
Access Yes Program 2018 Annual Report



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Information about the Access Yes Program 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 rural to urban setting and changing wildlife values. Thirty years ago, prospective 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 usage. An increasing number of traditional landowners are selling their properties to individuals who are not purchasing the land for farming or ranching, but for their own hunting pleasure, wildlife sanctuaries or even development. In many instances, landowners view wildlife as competition for livestock forage or crops and welcome hunters onto their land to manage wildlife populations. Conversely, some non-traditional landowners want to see increased wildlife on their land and, therefore, do not allow hunting. The amount of private lands leased by those in the outfitting industry has increased. With many traditional landowners now charging trespass fees to generate additional income, fewer people have 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 3 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. 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 provided for sportsmen.



Purpose

The goal of the Access Yes Program is to enhance and/or maintain public hunting and fishing access onto Wyoming private and landlocked public lands. This is accomplished by enrolling private landowners into one of the access 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 to 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 modest monetary payment based on the number of acres or stream length enrolled;
- Increased law enforcement presence;
- Increased wildlife management (population control and damage prevention); and,
- Management of sportsmen, alleviating phone calls and other disruptions to landowners (access maps, hunter instruction on ranch rules, etc.).

Program Successes

The Access Yes Program assists landowners through management of hunters and anglers, providing sportsmen 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 2018, the Access Yes Program experienced many successes, including, but not limited to:

- Providing access to 2,670,173 acres (1,693,921 acres of enrolled private and state lands, and 976,252 of public lands) for hunting within the boundaries of the WIHA and Hunter Management Area (HMA) programs. This included land in every county within Wyoming.
- Providing additional access to 178,448 acres of public lands located outside the boundaries of the WIHA and HMA, which would not have been accessible without the Access Yes program.
- Providing fishing access to 4,006 lake acres and 86 stream miles through the Walk-in Fishing Area (WIFA) program.
- Continued to work with the Department IT personnel to ensure the online permission slip process continues to be user friendly for sportsmen and problems associated with obtaining permission slips for the HMAs and the National Elk Refuge (NER) are reduced.
- An additional Cheyenne Game Warden whose duties include assisting the Laramie Region Access Coordinator with the Access Yes Program.
- Issued 27,655 online permission slips to 16,077 individual hunters for access to the HMA program and the NER.
- 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 maintenance and enhancement of hunting and fishing traditions.
- Responded to 110 e-mails received through the Access Yes program website regarding hunting, fishing, or the Access Yes Program. The majority of these e-mails (90%) were responded to within one day of receipt.
- Successfully implemented the third year of the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) grant. The Department was awarded \$1,198,122 over three years to be used for contract personnel time, supplies, promotion of the Access Yes program, Access Yes easements, and long-term easements.
- Hunters surveyed during the 2017 hunting season for harvest results indicated 22% of antelope hunters (24% nonresident, 19% resident), 17% of deer hunters (16% nonresident, 17% resident), and 14% of elk hunters (11% nonresident, 15% resident) used either a WIHA or HMA to hunt on. This would equate to an estimated 10,875 antelope, 10,433 deer, and 8,935 elk hunters having hunted either a WIHA or HMA.

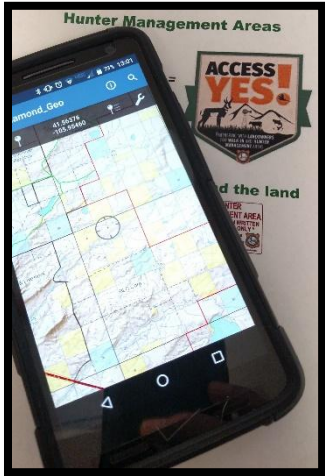
- Increased hunting access translates into improved wildlife population management and decreased agricultural damage through harvest.
- Began the Access Yes Patrol Enhancement (AYPE) plan. Regional Access Coordinators provided patrol assistance to each other during busy times on Access Yes areas.
- Increased license sales in hunt areas with difficult public access.
- A 12% funding increase in FY18.
- Hunters surveyed during the 2017 hunting season who indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied with the opportunity provided through the WIHA or HMA programs were 86% for antelope, 77% for deer, and 74% for elk. This is a 3% increase for antelope, while satisfaction for deer and elk stayed the same from 2016.



