

Wyoming Game & Fish Department



2016

Annual Law Enforcement Report

TABLE OF CONTENTS



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Message from the Chief.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Law Enforcement Organizational Chart	5
Statewide Region & Warden District Boundaries	6
Regional Law Enforcement Highlights	
Jackson	7
Cody	11
Sheridan.....	16
Green River	22
Laramie	25
Lander	30
Casper.....	33
Pinedale	37
Wildlife Investigative Unit.....	40
Large Carnivore Section.....	44
Watercraft Safety Program	45
State Land Enforcement.....	47
Regional Law Enforcement Statistics	
Jackson	48
Cody.....	48
Sheridan.....	49
Green River	49
Laramie	50
Lander.....	50
Casper.....	51
Pinedale	51
Wildlife Investigative Unit Law Enforcement	
Statistics.....	52
Administration Law Enforcement Statistics	52
Statewide Law Enforcement Statistics	53
Wildlife Forensics Lab	55
Game Warden Applicant Testing	55
Game Warden Training	56
Equipment and Technology	58
Stop Poaching Program.....	59
Wyoming Wildlife Protectors Association.....	59
Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact.....	60
New Legislation Affecting Law Enforcement	60
Awards & Recognition	61
Retirements	61
Promotions	61
Honoring the Fallen	62

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Wyoming is truly like no other place on earth - the wildlife, the history, the people, the wildness - and it's citizens have clearly expressed their high expectations for the protection of our state's wildlife and the fair enforcement of Wyoming's wildlife and boating laws. This report reflects the priority Game and Fish places on wildlife law enforcement in response to the public's expectations. In 2016, the Department invested significant manpower and resources protecting our exceptional wildlife resources and ensuring public safety. The Department's 82 law enforcement officers initiated over 4,300 enforcement actions including dozens of investigations related to serious crimes perpetrated against wildlife and Wyoming's citizens.



It is important to recognize this tremendous effort requires a large and dedicated team. Game and Fish receives outstanding support and case-breaking help from the public. Many of the most significant wildlife crime investigations begin with a tip from a concerned sportsperson or an observant recreationist. Suffice it to say, the achievements documented in this report would not be possible without these individuals.

While this report depicts important statistics and accomplishments related to actions led by game wardens and wildlife investigators, other Department employees work behind the scenes to contribute in a big way to our law enforcement program. Take the time to look at the wildlife forensic lab on page 55. They performed over 11,000 analytical tests in 2016 and are a critical component to the Department's law enforcement program. Regional office managers serve as the first contact many sportsmen and women have when they visit one of our offices. They provide much of the information hunters, anglers and boaters need so they can remain compliant with the law. Office managers often field stop poaching reports and other reported violations and disseminate information to field officers. Game and Fish biologists spend a significant amount of time checking licenses in the field, providing helpful information to hunters and anglers and oftentimes assist law enforcement officers with task forces and other enforcement activities. Our Information and Education Specialists use their talents to pro-actively ensure compliance with Game and Fish regulations by targeting specific times of the year with educational messages through the media and other events.

While the citizens of our state and the dedicated employees of the Department are on the front lines protecting our resources, current and past Legislatures and Governors have demonstrated their commitment to wildlife values through the enactment of strong wildlife laws. The enactment of the "winter range statute" in the mid-90s and the addition of felony provisions for the most egregious wildlife violations in 2011 are noteworthy legislative accomplishments that have significantly contributed to holding those who intentionally violate wildlife laws accountable for their actions. Prosecutors and judges around the state do an exceptional job handling wildlife cases in a fair manner in alignment with statutes and regulations promulgated by the Legislature and Commission. Wyoming's elected officials have bolstered the abilities of the Department and the Commission by passing strong laws and following those laws to adjudicate wildlife crimes.

In conclusion, I hope you find this report informative and helpful in understanding the efforts of our Department and Commission to protect Wyoming's wildlife, provide public safety and ensure fair chase. We will continue our commitment to protect Wyoming's wildlife – our public and wildlife deserve no less.

Regards,

Brian R. Nesvik
Chief Game Warden



INTRODUCTION

Each year, Wyoming Game and Fish Department (Department) law enforcement officers dedicate thousands of hours, hundreds of thousands of vehicle miles (patrol vehicles, ATVs and snow machines), thousands of watercraft hours and hundreds of horseback days patrolling Wyoming's vast landscapes to enforce the state's hunting, fishing, boating and general wildlife laws. Officers investigate reported and unreported wildlife crimes and work through the court system to ensure the successful prosecution of violators. The overall goal of these law enforcement efforts is the conservation and protection of Wyoming's wildlife resources.

The following report is a compilation of Department law enforcement efforts and highlights for calendar year 2016. Included in this report is an organizational chart of law enforcement personnel, regional summaries, law enforcement statistics, new legislation affecting our law enforcement program, new game warden testing/hiring results, game warden training, our Stop Poaching Program, Wildlife Investigative Unit efforts and other aspects of the Department's law enforcement program.



Warden Dave Hays with a successful sage grouse hunter.

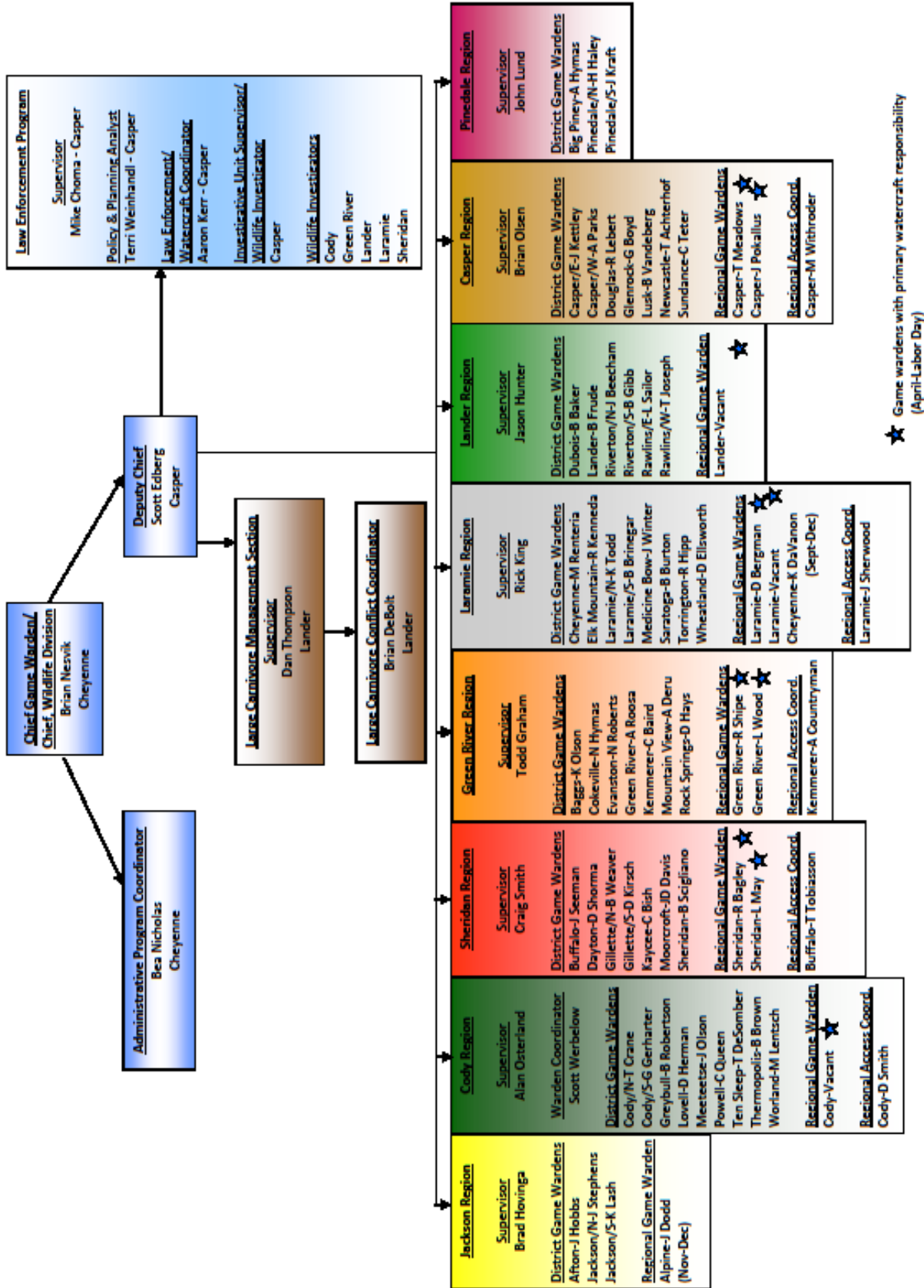


Warden Adam Parks on horseback patrol (above). Warden Justin Dodd visits with a young girl on her first fishing trip (right).



2016 LAW ENFORCEMENT ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

As of December 31, 2016



REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Jackson Region

Work Unit Overview

The Jackson Region has five law enforcement officers, including three district game wardens, one regional game warden stationed in Alpine and one regional wildlife supervisor. The Jackson Region is located south of Yellowstone National Park and wardens patrol the Jackson Hole Valley, Gros Ventre Range and Star Valley, along with the Hoback and Greys River drainages. The district game wardens cover the North Jackson, South Jackson and Afton game warden districts.

2016 Law Enforcement Efforts

Jackson Region law enforcement officers documented 244 violations within the region in 2016. Officers issued 89 citations, 151 written warnings and investigated 4 cases in which a suspect was never developed. Although the Jackson Region is a relatively small region, the game wardens in the

region are extremely busy from a law enforcement perspective. In addition to fall hunting seasons, fishing enforcement, bear baiting and dealing with winter range/antler collection violations, game wardens respond to a wide range of calls for service from a very diverse public.



Warden Kyle Lash checks anglers on the Snake River.

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

During mid and late June, game wardens from the North and South Jackson game warden districts, along with wardens from other parts of the state, packed into the Thorofare area on horseback to monitor and investigate reports of large over-limits of cutthroat trout being taken by fishermen. A similar effort in 2015 did not detect any significant illegal take of cutthroat trout. The investigatory patrols again revealed that no major fishing violations were taking place and compliance with fishing regulations was good among anglers. These enforcement efforts have elicited a positive response from local outfitters that enjoyed seeing the extra enforcement presence in this remote area.



Warden Jon Stephens patrols the Teton Wilderness

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Trapping continues to be a sensitive issue with some members of the public in the Jackson Region. Wardens spent time working trapping enforcement and responding to public concerns when traps were encountered along major recreational trails on the Bridger-Teton National Forest.



Warden Kyle Lash checks a big game hunter.

The addition of a regional game warden in Alpine during November has been extremely valuable in workload relief for district game wardens. Having that position in Alpine increases enforcement presence in the region and allows district game wardens to diversify work tasks. The position also provides a significant benefit to district game wardens in dealing with wildlife damage issues.

The Grand Teton National Park elk reduction program and the elk/bison season on the National Elk Refuge continue to be a considerable workload for law enforcement personnel in the region. This year, harvest was higher than 2015 due to the early onset of severe winter weather conditions in December, causing the early arrival of elk and bison on the park and refuge. Elk harvest was high in December and bison harvest was significantly higher and earlier than in past years. The region implemented an emergency closure to the bison season in order to accommodate the initiation of elk feeding on the refuge.

