



# Access Yes 2024 Annual Report



# Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Purpose.....	3
Program Successes .....	3
Hunting and Fishing Access Programs.....	4
<i>Hunter Management Areas</i> .....	4
<i>Walk-in Hunting Areas</i> .....	6
<i>Walk-in Fishing Areas</i> .....	7
Access Yes Funding.....	8
VPA-HIP Grant.....	10
The National Elk Refuge.....	10
Additional Access Yes Programs and Services.....	11

Information about Access Yes can be obtained from the Department’s website at <http://wgfd.wyo.gov>, Cheyenne Headquarters, or any regional office (below). Access information for fishing is updated each December for the following year. Hunting information is updated each July for the fall hunting seasons.

Contact Information	In-State Toll-Free #	Out-of-State Phone #
Cheyenne Headquarters	1-800-842-1934	1-307-777-4600
Casper Regional Office	1-800-233-8544	1-307-473-3400
Cody Regional Office	1-800-654-1178	1-307-527-7125
Green River Regional Office	1-800-843-8096	1-307-875-3223
Jackson Regional Office	1-800-423-4113	1-307-733-2321
Lander Regional Office	1-800-654-7862	1-307-332-2688
Laramie Regional Office	1-800-843-2352	1-307-745-4046
Pinedale Regional Office	1-800-452-9107	1-307-367-4353
Sheridan Regional Office	1-800-331-9834	1-307-672-7418

# Introduction

In the past century, hunting and fishing has changed dramatically in the United States. Hunting and fishing activities, once required to feed one's family through the lean winter months, are now viewed more as recreation. This change has occurred for a variety of reasons such as the availability of other food sources, transition from a primarily rural to urban demographic and changing wildlife values. Thirty years ago, hunters or anglers simply had to knock on a landowner's door and ask for permission to hunt or fish. Typically, the landowner would grant free access. Today, this happens less frequently due to the monetary value of wildlife, complex land ownership, and nontraditional land usage. An increasing number of traditional, agriculture-based landowners are selling their properties to individuals who are not purchasing the land for farming or ranching, but for their own hunting opportunity, to create wildlife sanctuaries, or even for commercial or residential development. In some instances, landowners view wildlife as competition for livestock forage or crops and welcome hunters onto their land to manage wildlife populations. Conversely, some landowners want to see increased wildlife on their land and, therefore, do not allow hunting. The amount of private lands leased by the outfitting industry continues to increase. Also, many landowners now charge trespass fees to generate additional income, providing fewer people the opportunity to hunt or fish on private and landlocked public lands.

Hunters and anglers in Wyoming have voiced their concerns and frustrations over declining access to private and landlocked public lands. During the 1990s, the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission (Commission) created a pilot program to explore ways to increase public access onto these lands. The Private Lands Public Wildlife (PLPW) Access Initiative was developed with three sub-programs:

- 1) Hunter Management
- 2) Walk-in Hunting
- 3) Walk-in Fishing

In 1998, the Walk-in Hunting Area (WIHA) program started with a modest 27,000 private acres. By 2000, all three sub-programs were growing quickly and included more than 657,500 acres for hunting as well as 222 lake acres and 71 stream miles for fishing. Beyond providing public access, the program has also increased cooperation among landowners, hunters, anglers, and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (Department).

By increasing access to privately owned irrigated fields and riparian lands, which compose the majority of productive wildlife habitat in the state, the Department can be more effective at managing wildlife populations and mitigating agricultural damage.

The success of the PLPW Access Pilot Program led the Commission to make the program permanent in 2001. In 2016, the PLPW program was "rebranded" to the Access Yes Program (Access Yes). The goal was to tie the name and the key funding source of the program together and make the important connection between the funding source and the access it provides sportspersons.



## Purpose

The goal of Access Yes is to enhance and maintain public hunting and fishing access on private and landlocked public lands. This is accomplished by enrolling private landowners into one or more of the three Access Yes programs: Hunter Management Area, Walk-in Hunting, and/or Walk-in Fishing. The landowner and Department personnel negotiate the terms of an agreement including: agreement length (one or five years), the species that can be harvested, the geographic location, dates access will be allowed, and any other specific rules or stipulations. In return for access, landowners benefit in several ways including:

- A monetary payment based on the number of acres or stream length enrolled.
- Increased law enforcement presence.
- Increased wildlife management (population control and damage prevention).
- Management of sportspersons, alleviating phone calls and other disruptions to landowners (The Department also provides access maps, hunter instruction on ranch rules, etc.).