Hunting and Fishing Access Programs

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

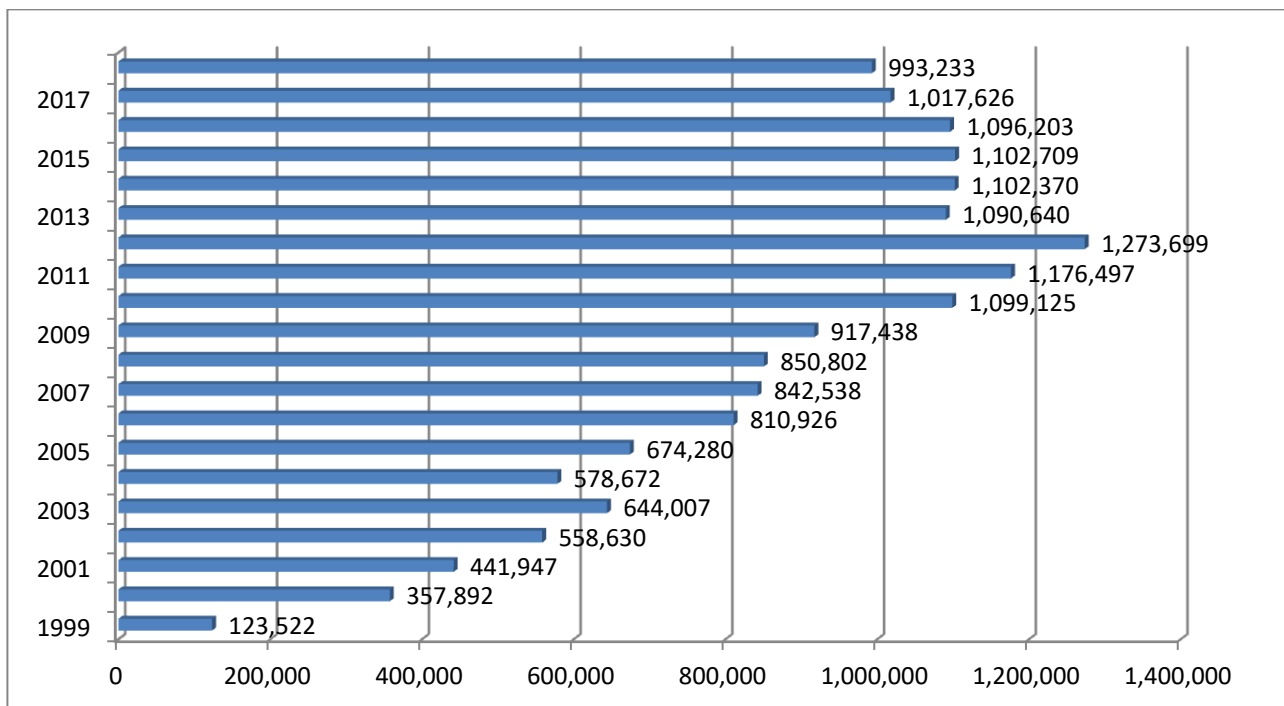
Hunter Management Areas



Hunter Management Areas are access areas where each hunter must first obtain a permission slip from the Department prior to hunting. These areas are generally larger than WIAs, and usually have some level of vehicle access. Permission slips are issued through the Department’s website, and this method has proven to be a fair and popular way to distribute hunter access. 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 2018, there were 56 HMAs with 145 participating landowners encompassing 993,233 enrolled acres for hunting primarily big game species, but also included small game and upland game birds (Figure 1). This is a decrease of 24,393 acres from 2017 due to the

removal of the DeSmet HMA and the loss of some acreage and landowners in the Laramie River, Medicine Butte, Rattlesnake and Shirley Basin HMAs. In 2018, Access Yes added the Junction HMA and added acreage in the Lower Sweetwater River HMA and Muddy Mountain HMA.