Game wardens invested a significant effort in the enforcement of the collection of shed antler and horns regulation. With their increased patrol efforts and cooperation from the public, game wardens were extremely successful in catching violators of this regulation and local winter range closures.

Compliance with the regulations requiring Elk Special Management Permits to hunt certain hunt areas continued to be poor. These permits are required to hunt elk in areas with feedgrounds with money generated from these permits going to the feedground program. Many hunters contacted by wardens in the field did not have these permits while elk hunting. Wardens sold several of the permits in the field and documented violations with written warnings or citations.

Decoy Operations

In October, Jackson Region game wardens initiated two separate decoy operations during the deer season on the west side of the Teton Range to deal with reports of illegal hunting by Idaho residents. It has long been suspected that Idaho residents were frequently hunting isolated areas in Wyoming without Wyoming licenses. During the two operations, 10 vehicles passed by decoys that had been placed to apprehend violators. Of those vehicles, one vehicle stopped to observe the decoy and one individual shot at the decoy. The shooter was issued a citation for hunting deer in Wyoming.



Wardens set up a mule deer decoy to target potential violators.

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

without a valid hunting license. Warnings were issued for violations of shooting from the road and no fluorescent orange clothing. The decoy operations received considerable positive press in the local newspaper and on Idaho television news.

Task Forces

The Jackson Region conducted its annual Antler Rendezvous task force in Alpine from May 14 – 21. This effort is designed to monitor the sale and transfer of antlers, heads, taxidermy mounts and other wildlife parts during the annual Antler Rendezvous. This is an excellent opportunity to work closely with participating antler dealers/vendors while issuing interstate game tags (IGT) for antlers/horns on skull plates prior to and during the week-long event. A modest number of minor violations centering on IGT requirements were documented during the rendezvous. No major violations were detected. Game wardens also worked the National Elk Refuge antler sale on the Jackson Town Square held May 21, immediately following the Alpine Antler Rendezvous. This annual effort provides game wardens an opportunity to handle IGT violations that arise at the auction and is an excellent public relations opportunity for the Department.



Wardens Todd Graham and Jordan Winter talk to sellers at the Alpine Antler Rendezvous.



Warden James Hobbs with an interstate game tagged non-typical mule deer skull.

Notable Cases

Waste of Elk and License Transfer: On the morning of October 3, Game Warden Jon Stephens received a call in regards to the partial wasting of an elk on Gunsight Pass in Teton County. Later in the day, Warden Stephens contacted the suspect and another hunter as they were returning to their vehicle from elk hunting. Both were wearing orange and carrying rifles. When asked for their licenses both individuals presented valid nonresident general elk licenses and associated stamps. He left the hunters and proceeded to their camp, where he checked two bull elk taken by other members of the hunting party. Warden Stephens began asking questions about any other elk taken and was informed a third bull elk had been taken but it had already left the state. When asked about details of this third bull elk, the hunters in camp claimed that it had been killed by a relative of the suspect before they arrived. When the suspect got back to camp, Warden Stephens questioned him about the third bull and told him about the reported violation. The suspect stated his brother-in-law shot a bull elk on September 29. The suspect explained he was with his brother-in-law at the time of harvest and helped him break down the elk and pack it back to camp. The suspect admitted they left the front shoulders because they were too exhausted to return that

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

evening or the following day. Upon further questioning, the suspect confessed that he actually was the one who shot the bull elk in question, not his brother-in-law. The suspect explained that his brother-in-law was heading back home to Minnesota early, so he talked his brother-in-law into tagging the elk so that he (the suspect) could stay and continue hunting. Warden Stephens reviewed many of Wyoming's game laws with the suspect, seized his elk license and issued him citations for accessory to the transfer of a big game license, waste of a big game animal and attempt to take an over-limit of big game. On October 4, Warden Stephens contacted the suspect's brother-in-law via cell phone and questioned him about the hunt. The brother-in-law provided the same account as the suspect. Warden Stephens explained to the man that party hunting is not permitted in Wyoming and issued him a written warning for the transfer of a big game license.



Bullet recovered as evidence from a wasted elk carcass.

False Identity: On July 15, Game Warden Kyle Lash was on horseback patrolling for anglers on the



Warden Kyle Lash on backcountry patrol.

west side of the Tetons when he observed an individual fly fishing Green Lake. He approached the individual and explained that he was a Wyoming game warden and asked to check a fishing license. The individual claimed he bought a three day fishing license for Idaho but left it in his vehicle at the trail head about six miles away. Warden Lash explained to the man he was fishing into Wyoming by eight miles and that he needed to have a Wyoming fishing license in order to be legal. At this point the suspect apologized and Warden Lash explained a citation would be issued for fishing without a license. The suspect appeared to be very cooperative, explaining he left all his contact information back at his vehicle. Without radio or cell phone service for the area, Warden Lash had the suspect verbally give his contact information. The suspect stated his name, address, date of birth and phone number. His information was entered onto the citation and Warden Lash asked if all the information appeared correct. The suspect claimed it did and signed his citation for fishing without a license. Warden Lash left the violator and continued to check the other lakes in the area for additional anglers. When Warden Lash got back into radio and cell service, he called dispatch to check the information given by the suspect to obtain the proper driver's license number. Upon searching the suspect's name and date of birth, dispatch couldn't find any returns. It was at this

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

point Warden Lash realized the suspect gave false contact information. Warden Lash did several hours of searching Google and Facebook, and worked closely with an Idaho game warden to figure out who this individual was. Warden Lash found the suspect's Facebook profile, where he recognized the man's picture and noticed his cell phone was only off by the last digit. Warden Lash contacted the suspect, who confessed over the phone and agreed to drive to Jackson in order to resolve the situation. He was charged with fishing without a valid fishing license and interference with the lawful duties of a peace officer. He was found guilty of fishing without a license and fined \$220. The interference charge was dismissed by the prosecution.



Warden Jordan Winter checks a successful ice fisherman.

Cody Region

Work Unit Overview

The Cody Region consists of 12 law enforcement officers, including nine district game wardens, one access coordinator, one game warden coordinator and one regional wildlife supervisor. The Cody Region is located in northwest Wyoming and wardens patrol from the Montana state line south to Boysen Reservoir and from Yellowstone National Park east to the west slope of the Bighorn Mountains. The region includes the North Cody, South Cody, Powell, Lovell, Meeteetse, Greybull, Tensleep, Thermopolis and Worland game warden districts.



Warden Matt Lentsch recovers a bullet from a carcass as evidence during an investigation.

2016 Law Enforcement Efforts

Cody Region law enforcement officers documented 383 violations within the region in 2016. Officers issued 162 citations, 202 written warnings and investigated 19 cases in which a suspect was never developed. Wardens spent the majority of their time patrolling their districts and assisting neighboring wardens with locating possible suspects and executing several search/arrest warrants. Several Cody Region wardens ended up closing major cases that have been under investigation and in court proceedings for over a year. The Cody wildlife investigator has been involved in several high priority cases and has been instrumental in assisting Cody Region wardens with larger cases that involve search/arrest warrants. One of these cases involved a Wisconsin man outfitting illegally in Wyoming and Colorado. After a multi-agency investigation spanning several years, the man was charged with several counts of outfitting without a license. He was sentenced to \$7,400 in fines and restitution and had his hunting privileges suspended for three years.

The North Fork Shoshone River and Buffalo Bill Reservoir continue to be a very popular fishery. The North and South Cody wardens continue to spend a great deal of time patrolling these waters. The Bighorn River near Thermopolis has seen an

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Game Warden Coordinator Scott Werbelow with deer antlers seized as evidence during a search warrant.

increase in the number of fly fishermen floating and fishing this blue ribbon stretch of river over the past several years. Upper and Lower Sunshine reservoirs west of Meeteetse continue to be very popular fishing spots for both summer and ice fishermen.

The Cody Region continues to deal with late cow elk hunting seasons. Most of these seasons closed December 21, but two hunt areas remained open until January 15. These late cow seasons are needed to obtain suitable harvest in areas where elk populations are over objective and hunter access is limited due to large numbers of elk congregating on private properties that allow no public access. In these late season hunts, wardens typically experience trespassing calls, over-limits of elk, and shooting wrong sex of elk violations. A number of yearling bulls are harvested on cow tags each year during these late hunts. These mistakes often occur when hunters shoot long distances into large groups of elk.

The Cody Region has a great deal of rugged back country to patrol, which is home to both trophy and big game animals. Wardens spend a great deal of time each fall patrolling these areas with horses and pack animals. This work can be very rewarding for

wardens but can also be very dangerous if not properly prepared for the many situations that can arise. These include the potential for bad weather, grizzly bear encounters, downed trees across trails, horse wrecks and other hazards.

Notable Cases

Greybull Wanton Destruction: A case was adjudicated on March 8 in the prosecution of two juveniles from Big Horn County for the wanton destruction of five antelope and three sage grouse. The two juveniles killed the animals at night with the use of several rifles and a spotlight on private property north of Shell in October 2014. This surprisingly occurred after both of the juveniles were warned by Greybull Game Warden Bill Robertson for spotlighting without permission two days prior. Both were cited into juvenile court for the wanton destruction charges. Warden Robertson and Game Warden James Hobbs interviewed the suspects and conducted the field investigation. Ballistic and blood evidence was used to place the individuals at the scene. The 17 year old male admitted to one charge of using artificial light to take big game animals and two counts of wanton destruction of big game animals. He was sentenced to pay \$3,000 in restitution to the State of Wyoming, ordered to retake a hunter safety course, ordered to provide 100 hours of community service and lost his hunting privileges for two years. The second defendant, a 14



Antelope shot and then run over by suspects in wanton destruction case near Greybull.

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Blood on the vehicle's undercarriage linked the suspects to the crime scene.

year old male, admitted to one count of using artificial light to take big game animals, four counts of wanton destruction of big game animals, one count of taking game birds out of season and one count of wasting edible portions of a game bird. The juvenile was sentenced to pay \$12,300 in restitution to the State of Wyoming but due to his inability to pay, he was ordered to pay off \$1,200 in restitution under a community work service agreement. In addition, he was placed under the supervision of a multidisciplinary team for one year, lost all hunting privileges until discharged from the court and was ordered to retake a hunter safety course. The court ordered the forfeiture of a .25-06 rifle and the spotlight used in the incident to the Department. The court also ordered the juvenile's parents to pay \$2,000 in restitution for the loss of the animals to the State.

Over-limit of Elk: Locally known as the “Black Friday Event” (due to it occurring on the day after Thanksgiving) the investigation and prosecution of individuals who illegally took nine elk in Elk Hunt

Area 41 came to a close in June. On November 29, 2015 Greybull Game Warden Bill Robertson received information from hunters who observed several dead elk near Spiney Point. An investigation at the scene confirmed that six elk had been shot and left in the field. Very little evidence was recovered except for some .270 caliber bullets recovered from some of the carcasses. Harvest information of elk taken in that area collected and registered by a Department brucellosis technician on November 28, 2015 offered a list of possible suspects.