## Program Successes

Access Yes assists landowners through management of hunters and anglers, providing sportspersons places to hunt and fish, and reducing agricultural damage through hunter harvest. The Department benefits through increased wildlife management opportunities, increased license sales, reduced agricultural damage, and providing quality hunting and fishing access to the public. During 2024, Access Yes celebrated many successes, which include, but are not limited to:

- Provided hunting access to 2,581,095 acres (1,727,308 acres of enrolled private and state lands, and 853,787 acres of public lands) for hunting within the enrolled boundaries of Walk-in Hunting Areas (WIHA) and Hunter Management Areas (HMA). This includes land in every county within Wyoming.
- Provided additional access to 194,147 acres of otherwise inaccessible public lands adjoining the boundaries of WIHAs and HMAs.
- Provided fishing access to 3,964 lake acres and 94 stream miles through the Walk-in Fishing Area (WIFA) program.
- Issued 20,494 permission slips to 9,924 sportspersons for access to HMAs, the National Elk Refuge, Mule Creek Public Access Area and one Wildlife Habitat Management Area (WHMA).
- Received approval for an approximate 40% landowner payment increase in 2024.
- Provided free hunting and fishing access on Walk-in Areas to anyone with the proper licenses. Many of the participants are families, contributing to the creation and enhancement of hunting and fishing traditions.
