

2024



Annual Law Enforcement Report



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Message from the Chief

When I recently took the role as the Chief Game Warden and Wildlife Division Chief, I was humbled to see the dedication, passion, and tenacity of those who work so hard to meet the Department's mission of conserving wildlife and serving people. In this state, a game warden's duties extend far beyond just law enforcement. It includes all aspects of wildlife management, knowledge of the resources beyond wildlife, collaboration with the public and landowners, and solving problems on a daily basis using common sense and good judgement. Game wardens do this while working to protect the resources we all value, enforcing laws and regulations to ensure fair chase, sustainable harvest, and public safety.

This summary of the 2024 law enforcement efforts of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department illustrates the hard work of game wardens and their use of knowledge, skills, and relationships to protect and conserve Wyoming's wildlife resource. I commonly hear from people across Wyoming how our game wardens are helpful, knowledgeable, and treat people with respect. I am very proud of the work they accomplish and the role they play in serving you.

Wyoming game wardens share the desire to catch the "bad guys." As you read the following report, you will see the effort here is great. You will also see to what lengths teamwork makes it happen. We rely on the public and landowners reporting violations, cooperation with other agencies to investigate illegal activity, and collaboration within the Department to bring a case to court and secure prosecution. As you read through the Notable Cases, you will also notice that every case is different. Our wardens are involved in cases that pertain to big game or fishing, take place in the country or right in town, quickly resolved, or take years to investigate and find the violator. Ultimately, the result is catching the "bad guy" and protecting wildlife.

Thank you for your interest in protecting Wyoming's wildlife and wild places. We will continue to work hard for wildlife and for you, and we look forward to meeting you in the field.

All the best,



Dan Smith
Chief Game Warden

Introduction

More than 800 species of wildlife call Wyoming home, creating a wealth of opportunities for the public to hunt, fish and view these animals in their natural habitats. The Wyoming Game & Fish Department (Department) is responsible for conserving and managing the state's wildlife to ensure these opportunities for future generations. Effective law enforcement and apprehension of wildlife violators are critical components of the Department's overall wildlife management efforts.

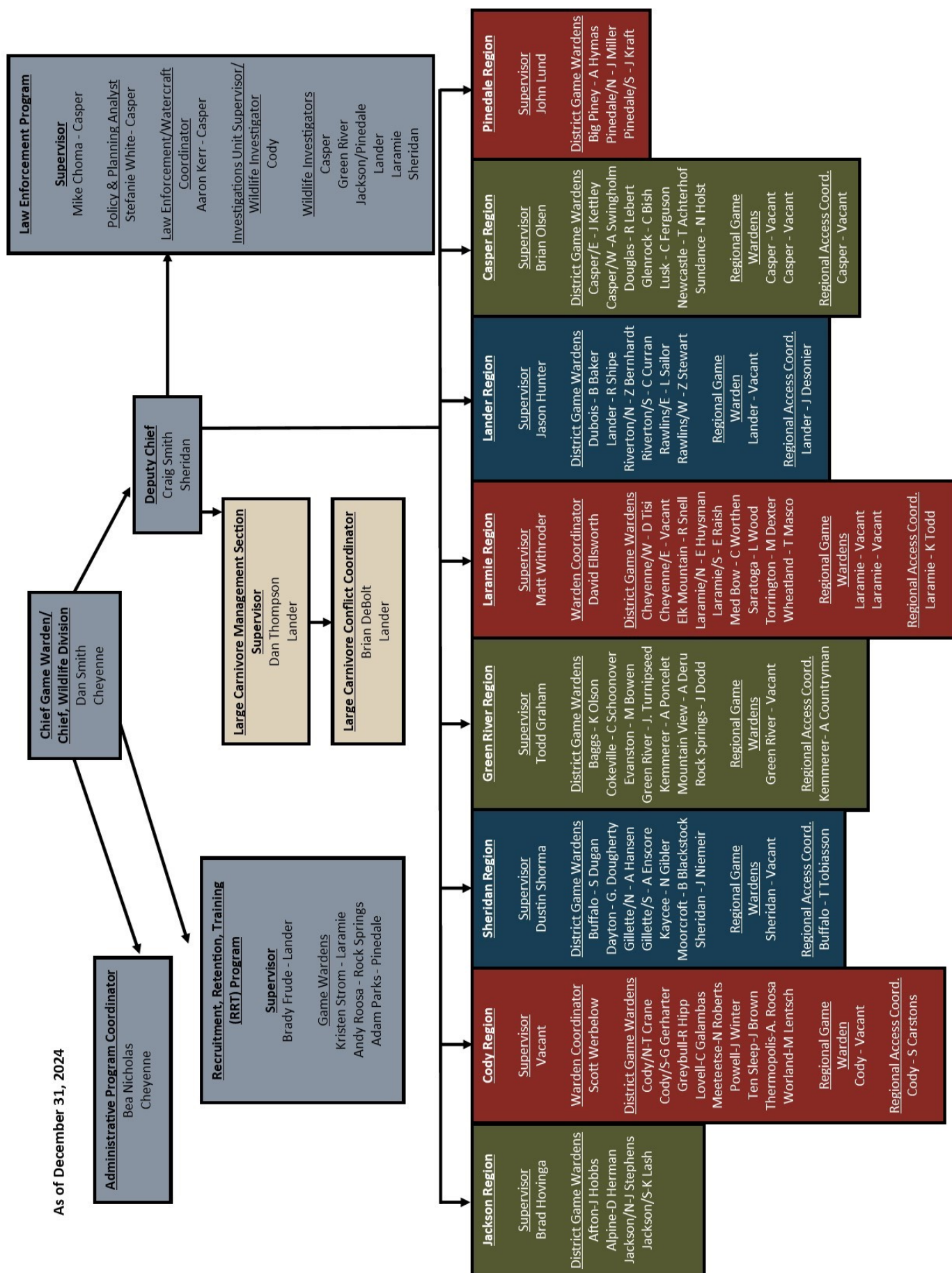
Each year, Department law enforcement officers dedicate thousands of work hours, hundreds of thousands of vehicle miles (patrol vehicles, all-terrain vehicles and snowmobiles), thousands of watercraft hours and hundreds of horseback days patrolling Wyoming's vast landscapes to enforce the state's hunting, fishing, trapping, boating safety and general wildlife laws. More than simply enforcing laws and regulations, officers take it upon themselves to educate the public about wildlife management and public safety issues. The 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. Department law enforcement officers investigate all types of wildlife crimes and work through the court system to ensure the successful prosecution of violators.

The following report details Department law enforcement efforts and highlights for calendar year 2024. It includes an organizational chart of law enforcement personnel, regional summaries and violation statistics. It also discusses game warden hiring and training, Wyoming's Stop Poaching Program, Wildlife Investigations Unit efforts and other aspects of wildlife law enforcement in Wyoming.

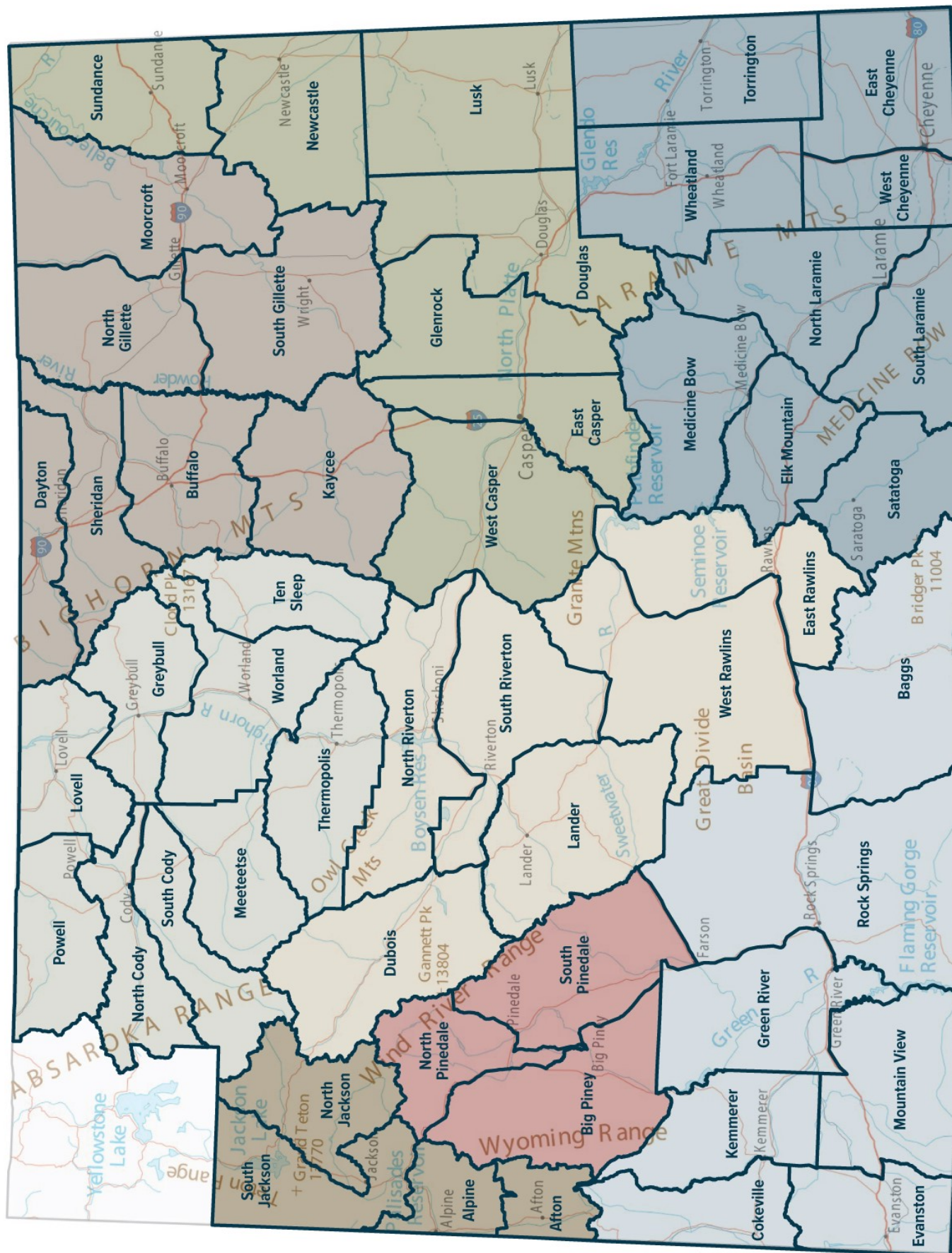


Training day on Alcova Reservoir

Organizational Chart

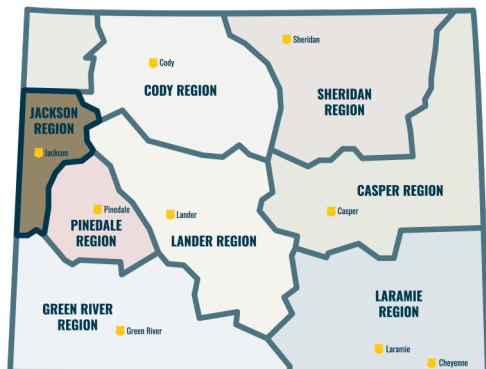


Region and Warden District Boundaries



Regional Overview

Jackson Region



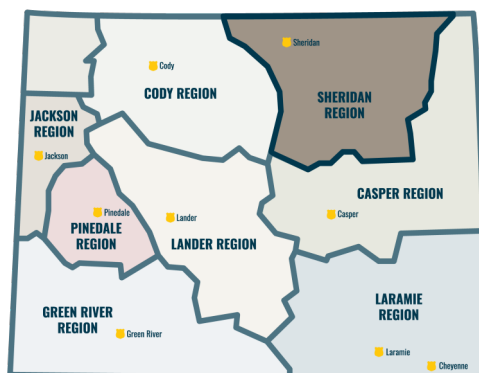
patrol from the Montana state line south to Boysen Reservoir and from Yellowstone National Park east to the west slope of the Bighorn Mountains. The region includes the North Cody, South Cody, Powell, Lovell, Meeteetse, Greybull, Ten Sleep, Thermopolis and Worland game warden districts.