Figure 1. Hunter Management Area Acres by Year

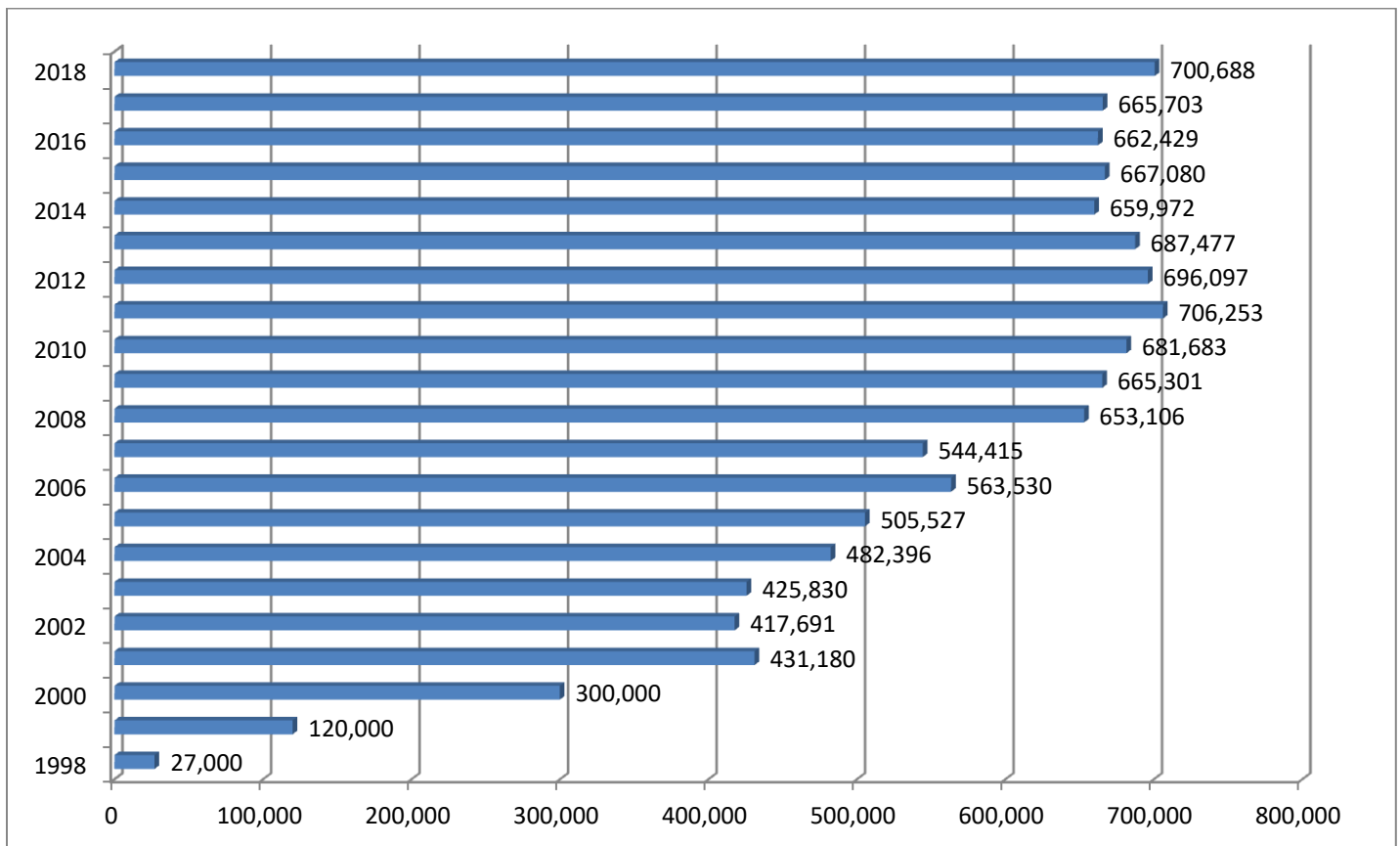


Walk-in Hunting Areas

Walk-in Hunting Areas are parcels of land open to anyone who has a valid hunting license; 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. Walk-in Hunting Areas are similar to HMAs in that landowners determine which species can be hunted and when access will be granted. For 2018, the Access Yes Program enrolled 700,688 private and state acres involving 479 landowners (Figure 2). This is an increase of 34,985 acres from 2017 due to the acquisition of some properties, and changes in