- Translates into improved wildlife population management and decreased agricultural damage through harvest.
- Continued the Access Yes Patrol Enhancement (AYPE) effort. Regional Access Coordinators provided patrol assistance and hunter/landowner contacts to other regions during high use periods on Access Yes areas.



# Hunting and Fishing Access Programs

Hunter Management Areas – Walk-in Hunting Areas – Walk-in Fishing Areas

## *Hunter Management Areas*

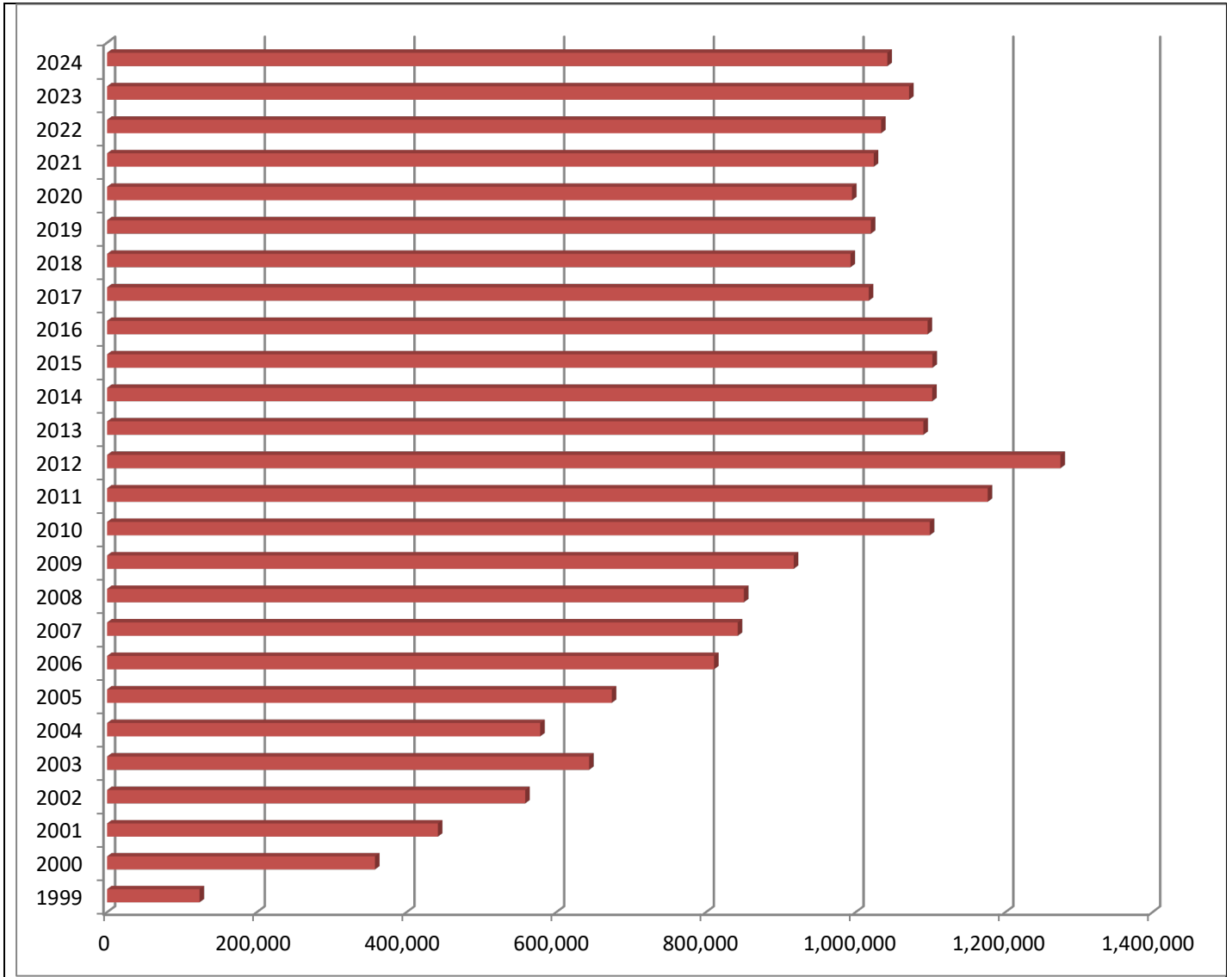
Hunter Management Areas are access areas where each hunter must first obtain a free permission slip from the Department prior to hunting. These areas are generally larger than WIHAs, and often provide some level of vehicle access. Permission slips are issued through the Department’s website, and this method has proven to be a fair and efficient way to distribute hunter access. For HMAs with limited access and high demand, random draws are used to assure a fair distribution of permission slips. Website distribution of permission slips is popular with nonresident hunters as they can obtain permission for HMAs prior to coming to the state to hunt. Regional office personnel and game wardens/biologists provide extra assistance to hunters needing help obtaining a permission slip. HMAs can provide: unlimited, limited first-come first-served, or limited random draw hunter access permission slips. The type of HMA depends upon several factors such as desired harvest levels, hunter participation, wildlife population numbers, landowner preference, and agricultural damage.