In early 2024, the Thermopolis game warden transferred to Evanston and was replaced by another game warden. In December of 2024 it was announced that the Cody regional wildlife supervisor had been selected as the Department's new Chief Game Warden.

Work Unit Overview

The Jackson Region has five law enforcement positions: four district game wardens and one regional wildlife supervisor. In 2024, the Jackson Region also had a regional game warden. 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.

Sheridan Region



Work Unit Overview

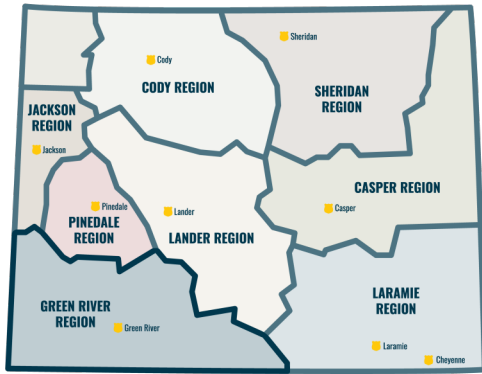
The Sheridan Region has 10 law enforcement positions, including one regional game warden, seven district game wardens, one access coordinator and one regional wildlife supervisor. The Sheridan Region encompasses the east slope of the Bighorn Mountains, the Powder River Basin, the Rochelle Hills, Portions 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.

Work Unit Overview

The Cody Region has 13 law enforcement positions, including one regional game warden, nine district game wardens, one access coordinator, one game warden coordinator and one regional wildlife supervisor. The Cody Region is located in northwest Wyoming. Wardens

There were several staffing changes in the Sheridan Region during 2024. The new Kaycee game warden started in January. The Dayton game warden transferred to North Pinedale in October. The Moorcroft game warden district was filled in November.

Green River Region

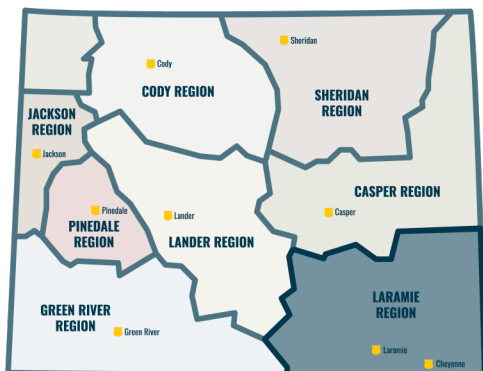


Work Unit Overview

The Green River Region has 10 law enforcement officers, including seven district game wardens, one regional game warden, one access coordinator and one regional wildlife supervisor. The Green River Region covers southwest and south central Wyoming, including the Baggs, Rock Springs, Green River, Mountain View, Evanston, Kemmerer and Cokeville warden districts.

There were some personnel changes in the Green River Region in 2024. The Evanston game warden left the agency for a game warden position in Texas and was replaced by a new game warden in October. The new Evanston game warden has 27 years of experience as a game warden in Montana and Idaho. In November, the Green River regional game warden was promoted to fill the vacant Green River game warden district.

Laramie Region



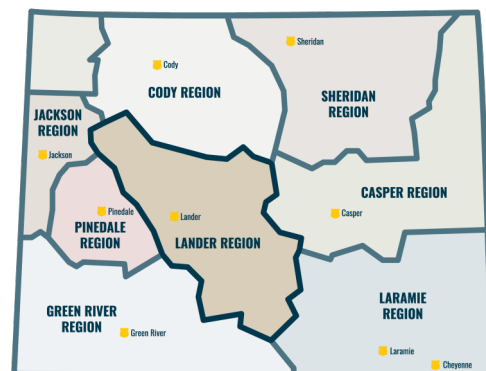
Work Unit Overview

The Laramie Region has 14 law enforcement officers,

including nine district game wardens, two regional game wardens, one access coordinator, one game warden coordinator and one regional wildlife supervisor. The region includes the following game warden districts: East Cheyenne, West Cheyenne, Torrington, Wheatland, Medicine Bow, North Laramie, South Laramie, Elk Mountain and Saratoga. In addition, two regional game wardens are stationed in Laramie.

In 2024, the Laramie Region experienced turnover in personnel and vacancies in the East Cheyenne, Wheatland, and Medicine Bow game warden districts and within the two regional game warden positions. Two positions were vacant for four months of the year and three others were vacant for seven months or more of the year. In addition to the vacancies within the region, several personnel were completing law enforcement certifications, which further limited enforcement capacity for the region.

Lander Region



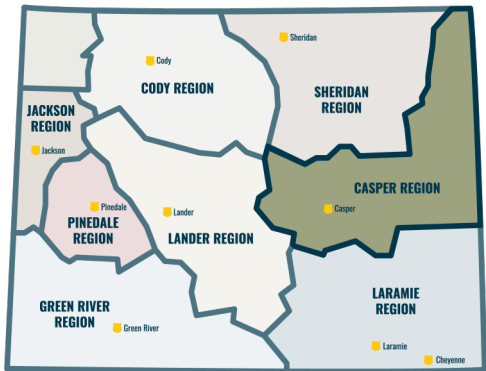
Work Unit Overview

The Lander Region has nine law enforcement officers, including one regional game warden, six district game wardens, one access coordinator 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 the Gas Hills west to the Wind River Range and southern Absaroka Mountains.

The Lander Region added an access coordinator

position, based in Riverton. The Lander Region has been short a West Rawlins game warden for the past two years however, a new warden started in that district at the end of the year.

Casper Region

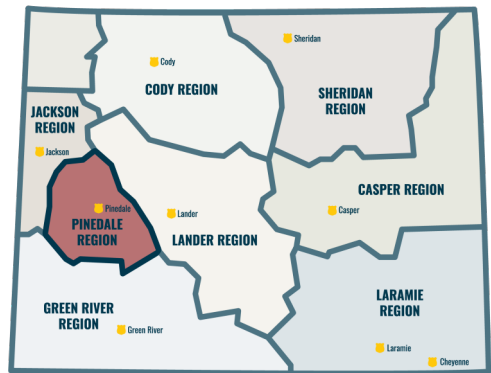


Work Unit Overview

The Casper Region consists of 11 law enforcement officers, including two regional game wardens, seven district game wardens, one access coordinator 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, East

Casper and West Casper.

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.

The North Pinedale district game warden retired on August 1. The Dayton game warden transferred to North Pinedale on November 10.

2024 Law Enforcement Efforts

Wyoming game wardens are tasked with various responsibilities as peace officers and wildlife managers. Outside of law enforcement, game wardens gather information on wildlife populations, investigate and mitigate damage caused by wildlife, respond to reports of sick or injured wildlife and educate the public about wildlife management issues. In their law enforcement role, game wardens spend as much time as possible proactively

patrolling their districts and interacting with sportspersons who are hunting, fishing or boating. They also answer calls for service and investigate tips



Pass Creek Rd fire

received through the Stop Poaching program. In addition to routine law enforcement duties, wardens focus on protecting big game on their winter ranges, monitoring areas closed to shed antler collection and improving compliance with aquatic invasive species (AIS) requirements.

Big game seasons in much of the state were impacted by hot, dry weather which

reduced overall hunter success. Severe wildfires burned over 460,000 acres of private and public lands in the Sheridan Region in the late summer and into the fall. Areas in the Jackson and Lander Regions also experienced large, severe wildfires. The fires closed a great deal of the available hunting access and game wardens in these areas spent much of their time offering logistical support to firefighting crews. In addition, many big game herds, particularly deer and antelope, continued to recover from the severe winter of 2022-23 and license issuance remained conservative, leading to fewer hunters in the field.

The enforcement of shed antler collection closures on public lands in western Wyoming continued to be a priority and was especially important this year. Disturbance of big game animals in the late winter and early spring can lead to increased mortality of animals with limited fat reserves. Over the past several years, there has been increased public interest in shed antler collection and the Department regularly receives complaints regarding antler collection during



Wardens patrolling during antler collection closures

closed periods or trespassers on private lands without permission. New legislation went into effect for 2024 stipulating that any season for the collection of big game antlers or horns shall begin seven days earlier for residents than nonresidents. Game wardens investigated several reports of nonresidents looking for shed antlers during the first week of the season. In

most of these cases, the nonresidents were unaware of the law change. Before the May 1 antler collection season opened, the Department deployed a task force of several game wardens in the Green River region near Baggs to deter violators from antler hunting during the closure. Wardens in the Lander, Jackson and Pinedale regions also spent considerable time monitoring antler collection area closures, the Alpine antler sale, National Elk Refuge / Scout antler auction and other antler sales.

In recent years, neighboring states have discovered new zebra and quagga mussel infestations in their waterways, most notably Lake Pactola in South Dakota and on the Snake River near Twin Falls, Idaho. These mussels spread rapidly and can cause considerable problems with other wildlife and infrastructure in and



AIS check station at Evanston Port of Entry

around the waterways they inhabit. The Department prioritizes inspecting and decontaminating watercraft entering the state to prevent the spread of these and other AIS. In 2024, much of this effort again focused on the busiest AIS check stations, on I-80 near Evanston and I-25 in Cheyenne. The Evanston Port of Entry AIS check station remained the busiest in the state and violations for failing to stop at the check station continued to be high. Extra help was brought in from other regions on the summer holiday weekends to work the check station, documenting 84 violations for failing to stop at the check station in 131 hours of work

time. Game wardens in the Laramie Region monitored AIS check stations on I-25 at Cheyenne, I-80 at Pine Bluffs and Highway 287 in Laramie, intercepting 66 watercraft owners entering the state without stopping for an inspection. Statewide, game wardens documented 351 violations of AIS regulations. Of these, 25 were watercraft that had already been launched without a required AIS inspection.