enrolled boundaries. Walk-in Hunting Areas provide incredible opportunities throughout the entire state for a wide variety of game species, making it possible for hunters to enjoy free hunting access close to their home.



Figure 2. Walk-in Hunting Area Acres by Year

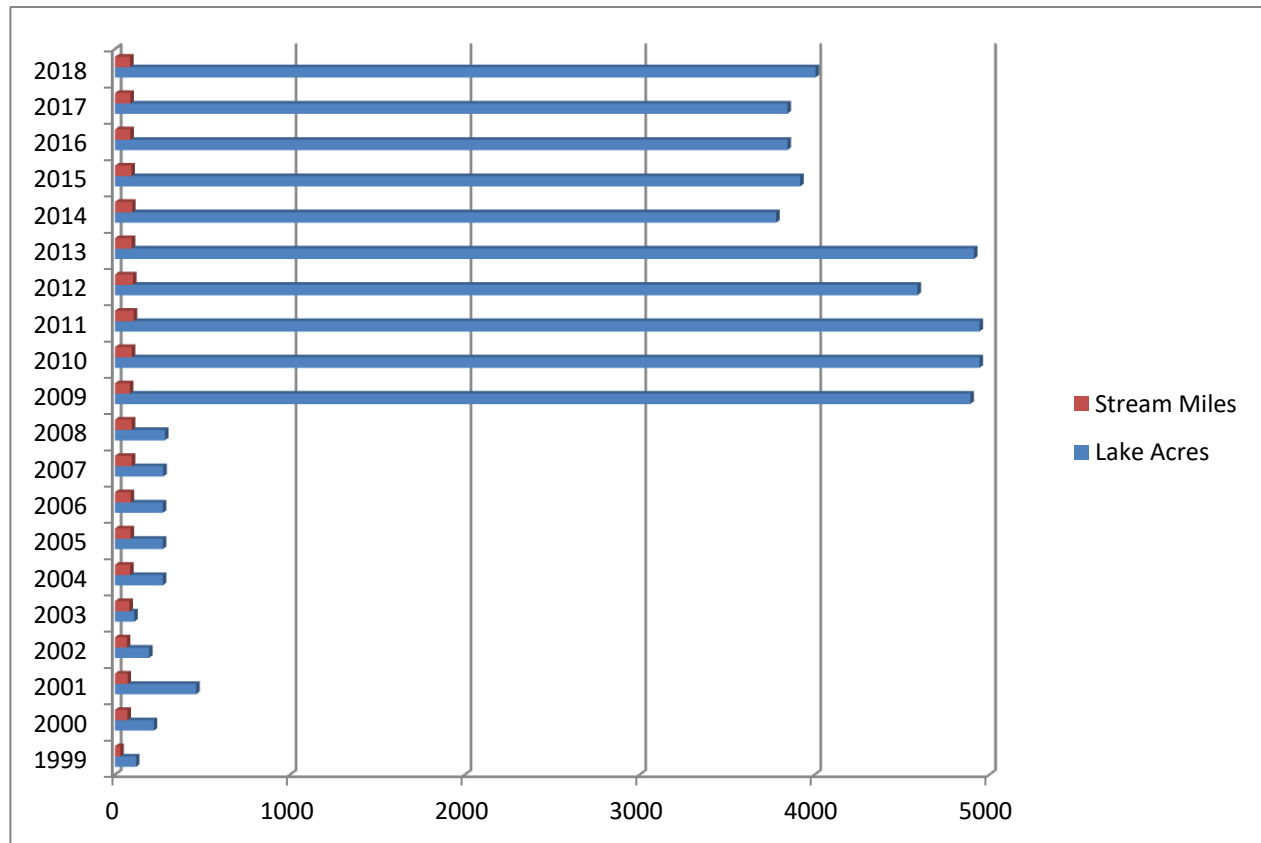




Walk-in Fishing Areas

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. Walk-in Fishing Areas 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 2018, 4,006 lake acres and 86 stream miles were available for anglers, thanks to the 68 landowners enrolled in the WIFA program (Figure 3).