For 2024, there were 69 HMAs with 133 participating landowners encompassing 1,042,434 enrolled acres for hunting primarily big game species, but also small game and upland game birds (Figure 1).

Also, in past years, Access Yes had not counted the acres of the National Elk Refuge (NER) and Mule Creek HMA, even though the program issues permission slips, conducts law enforcement, creates ranch rules, documents and signs for hunters to use these areas and displays them on our website. Access Yes brought these 32,182 acres into the totals for 2023 due to these areas being primarily managed by Access Yes.



**Figure 1. Hunter Management Area Acres by Year**



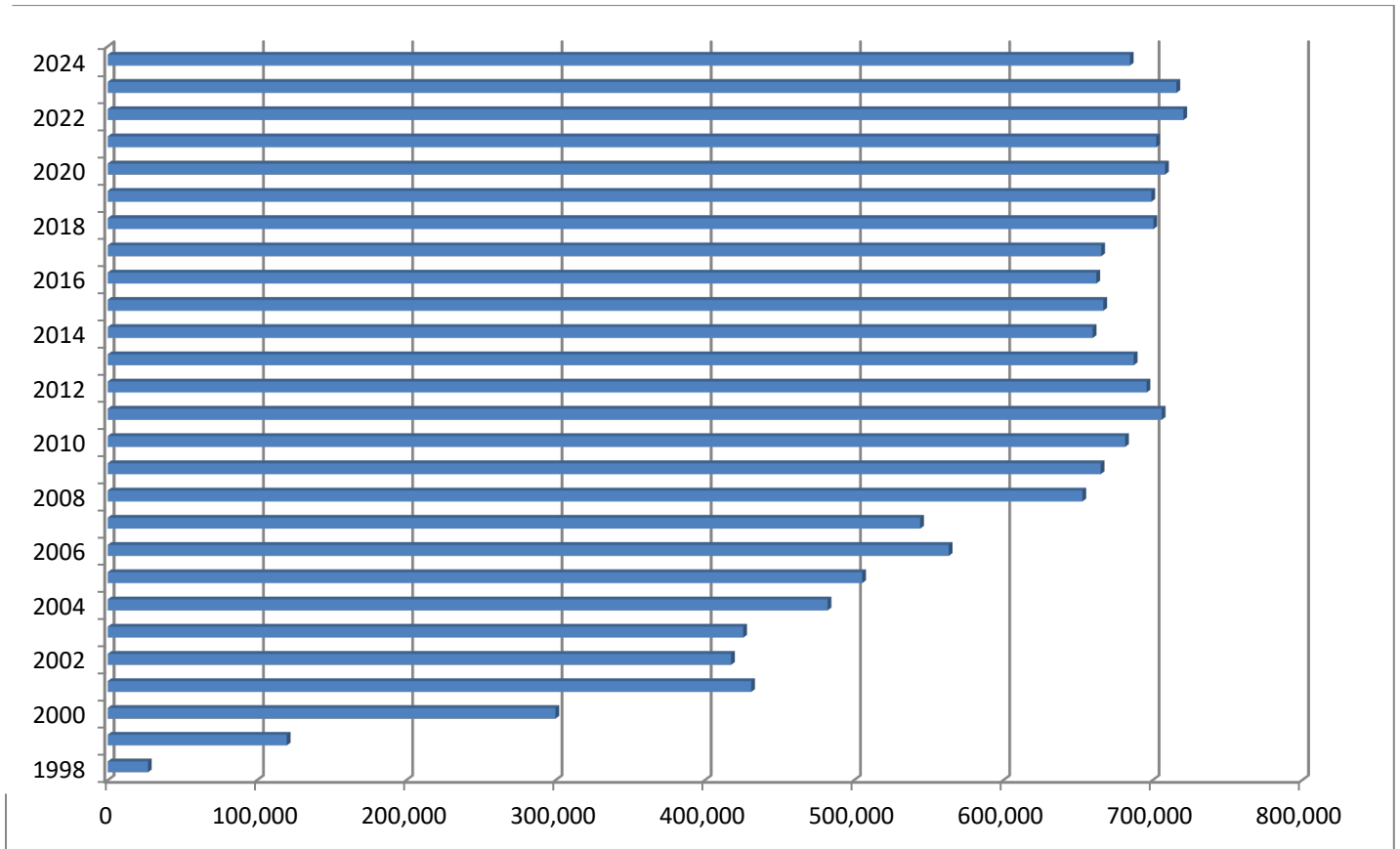
## Walk-in Hunting Areas

Walk-in Hunting Areas are parcels of land open to anyone who has a valid hunting license for the species allowed to be hunted on the WIHA; no permission slip is required. These access areas are usually smaller than HMAs and, as the name implies, typically require hunters to walk in to hunt.

WIHAs are similar to HMAs in that landowners determine which species can be hunted and when access will be granted. The state acres counting toward the totals are owned by the Wyoming Military Department, the Office of State Lands and Investments and Wyoming State Parks and Cultural Resources. These state acres are enrolled in Access Yes so that specific rules can be implemented that allow the public to hunt or fish these areas. For 2024, the Access Yes Program enrolled 684,874 private and state acres involving 434 landowners in WIHAs (Figure 2). This was a decrease from 2023 of 31,225 acres due to areas removed by landowners.



