL WILDLIFE SUPERVISOR TO DEPUTY CHIEF GAME WARDEN

GAME WARDEN TO SENIOR GAME WARDEN:

ALEX PONCELET - TORRINGTON
COLTEN GALAMBAS - LOVELL
CONOR CURRAN - SOUTH RIVERTON





Help protect Wyoming's wildlife

Call the Stop Poaching Hotline or text TIP411
(text keyword WGFD and message)



STOP POACHING

1-877-WGFD-TIP