On December 1, 2015 a statewide news release describing the incident was published requesting information about the poaching violation. Three days later, Warden Robertson received information about an individual who had participated in the event. The report stated that a young man from Glenrock had been “talking all about it” at a Greybull tavern late in the evening of November 27, 2015. On December 6, Moorcroft Game Warden J.D. Davis was contacted by a woman representing a family group from Moorcroft and Sundance who wanted to confess to the incident. Warden



Spike elk shot and left by suspects in the “Black Friday Event.”

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Warden Bill Robertson recovers spent shell casings as evidence in the “Black Friday Event.”

Robertson immediately met with Warden Davis and received written statements prepared by several family members. In their statements, the defendants confessed their involvement in the over-limit and also associated the man at the tavern, his father and another man from Gillette to the incident. A total of ten participants were identified.

Six of those hunters were pursuing elk along the Trapper Canyon rim near Spiney Point late in the afternoon on November 27. Several family members were parked some distance away observing the area with binoculars and communicating with the hunters on the rim as to the location of elk they could see. It had been pre-arranged that if the hunters encountered elk they would fill the others’ licenses for them. A large group of elk exited the security of the timber after one hunter encountered them. The group of elk moved into a large flat below a knoll where the six shooters had assembled. After the shooting began, the elk ran in circles and the hunters continued to shoot into the group. Afterwards a total of 16 elk lay dead. Only seven of the elk had been taken legally. The two groups of hunters came together and began to field dress the elk but it soon became dark and they returned to camp with eight elk remaining in the field. The next

morning some of the license holders returned and retrieved two more carcasses but then left the area after realizing there were more elk than they had licenses for.

Five members of the party had driven their off-road vehicles onto private land enrolled in the Spanish Point Hunter Management Area, violating a road closure. Warden Robertson received assistance from Warden Davis, Glenrock Game Warden Gary Boyd and Gillette Game Warden Dustin Kirsch with the interviews of the suspects. Six over-limit citations, two accessory to take over-limit citations, three transfer of license citations, and five Hunter Management Area road closure citations were issued. One written warning was issued to a juvenile. Big Horn County Circuit Court Judge Thomas Harrington accepted guilty pleas from all defendants. Fines totaled \$5,100 and Judge Harrington ordered six defendants to pay \$9,500 in restitution to the Wyoming Wildlife Protectors Association (Stop Poaching Fund). These same six defendants also collectively lost 10 years of hunting privileges.

Poached Mule Deer in Cody: A case involving a poached deer in the city limits of Cody came to a close, thanks to information provided by local citizens. The case began on November 14, when



Buck mule deer killed in Cody during a closed season.

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



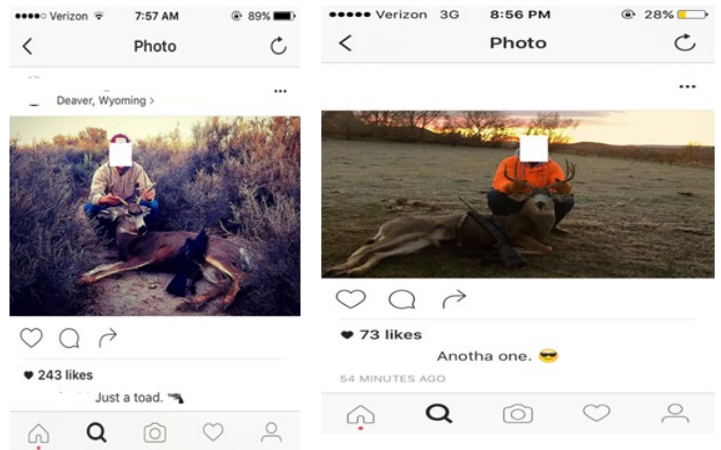
Warden Travis Crane recovered a crossbow bolt from the hind quarter of this poached buck mule deer.

North Cody Game Warden Travis Crane received a report of an injured mule deer at a residence in Cody. When Warden Crane arrived, he discovered a buck mule deer with a crossbow bolt protruding from its hindquarters. The season for buck deer was closed at the time. Warden Crane dispatched the wounded deer, retrieved the bolt and was able to follow the blood trail of the animal to Alger Avenue. While following the blood trail, Warden Crane was approached by witnesses who reported seeing a man earlier that morning who seemed to be looking for something in the area. A couple who lived nearby gave a detailed description of a man they saw searching the area, looking over fences and into backyards. More information was made available after the Department reached out asking the public to help solve the case. The fact that witnesses came forward to report suspicious activity was key in solving this case. In Park County Circuit Court on January 6, 2017, a Cody man was sentenced in this case for taking a big game animal during a closed season. He was fined \$1,000 and lost his hunting privileges for three years.

Social Media Helps Solve Deer Poaching: In early

November, Lovell Game Warden Dillon Herman received an anonymous report from dispatch of a young Cowley man that reportedly shot two deer and let his father tag one of them. Warden Herman was also informed the suspect had posted photos of both deer to his Instagram account, one from November 2 and the other from November 5. Social media can be a very useful tool in investigations, and the captions associated with the photos were very incriminating. The first post read “Just a toad” and the second read “Anotha one.” This was later changed to “Getting it done this morning.” On November 6, Warden Herman and Powell Game Warden Chris Queen met in Cowley to interview the father and son suspects. The son was not home at the time, so the father was interviewed by the wardens, who also asked if they could collect a CWD sample. He was very vague with details about his hunt and could not even remember which day he had killed his deer. It was clear he hadn’t actually shot a deer, nor did he have much interest in hunting.

When the son returned, Warden Queen accompanied him to a different house where the second deer was hanging. At this point, the young man realized the severity of his decisions and he was very forthcoming with Warden Queen. He confessed to everything that had happened, while his father continued to lie. As it turned out, the father’s gun had jammed the first night they were out. Instead of using his son’s gun, he just let his son shoot the deer for him and tagged it himself, since he knew his son



REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

had his eyes on a bigger deer on a different property. The son had recently turned 18, so the wardens decided it would be a benefit to make this a positive experience for the young man and cut him a break for being so honest. The son was issued a citation for failing to tag the first deer he had killed, and two warnings for taking an over-limit of deer and accessory to transfer of license. The father was issued a citation for transfer of license.



Cody Regional Wildlife Supervisor Alan Osterland at Eagle Pass.

Sheridan Region

Work Unit Overview

The Sheridan Region has nine law enforcement officers, including seven district game wardens, one access coordinator and one regional wildlife supervisor. 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.

2016 Law Enforcement Efforts

Sheridan Region law enforcement officers documented 766 violations within the Region in 2016. Officers issued 344 citations, 331 written

warnings and investigated 89 cases in which a suspect was never developed. Particular areas of concern are the out-of-season take of big game, wanton destruction (19 violations) and ethics related violations, such as shooting from a public road (19 violations), waste of big game (48 violations), and trespass to hunt (64 violations) observed across the region. Region wardens documented 27 instances of hunters taking the wrong sex animal, with the majority of those violations being self-reported by the offending hunter. Shooting at long distances and during dim-light conditions were identified as contributing causes to several of the wrong sex violations.

The wanton destruction of wildlife remains a problem within the region. In the Gillette area, one warden documented nine different cases of wanton destruction of deer and antelope in one seven-day period. Wanton destruction and out-of-season take of deer and elk along the state line and in the vicinity of the Kerns Wildlife Habitat Management Area (WHMA) was again a priority for the region this year. Numerous violations were discovered and several cases were solved. A high-profile case from 2014 in which several Crow Reservation tribal members were charged in Sheridan County Circuit



Sheridan Region wardens at one of the region's patrol cabins.

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Warden Troy Tobiasson checks fishermen at Keyhole Reservoir.

Court with the illegal take of several elk, was adjudicated in 2016, resulting in guilty verdicts for the defendants. An appeal by the main defendant is still pending and may represent a case of statewide and possibly national significance. Perceived tribal rights as well as disregard for Wyoming law along the Wyoming/Montana state line is an issue that will likely continue into the future.

Decoy Operations

The Sheridan Region conducted two decoy operations in 2016. Both operations were targeting specific suspects reported to be taking wildlife at night with artificial light in Campbell County. A mule deer decoy was deployed for a total of seven hours. During that time, three vehicles passed and no violations were observed.

Task Forces

One task force using out-of-region officers was conducted in the region again this year to address the problem of illegally taking elk and deer in the vicinity of the Kerns WHMA. Two-officer teams were assigned to the area during January and

February. Operations were focused on nighttime and early morning hours. Wardens drove 8,687 miles and worked 603 hours during this task force. They made 32 public contacts and documented three violations, including the illegal take of a rough-legged hawk and two cases of taking deer out-of-season.

The State Line Task Force resulted in few detected violations given the amount of time and effort expended, however, poor communications (radio and cell phone), the random nature of violations and the potential for violent confrontations with suspects were identified as potential difficulties in conducting the operation. Multiple suspects evaded wardens by fleeing to Montana at high rates of speed. Based on public comments received, area landowners and the sporting public appreciate the Department's efforts in addressing what has become a significant illegal killing of elk and deer.

Notable Cases

Closed Season Mule Deer: In November, Game Warden Dustin Kirsch received a report of a buck mule deer killed and stashed in a hay stack in Crook County. The season for mule deer had closed three weeks prior so Kirsch responded to the area. Warden Kirsch concealed himself in the hay stack and waited into the night for any suspects to return and retrieve the deer. After approximately four



Warden Brook Weaver at an educational display in Gillette.

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Law Enforcement Coordinator Aaron Kerr on night patrol near the Wyoming-Montana state line.

hours, Warden Kirsch observed a suburban approaching the hay stack at a very slow rate of speed. The suburban never stopped and continued past his perch and into the night. Shortly thereafter, Kirsch caught movement out of the corner of his eye. Utilizing a FLIR thermal imaging monocular, he observed two people run to the hay stack where the deer was hidden, where they went out of his sight. Staying concealed, Kirsch waited until both figures reappeared and noticed one of them was carrying the head of the dead mule deer as they began to leave the area on foot. Warden Kirsch identified himself and ordered them to stop. One suspect stopped and obeyed Kirsch's commands, but the other suspect continued running and fled the area. Warden Kirsch was able to subsequently contact the driver of the suburban and identify the suspect who fled. As often happens, one bad decision followed another and the suspect who fled located a vehicle in Wyoming with keys in the ignition. He chose to "borrow" the vehicle to return to Montana where the trio was staying. Warden

Kirsch was able to assist the Crook County Sheriff's Office with the stolen vehicle report and ultimately all of the suspects in this case were identified and charged with multiple violations. Combined, the suspects were sentenced to \$3,360 in fines and \$5,000 in restitution. The shooter's hunting and trapping privileges were suspended for three years and the other two suspects each received two-year suspensions.

TV Show Airs Illegal Hunt: The host of the Hunting Channel's "Days in the Wild" was charged and convicted for hunting in the wrong area in Johnson County during the fall of 2015. The case was initiated when a concerned viewer of an episode of the show that showed the suspect shooting a buck mule deer with a rifle and not wearing any hunter orange clothing called the Stop Poaching Hotline. Game Warden Jim Seeman ran a license history of the suspect, viewed the episode himself and noticed something very unusual about the geography. The suspect had a nonresident Region C deer license, which is valid east of Buffalo, and there are no mountains in these hunt areas. In the video of the hunt, mountains are clearly visible in the background within fairly close proximity. In fact, Warden Seeman recognized some of the terrain and thought it to be just northwest of Buffalo, near the Bud Love WHMA. With several still shots of the video, Warden Seeman drove northwest of Buffalo until he found the exact place the animal was shot.