**Figure 2. Walk-in Hunting Area Acres by Year**

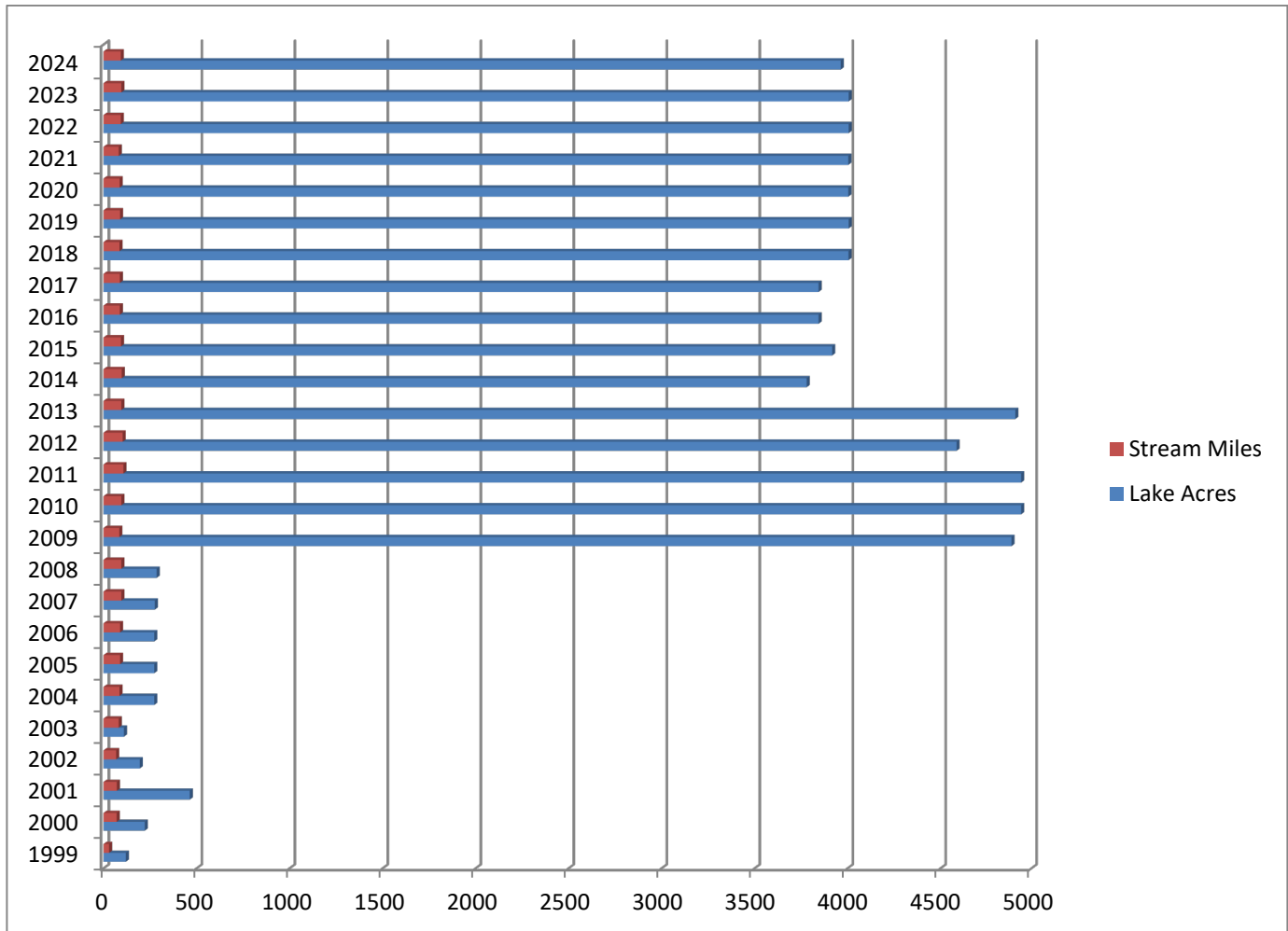


## Walk-in Fishing Areas



Walk-in Fishing Areas are similar to WIHAs in that anyone with a valid fishing license may enter the property to fish. Unless otherwise specified within Department publications, WIFAs are open year-round. WIFAs in Wyoming are not as prevalent as hunting areas simply because fewer water sources exist compared to hunting areas. Nevertheless, WIFAs provide valuable fishing access, particularly during the summer months. For 2024, a total of 3,964 lake acres and 94 stream miles were available for anglers, thanks to the 67 landowners enrolled in the WIFA program (Figure 3). This was a reduction of 70 lake acres from 2023 due to one WIFA being converted to Sodergreen Lake public access area