Altogether, game wardens documented 3,102 wildlife, fishing, watercraft and AIS violations, up slightly from 2,906 in 2023. Due to the reduced numbers of

hunters in the field and lower harvest success in much of the state, several wardens reported encountering fewer violations in their hunting season patrols. Additionally, several game warden districts remained vacant during part or all of the year, resulting in less overall patrol time by Department law enforcement officers. Several game wardens were hired in 2024 and will move into these vacant positions once they complete their training programs. However, based on current trends, it may take several years before the Department is fully staffed within the law enforcement ranks.



Warden printing an electronic citation from horseback



Plane crash at Palisades Reservoir

Notable Cases

The cases in this section were some of the more unique or interesting cases encountered by game wardens in 2024. Whether a major investigation or a more common violation with a unique aspect to it, these cases were highlighted by the game wardens who worked them.

Boysen Fishing Over-limits

On October 13, two Riverton game wardens received a call from a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) special agent regarding a report of anglers below the dam at Boysen Reservoir potentially keeping an over-limit of oversized fish. The wardens located two vehicles and six anglers matching the description given in the violation report. They contacted the group of anglers, who claimed to have been fishing that afternoon and were there together. During the investigation, the wardens determined the group possessed 23 rainbow trout, 22 of which were over 16 inches in length. The possession limit of trout per person in this area is three, with only one exceeding 16 inches. Based on the investigation, four of the anglers were cited for taking over-limits of game fish and taking fish in violation of size limits. Three of the suspects pleaded guilty and paid fines totaling \$960. The fourth suspect did not show up to court and a warrant for his arrest has been issued.

Dubois Illegal Deer

In early 2024, a case from the previous hunting season was adjudicated in the Fremont County Circuit Court. In October 2023, the Dubois game warden received a trespassing complaint about two individuals who had harvested deer from an area just west of Dubois. The game warden responded to the site and was able to get security camera footage of the suspects. The game warden interviewed witnesses in the area and was able to locate the sites where the deer were killed. He was also able to follow drag marks from those locations toward a neighboring property. The game warden used the security camera footage to match up the suspects and their ATVs to two individuals associated with the neighboring property. During interviews with the suspects, the game warden learned that after the deer were killed, one of the suspects traveled to Dubois to purchase a license after the fact. One suspect was issued a citation for trespassing to hunt and the second

suspect was issued citations for trespassing to hunt and taking a deer without a license. The first suspect was fined \$300 and the second was fined \$920 and lost all of his license privileges for one year.

Illegal Outfitting Case

A cooperative investigation between three law enforcement agencies led to the conviction of a woman for illegal outfitting. The investigation began on September 18, 2023, as the South Cody game warden and an investigator from the Wyoming Board of Outfitters and Professional Guides prepared to depart for a patrol trip into the Thorofare near Yellowstone National Park. A truck and horse trailer arrived at the Deer Creek trailhead and the driver told the officers that she was going to pack an elk out for a friend. The game warden recognized her from previous contacts and had seen her vehicle parked at the same trailhead the week before. After returning from their pack trip, the warden and outfitter investigator checked to see if the woman had an outfitter or professional guide license and authorization from the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to conduct outfitting activities on the Shoshone or Bridger Teton national forests. She did not have any permits and the USFS law enforcement officer told them that the woman had been cited for conducting commercial activities on a national forest without a proper permit in 2021. Further investigation revealed that the woman had charged a group of hunters \$3,600 to pack them into and out of their hunting camp with llamas and another \$1,000 to pack out an elk using horses. In October 2024, the woman pleaded guilty to outfitting without a license and was fined \$1,850.

Neighborhood Deer Poacher

Over a five-year period, at least five deer were shot and killed in a Green River neighborhood. During their investigation, game wardens and the Green River Police Department responded to numerous calls about dead or injured deer and recovered bullets from three of the deer.

The investigation began in August 2018 when game wardens were called to a home on Arkansas Drive to investigate a doe deer that appeared to have been shot. Witnesses heard what sounded like shots from a small caliber rifle in the early morning hours and later found the doe deer dying near a home. Witnesses also reported a bullet hole in their garage door. Game wardens analyzed the scene to determine the trajectory of the bullet and interviewed neighbors but were unable to identify a suspect.

Nearly three years later, in August 2021, wardens were called to Arkansas Drive to investigate a deer that was suspected to have been shot and a bullet was recovered from the buck deer that appeared to have come from a small caliber rifle. Wardens learned from an animal control officer that another buck deer had been removed from the neighborhood by city workers that morning and taken to the landfill. A game warden went to the landfill and necropsied that buck deer and determined it had been shot as well, though the bullet had passed through the animal and was not recovered.

In September 2022, students at Harrison Elementary School found an injured buck deer near their playground, not far from Arkansas Drive. At first glance, the deer appeared sick, but during a necropsy, a bullet was found lodged beneath the animal's skin. In August 2023, wardens were called again to the neighborhood on Arkansas Drive for a report of a doe mule deer believed to have been shot, and wardens recovered a bullet from that deer as well.

Game wardens and Green River Police Department officers executed two search warrants at a residence on August 17, 2023. Officers seized several firearms, ammunition and a homemade suppressor from the residence. Three bullets were sent to the DCI crime lab in Cheyenne, along with firearms seized under the search warrants. Ballistics testing confirmed that bullets recovered from the buck deer in 2022 and the doe deer in 2023 had been fired from the same .22 caliber Marlin rifle seized during the search. The bullet recovered from the buck mule deer in 2021 was too degraded to positively identify or eliminate that it had come from the same rifle.

In October 2023, a Green River man was charged with five counts of wanton destruction of a big game animal and four counts of using a suppressor to wantonly



Seized homemade suppressor

destroy a big game animal. In February 2024, the suspect pleaded guilty to five counts of wanton destruction of a big game animal. The charges of unlawfully using a suppressor were dismissed as part of the plea agreement. In April 2024, the Sweetwater County Circuit Court sentenced the man to 15 days in jail for each count, served concurrently, with credit for three days served after his arrest in October 2023. In addition, his hunting privileges were revoked for ten years and he forfeited the .22 Marlin rifle with scope and a homemade suppressor.

Stuck While Hunting in the Wrong Area

On the night of October 31, 2023, Carbon County Search and Rescue received a report of a missing elk hunter south of Rawlins. Members of the hunting party reported that their truck had broken down and was stuck near Littlefield Creek. One individual had attempted to walk north to Rawlins. The remaining party members were picked up, but searchers could not locate the individual who took off on foot. The search and rescue operation continued throughout the night and the Carbon County Dispatch Center received a call from another elk hunter just after daybreak on November 1, who reported finding a disoriented person near Miller Hill who matched the description of the missing individual.

During the search, the hunters made statements that made the search and rescue crew suspect that the hunters were involved in illegal activity. They reported this information and game wardens from Baggs and Rawlins responded to the scene. The game wardens

located a gut pile from a bull elk within 100 yards of the stuck truck. Both the truck and gut pile were located in Elk Hunt Area 108. The carcass, head and antlers from the bull elk had been removed from the scene before the arrival of the game wardens. The owner of the stuck vehicle told the search and rescue crew that he killed a bull elk in general Elk Hunt Area 21, approximately 2 miles away, on October 31. Game wardens learned that the man only possessed a general elk license and did not possess a limited quota elk license as is required for Elk Hunt Area 108.

As time passed, photos of this individual posing with a bull elk were seen on social media and passed along to a game warden. Wardens returned to the location where the truck had been stuck and matched the photos of the man posing with the bull elk to the same location. Through the ensuing investigation, subjects from the hunting party were interviewed, and evidence was gathered showing that the man had indeed illegally killed the bull elk in Elk Hunt Area 108, not Elk Hunt Area 21 as he had previously claimed.

On February 5, 2024, the Rawlins man was charged with intentionally taking an antlered elk without a proper license under W.S. 23-3-102(d). On May 15, 2024, the man pleaded guilty to the charge. He was fined \$1,570 and sentenced to 90 days in jail, with 82 days suspended and credit for eight days served in the Carbon County Detention Center. He also received a five-year suspension of his hunting and fishing privileges in Wyoming and all member states of the Wildlife Violator Compact.

Illegal Trail Camera Cases

The South Jackson game warden investigated several instances of violators unlawfully using real-time photography "cell cameras" to aid in the taking of big game. Three of the four cameras were found and reported by other sportsmen in the field. The reporting parties in each case felt the actions of the cell camera users were cheating in the hunting process, making the scouting/hunting planning much too easy. Of the four violations, only two have been resolved through court in 2024.

One case involved a Wilson resident who purchased a cell camera to help him in the scouting process. The camera was placed over an elk wallow with a tree stand

alongside it. At this location, the game warden confirmed there was indeed a cell phone signal, leading him to believe this particular cell camera was fully operational. This site was located in Teton County within Elk Hunt Area 78. The warden found a green light was on indicating it was in wireless transmitting mode.

A warrant was secured through a Teton County Circuit Court judge to look at the photos on the SD card within the cell camera. While examining the photos, game wardens noticed the same individual in several photos, in addition to several photos of trophy-quality elk. One warden recognized and helped identify the individual from Wilson, WY. This individual held a valid hunting license and was seen hunting from the blind with a bow and arrow. A game warden contacted the camera owner and he was honest about the camera and tree stand belonging to him. The warden explained the regulations limiting the use of certain specialized hunting technologies and equipment. The Wilson hunter admitted he broke the law and didn't realize it. This hunter was issued a citation for the use of real-time photography/cell camera and paid a fine of \$550.

Two other investigations involving the use of real-time photography/cell cameras included violations for illegal baiting of big game. The suspects in those cases were issued must appear citations and their cases will be resolved in early 2025.

Illegal Moose Sheds

In early 2024, the North Jackson game warden assisted Grand Teton National Park rangers with an illegal antler hunting case involving a Kelly resident who collected a set of moose paddles from within the Park. When the game warden contacted the suspect at their residence, he discovered several untagged elk heads. The suspect claimed to have picked up one of the recently collected heads on national forest land. The game warden had contacted the suspect years before in that same area and issued an interstate game tag for the collection of a dead head. The game warden issued the suspect a citation for transporting the bull elk heads without interstate game tags and a park ranger cited them for illegal antler collection in a national park. He was fined \$150 for the game tag violation and faced additional fines in federal court for the national park violation.

Misguided

During the summer, a young guide leading a youth group through the Teton Wilderness was turned in for killing a ruffed grouse. When contacted, the guide stated he captured the grouse by fashioning a noose at the end of a fly rod and slipping it over the bird's head. Somewhere between tightening the noose and collecting it in hand, the guide reported that the grouse's neck broke and it died. The guide told the game warden he burned the grouse after it was dead to keep from attracting bears to the group's camp. The guide was cited for taking a grouse out of season and fined \$150.