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

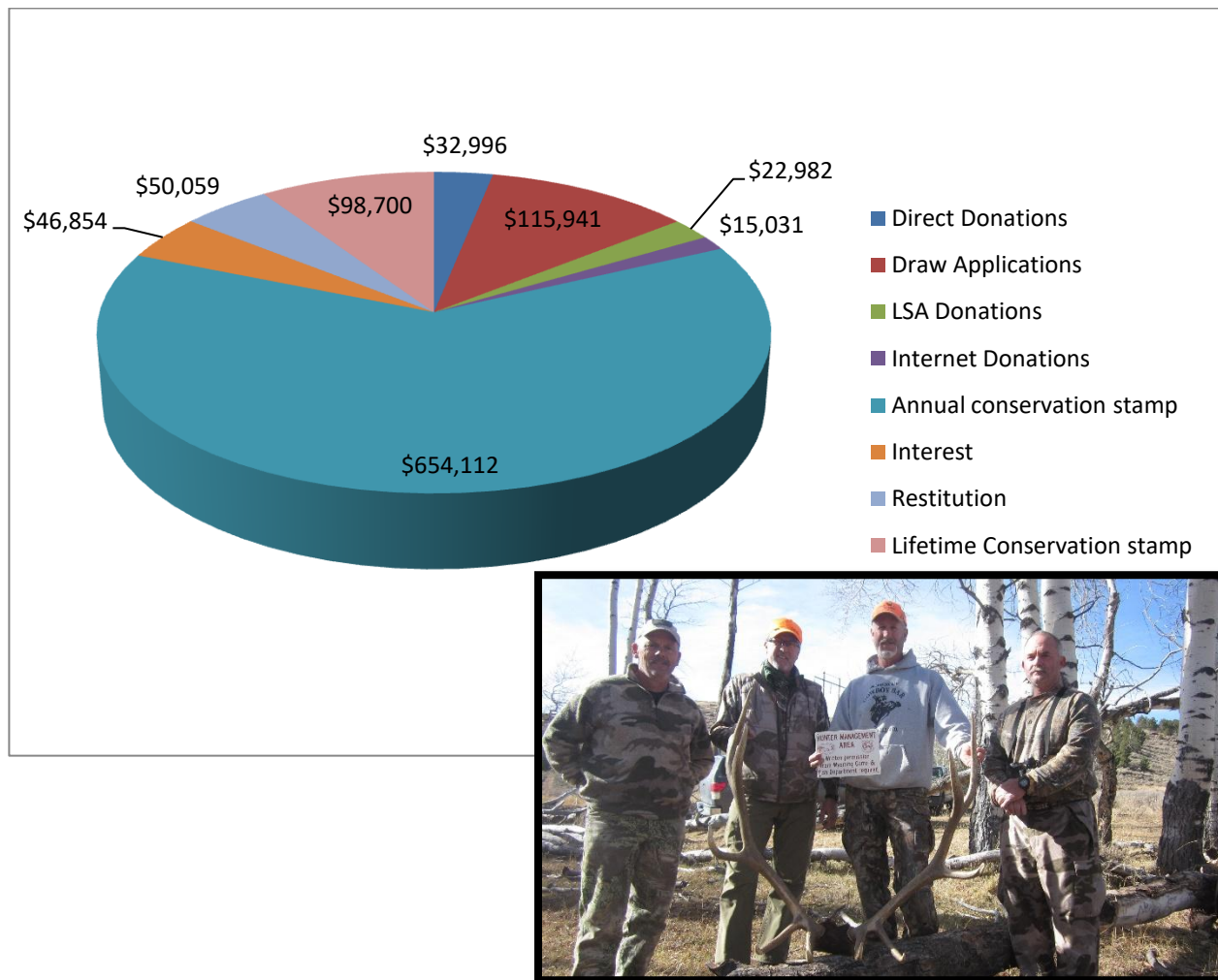


Program Funding

The Access Yes Program is funded by Department and Access Yes Program funds. Department funds, primarily from license sales, fund the daily operations including personnel. Revenue for the Access Yes Program 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 \$1,036,675 in 2018 (Figure 4). Except for a few exemptions, every hunter and angler must purchase an annual conservation stamp, unless a lifetime conservation stamp has been purchased previously. A portion of the sale of these stamps is deposited into the Access Yes account (\$2.50 per annual stamp and half of each lifetime stamp). These two sources generate the majority of the funds each year, and in Fiscal Year 2018, they generated \$752,812.

Easement payments made to landowners are funded through the Access Yes Program. Authorized by state statute, funds collected through the Access Yes Program may only be utilized for acquiring easements with landowners. In 2018, the Access Yes program paid \$918,742 to landowners for hunting and fishing access. Every dollar spent provided approximately 3.1 acres of access.

Figure 4. Access Yes Funds Received Totaling \$1,036,675 in Fiscal Year 2018



Donations to Access Yes provide another valuable source of funds. During Fiscal Year 2018, direct donations from conservation groups and organizations totaled \$30,074 indicating the importance these groups place on access. These organizations include: Fremont Beverages, National Wild Turkey Federation, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Pheasants Forever Inc., Cheyenne Field Archers, Bowhunters of Wyoming, Wyoming Ducks Unlimited, Wyoming Outdoor Council and Sweetwater Ranches Conservancy. Additional donations totaling \$2,922 were made by individual hunters at Department regional offices. Direct donations increased from Fiscal Year 2017 by \$4,366. These direct donations vary year-to-year based on changes in large donations from individual conservation groups. Hunters and anglers can also make donations to Access Yes when applying for or purchasing licenses; either in person at a license selling agent, or