**Figure 3. Walk-in Fishing Lake Acres and Stream Miles by Year**





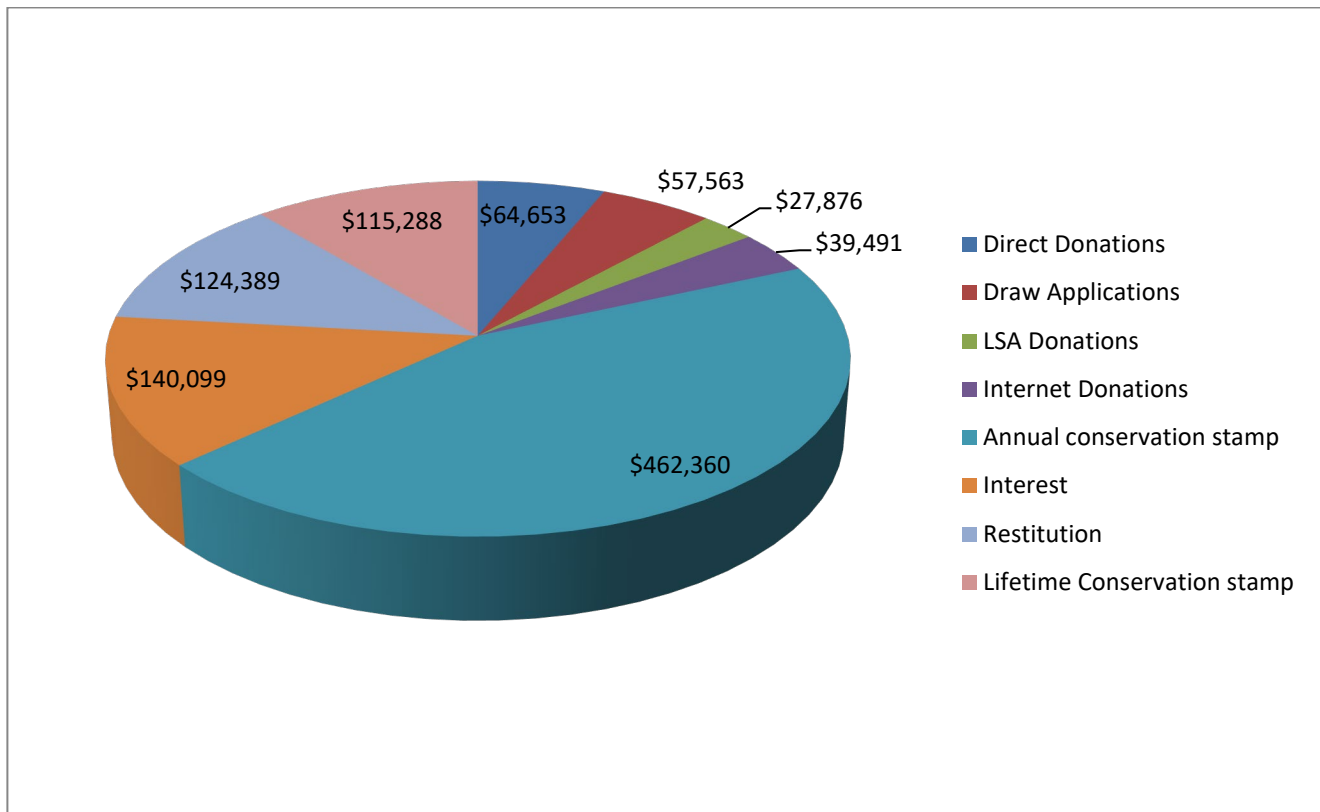
# Access Yes Funding

Access Yes is funded by Department and donated funds. Department funds, primarily from license sales, fund the daily operations including personnel. Revenue for the Access Yes account is generated from the sale of lifetime and annual conservation stamps, donations from organizations, individual hunters and anglers, state wildlife restitution amounts from court-imposed sentencing of wildlife violators, and interest, totaling \$1,031,718 in 2024 (Figure 4). With few exemptions, every hunter and angler must purchase either an annual conservation stamp or a lifetime conservation stamp. A portion of the sale of these stamps is deposited into the Access Yes account (\$3.00 per annual stamp and half of each lifetime stamp). These two sources generate the majority of the funds each year, and in Fiscal Year 2024, they generated \$577,648.

Easement payments made to landowners are funded through the Access Yes account. Authorized by state statute, funds collected through Access Yes may only be utilized for acquiring easements with landowners. In 2024, Access Yes paid \$1,317,850 to landowners for hunting and fishing access. Every dollar spent provided approximately 2.1 acres of access.



**Figure 4. Access Yes Funds Received Totaling \$1,031,719 in Fiscal Year 2024**





Donations increased from conservation groups and organizations in Fiscal Year 2024 (July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023) to \$64,653, an increase of \$37,839. Access Yes donations vary year-to-year based on large donations from conservation groups. Thanks goes out to National Wild Turkey Federation, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Cheyenne Field Archers, Fremont Beverages, Quail Forever, Wyoming Fire Chief’s Association and Bowhunters of Wyoming for their significant 2024 Access Yes donations.

Hunters and anglers can also donate to Access Yes when applying for or purchasing licenses, in person at a license-selling agent or through the Department website. Sportspersons contributed \$124,930 in Fiscal Year 2024, an 18% increase from 2023 donations. Overall, during Fiscal Year 2024, the Access Yes Program received \$1,031,718, an increase of \$135,308 (+15%) from 2023 (Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Access Yes Funds Received Each Fiscal Year**