Screen shot taken from a TV episode that showed a mule deer taken in the wrong hunt area.

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Photo taken by Warden Seeman from the kill site of the mule deer buck, near the Bud Love WHMA.

The kill site was in nonresident deer Region Y, the wrong area for the suspect's license. With this information, Warden Seeman and two Arizona game wardens interviewed the suspect and he confessed to the illegal activity.

False oath investigation: In the spring, Buffalo Game Warden Jim Seeman received an anonymous Stop Poaching report concerning the illegal purchase of resident hunting and fishing licenses (false oath). Over the summer months, Warden Seeman conducted an investigation which revealed a couple from Michigan had been purchasing resident licenses for the past nine years (2008-2015), totaling 27 licenses. The couple purchased a small mountain cabin near the Hazleton Peaks area of the Bighorn National Forest in the late 1990s. For many years after the purchase of their cabin, the couple would apply for and buy non-resident licenses, but in 2008 that changed. The couple admitted to Warden Seeman that they thought they were residents because of the amount of time they were spending in Wyoming each year. The couple told Warden Seeman that they typically spent most of the summers in Wyoming up to four months at a time. In fact, in an effort to get around the Wyoming residency law, the couple surrendered their Michigan driver's license and started receiving Wyoming driver's licenses, claiming the small summer cabin was their primary residence. Warden Seeman discovered at least two residences in Michigan owned by the couple, one of which is

where they spent a majority of the year. Twelve charges were filed in Johnson County Circuit court in August. In September, the couple plead guilty to making a false statement, were fined \$6,000 and ordered to surrender their 2016 hunting licenses.

State Line Elk Poaching Case Resolved: During the last part of April, Dayton Game Warden Dustin Shorma was able to complete an elk poaching case from January of 2014 involving four members of the Crow Tribe. The main suspect, who at the time was a game warden with the Crow Tribal Fish & Game, was tried and found guilty in Sheridan County Circuit Court for one count of taking an antlered big game animal (bull elk) without a license and one count of accessory to taking an antlered big game animal without a license. The case started after the tribal warden contacted Warden Shorma to talk about poaching issues along the Wyoming-Montana state line. After meeting the tribal warden, Warden Shorma became suspicious and discovered several photographs online of him posing with various elk and deer trophies. One set of photos showed the tribal warden posing with a dead bull elk that he claimed to have taken on the Crow Reservation. However, the photo contained landmarks in the photograph that were familiar to Warden Shorma as being well within Wyoming. Later that spring, Warden Shorma and the Sheridan Wildlife



Suspect poses with illegally taken bull elk.

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Investigator hiked up into the area where Warden Shorma believed the bull elk may have been killed. The two officers were able to locate the kill site and tie additional illegally taken bull elk to the tribal warden's brother and two other friends. DNA samples removed from the kill sites matched three bull elk heads seized from the suspects. In total, \$19,170 was paid in fines and restitution. The tribal warden has appealed his conviction based upon his belief that members of the Crow Tribe still retained hunting rights from the Treaty of 1868. The appeal is currently in District Court.

West Fork Elk Poaching Case: Dayton Game Warden Dustin Shorma completed a case involving a member of the Crow Tribe who poached a bull elk in the West Fork of the Little Horn River. The case started in March of 2014 when Warden Shorma found photographs online depicting an elk hunt that allegedly took place on the Crow Reservation. Warden Shorma recognized the topography in the background of the photograph and when the snow melted in May, was able to find the kill site and carcass of a large bull elk. Only the head of the bull elk had been removed, the rest of the carcass was left to waste. Warden Shorma, with help from a U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) agent, was able to locate the suspect and interview him. After a short interview the suspect admitted to shooting the elk "on the Crow Reservation" but stated the elk then ran into Wyoming where it was finished off. Forensic evidence found at the scene and during a search warrant contradicted the suspect's claim and suggested the elk was located and killed in Wyoming. The suspect was charged with taking an antlered big game animal without a license. He pled guilty in Sheridan County Circuit Court and paid \$5,040 in fines. Unfortunately, the bull elk head was sold to an antler buyer and was never recovered.

X-X Bull Elk Poaching: On September 22, Dayton Game Warden Dustin Shorma received a call from an outfitter who had discovered a headless bull elk on property he leased just west of Dayton. An investigation by Shorma revealed an individual from Lodge Grass, Montana may have been responsible



Suspect posing with illegally taken bull elk (above), photo by Warden Shorma documenting the kill site in Wyoming (below).



REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

for killing the bull elk. Before Shorma could interview the suspect in Montana, he discovered the man was trying to sell the bull elk head to an antler buyer in Sheridan. Further investigation revealed the man had an active warrant out of Big Horn County, Montana. With help from the Sheridan County Sheriff's Office and the Sheridan wildlife investigator, the suspect was arrested and detained in the Sheridan County Jail. During the arrest, the suspect had the bull elk head in his possession. The head was seized and, along with a DNA sample from the crime scene, was sent to the Wildlife Forensic Laboratory for analysis. It was determined the DNA recovered from the elk carcass matched the antlers recovered from the suspect. Warden Shorma and a USFWS agent interviewed the suspect in jail about the bull elk. He admitted to having killed the bull elk at night with artificial light and removing the head and hind quarters. The suspect was fined \$5,040 and spent 52 days in jail for taking a big game animal without a license and taking wildlife with artificial light.



Screen shot from video taken by drone harassing elk.

the hunter, who described in great detail how the drone had flown over a large herd of elk on the Horseshoe Ranch, west of Dayton. At one point the drone hovered over the fleeing elk at a height of about 50 feet, causing the elk to scatter and run. The hunter had seen a pickup truck at the entrance to the ranch. Concluding that the truck was associated with the drone, the hunter obtained the license plate number of the vehicle. The accurate and timely information provided enabled Warden Scigliano to track down the owner of the drone, a college student home for Thanksgiving. Warden Scigliano interviewed the suspect, who admitted to flying the drone over the elk, and on several occasions, pursuing the animals with the drone as they attempted to escape the craft. A video camera was onboard the drone and Warden Scigliano seized a recording of the flight. The suspect claimed that he did not think it illegal to fly the drone over the elk and did not think he was harassing the animals, despite the video evidence. In the video, approximately 200 elk are seen running from the drone as it approached the ground. The suspect continued to pilot the drone, chasing the elk for approximately a quarter mile before coming down to nearly eye level of the terrified cows, calves and bulls. Warden Scigliano explained the implications of the flight, noting that drones are considered to be aircraft under Game and Fish Commission Regulations. The suspect was issued a citation for harassing big game from an aircraft and forfeited bond in the amount of \$420. This case shows the importance of the cooperation that wardens receive from the public in protecting Wyoming's wildlife.



Head from poached bull elk recovered during investigation.

Drone Chasing Elk: This case illustrates that the emergence of new technologies sometimes creates the possibility of violations that wardens would not have imagined 10 or 15 years ago. On November 23, Game Warden Bruce Scigliano received a call from Office Manager Kathy Boyles. Boyles told Warden Scigliano that she had received a report from a concerned hunter who witnessed a man flying a drone over elk on the Horseshoe Ranch that afternoon. Warden Scigliano immediately contacted

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Green River Region

Work Unit Overview

The Green River Region has 11 law enforcement officers, including seven district game wardens, two regional game wardens, one access coordinator and one regional wildlife supervisor. The Green River Region covers southwest and south central Wyoming and includes the Baggs, Rock Springs, Green River, Mountain View, Evanston, Kemmerer and Cokeville warden districts. The two regional game wardens focused on watercraft enforcement from May through Labor Day Weekend. They also worked hunting seasons through the remainder of the year. One of the regional wardens was transferred to the Jackson Region in mid-November.

2016 Law Enforcement Efforts

Green River Region law enforcement officers



Warden Kim Olson on patrol in the Sierra Madres.

documented 646 violations within the region in 2016. Officers issued 268 citations, 355 written warnings and investigated 23 cases in which a suspect was never developed. There was increased watercraft and fishing enforcement on Flaming Gorge Reservoir as a result of having two regional wardens specifically assigned to work the reservoir. Other areas of focus included illegal shed antler collection and a task force in Baggs targeting a group of archery deer hunters that have been reportedly party hunting and taking deer from the highway in past years.

Task Forces

One task force using out-of-region officers was conducted in the Green River Region in 2016. The task force was designed to address problems of deer being illegally taken from roadways with archery equipment in Deer Hunt Area 82 near Baggs. Two visiting officers were assigned to the area during the first half of September to assist regional personnel in documenting violations. Operations were focused in areas with high densities of deer along roadways and in areas where shooting from the road violations have been documented in the past. During the task force, 15 contacts were made with hunters that were suspected of attempting to take wildlife from a roadway, and one citation was issued for accessory to taking wildlife from a roadway. Although the



Warden Rob Shipe helps a young angler land a trout.

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

number of violations documented was low, the task force was still deemed highly successful due to the number of educational contacts made with hunters regarding taking wildlife from a public roadway.

Notable Cases

The Moving Deer Skull: On April 16, a marked deer skull north of Evanston was tracked to a location in Evanston by Game Wardens Allen Deru and Chris Baird. The wardens contacted two men and asked them about the skull. The men told the wardens that they had picked up a deer skull with the antlers still attached. Both suspects were informed that they had picked up and transported the deer head without first acquiring an IGT, which is a violation of the law. The two men had also picked up the head in a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) winter range closure area. Warden Deru issued them both citations for transporting game without a game tag within Wyoming and notified them that they would also be contacted by a BLM law enforcement officer concerning the BLM winter range closure violation.



Deer head picked up in violation of interstate game tag requirements and a winter range closure.

Taking Deer on Private Property: On October 8, a trespassing incident occurred just north of the town of Baggs along Muddy Creek. Two hunters watched as a man and his two sons shot a rather large buck deer on private property. They obtained photos of



Illegally picked up deer head in possession of suspects.

the back of the truck with both the license plate and the deer. The report was received by Baggs Game Warden Kim Olson. Warden Olson searched for several hours to find the carcass and verify that the deer had been killed on private land. By this time, the suspects were on their way back to Utah. Warden Olson was able to contact a conservation officer with the Utah Department of Wildlife Resources and told him about the case and the suspects' address. As the Utah officer pulled into the yard, the suspects were just unloading the back of the truck and admitted to the trespassing violation. The animal was seized and the shooter was fined \$420 for trespassing. This case is a great example of cooperation between agencies in two states and perfect timing in catching up with the violators.