Backcountry Fishing Violators

Over the last couple of years, the Alpine game warden has wanted to ride in and check Bailey Lake over the Labor Day weekend. He noticed a lot of activity at the trailhead over that holiday, particularly from nonresidents. He had a hunch there was a group fishing without licenses. Bailey Lake is about four miles in from the trailhead. This year, the warden took a trainee with him and they contacted eight people at Bailey Lake. They observed two adults and one teenager fishing from the southern side of the lake. When they got over to the northern shore, they observed a fishing pole and tackle box by the water's edge, and a group of four men were sitting in chairs by the lake, approximately 75 yards from the pole. They all claimed to have not been fishing, and that a different group had left a pole there. After some investigation and interviewing several of them, it was discovered none of them had fishing licenses. The wardens observed two other individuals from the same group fishing, and neither of them had licenses either, though the teenager claimed that he just hadn't brought it with him. One individual made some comments leading the wardens to believe this group had been doing this annually for years and they finally got caught. One adult finally confessed that he had been fishing and would take the fall for the rest of the group. Citations were issued to two adults for fishing without licenses. They paid a total of \$500 in fines.

Deer Poachers Caught

On October 14, the Moorcroft game warden received a Stop Poaching tip about two individuals who the caller

believed had poached an antelope near Rozet. The game warden responded to the location and identified a man and woman from South Dakota, who were butchering a buck mule deer, not an antelope. The man told the game warden that his son-in-law had killed the deer and they were just taking care of it. During the conversation, the game warden remembered another Stop Poaching tip he had received earlier in the year, regarding a South Dakota man who was illegally killing deer in Wyoming without licenses. Believing this might be the same individual, the game warden dug deeper into the investigation. The man admitted to the game warden that he had not only killed this buck, but also killed another mule deer buck in 2023 without a Wyoming deer license. The man was issued two citations for taking deer without licenses and the woman was cited as an accessory to taking a deer without a license. They both pleaded guilty, were fined \$2,460 and paid \$4000 in restitution.

Platte Valley Mule Deer Wanton Destruction



Deer left to waste

On October 22, 2023, the Saratoga game warden received a report stating that a mule deer buck had been shot by a Saratoga man in Deer Hunt Area 80 on Tuesday, October 17, 2023. Hunt Area 80 is a limited quota area open for rifle hunting from October 1 through October 14. Participants in the poaching knew it was illegal and did not want to get in trouble, and had left the deer in the field to waste. Based on the information provided, the game warden located and

investigated the mule deer carcass, a large 5x5 buck, at the kill site.

The information in the tip identified the shooter and two other participants in the poaching, and game wardens interviewed them. Based on the interviews, game wardens learned that the three had been driving in the Pick Bridge/Sanger Public Access Area north of Saratoga three days after the deer season closed. When they saw the buck deer bedded near the road, the shooter stopped the vehicle, grabbed a rifle and shot the buck, wounding it. The shooter and another passenger ran after the deer and killed it with another shot. They returned to the truck and told the third person they were leaving the deer because it was gutshot and “not worth it.”

The shooter was issued a citation for wanton destruction of a big game animal. On October 22, 2024, he pleaded guilty and was ordered to pay \$70 in fines and \$4,000 in restitution. In addition, all hunting, trapping and shed hunting privileges were suspended for three years.

Fishing Mentor or Repeat Offender ?

Following a Laramie Region investigation that began on May 26, 2022, a Cheyenne man was cited for transporting and releasing live fish (smallmouth bass) into Sloan’s Lake without authorization. The man, an avid fisherman and local popular social media personality, was sentenced for those crimes on January 4, 2023. His sentence included a fine, one year of unsupervised probation and a thirty-day suspended jail sentence. He was also sentenced to a 10-year suspension of his fishing privileges in the 49 member states of the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact.

On January 11, 2023, a Stop Poaching report indicated the man had been fishing on Sloan’s Lake the previous weekend and a new case was opened.

The subsequent investigation documented the suspect fishing in multiple states, including Wyoming, while suspended. The man was arrested on multiple counts of fishing without a valid license and taking wildlife under suspension, as well as a bench warrant for violations of his probation, after being pulled over for speeding on January 16, 2024. While in jail, the man was served citations from Nebraska and Alabama for similar violations.

On December 18, 2024, the man pleaded no contest to one count of fishing without a license and one count of taking wildlife while under suspension. This time, the Laramie County Circuit Court judge sentenced him to pay \$70 in court costs, \$150 to the Victims Compensation Fund, and added nine more years to his game and fish license suspension. The man was also ordered to complete another year of unsupervised probation, a violation of which will require him to serve 210 days in jail. For the probation violations already documented, the man was sentenced to thirty days in jail, with credit for eight days already served.

Barring any future violations, and assuming the outstanding charges from other states are taken care of in the meantime, the man will regain his fishing privileges in early January 2042, equating to a 19-year suspension.

No Fishing License, Interference with a Peace Officer, and Stolen Vehicles

On March 8, the Torrington game warden saw a dark-colored van occupied by two men driving around Packers Lake and into Nebraska. The game warden ran the license plate on the van, which did not come back to any registered vehicle. On the morning of March 9, the game warden was back at Packers Lake and saw the van from the previous day parked next to a silver SUV. He parked next to the vehicles and saw a man and woman sleeping in the back of the SUV. There was a fishing line leading to the lake coming out of the front passenger door and trash, including a freshly burnt can, behind the SUV.

The game warden contacted the occupants and asked them about fishing. The man admitted to fishing and told the game warden he didn’t have his fishing license or ID with him. He gave the game warden his name and date of birth and asked to use a nearby bathroom while the game warden contacted dispatch to check his fishing license. After several minutes, the man did not return to the campsite. The game warden determined that the man had fled the area on foot and had given him a false name and date of birth. The game warden contacted deputies in Goshen County and Scottsbluff County, Nebraska and learned that the van had been stolen from Harrison, Nebraska the previous day. After several hours, the suspect was located and arrested in Lyman, Nebraska. He was rushed to the emergency

room after arresting officers learned that he had ingested over three grams of methamphetamine before he was caught.

The game warden cited the suspect for fishing without a license, unattended fishing pole, interference with a peace officer and littering. He pleaded guilty in Goshen County court and was fined \$930. In addition, the suspect has been charged with felonies related to the stolen van, eluding peace officers and narcotics crimes. The owner of the stolen van was grateful to have her vehicle and property returned.

Upper North Platte River Over-limit

On November 12, 2024, a game warden learned of numerous large brown trout that had been gutted and frozen in vacuum-sealed bags in a freezer belonging to a Saratoga resident. The resident said some friends of a friend from California were in the Saratoga area elk hunting and fishing and utilizing his shop space to process their meat. They had been storing their fish in his freezer, but he was unaware that they had been harvesting so many fish. The vacuum-sealed bags were labeled with names, and the resident stated that he believed that four or five individuals had been fishing the North Platte River off Veterans Island. The daily and possession limit for trout on the North Platte River at Veterans Island is three trout, one of which can be more than 16 inches in length.



Over limit fish

The game warden counted 32 brown trout, 18 of which were over 16 inches in length, and one rainbow trout. These fish appeared to be shared among three different anglers.

The game warden seized all the trout and proceeded to

Veterans Island, where he located the group of anglers. The anglers explained that they had been in town hunting cow elk and fishing, using a friend's shop to process and store meat. The anglers claimed they knew the daily limit for trout but seemed to be confused about the possession limit. The game warden explained that the possession limit cannot exceed a daily limit and that fish at home or in a freezer count toward the possession limit.

The anglers claimed they did not have any fish other than what was on a stringer at the time, until confronted with the fact that the game warden had already seen their stored fish in the freezer. In total, the three suspects had kept 33 trout, 18 of which were brown trout over 16 inches in length. They were each cited for taking an over-limit of game fish and taking fish in violation of size limits. All three pleaded guilty in court. Combined, they paid \$1,140 in fines, \$1,500 in restitution and all three had their fishing privileges suspended for one year.

Halfmoon Antler Poachers

During April, the South Pinedale game warden received a tip of a possible human presence violation on the Halfmoon Wildlife Habitat Management Area (WHMA). Investigation revealed that three individuals entered the Halfmoon WHMA during the seasonal closure on foot. While in the area and on adjacent USFS lands, the group collected a few elk and deer antlers during the seasonal antler closure. One subject took full responsibility for the crimes as his friends were unaware of the regulations and acting under his advice. The subject was cited for violating the human presence closure on Department-administered lands and for violation of the antler collection regulation. Fines totaled \$600 and the antlers were confiscated.

Shed Antler Trespassing

On the May 1 antler opener, four individuals trespassed through private property to access public lands for the purpose of antler hunting. The hunters were slightly misled based upon OnX road maps but admitted to being skeptical about access into the area. Based upon the landowner's request, all four antler hunters were cited for trespassing and fined \$450 each. In addition, their large collection of moose, elk and deer antlers were confiscated.

Elk Over-limit

In November, the South Pinedale game warden received reports of multiple shot and left elk near the Muddy Creek elk feedground. Subsequent investigation revealed that two elderly hunters had killed seven elk during a 12-hour period in Elk Hunt Area 98. Four of the elk were taken on private lands without permission and recovered from the field by the suspects; however, the landowner did not wish to pursue trespassing charges. One of the hunters had mistakenly shot three additional elk, including a spike and a five-point bull. The season was only open for antlerless elk at the time. None of the

three additional elk were recovered from the field and unfortunately wasted. The investigation revealed that the elderly hunter was not following up on his shots due to his assumption that an elk would go down with the caliber of rifle he was using and his physical inability due to his age and condition. Ballistic evidence from the wasted elk matched a rifle confiscated from the suspect. The elderly hunter was appalled and apologetic to learn that he had killed so many additional elk and that two of the elk were bulls. He was cited for three counts of over-limit of elk and two counts of taking the wrong sex of elk and was fined nearly \$2,000.

Wildlife Investigations Unit

Work Unit Overview

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

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 are 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).

2024 Law Enforcement Efforts

The WIU initiated 12 major investigations in 2024 and assisted game wardens throughout Wyoming and officers from other jurisdictions across the country with over 100 other cases. Investigators spent significant time in 2024 working ongoing investigations across Wyoming and moving cases through hearings and trials in court.

The WIU continues to explore new technologies related to tracking suspect activity, covert operations and digital forensics. The WIU analyzes cell phones, computers and other electronic devices seized from wildlife violators in Wyoming. Investigators analyzed 27 cell phones and four SD cards/flash drives seized by game wardens and investigators as evidence. Investigators also analyzed information produced by social media platforms. The WIU coordinated forensic extractions of additional cell phones for other Wyoming law enforcement agencies in several cooperatively worked cases. These forensic extractions require hundreds of hours of analysis by investigators to produce forensic reports for case officers. The WIU wrote and executed dozens of cell phone, Google geofence and social media preservation letters and search warrants as well as search warrants for premises and property in 2024.