ACCESS- SUMMARY OF FUNDS RECEIVED									
Fiscal Year	Total Access fund Receipts	Direct Donations F06 6246 4R20	LSA collections F06 6245 4R20	Draw Donations F06 6245 4R20	Sale donations F06 6245 4R20	State Restitution F06 3301 4R20	Lifetime C-stamp F06 2633 4R20	Annual c-stamp** F06 2607 4R20	Interest* F06 4601 4R20
FY2024	1,031,718	64,653	27,876	57,563	39,491	124,389	115,288	462,360	140,099
FY2023	896,410	26,814	24,488	59,486	21,430	94,504	127,995	467,614	74,080
FY2022	945,689	22,197	15,043	91,617	14,095	112,866	157,304	502,478	30,089
FY2021	1,026,302	2,779	19,008	104,245	17,815	98,796	133,004	581,877	68,779
FY2020	1,170,839	63,795	26,590	133,542	20,073	193,476	93,863	591,696	47,804
FY2019	975,880	15,177	22,075	127,345	12,496	84,909	85,052	565,300	63,526
2018	1,036,675	32,996	22,982	115,941	15,031	50,059	98,700	654,112	46,854
2017	913,366	28,630	25,023	112,586	19,504	64,379	76,983	545,267	40,994
2016	897,877	35,025	20,396	103,786	15,174	67,311	77,705	541,337	37,143
2015	895,524	19,909	19,990	101,951	15,163	79,701	72,110	542,534	44,166
2014	960,314	76,570	25,705	92,402	15,280	109,955	71,207	534,508	34,687
2013	908,837	37,827	23,347	88,058	14,426	58,135	82,308	530,694	74,042
2012	924,801	16,675	22,232	97,032	12,244	82,578	53,789	589,691	50,560
2011	897,862	13,744	18,100	85,332	10,305	96,226	52,887	513,977	107,291
FY 2010	909,072	31,215	20,697	85,962	11,541	122,591	51,051	528,037	57,978
FY 2009	882,935	32,032	27,545	90,255		87,859	57,098	539,559	48,587
FY 2008	879,512	45,261	27,350	104,025		104,962	95,674	444,805	57,435
FY 2007	761,297	20,078	25,952	97,362		74,916	63,662	442,699	36,628
FY 2006	710,736	7,466	26,213	92,281		71,340	48,385	432,820	32,231
FY 2005	645,468	4,862	24,894	89,118		50,295	36,965	409,151	30,183
FY 2004	654,354	7,697	25,922	91,481		62,721	12,975	429,776	23,782
FY 2003	607,282	11,648	26,250	105,393				443,172	20,819
FY 2002	632,814	12,690	31,831	106,000				460,009	22,284
FY 2001	312,003	6,862	35,296	97,361				161,601	10,883
	<b>\$ 18,549,438</b>	<b>\$ 545,134</b>	<b>\$ 532,440</b>	<b>#####</b>	<b>\$ 193,147</b>	<b>#####</b>	<b>\$1,420,722</b>	<b>\$10,985,100</b>	<b>\$ 986,744</b>

\* Interest includes prior period adjustments for gains on investment income.

\*\* This amount represents the funds deposited for annual conservation stamp sales in each respective fiscal year. The revenue is recognized when received not when the sale actually occurs. Payments for license sales occur the month following the sale which results in a timing issue related to the actual sales within the fiscal year compared to the revenue recognized. FY12 figures have been modified to reflect revenue recongnized rather than sales data reported last period.

Approximately 48% of the donations were from nonresidents and 52% from residents.

## VPA-HIP Grant

In 2024, the Department applied and was awarded a Voluntary Public Access & Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) grant from the National Resource Conservation Service. The VPA-HIP grant benefited Access Yes by providing \$357,597.56 for easement payments to landowners. The Department is grateful for the grant funding and appreciated the opportunity that the grant provided to grow Access Yes.

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## The National Elk Refuge



Access Yes has administered permission slips for elk hunting on the National Elk Refuge (NER) since 2008. Wild bison hunting access opportunity was added in 2014 and white-tailed deer opportunities were added in 2022. The permission slip application process is on the Department's Access Yes HMA web page. Hunters from across the country are able to apply and print out their permission slips regardless of their location.

The application period starts in July each year and continues through the end of the elk and wild bison hunting season. There are initial draws for permission slips in September, with additional weekly alternate permission slip drawings during the hunting season in October for elk hunters and November - December for wild bison and elk hunters. The application process is more complex than other HMAs throughout the state due to weekly drawings, but it allows hunters maximum opportunity to increase their chances of a successful hunt.

In 2024, wild bison permission slips were issued on a first-come, first-serve basis in January from the Jackson Regional Office and the NER office due to the uncertainty of a hunting closure on the NER. The NER allows hunting for wild bison through January or until the feeding of elk on the refuge begins, whichever comes first.