Multiple Big Game Violations: On October 4, Evanston Game Warden Nick Roberts was investigating a report of two men observed shooting at a deer from a public highway, not wearing hunter orange and most likely trespassing. The reporting party had taken a picture of the truck and license plate, which was out of Utah. Warden Roberts was able to locate a gut pile from a deer on private property and ran the plates to identify a suspect. While still at that location, Warden Roberts received a call from a landowner just a few miles away who

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Spent .30-06 shell casing found as evidence during investigation of multiple big game violations.

stated that he had found two fresh gut piles and an abandoned fawn antelope on his property. Warden Roberts investigated the scene and was able to find a spent .30-06 rifle casing. The landowner stated he had not given anyone permission to hunt on his property but had contacted a group of hunters two days prior who were staying in a cabin nearby. One hunter remained at the cabin and revealed that the cabin belonged to the suspect identified in the earlier complaint. Through a series of interviews with the hunting party, Warden Roberts was able to piece together the two incidents and identify multiple violations out of this same hunting party. The suspect from the original poaching report was cited for shooting from the road, given a warning for trespassing and forfeited the antlers from his deer. He paid a \$220 fine.

The second incident involved a husband and wife out of Ogden, Utah. They had two doe/fawn antelope licenses but ended up shooting two does and one fawn. They shot the animals on private property without permission and left the fawn to go to waste. Both were cited for trespassing and waste of the fawn. The husband was also cited for taking



Wardens Chris Baird, Neil Hymas and Andy Countryman with evidence seized from illegal antler hunters.

an over-limit of antelope. The investigation revealed that hunting party members consumed large amounts of alcohol and showed little respect for game laws. The husband was fined \$530 and had his hunting privileges suspended for one year. The charges against his wife were dismissed.

Multiple Residency Violations: In October of 2014, regional Access Coordinator Andy Countryman contacted an individual hunting elk on a resident general elk license on the Red Dugway Road in Uinta County. The man stated he lived in Lyman, Wyoming. However, during Countryman's contact with the man, several concerns led him to investigate further into the man's residency status. Countryman later confirmed that the man had been residing in Washington, Utah, with his wife and at least one child while making false statements to obtain Wyoming resident hunting and fishing licenses from 2011-2015. Twenty false statement violations were detected. Utah and Florida both verified the suspect had purchased resident hunting and fishing licenses in their states during those same years. The case was finalized on December 8. The suspect pled guilty to five counts of false swearing to obtain resident Wyoming hunting/fishing licenses

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

from the years 2011-2015. The Uinta County court sentenced the man to pay \$10,880 in fines and restitution and to serve five consecutive days in the Uinta County Detention Center. Also, all of his hunting and fishing license privileges suspended for 10 years and he will be entered into the wildlife violator compact agreement of at least 44 states.

Illegal Mountain Lion: On September 27, Green River Game Warden Andy Roosa received a call from Wildlife Biologist Patrick Burke stating that he had checked in a mountain lion that may have been killed prior to the hunter purchasing a mountain lion license. Warden Roosa conducted interviews with the suspect who registered the mountain lion, as well as his father who was hunting with him at the time the lion was harvested. The son had purchased the mountain lion license at 4:37 p.m. on September 26 in Green River and swore on the mountain lion harvest form that he legally harvested the lion with a bow at approximately 10:00 a.m. on September 27 northwest of Kemmerer. During more than two hours of interviews, it was revealed that the father had shot the mountain lion on September 25 and that neither of the suspects had a mountain lion license at the time. The father maintained that the lion was sneaking up on him while he was calling for elk in the trees and that he shot it with his bow out of self-defense. He said he had to go to work on Monday and wouldn't be able to check in the mountain lion himself, so he asked his son to buy the license and tag the lion. Warden Roosa issued the father a citation for taking a mountain lion without a license and issued the son a citation for accessory after the fact to taking a mountain lion without a license, along with a citation for making a false statement on a mountain lion registration form. Both suspects pleaded guilty to all charges and were sentenced to pay a fine of \$790 each and had all their hunting and fishing license privileges suspended until the end of 2017. The son also paid a fine of \$220 on the charge of making a false statement on a mountain lion registration form.

Laramie Region

Work Unit Overview

The Laramie Region has 13 law enforcement officers, including eight district game wardens, three regional game wardens, one access coordinator and one regional wildlife supervisor. The Laramie Region covers southeast Wyoming, including the eastern Sierra Madre Mountains, Snowy Range, Shirley Basin, Laramie Range and eastern plains to the Nebraska state line. The region includes game warden districts in Cheyenne, Torrington, Wheatland, Medicine Bow, North Laramie, South Laramie, Elk Mountain, and Saratoga. In addition, the three regional game wardens are assigned to Glendo, Laramie, and/or Cheyenne Headquarters.

2016 Law Enforcement Efforts

In 2016, Laramie Region game wardens documented 1,031 violations. Officers issued 382 citations, 638 written warnings and investigated 11 cases in which a suspect was never developed. These violations include a mix of wildlife, fishing and watercraft related violations.

Laramie Region reservoirs including Glendo,



Warden Biff Burton patrols the Encampment River Wilderness.

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Access Coordinator Jason Sherwood calls dispatch during a fishing without a license investigation in the Snowy Range.

Grayrocks and Guernsey draw large crowds from the nearby Front Range communities of Colorado. Laramie Region wardens spend a considerable amount of time on watercraft, fishing and aquatic invasive species enforcement on these waters. Many of these lakes and reservoirs were full or nearly full thanks to ample moisture in recent years, and these conditions provided many quality fishing opportunities. The plains lakes near Laramie and Wheatland Reservoir Number 3 near Rock River, for example, have been producing large trout and wardens detected a large number of fishing violations. Laramie Region law enforcement officers documented 67 fishing without license violations during the year.

Elk populations throughout the region are at or over management objectives and liberal seasons have produced many excellent elk hunting opportunities. Elk hunter use days in the Laramie Region are currently higher than in any other region in the state. Laramie Regional wardens documented 105 violations committed by elk hunters, which amounts to about 10% of the total violations documented region-wide during the year. By comparison, in 2006, the region documented 68 elk-related violations. Due to the mosaic of private and land-locked public land throughout the region, it is no

surprise that trespassing violations continue to require a significant amount of time. Wardens documented 58 trespassing violations with warnings and citations.

Decoy Operations

Laramie Region law enforcement personnel conducted seven decoy operations from September through November. All of these operations utilized mule deer decoys. Game wardens partnered with United States Forest Service (USFS) law enforcement personnel on two decoy operations. Decoy operations are designed to give those with little regard for game laws an opportunity to commit a crime in a controlled environment, while demonstrating that the majority of Wyoming's sportspersons are legal and ethical hunters. Laramie personnel worked approximately 30 hours on decoy projects and documented 63 vehicles in the areas of operation. Of these, the occupants of two vehicles were involved with wildlife violations. These violations included shooting from a roadway/ accessory to shooting from a roadway, hunting on private property without permission/accessory to hunting on private property without permission and hunting during a closed season. The vast majority of sportspersons observed during these decoy operations did not commit any violations. Those



Law Enforcement Coordinator Aaron Kerr and a volunteer check a harvested elk at a check station.

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Sign alerting hunters to an upcoming check station.

that were observed violating game and fish laws showed little regard for private property, safe shooting distances from roadways or hunting seasons. The decoy efforts were an excellent example of what these operations are designed to uncover.

Task Forces

The Laramie Region conducted a big game check station task force and a Platte Valley winter range task force in 2016. The big game check station task force occurred over the opening weekend of Snowy Range elk seasons and the Platte Valley winter range task force ran from November through early December.

Laramie Big Game Check Station Task Force

In recent years, Laramie Region personnel have observed a large number of hunters who fail to stop at established hunter check stations as required by state law. They have also noted a significant number of Colorado hunters who travel Wyoming Highway 230 from the North Park area back to their residences in the Fort Collins and Denver metro areas. The Laramie Region big game check station task force was a two-day operation. Laramie Region personnel established hunter check stations on Wyoming Highway 130 at the University of Wyoming Hanson Livestock Arena and Wyoming Highway 230 at Jack's Place near mile post 20 on

October 15-16. Check stations were set up and operational by 9:00 a.m. and ran continuously until after dark each evening. Game wardens assisted in making public contacts and collecting biological data, but also focused on identifying and stopping hunters who failed to stop at the check station. The Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife sent two officers to assist at the Wyoming Highway 230 check station.

During the two-day task force, seven law enforcement officers worked a total of 128 hours at the two check stations and documented a total of 23 violations (15 warnings and 8 citations). The majority of these violations (70%) were for failing to stop at an established check station. The other violations were relatively minor and included failing to produce proof of hunter education, failure to purchase a conservation stamp, and failure to properly tag big game. The task force approach allowed local district game wardens to be in the field and address the high volume of standard hunting season calls without getting tied down at a check station. The use of a portable light tower allowed the safe operation of the check station after dark. The presence of Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife officers was beneficial in addressing contacts made with those hunters returning from Colorado hunting trips.



Game wardens await hunters at Highway 130 check station.

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Platte Valley Winter Range Task Force

The Laramie Region requested the assistance of six officers from outside the region to patrol mule deer winter ranges in the Platte Valley from November 3 through December 12. The Platte Valley has been an area of special attention in recent years and during the Platte Valley Mule Deer Initiative, the region identified the need and public desire for an increased law enforcement presence on winter ranges throughout the area. This task force was designed to meet this need and 2016 was the second year of operation. During the task force, out-of-region wardens patrolled winter ranges from the Colorado state line to I-80. Wardens primarily patrolled winter ranges in their marked vehicles, but an unmarked truck was provided for plain clothes patrol. No violations were detected during the task force, but game wardens contacted many individuals on the winter ranges. Public support for the added law enforcement presence was high and it appears the additional coverage over the last two years has helped deter violations.

Notable Cases

Tip Leads to Multiple Convictions for Illegal Elk:

Many cases take time to develop, investigate, and prosecute. A case from the files of Wheatland Game Warden David Ellsworth highlights the work and time involved in building investigations. In late 2015, Warden Ellsworth received information from a confidential informant (CI) regarding the illegal take of bull elk near Wheatland in October of 2015. The CI reported that an Arkansas resident allowed his daughter to harvest a trophy elk without a license. The Arkansas resident used his license in an attempt to cover the illegally taken elk. During the course of the investigation, digital evidence was discovered on Facebook and in December, 2015, a search warrant was served to secure this evidence. The Laramie wildlife investigator assisted Ellsworth in sorting through the Facebook evidence. By meticulously piecing the information together, officers determined the illegally harvested bull elk was taken to a Utah taxidermist and that the Arkansas man's daughter resided in Utah with her mother. In the spring, wildlife officers from Utah

and Arkansas assisted by conducting multiple interviews. After compiling all the evidence, Warden Ellsworth was able to issue citations to the Arkansas resident for transferring a license and accessory to taking an elk without a license. His daughter was issued citations for taking an elk without a license and accessory to transferring a license. Two additional suspects were identified in this case; both were issued citations for accessory to taking an elk without a license and transfer of a license. All pled guilty and in total \$6,560 in fines was levied. As this case illustrates, information from the public is critical in detecting wildlife violations.

Tip Helps Catch Deer Poacher: Successful game wardens build relationships and establish a network of eyes and ears throughout their district. An example from the North Laramie case files highlights the importance of these relationships. North Laramie Game Warden Kelly Todd received a second hand report of a suspected deer taken out of season on October 31. In this case, a landowner relayed information to Warden Todd from another party that had observed a truck with a large mule deer buck leaving a closed area. Thanks to the quick response from the landowner, who was able to call Game Warden Todd directly on his cell phone, the suspect was located just after he arrived in town. With the steaming fresh deer (i.e., smoking gun) in the bed of his truck, the suspect quickly confessed to



A tip from the public led to the suspect who killed this buck deer during a closed season near Laramie.