Notable Case

Man Loses Big Game Privileges for Life

On opening morning of the 2021 deer season, the Cheyenne game warden contacted a man who had just killed a large mule deer buck. The deer wasn't tagged and the shooter claimed he planned to tag it at home, only a short distance up the road. When the man couldn't seem to find his license, the game warden contacted dispatch to verify his license information. The game warden learned that the man's current deer license was a sought-after limited quota license for Deer Hunt Area 78, which had been carried over from

2020 due to the extensive Mullen Fire. The license was not valid in Deer Hunt Area 61, where the deer had been killed. The man was cited for taking a deer without a license. The deer was seized and the meat was cared for so it could be donated.

Days later, the game warden located the suspect's social media presence and noted photos of a trophy-class mule deer buck, which appeared to have been taken in 2020, the year the suspect had turned his Wyoming license in due to fire activity. The game warden worked with WIU investigators as he realized the case was going to entail far more than it first appeared.

Further investigation found photos of pronghorn bucks taken in years when the suspect had no hunting licenses and photos of multiple mule deer bucks and bull elk from the same year. No license records from Wyoming or other states seemed to match up with many of these animals. Additional evidence revealed the suspect was applying for resident Wyoming licenses while also enjoying resident goose hunting and salmon-fishing opportunities in Washington State. The suspect had also been applying for extra licenses using two different profiles related to his juvenile son. The suspect had invited friends to hunt with him without licenses of their own.

Eventually, an additional 90 charges were filed against the suspect, including numerous counts of false claims of residency for Game & Fish license purchases, take of multiple animals without licenses, accessory to the illegal take of animals without licenses, transfer of licenses, trespassing, utilizing a device to muffle the report of a firearm during the illegal take of big game, acting as an accessory to the take of wildlife at night with artificial light and importing illegally-taken wildlife parts into Wyoming.

Following a jury trial in April 2022, the man was found guilty of killing the initial buck mule deer without a valid license and served four days in jail, with 300 more days in jail suspended, pending a year of unsupervised probation, with a \$220 fine, \$4,000 restitution, and a three-year suspension of hunting privileges.

Two accomplices, who had killed a trophy-class bull elk with the man in September 2021, entered guilty pleas in Albany County Circuit Court on September 27, 2022 for the intentional take of antlered big game without a license and accessory after the fact, respectively. They were each sentenced to pay \$5,000 in fines, jointly pay \$6,000 restitution for the elk, and forfeited a crossbow used in the poaching. One of these accomplices also entered a guilty plea for a trespassing charge in Laramie County.

On January 2, 2024, the main suspect entered a nolo contendere plea, as part of a plea agreement between his attorney and the Laramie County District Attorney's Office, to one count each of intentionally taking an antlered game animal without a license, accessory to intentionally taking antlered game without a license, trespassing to hunt, and importing illegally-taken wildlife into Wyoming. Under the plea agreement, the suspect was sentenced to pay a \$20,000 fine. He was ordered to forfeit numerous seized wildlife parts, a Christensen Arms rifle with attached accessories, a Marlin 1895 rifle with accessories, a Bowtech compound bow with accessories and a seized cellular phone. He was also sentenced to a lifetime ban on hunting big or trophy game animals. His small game and bird hunting privileges are suspended until all fines are paid in full.



Warden on back country fishing patrol

Reserve Game Warden Program

2024 was the second year of the Department's Reserve Game Warden Program (RGWP). The RGWP utilizes retired Department law enforcement personnel to provide additional law enforcement presence in the field during the hunting seasons, assist game wardens and wildlife biologists with non-law enforcement activities as needed and conduct background investigations on new game warden candidates. Reserve game wardens are part-time contract employees of the Department, are Wyoming Peace Officer Standards and Training peace officer certified and must meet all Department game warden standards and training requirements.

In 2024, one reserve game warden was based in the Casper Region. This reserve game warden worked for 6.5 months (January, February, mid-August – December). Primary work duties included conducting four background investigations, field patrols focusing on coverage when district game wardens were unavailable and areas with high hunter presence (i.e. openers/weekends/check stations). Other duties included Casper Region Office presence/coverage, hunter/landowner/public contacts, big game harvest documentation, conducting wildlife damage training, completing required law enforcement training, riding along with new game wardens and miscellaneous work including reviewing various documents and draft legislation.

The reserve game warden in Casper spent 102 hours of work time on law enforcement activities, driving 2,284 miles and documenting 10 violations (one citation and nine warnings). In its second year, the RGWP is working as envisioned and the assistance is greatly appreciated by employees.

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. The LCS has one law enforcement officer, stationed in Lander, who serves as the LCS Conflict Coordinator (coordinator) and has a variety of job duties. The coordinator is responsible for reviewing all trophy game damage claims in the Pinedale, Lander, Cody and Jackson regions and assisting district game wardens and supervisors with trophy game damage claims throughout Wyoming. The coordinator is responsible for executing the Wildlife Services-WGFD contract to mitigate large carnivore damage statewide. In addition, the coordinator serves as the lead of the Department's Predator Attack Team (PAT) and conductive electrical weapons (CEW) trainer. The coordinator focuses on managing conflicts between humans and carnivores and law enforcement issues by working cooperatively with regional wardens and

investigators, federal agency law enforcement officers, and LCS personnel on all human attacks by carnivores. The coordinator provides an advisory and investigative role in statewide trophy game law enforcement activities and trophy game damage investigations.

2024 Law Enforcement Efforts

The coordinator was active in investigating multiple reports of aggressive grizzly bear encounters, including investigations into grizzly bear-caused human injuries. The coordinator served as the lead contact to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) agents and game wardens in multiple grizzly bear enforcement cases. The coordinator assisted the USFWS and Wyoming county sheriff's offices in the investigation of six grizzly bear shooting cases in 2024. In addition to grizzly bear investigations, LCS personnel assisted with multiple wolf, mountain lion and black bear investigations. The coordinator also participated in 12 cases involving big game, and black bear hunting, waterfowl, and other fish and wildlife-related incidents. Although most cases are referred to district game wardens, the coordinator cited several individuals for misdemeanor wildlife violations.

PAT personnel responded to several reports of aggressive grizzly bears and injuries this year in Wyoming. These conflicts require an immediate response by trained, equipped law enforcement personnel. The coordinator helped USFWS agents prepare the investigative reports for submission to the U.S. Attorney's office. 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.

The coordinator spent significant time monitoring trophy game conflicts in the Lander Region in 2024. Investigations of property damage, food rewards and livestock damage resulted in approximately 70 conflicts being documented. Several black and grizzly bears were lethally removed or relocated depending on the circumstances of each conflict.



Depredation bear tranquilized

Watercraft Safety Program

The Department is the state agency primarily responsible for watercraft safety education and enforcement. Each year, Wyoming game wardens spend much of their time patrolling water bodies ranging from major reservoirs to small ponds and streams. They enforce fishing and boating safety laws and regulations and promote safe boating activities.

Game wardens worked 3,777 hours and contacted thousands of boaters during their watercraft safety enforcement and education patrols. When fully staffed, the Department has eight regional game warden positions assigned primarily to watercraft duties between Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends. Several 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 as time permitted.

To accomplish the Department's boating safety mission, game wardens work with county sheriff's 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 nationwide 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



Wyoming

boating public.

Game wardens investigate all reported watercraft incidents occurring in the state. To develop the skills necessary for these investigations, the Department sends game wardens to advanced training in watercraft incident investigation techniques. This is a week-long course that aids wardens in conducting thorough, professional investigations to determine the causes of watercraft accidents ranging from those involving minor property damage to incidents involving serious injuries or death. Two game wardens attended incident investigation training hosted by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department. The Department also has a boat incident reconstruction team made up of game wardens who have taken an additional week of advanced training to investigate more complex boat collisions and incidents. One game warden attended an advanced boating incident reconstruction course hosted by the Florida Public Safety Institute.



Capsized boat recovered from Glendo Reservoir

In 2024, game wardens investigated 13 boat incidents, up from 10 in 2023. These included two boating-related fatalities. The first was on Packers Lake near Torrington in May. In this incident, two people were aboard a standup paddleboard in rough water and fell off. Neither were wearing life jackets and one of them drowned. In mid-June, a kayaker on Jackson Lake went missing and is presumed deceased after his kayak capsized in high winds and waves. According to his companion in a second kayak, the missing man was not wearing a life jacket when he capsized. Incidents on Glendo Reservoir, Flaming Gorge Reservoir and Hawk Springs Reservoir caused injuries to four individuals. The remaining incidents involved boats

that suffered damage exceeding \$500.

The Department again participated in Operation Dry Water, a nationwide effort to educate the public about the dangers of boating under the influence of alcohol and drugs (BUI) and encourage boaters to designate a sober operator. One boat operator was arrested for boating under the influence at Alcova Reservoir on July 4. Alcohol and drug use have contributed to many of the most serious watercraft accidents in Wyoming over the past several years. Game wardens were heartened to find that many boats they encountered with alcohol on board had designated sober operators. Two game wardens attended specialized training to become BUI detection and enforcement instructors.

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 National Association of State Boating Law Administrators and participated on the association's Enforcement and Training Committee, which is dedicated to developing and providing training resources to marine law enforcement officers nationwide.



Wardens on watercraft patrol

State Land Enforcement

The Department assists the Wyoming Office of State Lands and Investments by enforcing certain statutes applying to Wyoming State Trust Land (state land). Game wardens have the authority to enforce prohibitions of off-road travel, overnight camping, open fires and littering on state land. Wardens detect most state land violations during their hunting and fishing patrols.