through the internet. These sportsmen contributed a total of \$153,954 in Fiscal Year 2018, a 3% decrease from 2017 donations. Overall, during Fiscal Year 2018, the Access Yes Program received \$1,036,675, an increase of \$123,309 (12%) from 2017 (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	License Draw Donations F06 6245 4R20	Internet 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
FY 2018	1,036,675	32,996	22,982	115,941	15,031	50,059	98,700	654,112	46,854
FY 2017	913,366	28,630	25,023	112,586	19,504	64,379	76,983	545,267	40,994
FY 2016	897,877	35,025	20,396	103,786	15,174	67,311	77,705	541,337	37,143
FY 2015	895,524	19,909	19,990	101,951	15,163	79,701	72,110	542,534	44,166
FY 2014	960,314	76,570	25,705	92,402	15,280	109,955	71,207	534,508	34,687
FY 2013	908,837	37,827	23,347	88,058	14,426	58,135	82,308	530,694	74,042
FY 2012	924,801	16,675	22,232	97,032	12,244	82,578	53,789	589,691	50,560
FY 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
	\$ 14,430,729	\$ 441,187	\$ 449,725	\$ 1,756,326	\$ 128,668	\$ 1,183,028	\$ 951,499	\$ 8,743,749	\$ 776,547

* 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 50% of the donations were from nonresidents and 50% from residents.

VPA-HIP Grant

In 2018, the Department implemented the third year of a three-year Voluntary Public Access & Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) grant from the National Resource Conservation Service. The VPA-HIP grant benefits the Access Yes Program by providing funding for hiring additional contract personnel, leasing of vehicles, signing supplies, commercial printing, program advertising, and easement payments. The Department hired five contract personnel positions for a six-month period (mid-May through mid-November). Access technicians signed 2.43 million acres on HMAs, 461,213 acres of WIHAs, 276 lake acres of WIFAs, and 33 stream miles of WIFAs. As the access technicians transitioned from signing access areas in the summer to assisting sportsmen in the fall, they contacted 2,789 sportsmen and 200 landowners. These contacts with sportsmen and landowners enhanced the Department's relationship with sportsmen and landowners, all while highlighting the Access Yes Program.