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

his crime. The deer was seized and the suspect was cited for intentionally taking an antlered big game animal during a closed season.

Arctic Fox Imported Illegally: Wyoming game wardens are responsible for the protection of all of Wyoming's wildlife and occasionally find themselves investigating the importation of non-native species. South Laramie Game Warden Bill Brinegar received information that a Laramie resident was in possession of an arctic fox (*Vulpes lagopus*). In order to protect Wyoming's native wildlife, state statutes prohibit the importation of such species without a permit. Further investigation by Warden Brinegar revealed the Laramie man did not have a permit and had imported the arctic fox from a breeder in Indiana. The fox was sick. Warden Brinegar contacted the individual and learned that he, too, was sick. Suspecting rabies, Warden Brinegar seized the fox and transported it to the Wyoming State Veterinary Laboratory. Lab testing determined a bacterial infection was the cause of illness to the fox. The bacterial infection had been passed on to the owner. The owner was prescribed some powerful antibiotics and the fox was euthanized. The owner was issued a warning for illegally importing live wildlife without a permit.

Over-limit of Brook Trout: Greed is often at the root of many wildlife violations. While patrolling local lakes, South Laramie Game Warden Bill Brinegar observed an angler that appeared to be illegally snagging brook trout at Lake Owen. Warden Brinegar set up surveillance and determined the individual was indeed snagging large adult brook trout from their spawning beds. The large, weighted treble hook used by the violator was highly effective. Before Warden Brinegar shut down the angler's illegal ways, fourteen large brook trout had been ripped from their spawning beds.

Another fishing greed story originates with Access Coordinator Jason Sherwood. He received a tip regarding an angler who was fishing while under suspension and taking over-limits of large trout. Upon further investigation, Warden Sherwood



Over-limit of brook trout taken by a suspect illegally snagging fish at Lake Owen.

identified the suspect, who had recently been in court for an over-limit violation and had his hunting, fishing, and trapping privileges suspended for a one-year period beginning in June. Wardens Brinegar and Sherwood set up surveillance and were able to watch the suspect fishing at Lake Hattie on the evening of October 27. The two officers secured a search warrant of the suspect's home and vehicle from an Albany County judge. When they served the warrant, the suspect was not at home. Almost unsurprisingly, he was at the lake fishing! Warden Brinegar arrested the suspect at the lake with five large trout in his possession while Sherwood and other officers completed the search of his residence. The search uncovered four more large Lake Hattie trout in the suspect's freezer. He was charged with eleven counts of fishing while under suspension

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



This violator caught a stringer full of lake trout in Lake Hattie while serving a license suspension for prior violations.

and one over-limit of game fish. The search also turned up marijuana, which was handled by officers from the Laramie Police Department.

Lander Region

Work Unit Overview

The Lander Region has seven law enforcement officers, including six district game wardens and one regional wildlife supervisor. District game wardens are stationed in Dubois, North Riverton, South Riverton, Lander, West Rawlins and East Rawlins. The Lander Region is located in central Wyoming and wardens patrol from the Red Desert north to the

Owl Creek Mountains and from the Gas Hills west to the Wind River Range and southern Absaroka Mountains.

2016 Law Enforcement Efforts

Lander Region law enforcement officers documented 333 violations within the region in 2016. Officers issued 107 citations, 186 written warnings and investigated 40 cases in which a suspect was never developed. The Lander region focused efforts on issues ranging from illegal antler collection in Dubois, illegal outfitting in Riverton and overall wildlife law and regulation compliance in the Rawlins districts. Progress was made in these areas using trail cameras, task force operations, simulated wildlife decoys and coordination with the Wildlife Investigative Unit and USFWS special agents.

Decoy Operations

The Lander Region used simulated wildlife decoys in the Rawlins districts in 2016. There were plans to use them in other districts, but these operations were canceled due to weather and other priorities arising. The Rawlins decoy operations detected fewer violations than in 2015, but still resulted in multiple



Warden Brad Gibb checks hunters south of Rawlins.

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Law Enforcement Supervisor Mike Choma records information at a check station near Rawlins.

citations being issued for hunting in the wrong area or shooting from the road/vehicle.

Task Forces

The Lander Region conducted two task forces in 2016. In total, 14 Department law enforcement officers from outside the region were utilized to ensure these task forces were successful. Most of these personnel were used during the Miller Hill/Bridger Pass Task Force south of Rawlins.

Miller Hill/Bridger Pass Task Force

Total Contacts: ~230

Total violations: 11 (7 residents and 0 nonresidents)

Total Fines: \$1,290

Hunting in the wrong area violations have been suspected to be increasing over the years in the

Miller Hill/Bridger Pass area south of Rawlins. District game wardens were routinely responding to calls in other parts of their districts, making them unavailable for decoy operations and general patrol in the Miller Hill/Bridger Pass area. Having task force personnel dedicated to this particular area and issue allowed them to document violations and contact numerous hunters, while allowing district wardens to work as usual and respond to calls during the opening weekend of deer season in other areas of their districts.

Overall, the task force was successful in addressing some of the issues for which it was intended. This was the second year this task force was conducted and the operation from 2015 seems to have made an impact. Fewer violations were detected in 2016 despite a greater law enforcement presence. Many of the hunters were locals and remembered the decoy from the previous year, paying closer attention to deer along roads before shooting. There were 11 violations detected in total, with eight citations and three warnings issued. Of these, two warnings and two citations were attributed to a single hunter shooting at the decoy. All of the violators were Wyoming residents, with many of those being locals from Carbon County. It is unknown if the decrease in violations is a result of hunters being more wary of decoys or an actual reduction in intent to violate the laws.



Warden Linnea Sailor issues a citation for shooting from a public road to a hunter south of Rawlins.

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

During the four days the decoys were deployed, wardens documented 88 vehicles on the roads near the decoys. Of those 88 vehicles, the occupants of 23 noticed the decoy and stopped to look at it. Two of the vehicles that stopped took photos and then left, one subject was told by another hunter that it was a decoy before being able to shoot and all others seemed to identify the deer as a decoy. The only incident involving the decoy was severe, with that hunter committing at least four different violations as follows: shooting from the roadway, attempting to take a deer after legal hours, attempting to take the deer in the wrong area, and using artificial light (headlights) while doing so. During this task force, nine wardens and two biologists contacted at least 220 different hunters while patrolling and at the check station. This large number of Department personnel in the field for a second year in a row will hopefully deter potential violations in the future. Many hunters commented about last year's task force and expressed hope that wardens caught the people breaking the laws.



Wardens and biologists work a check station south of Rawlins.

Spence Moriarity Wildlife Management Area and Inberg Roy WHMA Antler Task Force-Dubois Warden District

Total violations: 1 (resident)

Total Fines: \$120



Warden Brian Baker checks a camp in the Dubois backcountry.

Antler hunting is a very popular activity and the public is very concerned about individuals trespassing on Dubois area wildlife management areas and wildlife habitat management areas during the seasonal closure to pick up shed antlers. The task force was very effective at increasing enforcement presence and this increased presence was noticed by the public. Even though the number of documented violations was low, this task force was a success and will likely be continued in future years.

Notable Cases

The Lander Region documented an increase in the number of cases involving individuals picking up or being in illegal possession of live wildlife. Most of these cases involved the possession of live pronghorn fawns. In one instance, an individual carried a fawn in the cab of his truck along with multiple dogs. In this case, the individual was cited for illegal possession of big game and fined. As part of his sentencing, the defendant was required to write an article about the negative effects of picking up newborn wildlife. Another instance included a nonresident couple who picked up a pronghorn fawn next to the highway and were planning on taking it home with them. In both instances the fawns had to be euthanized. Lander Region wardens also documented two cases of illegal possession of mule deer in the Riverton area. In one instance, a deer

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



This bull moose was shot and left in the Lander area. As is often the case in these situations, the meat spoiled and was unable to be salvaged. Suspects have not been identified.

was found hit on the highway and reported as being a collared deer. Assuming it was a radio/GPS collar, game wardens responded and found a young deer that had a dog collar around its neck. Suspects have been identified and the case is ongoing.

Casper Region

Work Unit Overview

The Casper Region has seven district game wardens, one regional game warden stationed in Casper, one access coordinator and one regional wildlife supervisor. The Casper Region is located in east-central Wyoming and wardens patrol from the Rattlesnake Hills and southern Bighorn Mountains east to the Nebraska state line, along with portion of the Thunder Basin and Black Hills. District game wardens are stationed in Glenrock, Douglas, Lusk, Newcastle, Sundance and two in Casper (East and West).

2016 Law Enforcement Efforts

Casper Region law enforcement officers documented 724 violations within the region in 2016. Officers issued 355 citations, 335 written warnings and investigated 34 cases in which a suspect was never developed. The region continues to have issues with hunter trespass, hunting in the wrong area and failure to properly tag game animals. The entire region continues to see an increase in off-



Warden Brady Vandenberg checks a successful rabbit hunter.

road vehicle use on private, state and federal lands. Late season elk hunting resulted in an increase in ethics-related violations, such as shooting from the road, taking game from a vehicle and shooting into a herd of animals, resulting in wounded animals that are not recovered. Late season elk hunting, mountain lion hunting and antler collecting has shown increased use of tracked vehicles off of established roads, causing damage to wildlife habitat on public and private lands and concerning landowners about trespassing on their property.

The Black Hills have very high densities of deer hunters on public and private lands during November. Over 20% of all deer harvested in the state are harvested in the Black Hills each year. This area is also the state's most popular mountain lion hunting destination. Game wardens from the entire

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Wardens check fishermen on Pathfinder Reservoir.

region are scheduled to assist the Sundance game warden in November due to the high number of hunters.

The Lusk, Newcastle and Douglas game warden districts are predominately private land and host a high number of nonresident deer and antelope hunters during the fall months. Portions of the Douglas and Casper game warden districts have a mix of private and public land and high hunter use days for deer, elk and antelope. Warden districts along the North Platte River also see quite a few waterfowl hunters during the fall and early winter months.

During the summer months, Casper Region wardens continue to place emphasis on watercraft safety, boating under the influence of drugs or alcohol (BUI) and fishing enforcement on Alcova, Pathfinder and Glendo reservoirs and on the North Platte River. Enforcement efforts on these waters have resulted in a decrease in watercraft safety violations and an increased awareness of the seriousness of BUI. Casper wardens observed high numbers of boats equipped with all required safety equipment and many kids wearing life jackets. Sloanes General Store of Alcova teamed up with the Department to give every kid “caught” wearing a life jacket a free ice cream cone.

Casper Region game wardens contacted hundreds of families and over 2,000 people recreating during the summer boating season. Game wardens documented 191 violations in the region through their watercraft enforcement efforts. Out of these, 118 were watercraft violations and 73 were fishing violations. Nine arrests for BUI were made by game wardens during the boating season, all occurring on Alcova Reservoir. All operators arrested for BUI tested positive for the presence of alcohol, and blood testing revealed the presence of marijuana in one individual. At least 12 more individuals were put through preliminary BUI testing and were subsequently found to be within legal limits to operate their watercraft.