On many state land parcels throughout 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. Illegal overnight camping on state lands occurs throughout the year and can contribute to resource damage and littering. 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



Illegal camp on state land near Gillette

State Land Violations			
Violation	Written Warnings	Citations	Total
Off-Road Travel	11	9	20
Camping	20	12	32
Open Fires	0	0	0
Littering on State Land	1	0	1
Total 2024	32	21	53
2023	45	26	71
2022	32	27	59

Regional Law Enforcement Statistics

Jackson Region - 5 Enforcement Personnel

Activity	Hours	Watercraft Hours	Miles
Wildlife Enforcement	2,961	3	30,193
Watercraft Enforcement	293	42	2,685
Total 2024	3,254	45	32,878
2023	2,515	47	27,864
2022	2,788	30	31,899

Program Enforcement	Warnings	Citations	Unknown Suspects	Total Law Enforcement Actions
Terrestrial Wildlife	81	37	3	121
Sport Fish	37	41	0	78
Watercraft	21	3	0	24
Aquatic Invasive Species	13	6	0	19
Total 2024	152	87	3	242
2023	141	79	2	222
2022	112	91	5	208

Cody Region - 13 Enforcement Personnel

Activity	Hours	Watercraft Hours	Miles
Wildlife Enforcement	6,409	0	97,286
Watercraft Enforcement	91	9	1,155
Total 2024	6,500	9	98,441
2023	6,731	28	102,686
2022	6,289	36	95,582

Program Enforcement	Warnings	Citations	Unknown Suspects	Total Law Enforcement Actions
Terrestrial Wildlife	120	96	3	219
Sport Fish	21	15	0	36
Watercraft	3	1	0	4
Aquatic Invasive Species	18	3	0	21
Total 2024	162	115	3	280
2023	197	132	3	332
2022	184	94	5	283

Sheridan Region - 10 Enforcement Personnel

Activity	Hours	Watercraft Hours	Miles
Wildlife Enforcement	5,882	1	85,968
Watercraft Enforcement	771	139	8,845
Total 2024	6,653	140	94,813
2023	5,571	136	78,411
2022	6,018	227	86,123

Program Enforcement	Warnings	Citations	Unknown Suspects	Total Law Enforcement Actions
Terrestrial Wildlife	210	126	67	403
Sport Fish	26	40	2	68
Watercraft	61	14	0	75
Aquatic Invasive Species	76	15	0	91
Total 2024	373	195	69	637
2023	444	192	68	704
2022	422	229	74	725

Green River Region - 10 Enforcement Personnel

Activity	Hours	Watercraft Hours	Miles
Wildlife Enforcement	3,300	6	49,767
Watercraft Enforcement	320	77	3,922
Total 2024	3,620	83	53,689
2023	3,857	75	66,634
2022	5,410	125	76,528

Program Enforcement	Warnings	Citations	Unknown Suspects	Total Law Enforcement Actions
Terrestrial Wildlife	81	33	24	138
Sport Fish	12	13	0	25
Watercraft	11	3	0	14
Aquatic Invasive Species	47	7	0	54
Total 2024	151	56	24	231
2023	145	77	14	236
2022	204	65	13	282

Laramie Region - 14 Enforcement Personnel

Activity	Hours	Watercraft Hours	Miles
Wildlife Enforcement	6,719	9	101,577
Watercraft Enforcement	890	230	14,371
Total 2024	7,609	239	115,948
2023	4,628	45	79,273
2022	5,927	100	104,992

Program Enforcement	Warnings	Citations	Unknown Suspects	Total Law Enforcement Actions
Terrestrial Wildlife	276	115	6	397
Sport Fish	42	28	0	70
Watercraft	61	26	1	88
Aquatic Invasive Species	106	6	0	112
Total 2024	491	169	7	667
2023	395	150	7	552
2022	217	133	21	371

Lander Region - 9 Enforcement Personnel

Activity	Hours	Watercraft Hours	Miles
Wildlife Enforcement	4,542	12	57,293
Watercraft Enforcement	275	170	3,757
Total 2024	4,817	182	61,050
2023	4,140	64	48,767
2022	4,119	87	59,284

Program Enforcement	Warnings	Citations	Unknown Suspects	Total Law Enforcement Actions
Terrestrial Wildlife	80	51	15	146
Sport Fish	13	20	0	33
Watercraft	13	10	0	23
Aquatic Invasive Species	11	2	0	13
Total 2024	117	83	15	215
2023	99	58	12	169
2022	124	54	78	256

Casper Region - 11 Enforcement Personnel

Activity	Hours	Watercraft Hours	Miles
Wildlife Enforcement	3,974	38	64,511
Watercraft Enforcement	527	123	5,523
Total 2024	4,501	161	70,034
2023	4,427	124	62,175
2022	5,073	285	65,214

Program Enforcement	Warnings	Citations	Unknown Suspects	Total Law Enforcement Actions
Terrestrial Wildlife	250	153	29	432
Sport Fish	25	43	0	68
Watercraft	35	31	0	66
Aquatic Invasive Species	15	6	0	21
Total 2024	325	233	29	587
2023	267	182	16	465
2022	333	183	6	522

Pinedale Region - 4 Enforcement Personnel

Activity	Hours	Watercraft Hours	Miles
Wildlife Enforcement	1,583	9	19,456
Watercraft Enforcement	95	24	824
Total 2024	1,678	33	20,280
2023	1,442	30	14,957
2022	1,969	29	29,301

Program Enforcement	Warnings	Citations	Unknown Suspects	Total Law Enforcement Actions
Terrestrial Wildlife	52	30	5	87
Sport Fish	6	8	0	14
Watercraft	1	2	0	3
Aquatic Invasive Species	2	2	0	4
Total 2024	61	42	5	108
2023	58	39	15	112
2022	82	55	4	141

Law Enforcement Administration/ RRT

Activity	Hours	Watercraft Hours	Miles
Wildlife Enforcement	1,554	6	17,799
Watercraft Enforcement	515	21	3,675
Total 2024	2,069	27	21,474
2023	2,282	54	27,643
2022	1,349	31	8,080

Wildlife Investigations Unit - 7 Enforcement Personnel

Activity	Hours	Miles
Wildlife Enforcement (2024)	7,778	57,951
2023	9,255	64,050
2022	10,044	66,424

Law Enforcement Administration/ Wildlife Investigations Unit/RRT

Program Enforcement	Warnings	Citations	Unknown Suspects	Total Law Enforcement Actions
Terrestrial Wildlife	66	18	1	85
Sport Fish	6	4	0	10
Watercraft	12	12	0	24
Aquatic Invasive Species	12	4	0	16
Total 2024	96	38	1	135
2023	77	26	11	114
2022	37	11	2	50

Statewide Cumulative Law Enforcement Statistics

Activity	Hours	Watercraft Hours	Miles
Wildlife Enforcement	44,702	84	581,801
Watercraft Enforcement	3,777	835	44,757
Total 2024	48,479	919	626,558
2023	44,848	603	572,460
2022	48,804	947	626,375

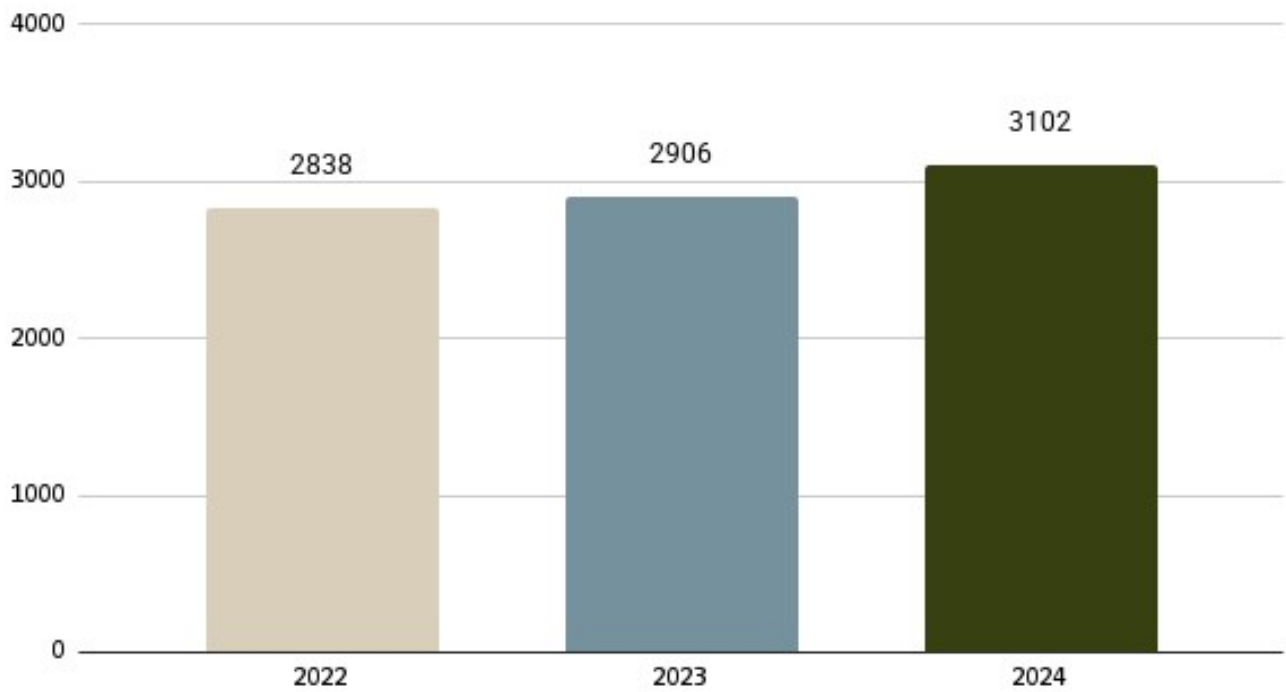
Program Enforcement	Warnings	Citations	Unknown Suspects	Total Law Enforcement Actions
Terrestrial Wildlife	1,216	659	153	2,028
Sport Fish	188	212	2	402
Watercraft	218	102	1	321
Aquatic Invasive Species	300	51	0	351
Total 2024	1,922	1,024	156	3,102
2023	1,823	935	148	2,906
2022	1,693	937	208	2,838

Fines Levied by Courts	
Fines for Violations	\$341,384
Court-Ordered Restitution	\$81,420
Total 2024	\$422,804
2023	\$605,505
2022	\$597,739

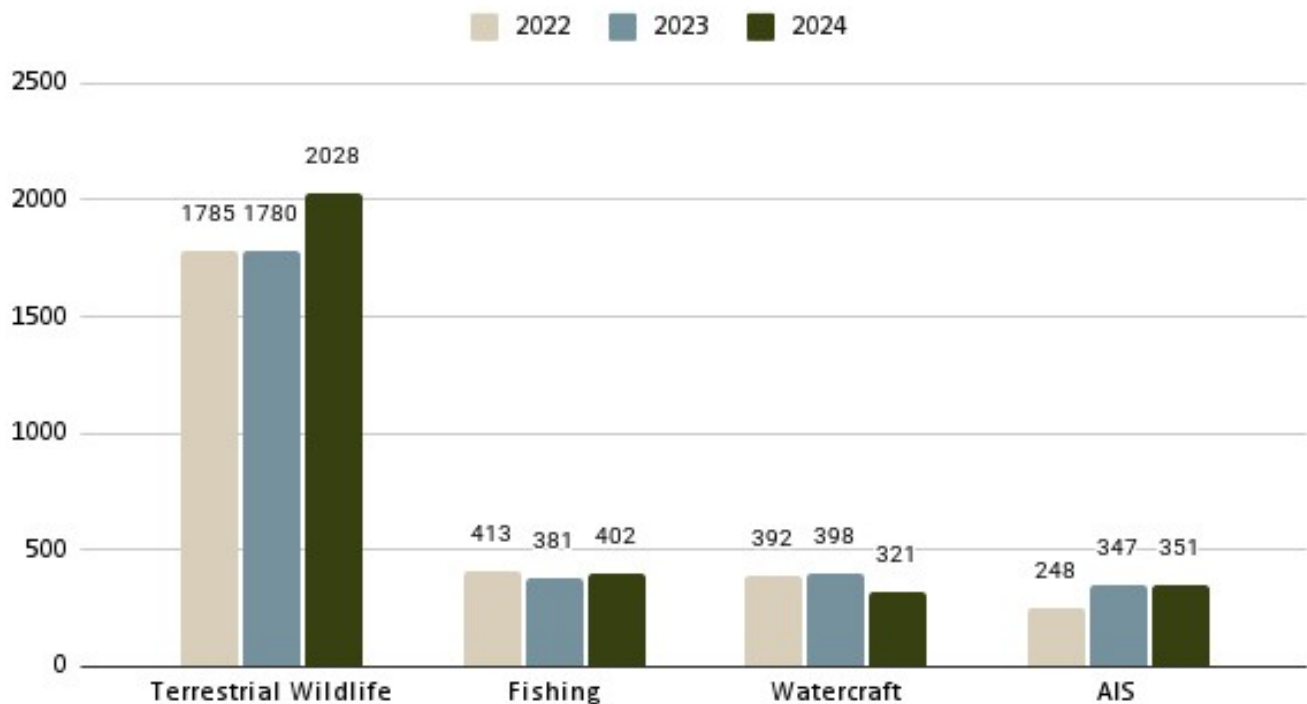
Fines and restitution are imposed by the courts. Fine amounts are determined by a combination of state statute, which sets the severity of crimes (ex: misdemeanor versus felony) and the bond schedule, which specifies the fine for the charge if a defendant chooses to pay the citation instead of taking the case to court. Money collected for fines does not get paid to the Department.