The VPA-HIP grant provided funding for advertising and marketing of the Access Yes Program. The marketing and advertising efforts were focused on continuing the Department's message out to constituents about the "rebranding" of the Access Yes Program. These funds assisted with purchasing magazine ads and promotional products: sticky calendars, vests, hats, etc. Social media and placing paid ads in local newspapers were used to thank participating landowners.

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The National Elk Refuge

The Access Yes Program has been administering permission slips for elk hunting on the NER since 2008 and added wild bison hunting access opportunity in 2014. 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 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 for wild bison 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. During the 2018 hunt on the NER, there were 216 permission slips issued for bison and 1,288 permission slips issued for elk.

Additional Access Yes Programs and Services

The Access Yes Program continues to modify its programs to benefit landowners, hunters, anglers and the Department. For example, one ongoing service is the Hunter/Landowner Assistance Program that matches landowners who desire additional harvest with hunters looking for a place to hunt. This program was developed as an avenue to assist landowners who wanted increased harvest of big game animals on their private property without having to enroll in one of the existing access programs. The program operates by posting landowner contact information on the Department's website where hunters can contact them directly to secure their own access. Landowners do not receive any compensation from the Department, and all details pertaining to access to their property is arranged between the landowner and the hunter. Once a landowner obtains the desired harvest, their information is removed from the website. Landowners are added and removed throughout the hunting seasons. For 2018, there were 44 landowners allowing access for antelope hunting, 49 allowing access for deer hunting, nine allowing access for elk hunting, two allowing access for turkey hunting, and three allowing access for sandhill crane hunting. Participation in the program was slightly higher in 2018 than in 2017, and this program has been very successful in assisting landowners while 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 needed harvest.

Recognition of landowners who provide access is an important aspect of maintaining sportsman/landowner relationships. The Access Yes Program coordinators participate as facilitators in the Access Recognition Program. This program, a joint program of the Wyoming Board of Agriculture (Board), the Commission, and Wyoming Wildlife – The Foundation, recognizes landowners who provide access to or through their property to hunters and anglers. The state is divided into four quadrants, and the regional access coordinators facilitate this 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 is recognized at the annual Wyoming Stock Growers Association winter meeting. The recipients each receive a plaque and a check for \$2,000. Funding for the program is provided by Commissioner donated licenses. The four recipients of the 2018 Access Recognition Program award were: Zimmershied Ranch of Moorcroft, Hovendick Ranch of Lander, EJ Medicine Bow Ranch of Wheatland, and McAllister Ranch of Dixon.

Elk herds that exceed Commission population objectives are a major concern for landowners and the Department, and getting these populations towards objective are a high priority for the Department. The Department's main method to decrease an elk population is hunting, but elk hunting access on private lands remains limited in many areas of the state. To address over objective elk populations and private landowner

access concerns, the Department, in 2010, initiated a new program called the Hunter Management and Access Program (HMAP). The HMAP was designed to increase antlerless elk harvest at specific locations by coordinating with landowners to allow controlled and monitored hunting access. The Department hires a Hunt Management Coordinator (HMC) to facilitate hunting by directing, monitoring and assisting small groups of hunters as they elk hunt.

During the 2018 hunting season, the Laramie Peak HMAP continued for the sixth year in Elk Hunt Area 7. Although the HMAP was scaled back from previous years, the HMC position continued to focus their efforts on HMAs and WIHAs in and around the Laramie Peak HMAP properties. With no specific "Laramie Peak HMAP" property or special permission slip requirements and having the HMC being rolled into a damage technician position, the HMC worked on and around the existing Pinto Creek, Menter Knob, McFarlane HMAs, the Mule Creek Public Access Area, and Albany County WIHAs #2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, and 12. Heavy snow accumulations and severely drifted roads in the area during the 2018 season reduced hunter success for the latter portion of the season, however personnel working in the area have documented more than 60 antlerless elk harvests in the focus area through the end of December.