Game wardens responded to two drowning incidents and three near-drownings, one of which required a helicopter flight to the hospital. In both drowning incidents, game wardens were involved in recovery of the victims. In June, Casper game wardens worked two boat accidents, including search and rescue efforts on an incident that resulted in one fatality.

Decoy Operations

Decoys were used 12 times during the fall and two citations were issued. A white-tailed deer decoy was deployed five different times by Sundance Game



Warden Dylan Bergman with an illegal leg-hold trap.

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Warden Chris Teter in Crook County. Landowners and hunters often complain about deer hunting at night and shooting at deer from the road in these areas where decoys are being used. No shooters or violations were detected during these deployments. A mule deer decoy was used seven times by multiple game wardens in the Casper Region. During one operation in an area north of Casper, one citation was issued for attempting to take a decoy. A citation was also issued for shooting from the road near Newcastle.



Wardens Gary Boyd and Rod Lebert deploy a deer decoy.

Task Forces

Glendo Memorial Day Weekend

The Casper Region conducted a law enforcement task force at Glendo Reservoir during the Memorial Day holiday weekend. This task force was to address the heavy recreational watercraft use and walleye fishing on the reservoir. Seven game wardens (three from the Casper Region, two from the Laramie Region, one from the Sheridan Region and one from the Lander Region) documented a total of 22 violations over the long weekend, including 12 written warnings and 10 citations.

Alcova 4th of July

The Alcova 4th of July task force included five Casper Region officers and two additional officers from around the state. These seven officers worked Alcova and Pathfinder reservoirs as well as the North Platte River over the July 1-4 holiday weekend. The task force documented a total of 60 violations including three BUI arrests. A total of 35 citations and 25 warnings were issued. Game wardens were also involved in two warrant arrests.

Glendo 4th of July

The Casper Region also conducted a July 4th law enforcement task force at Glendo Reservoir. This task force resulted in numerous citations and warnings again this year. Seven game wardens (four from the Laramie Region and three from the Casper Region) wrote a total of 33 citations and 58 warnings. Game wardens did not arrest any boaters for BUI over this holiday weekend.

Notable Cases

Elk Hunt Area 19 Poaching: East Casper Game Warden Cody Bish recently closed a case involving two bull elk killed illegally in Elk Hunt Area 19. After an investigation matching DNA and ballistics, two individuals were charged with taking an over-limit and waste of elk. Both bull elk and a rifle were seized and forfeited. The individual primarily responsible lost three years of hunting and trapping privileges and had to pay restitution in the amount of \$1,000.



Warden Cody Bish with antlers from two bull elk killed illegally.

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Wardens Gary Boyd and Matt Withroder with evidence seized from a violator who killed the elk, deer and antelope in areas where his licenses were not valid.



The suspect poses with the illegal bull (left). Wardens Boyd and Withroder later found the kill site and carcass (above).

Hermit Rock Case:

Access Coordinator Matt Withroder received a call from a landowner south of Glenrock reporting a red Chevy pickup driving off-road in September. After a short investigation, the owner of the red pickup was issued a citation for driving off-road and for littering. Further investigation of the suspect's

Facebook page along with another interview revealed that the suspect had harvested a bull elk in the wrong area. After Warden Withroder discovered this violation, he seized the suspect's cell phone as evidence. The cell phone information, along with another interview, revealed that the suspect had also harvested a mule deer and an antelope in the wrong area while trespassing. The antelope was harvested

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

with a rifle during a special archery season. The suspect pled guilty to seven charges, lost his hunting privileges for 15 years and paid over \$13,000 in restitution to the Department's Access Yes fund.

Off-Road Archery Case:

A Natrona County Sheriff's Office deputy received a call from a landowner near Alcova concerning a pickup truck that had driven through his alfalfa field and became stuck in the mud. Casper Game Warden Dylan Bergman was in the area and located the truck and two occupants, a father and his son. The father had been driving along a draw adjacent to the alfalfa field looking for deer to harvest with his crossbow. The landowner had his property signed up in the Walk-in Access Yes Program, which allowed vehicles to drive on existing roads. Warden Bergman issued the driver a citation for driving off-road on the Walk-in Area. A judge found him guilty and ordered him to pay the fine plus \$500 to the landowner to replant the area he had damaged.

State Land Littering: A phone call from the landowner leasing a section of state land near Glenrock resulted in a hefty fine for littering. Glenrock Game Warden Gary Boyd investigated the littering and found an abandoned camper trailer that was full of trash. The license plate and propane tanks had been removed, along with any valuable items. Inside the trailer, Warden Boyd found a box amongst the trash that still had the mailing label on it. The owner of the camper had given it to his niece 12 years ago. The niece's boyfriend decided to get rid of the camper by parking it in the middle of the state land and didn't think anyone would find out where it came from. After receiving his citation, the suspect hauled it back to his house for storage.

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



This bull elk was shot and partially field-dressed before being abandoned near Big Sandy Openings.

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. On large-scale investigations, the Green River wildlife investigator is utilized when needed.

2016 Law Enforcement Efforts

Pinedale Region law enforcement officers documented 214 violations in 2016. Officers issued 94 citations, 110 written warnings and investigated 10 cases in which a suspect was never developed. The region is home to a very diverse wildlife and aquatic resource with high desert habitat as well as three major mountain ranges and several cold-water lakes. Typical enforcement duties include desert and front country small and big game enforcement, watercraft and backcountry patrols.

Enforcement efforts focused on different priorities throughout the year. Late winter revolved around the antler hunting season closure and WHMA closures. Antler hunting complaints continue to increase as more people become interested in the activity. Wardens receive countless reports of illegal

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

activity every year, however, many of the reports are vague and only reporting suspicious activity. While enforcement of the antler hunting regulation remains difficult, several cases were made. Wardens spent a significant amount of time between February and June patrolling and responding to antler hunting complaints. Wardens continue to explore new enforcement techniques, some of which resulted in detection and prosecution of cases that would have otherwise gone undocumented.

In addition to antler hunting enforcement, wardens focused attention on black bear bait compliance checks in the spring. Summer efforts were focused on fishing and watercraft enforcement on lakes and rivers, including back country fishing enforcement. Several typical fishing violations were detected, both on Pinedale area lakes and rivers, as well as in remote backcountry areas. While the region has several large lakes, recreational watercraft activity is minimal compared to other regions. Cold water temperatures discourage water skiing and personal watercraft activity, so documented watercraft violations remain low.

Fall big game enforcement was typical of most years, although variable weather conditions resulted in average elk harvest. Early October and November snow storms resulted in early movement of deer and elk to lower elevations where they were more accessible to hunters. With the improved low-elevation hunting, violations also increased. Several cases of deer and elk over-limits, taking the wrong sex of deer and elk and various other violations resulted from these early storms. Many cases resulted from hunters turning themselves in after accidentally harvesting the wrong sex or over-limits of big game animals. This trend in self-reporting is encouraging. Compliance with Elk Special Management Permits remains poor and an increase in advertising and education for the program will be implemented in 2017. Game wardens in the Pinedale Region again spent time addressing reports of illegal outfitting, which require extensive time in the backcountry and often take several years to develop a case.

Task Forces

An annual mule deer winter range task force has been ongoing for 17 years and continued in 2016. Wardens from other regions assisted in these winter range patrols. The number of documented violations and suspects charged tends to fluctuate annually, and very few violations have been documented over the last two years. One case involving the illegal take of an antlered mule deer was documented, but no suspects have been identified. This high-profile task force continues to have significant public support.

Notable Cases

Illegal Antler Hunting: In April, Big Piney Game Warden Adam Hymas observed two individuals hiking through the sagebrush. They appeared to be looking for shed antlers near North Cottonwood Creek, an area of public land where elk commonly shed their antlers. Over the next couple hours, Warden Hymas observed two herds of elk run off from the area of the individuals while they were hiking around. A short time later, Hymas was able to make contact with the father and son pair, who were in possession of 10 shed elk antlers. They stated that they were tired of going out on the opening day (May 1st) and not finding any antlers. Citations were issued for violation of the shed antler season. Following a court appearance, total



Elk antlers seized as evidence after being illegally collected prior to the May 1 shed antler season opening date.

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

penalties included \$500 in fines, loss of hunting privileges for two years, loss of ability to hunt antlers for 11 months and 65 hours community service. This case is just one example of antler hunting violations that were detected throughout the Pinedale Region.

Farson Deer Poaching: South Pinedale Game Warden Jordan Kraft received a tip from a Farson resident about a yearling buck deer that had been shot and left in the Farson area. A quick investigation identified two California suspects who were hunting doe mule deer on several ranches in the Farson area. One suspect had already left the state after the poaching incident, but the other suspect was located and interviewed. When confronted with the evidence, the man readily admitted to accidentally shooting a yearling buck mule deer on a doe/fawn license. The suspect stated they were both troubled by the situation and decided to hide and abandon the deer instead of caring for the meat or notifying a game warden. It's likely the suspects fled from the area after the incident because the man had shot the deer from a county road and in a wrong hunt area. Each had already harvested a deer in the wrong area and were intentionally hunting in a wrong area after they were unsuccessful with their first choice hunt area. Further investigation revealed one suspect had also harvested an antelope on his wife's license. The man eventually admitted that his wife never came to the Wyoming and does not hunt. One suspect was charged in Sweetwater County with two counts of taking a deer in the wrong area, failure to wear fluorescent orange clothing, shooting a deer from a public roadway, taking the wrong gender of deer and waste/abandonment of big game. The man was fined nearly \$600, ordered to pay \$4,000 restitution for the deer, lost his hunting privileges for three years and was sentenced to two years of suspended jail time while placed on probation. The same man was also charged for the illegal antelope out of Uinta County, was fined over \$1,200 and lost his hunting privileges for five years on those offenses. The second suspect was interviewed in California and charged with taking a deer in the wrong area and for

aiding in the abandonment and waste of a deer. The man was fined nearly \$700. Two harvested deer and one harvested antelope were seized from the men and the meat was donated to families in need.



Yearling buck mule deer shot and abandoned by two suspects.

WILDLIFE INVESTIGATIVE UNIT

Work Unit Overview

The Wyoming Wildlife Investigative Unit (WIU) is comprised of five wildlife investigators stationed at the Cody, Green River, Lander, Laramie and Sheridan regional offices. One supervisor/investigator is stationed at the Casper regional office.

The WIU is responsible for investigating large-scale, complex, lengthy, overt and covert cases. The WIU places its highest priority on cases with commercial involvement (illegal outfitting or sale of wildlife), 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 databases, including the Department's law enforcement intelligence system. WIU members operate with unmarked vehicles and typically out of uniform. The WIU is equipped with digital media forensics, modern evidence collection, surveillance, tracking, covert vehicles and other equipment items. The WIU also works closely with other states' wildlife investigators and with several federal agencies, including the USFWS.

2016 Law Enforcement Efforts

The WIU initiated 12 major investigations in 2016 and assisted game wardens throughout Wyoming, as well as officers from other jurisdictions across the country, with over 150 cases. The WIU was able to

close 16 ongoing investigations and had 8 cases in the prosecution phase at the end of the year.