Restitution is determined by the Court and can be designated to go to the Department or the WWPA.

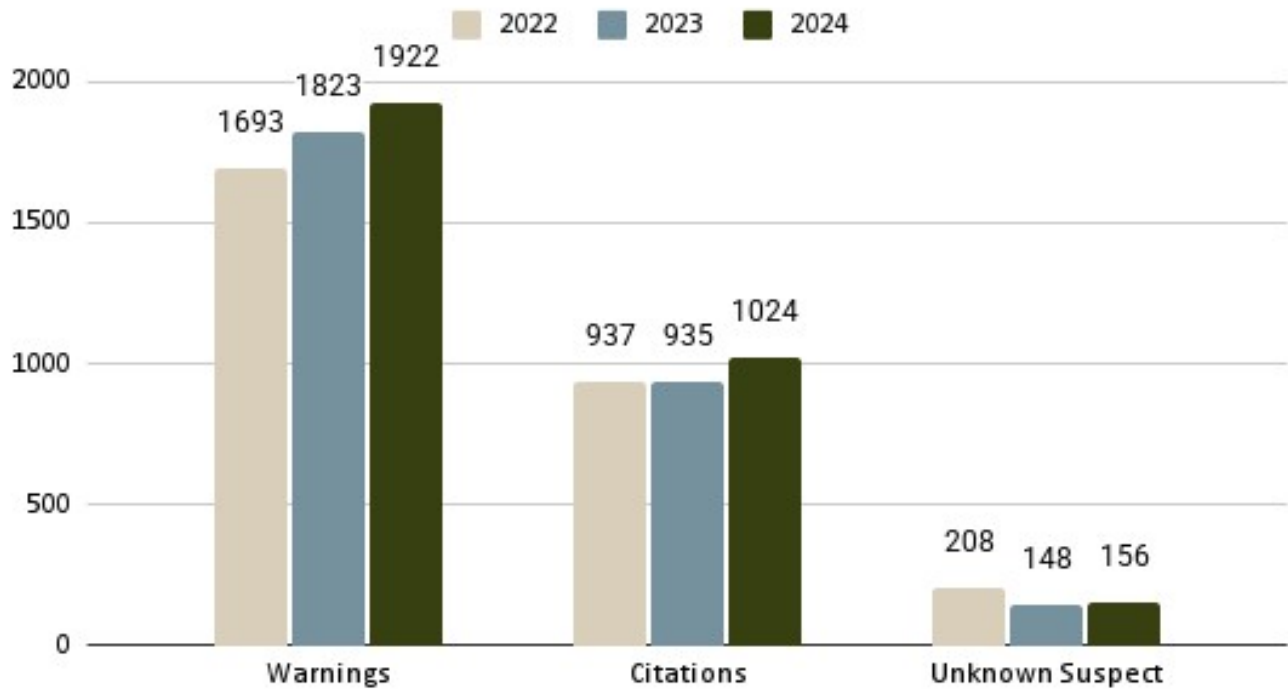
Total Documented Violations by Year



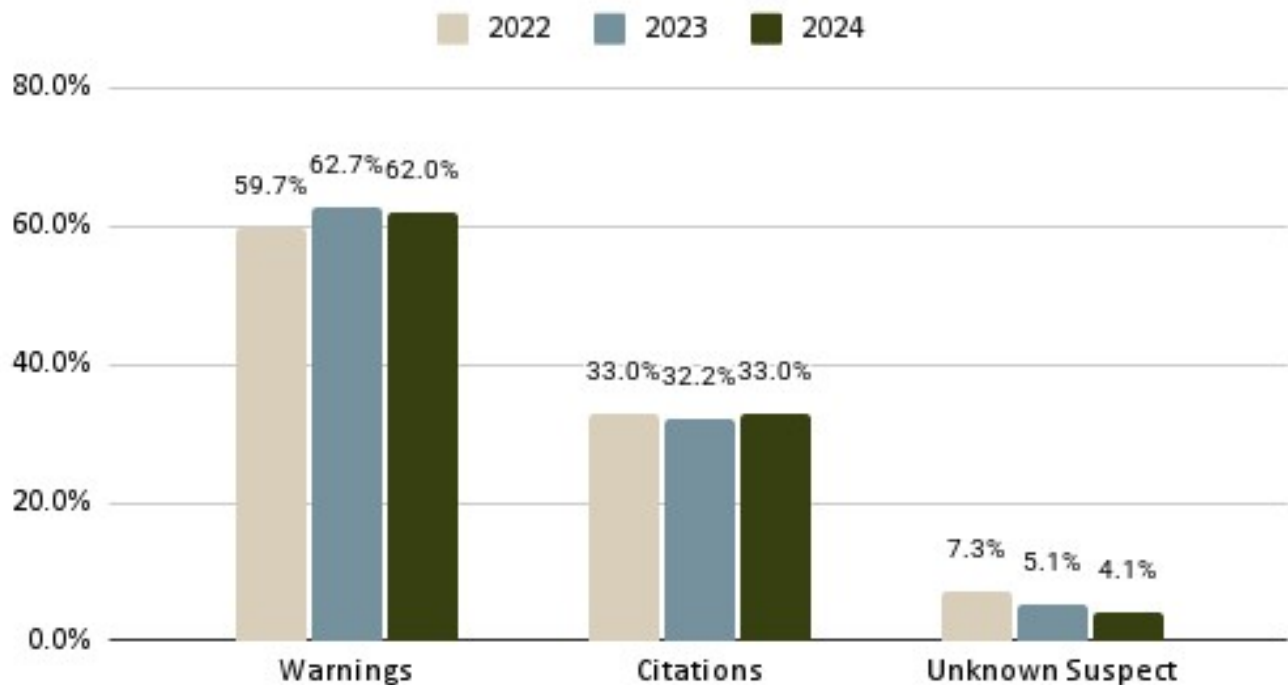
Violations by Category



Law Enforcement Actions



Percentage of Law Enforcement Actions



Top 10 Violations

In 2024, the top ten violations documented by Department law enforcement officers accounted for approximately 46% of all violations encountered. With few exceptions, the most common violations have not changed over the past several years and much of the Department's enforcement efforts are geared toward these violations.

Fishing without a license is consistently the most common violation in the state. Recreational anglers are 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 over 8% of all violations detected.

Violations of the AIS regulations remained high in 2024. The Department continued increased enforcement efforts at AIS check stations this year and stopped over 210 boaters who failed to stop for AIS inspections. 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 boating and AIS regulations because they are offered a watercraft regulation brochure when they register their watercraft. The Department continues to expand awareness of the AIS program and the importance of

preventing species like zebra mussels and invasive vegetation from becoming established in Wyoming waters. These two AIS violations combined comprised approximately 10% of total violations.

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

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. Failing to purchase a conservation stamp made up over 4% of all violations.

The most common boating safety violation continues to be having inadequate life jackets aboard watercraft. Game wardens patrolling the water emphasize the importance 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

Top 10 Violations Documented in 2024

1. Fishing without a license	263
2. Hunt, fish, trap, collect shed antlers on private land without permission (trespassing)	224
3. Fail to stop at AIS check station for inspection	213
4. Fail to purchase conservation stamp	133
5. Fail to provide life jackets aboard watercraft	114
6. Fail to purchase AIS decal	111
7. Violation of rules governing use of Department-administered lands	106
8. Take wrong sex of animal	105
9. Fail to tag big or trophy game animal	87
10. Accessory before or after the fact	81

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 4% of the total.



Warden patrolling Glendo Reservoir

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 several years, multiple 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 3.5% of the total.



Seized antlers

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 are taken by hunters with doe/fawn or cow/calf licenses. The Stop Poaching Hotline receives calls from multiple hunters each year 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.

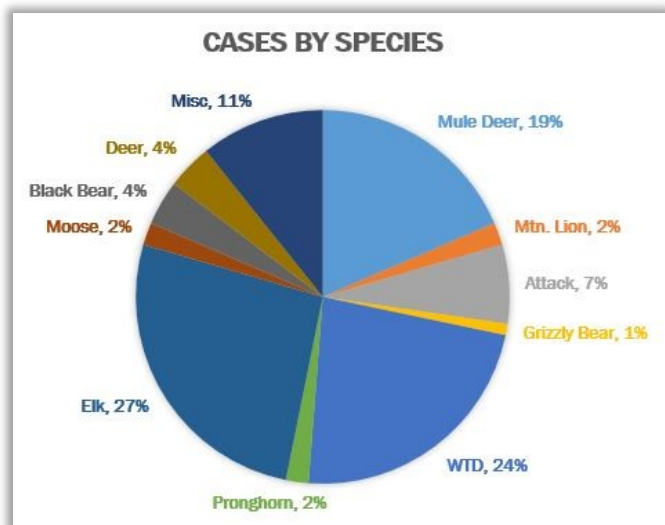
Failing to tag big game and trophy game animals continues to be a common violation. Licenses for these species contain carcass coupons, commonly referred to as tags. When one of these animals is harvested, the hunter is required to properly fill out the tag before leaving the site of the kill. Proper 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. Fail to tag violations made up almost 3% 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 committing 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.