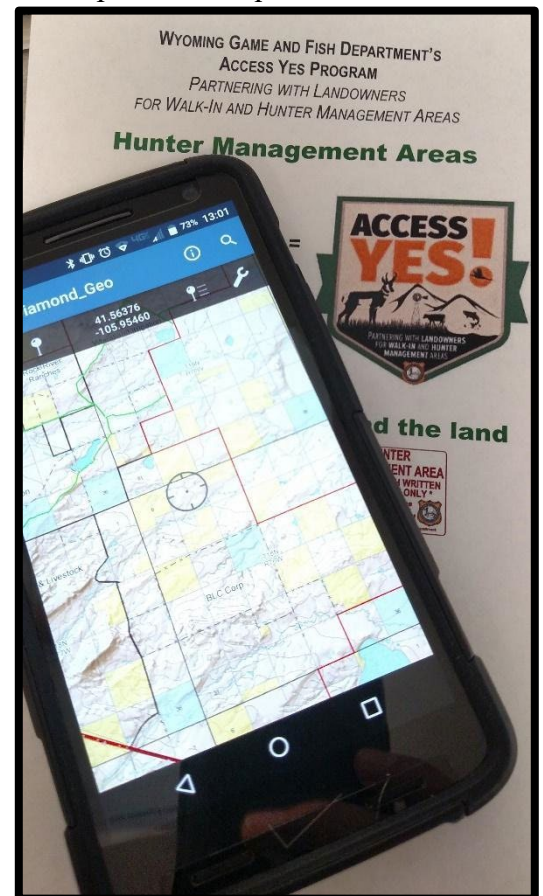
During the 2024 NER hunt, there were 44 permission slips issued for wild bison, 1,474 permission slips issued for elk and 57 permission slips issued for deer

## Additional Access Yes Programs and Services

Access Yes continues to modify its programs to benefit landowners, hunters, anglers, and the Department. The ongoing Hunter/Landowner Assistance Program was developed to assist landowners with increasing harvest of big game animals on their private property without having to enroll in one of the existing Access Yes programs (i.e. HMA or WIHA). The program operates by posting landowner contact information on the Department's website allowing hunters to contact landowners directly to secure their own access. Landowners do not receive compensation from the Department and all details pertaining to access to their property are arranged between the landowner and the hunter. Once a landowner obtains the desired harvest, their information can be removed from the website when requested. Landowners are added and removed throughout the hunting seasons. This program has been very successful in assisting landowners and increasing hunting access. Some landowners choose not to have their information on the website during subsequent years because the number of game animals has returned to acceptable levels or they have returning hunters who provide adequate levels of harvest.

Recognition of landowners who provide access is an important aspect of maintaining sportsman/landowner relationships. The Access Yes coordinators serve as facilitators in the Access Recognition Program (ARP). The ARP is a joint program between the Wyoming Board of Agriculture (Board) and the Commission recognizing landowners who provide access to, or through, their property to hunters and anglers. The state is divided into four quadrants, and the Access Yes coordinators facilitate the selection by working with the four quadrant committees to select a quadrant winner each year. The quadrant committees are comprised of Board and Commission members. Each of the four winners are recognized at the annual Wyoming Stock Growers Association winter meeting. Recipients of the ARP award receive a recognition plaque and a monetary award of \$2,000. Funding for the program is provided by Commissioner donated licenses. The four recipients of the 2024 Access Recognition Program award were: J.D. Radakovich (Hoodoo Land Holdings) of Cody, Blair and Tami Bishop of Rozet, the Julian Family of Kemmerer and the Condict Ranch of Saratoga.

For the fourth year, Access Yes administered the issuance of permission slips to allow early entry into the Spence & Moriarty Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and Inberg/Roy Wildlife Habitat Management Area (WHMA). The early access is primarily used by sportspersons looking for shed antlers on the WHMAs. Utilizing the Access Yes permission slip database, the Department issued 40 permission slips through a drawing to permit early entry to the WMA & WHMA. Each individual who drew a permission slip could then bring up to two additional occupants inside of one vehicle into the human presence closure area one day prior to the



regularly scheduled opening day. Early, controlled access onto these lands is intended to reduce wildlife – human conflicts that Department personnel have witnessed over the past several years.

In 2018, Access Yes coordinators began the Access Yes Patrol Enhancement effort. This was to increase Access Yes coordinator presence in various areas of the state during high use periods. Hunting season workloads for Access Yes coordinators vary across the state throughout the year and when one portion of the state has slower seasons, that coordinator can help out other areas of the state that are busier. These patrols have been very successful across the state and landowners have welcomed the additional presence.