In addition, during the 2018 hunting season, a second HMAP continued in the Black Hills in Elk Hunt Area 117 and Deer Hunt Area 1. The HMC concentrated on property north of Newcastle for elk and near Devils Tower for deer. Elk were harvested from August through January. During the month of November, the HMC focused on harvesting doe white-tailed deer and was able to gain access on private lands, communicate with landowners, coordinate hunts, and guide hunters. During the 2018 deer season, HMAP hunters took 80 antlerless white-tailed deer. During the elk season, HMAP hunters took 64 antlerless elk and family and friends harvested an additional 8 elk on the adjacent landowner's property.

The HMC was charged with locating and monitoring elk herds, and communicating and coordinating with landowners in order to assist hunters in successfully harvesting elk. The HMC collected CWD samples and extracted teeth for aging from harvested animals. Aside from increased elk and deer harvest, other benefits include: 1) Hunters were very appreciative of this hunting opportunity and exhibited good hunting ethics; 2) The HMAP provided great opportunity for new hunters (youth and adults) to harvest their first elk and deer; 3) Hunters did not contact the landowners for permission to hunt which allowed landowners to complete ranch work without worrying about hunters on their property; 4) Increased interaction between Department personnel and landowners improved relationships; and 5) Increased chronic wasting disease sampling. A final report, for these two 2018 HMAPs, will be available in late March 2019.

Challenges Facing the Access Yes Program

As land ownerships continues to change and the Access Yes Program continues to expand, one big challenge it continues to face is limited personnel. Maintaining or increasing access areas while maintaining positive landowner relationships is difficult with limited personnel dedicated toward this effort. In 2018, the Access Yes program added an additional game warden in the Cheyenne area whose job duties include assisting the Laramie Region Access Coordinator. This new position came with many responsibilities and demands which resulted in a minimal assistance to the Access Yes Program. Having another designated Access Yes Coordinator would be ideal. Additionally, with long hunting seasons and overlap of season dates between species, providing Department presence, due to limited personnel, on the enrolled Access Yes properties is very difficult. Through the Access Yes Patrol Enhancement efforts, we hope to address this issue into the future. Seasonal contract technicians hired during the summer, and extended into the fall through the VPA-HIP grant; provide much needed assistance to regional access coordinators with sign maintenance and landowner/hunter/angler contacts. However, with the VPA-HIP grant being in the last year of its implementation, finding additional help will once again be a challenge.



With expanding workloads, regional access coordinators have difficulties in adequately maintaining signs and having a presence on enrolled properties. To continue healthy department/landowner relations, signing and patrolling assistance from regional personnel (game wardens/biologists) is necessary. Through our successes, and through more involvement from regional personnel, we hope to overcome this challenge.

In 2015, the Access Yes program increased payments to landowners enrolled in the program. The last increase before that was in 2005. In order to continue to benefit landowners and seek out new opportunities, another pay increase will need to happen in the future. The Access Yes program has seen an uptick in donations the last few years due to the increase in conservation stamp sales and donations from conservation groups and organizations. This increase in funds is a great benefit, but does not give us the flexibility without losing access areas to increase payments to landowners who are enrolled in the program. With license fee increases and additional license sales fees, donations could see a decrease in 2019 and in the future.

Wyoming, like so many other western states, has experienced some transition from traditional landowners to those who purchase property for their own hunting pleasure or non-consumptive uses. This typically correlates to a decrease in the amount of access hunters and anglers enjoy. Additionally, many traditional landowners charge a trespass fee or lease the hunting rights to their property as a means to supplement their income. The result is fewer people hunting and fishing private lands, which impacts wildlife management, agricultural damage, hunter success and license sales. Additionally, increased and expanded development (i.e. natural resources and subdivisions) has affected hunter access and in turn, created some wildlife management issues. This is a concern for the Department and something our access programs aim to mitigate by continuing to look for ways to partner with landowners for access.