Wildlife Forensics Lab

The Forensic and Fish Health Laboratory provides law enforcement analytical and technical forensic services to aid Wyoming wildlife law enforcement personnel, Wyoming biologists and wildlife managers in an additional 12 states. The lab maintains accreditation through the American National Standards Institute's (ANSI) National Accreditation Board (ANAB) to ISO 17025 standards. These international standards establish requirements for testing labs to ensure competency and accuracy in all testing.

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 DNA 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 during wildlife cases in court.



*Misc includes javelina, turkey, mice, pig, cattle, coyote and bobcat.

*Attack cases include black bear, grizzly bear and deer.

In 2024, various physical and biological properties were tested on 558 samples in response to 68 requests. A total of 15,404 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 a minimum of \$53,975 in fines and restitution, which does not include pending

fines, restitution or forfeitures. A combined 15 years of hunting and fishing privileges were lost, a combined four and half years of unsupervised probation and 360 days of suspended jail sentence were issued.

Notable Case

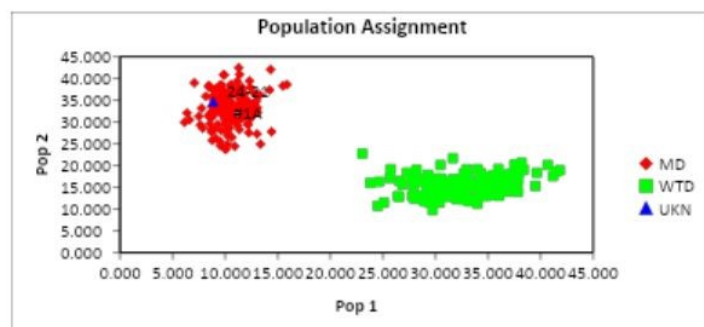
In April, the lab received 12 bone samples from the Cheyenne game warden requesting species and sex identification. Each bone sample was drilled to obtain bone dust in order to extract the DNA from each sample. The samples first went through the lab's DNA

sequencing test method for species identification. It was determined that one sample originated from deer, either mule deer or white-tailed deer, nine of the bone samples originated from cattle and two of the bone samples originated from elk. The item that originated from



Bones submitted for testing

deer was tested further using the laboratory's new species assignment test to differentiate between mule deer and white-tailed deer. The item was determined to originate from mule deer. In conclusion, the bones represented one male mule deer, one female elk, one elk of unknown sex and nine cattle.



Species Assignment to differentiate between mule deer and white-tailed deer.

The defendant in this case pleaded guilty to two counts of wanton destruction of big game and was sentenced to 180 days suspended jail time, \$10,000 in fines, a five-year suspension of hunting privileges and two years of probation.

Recruitment, Retention and Training Unit

The Recruitment, Retention and Training (RRT) unit was established by the Department in 2023 to better address the training and professional development needs of personnel. The RRT unit oversees the recruitment and testing process for new game wardens, manages the Field Training Officer (FTO) program and organizes regular training sessions for game wardens across the state. In February, one game warden transferred out of the RRT unit into the Thermopolis game warden district. In December, another warden transferred into the unit from the Wildlife Investigations Unit.

The RRT unit spent time on recruitment efforts across Wyoming and in Colorado. RRT members attended several career fair events around the state, gave talks at the Department's Boys and Girls Camps at Whiskey Mountain Conservation Camp, participated in a law enforcement panel at Front Range Community College in Ft. Collins, CO, and presented information on the game warden career at multiple University of Wyoming wildlife classes.



Women in Wildlife Law Enforcement Conference

This year, the RRT unit worked with five new game wardens through the FTO process and successfully trained nine new game wardens who were promoted from regional game warden to district game warden. In addition to their responsibilities with the RRT unit, these game wardens took on some additional duties and projects. RRT Supervisor Brady Frude assisted with enforcement duties at the fishing derby on Ocean Lake and Boysen Reservoir in the Lander Region and participated in the Evanston AIS check station task force over the Memorial Day weekend. RRT Warden Kristen Strom attended the Colorado Parks and Wildlife's officer survival school, which is a component of their game warden and park ranger training academy. There, she

assisted with conducting scenario-based training for the Colorado officers. Warden Strom also hosted Wyoming's first-ever Women in Wildlife Law Enforcement Conference at the Whiskey Mountain Conservation Camp. Attendees included Wyoming's female wardens, wardens from Colorado and Texas and officers from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and (USFWS).

Game Warden Applicant Testing

Wyoming statute requires that all game wardens be selected by competitive examination. 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. Since 2019, applicants with other degrees, such as criminal justice, are also considered, as long as they have a minimum amount of college credits in wildlife coursework. 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. In addition to hiring game wardens from other states, the Department has also recruited and hired currently certified law enforcement officers from local sheriff's departments and municipal police departments, provided they have the necessary educational qualifications.

Candidates who meet the education requirements and other initial employment qualifications are invited for a preliminary online interview. This determines which candidates will complete the game warden exam, in-person interviews, personality profile testing, psychological testing and polygraph examination. In 2024, the Department implemented a physical fitness test as part of the in-person testing week using the

same standards as the Wyoming Law Enforcement Academy's (WLEA) entrance assessment. Three categories are assessed; one-minute push-ups and one-minute sit-ups to test dynamic strength, and a 1.5 mile timed run to test cardiorespiratory fitness.

Candidates who receive a conditional offer for a game warden job undergo a thorough background investigation and must successfully graduate from the 14-week, 605-hour Peace Officer Basic (POB) course at WLEA 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 2024:

114 people submitted applications for game warden positions (79 met education qualifications based on transcripts)

77 online interviews were conducted

27 attended in-person interviews

5 candidates received conditional offers of employment

3 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 take additional online and in-person courses to complete training and legal updates necessary to maintain their POST certification.

Whenever possible, Wyoming game wardens participate in training with officers from other law enforcement agencies, including wildlife officers from other states. Some of these training topics include specialized investigation techniques, active shooter training, interview and interrogation, leadership skills and other courses. These combined

training courses allow agencies to pool resources and share costs while benefiting many jurisdictions at the same time.

In 2024, the Lander Region hosted Dr. Godfred Bempah from the Wildlife Division of the Ghana Forestry Commission in Africa. Dr. Bempah spent four

months shadowing Wyoming game wardens, participating in the hunting season setting process, observing how game wardens and biologists work together, and learning many other aspects of the Department's mission and function. He greatly appreciated the collaboration with Department



Lander Region staff with Dr. Godfred Bempah

employees and planned to incorporate many of the lessons he learned in Wyoming into the wildlife management program in Ghana.

New game wardens attend three main training sessions after completing their basic training at the WLEA.

Training topics during spring training 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. Wardens attend a late summer 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, the Access Yes Program, general wildlife law enforcement, collection of evidence, crime scene investigation and various other game warden duties. During the winter training, the new game wardens are introduced to a wide variety of issues, including the Hunter Education program, media training, courtroom procedures, trophy game conflict resolution, wildlife damage evaluation and mitigation techniques, furbearers and trapping enforcement, snowmobile operations and maintenance, landowner relations, the hunting season setting process, winter survival and ice safety and social media and cell phone search warrants. In addition to these intensive training sessions, new game wardens spend considerable time in their respective regions receiving on-the-job mentoring from other Department employees.



Watercraft training on Alcova Reservoir



Green River Region summer training



High risk stop training

Stop Poaching Program

In 1980, the Stop Poaching Hotline was created to give the public an easier avenue to report suspected wildlife crimes in Wyoming. The hotline is answered 24/7 by dispatchers in a statewide law enforcement communications center in Cheyenne. In addition to the toll-free phone hotline, the public can report suspected violations via the Department website and a text tip line.

The Stop Poaching Program is an excellent and necessary tool to aid game wardens in identifying and apprehending wildlife violators. People providing information regarding possible violations can remain anonymous.

In 2024, 235 tips were received from members of the public and game wardens followed up on all of them. In many cases, no violations could be determined. However, tips from the public were instrumental in identifying several specific violations and possible suspects. These tips led to 28 citations and 16

warnings being issued to violators. Defendants charged due to Stop Poaching tips were ordered to pay \$23,590 in fines and restitution for this year, with 20 cases still under investigation or pending court

disposition. Without the public's help and support, game wardens would have a much more difficult job.



Warden on patrol

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 was started in 1983 as a registered non-profit organization. The sole purpose of the WWPA is to manage a reward account and provide monetary rewards to citizens who provide information leading to the apprehension and conviction of wildlife violators. The WWPA is funded by restitution payments as ordered by the courts at the 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 information provided by concerned citizens. Many informants show genuine concern for Wyoming's wildlife by turning in friends or family members. Department enforcement officers may submit a reward recommendation to the WWPA when a violator has been successfully prosecuted. In 2024, \$3,700 in rewards was paid to six individuals who provided the information leading to the conviction of wildlife violators.

Wildlife Violator Compact

Wyoming joined the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact (Compact) in 1996. The Compact is a reciprocal agreement between member states to honor suspensions of hunting, fishing and trapping privileges for convicted wildlife violators. Individuals suspended in one member state may also have their privileges suspended in the other member states. The Compact serves 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 to ensure that nonresident violators meet their court obligations, as those who fail to do so have their privileges suspended until their case is resolved.



Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact

There are now 49 member states and the last non-member state, Hawaii, is in the process of joining. This makes a suspension in one state effectively a nationwide loss of privileges. Nationally, 4,865 new license suspensions were entered into the Compact in 2024, including 43 from Wyoming. Several cases initiated in 2024 are awaiting court proceedings and may lead to further license suspensions once completed.



Bullet found in poached deer



Investigating shot and left bull elk

Awards and Recognition

2023 Wyoming Game Warden Association Officer of the Year

Grant Gerharter, South Cody Game Warden

Nominated by their peers, this award honors an officer for the previous year's service based on their law enforcement and wildlife management work ethic, public involvement and relationships, WGWA involvement, professionalism, morale contributions and other positive attributes.

2024 Shikar-Safari Wildlife Officer of the Year

James Hobbs, Afton Game Warden

Presented annually by Shikar-Safari Club International, this award honors a wildlife officer in each state and Canadian province for outstanding performance and achievements.

Promotions

Dan Smith - Cody Regional Supervisor to Chief Game Warden

Regional Game Warden to Senior Game Warden

Brad Blackstock - Moorcroft

Zane Stewart - West Rawlins

Zach Bernhardt - North Riverton

Daniel Tisi - West Cheyenne

Chase Ferguson - Lusk

Jack Turnipseed - Green River

Ty Masco - Wheatland

Connor Worthen - Medicine Bow

Emmalee Raish - South Laramie

Retirements

Brian Nesvik, Director

29 years of service



Rick King , Chief Game Warden

26 Years of Service



Scott Browning , Lander Wildlife Investigator

36 years of service



Bubba Haley, N. Pinedale Senior Game Warden

28 Years of Service





STOP POACHING

1-877-WGFD-TIP

Help Protect Wyoming's wildlife

Call the Stop Poaching Hotline or text TIP411

(Text keyword WGFD and message)