The WIU continues to explore new technologies related to tracking suspect activity, covert equipment and forensics. The WIU analyzes all cell phones, computers and other electronic devices seized from wildlife violators in Wyoming. Approximately 45 cell phones, GPS Units, and SD cards seized by game wardens as evidence were forensically downloaded by WIU personnel.

Notable Cases

Poached Deer on Display: Several individuals contacted Big Piney Game Warden Hymas stating that a large and unique 230 inch non-typical mule deer was being displayed at the "All Hunting Expo" in Salt Lake City, Utah. The complainants stated that the deer had been observed alive and photographed after the close of the 2015 general



Extracting evidence from suspect cell phone.



Mule deer buck on display at a Utah hunting expo.

WILDLIFE INVESTIGATIVE UNIT



Photo taken after the mule deer season closed.

deer season, possibly indicating that the deer had been taken after the season closed. Investigators also learned that the suspect had killed a large typical mule deer buck during the archery season. Pictures of this buck were located and it was obvious that these were two very different deer.

Investigators searched the Department license database and found that the suspect had applied for and received a 2015 Deer Area 138 Type 3 license. This license is for Deer Hunt Area 138 only in Sublette County, and only valid for white-tailed deer. Investigators interviewed the taxidermist in Utah who had mounted the deer and were advised that the suspect had dropped the deer in question off on November 27, 2015, but had called to set up an appointment about a week prior to that. The taxidermist recalled that the suspect said that everyone hunts high for deer, but he killed this one down low in the river/creek bottom, in the willows. Investigators obtained the affidavit the taxidermist has all hunters sign when dropping off wildlife. In the affidavit, the suspect stated among other things, that he did take this deer in compliance with all state and federal game laws. The taxidermist provided a Wyoming deer license number corresponding with the license issued to the suspect for a white-tailed deer only.

Investigators obtained a search warrant and interviewed the suspect. The suspect admitted to killing the deer and taking actions to cover up the fact that this was the second large buck mule deer that he had taken in the 2015 season. The suspect was charged with knowingly taking an antlered deer without a license and in October, he pled guilty to the charge. The defendant was sentenced to a \$5,000 fine, \$4,000 in restitution, 10 days in jail and a seven year revocation of all license privileges.

9V Ranch Investigation: This investigation began in September, 2009 when six individuals were observed by Game Wardens Jason Hunter and Kelly Todd hunting with rifles during the special archery season on the 9V Ranch southwest of the Shirley Mountains. Previous reports from individuals in the area detailed illegal deer and elk hunts by nonresidents who utilized the ranch owner's resident licenses to cover the animals. A search warrant was served on the ranch and subsequent analysis of samples submitted to the Department Forensic Laboratory determined three elk and four mule deer were recently killed. A year-long investigation, with additional search warrants served in Dalhart, Texas and interviews of individuals in Colorado, Texas and Wyoming provided the identities of the six hunters. The investigation also revealed an additional violation of taking a black bear without a license in September, 2008. A taxidermist in Amarillo, Texas



Suspects under surveillance during the 2009 hunting season.

WILDLIFE INVESTIGATIVE UNIT



A game warden searches for evidence at the 9V Ranch.

provided the 6x6 elk rack and cape and 4x4 mule deer rack and cape illegally killed on the 9V Ranch in 2009. The investigation also documented over 10 years of residency violations on licenses purchased by the ranch owner.

A protracted prosecution began in 2011, where it started with federal prosecutors, was transferred to Carbon County prosecutors and then back to federal prosecutors in 2013. During the federal prosecution phase, three individuals conducted proffers and a fourth individual accepted a plea agreement. One individual was granted immunity for his testimony against the remaining three. One individual accepted a plea agreement of illegal transportation of a black bear in 2008 and was assessed \$5,525 in



finer and restitution. Another individual accepted a plea agreement of illegal transportation of a buck mule deer and assessed a \$4,000 in restitution. The ranch owner did not participate in a proffer and accepted a plea agreement of illegal transportation of a bull elk and was assessed \$14,000 in fines and restitution.



The 9V Ranch investigation revealed illegally taken elk, deer and a black bear.

In October, 2015, state charges were initiated against the ranch owner. In Carbon County, he was charged with 11 counts of wildlife violations that occurred on the 9V Ranch in 2008 and 2009. In Albany County, he was charged with 30 counts of residency violations for resident licenses he purchased over the counter in Laramie. By the end of October, 2016, plea agreements were finally reached between the ranch owner and state prosecutors. In Albany County Circuit Court, he was fined \$80 and received five years suspension of his hunting, fishing and trapping privileges. In Carbon County Circuit Court, he was fined \$15,900 and received an additional five year suspension of his hunting, fishing and trapping privileges. The three vehicles used by the hunters during the illegal hunts on the 9V Ranch in 2008 and 2009, a Toyota Land Cruiser and two ATVs, were ordered forfeited to the Department by the judge. Total fines and restitution amounted to \$39,505.

WILDLIFE INVESTIGATIVE UNIT



Suspects under surveillance on the 9V Ranch (above). Black bear mount forfeited as a result of this investigation (below).



Spring Gulch Ranch Investigation: The suspect in this case ran the hunting on the Spring Gulch Ranch in Hot Springs County for many years. He also ran the hunting operation on the Antlers Ranch in Park County for 2013 and part of the 2014 hunting season. He ran these operations illegally without an outfitter license. Through interviews with over 30 hunters and the execution of a search warrant on the suspect's bank account, investigators documented that he took in over \$30,000 from hunters between 2012 and 2014. An additional \$15,000 in cash was deposited in his account that was not attributable to any hunters, but was deposited with checks from multiple hunters.

An eight count misdemeanor information and summons was filed in Park County Circuit Court in 2016. A plea agreement was reached between the Park County Attorney's Office and defense council consisting of the suspect pleading guilty to one count of outfitting or guiding without a license, a \$1,000 fine and a letter to be drafted by the Hot Springs County Attorney promising no charges would be filed in Hot Springs County. This case was investigated by WIU investigators and the Wyoming Outfitter Board investigator.

LARGE CARNIVORE SECTION

Work Unit Overview

The Large Carnivore Section (LCS) assists with management and conflict resolution of trophy game species (mountain lions, black bears, grizzly bears and wolves). The inherent controversy and conflict associated with large carnivores requires a working knowledge of the species on the landscape and the ability to convey information about these animals to a wide array of diverse publics. The LCS consists of one law enforcement officer, serving as the LCS Conflict Coordinator, and several non-law enforcement personnel. The LCS Conflict Coordinator assists regional personnel with law enforcement investigations and assists with USFWS investigations related to grizzly bear/human conflicts, specifically investigations where humans and/or grizzly bears are injured or killed. Non-law enforcement LCS personnel also assist with law enforcement cases involving trophy game and other wildlife enforcement cases.

2016 Law Enforcement Efforts

LCS personnel often investigate cases and refer law enforcement actions to local game wardens, wildlife investigators and USFWS agents. The LCS Conflict Coordinator worked on multiple illegal mountain lion and black bear harvest cases in the Cody, Lander and Pinedale Regions. LCS personnel assisted USFWS and Department law enforcement officers on six grizzly bear mortality investigations in northwest Wyoming. They also investigated reported defense of property black bear killings and monitored compliance with black bear baiting regulations in the Lander Region. The aforementioned efforts do not include multiple investigations of large carnivore conflicts that occur annually with the potential to develop into a law enforcement case. In 2016, LCS personnel responded to 517 trophy game conflicts. The LCS provided bear/human attack investigation training to Wyoming and Louisiana wildlife officers and biologists. The LCS Conflict Coordinator assisted the WIU with serving search warrants during an ongoing large-scale, multi-agency undercover investigation of an illegal deer baiting and outfitting operation.



Louisiana state and federal wildlife enforcement officers participating in bear/human attack training conducted by LCS Conflict Coordinator Brian Debolt in Lafayette, Louisiana.

Notable Cases

One reported grizzly bear self-defense shooting case involved a shed antler hunter in the Dubois area. The man was hiking alone looking for antlers and encountered a sow grizzly bear with two young cubs at close range. The man was charged by the sow and fired eight rounds from his 10mm handgun at the bear. The only round determined to have struck the bear “bounced” off from point blank range as the bear ran past the man. There was no evidence indicating the bear was wounded. Upon investigation, the antler hunter was not charged with any violations. As grizzly bear populations expand, the potential for conflicts with humans has increased. LCS personnel have responded by increasing education and proactive efforts that reduce the likelihood of conflicts between grizzly bears and humans. This program relies on education, expertise and vigilance to investigate and resolve conflicts between large carnivores and people in Wyoming.



10mm bullet determined to have “bounced” off grizzly bear.

WATERCRAFT SAFETY PROGRAM

Wyoming has a wealth of opportunities for recreational boating, from major reservoirs and river systems to countless smaller lakes, ponds and streams. These include fishing from boats, towed water sports (tubing and water-skiing), white-water rafting and other boating activities. An important component of game warden duties is ensuring the safety of Wyoming boaters and other water recreationists. The Department is the state agency primarily responsible for promoting and enforcing watercraft safety laws, and coordinates these efforts with other law enforcement agencies.



Warden Gary Boyd assists a kayaker after a near-drowning incident.

The Department also partners with the United States Coast Guard and boating safety organizations from around the country to work toward more consistent regulations and educational messaging among the states. For example, Wyoming joined in the National Safe Boating Council's "Wear It!" Campaign, which seeks to educate the public about the importance of wearing life jackets while on the water. In an average year, drowning accounts for approximately 70% of all boating-related fatalities nationwide. In about 85% of these cases, the victims were not wearing life jackets.

Game wardens dedicated over 6,300 work hours to watercraft safety enforcement and educational efforts. Six wardens (two in the Laramie Region, two in the Casper Region and two in the Green

River Region) were assigned full time to watercraft safety duties, and many other wardens worked watercraft safety in addition to their other duties. Wardens contacted thousands of Wyoming boaters during the spring and summer months, placing an emphasis on the importance of carrying the proper safety equipment on board and operating watercraft in a safe and sober manner. Several wardens also took time to speak to various school and community groups to educate attendees on safe boating practices.



The Department is responsible for investigation of all watercraft accidents that occur on Wyoming waters. Over the past several years, the Department has sent many game wardens to advanced training in watercraft accident investigation techniques. Four wardens attended a comprehensive watercraft accident investigation training course in Denver,



Warden Dustin Kirsch collects evidence during a BUI investigation.

WATERCRAFT SAFETY PROGRAM



CO. This training gives wardens the skills and knowledge required to conduct professional investigations to determine the causes of watercraft accidents, ranging from accidents involving minor property damage to those involving serious injuries or death. Watercraft accidents often involve criminal and civil court proceedings and wardens are called upon to testify in these cases. In 2016, game wardens investigated nine reportable watercraft accidents. Unfortunately, one of these involved a fatality and another resulted in serious injuries to two people aboard a personal watercraft.

Alcohol and drug use is a contributing factor in many watercraft accidents, and as a result, game wardens keep a watchful eye out for boat operators under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs. During the summer, 11 boat operators were arrested for BUI, minimizing the chance for them to injure

Game wardens participated in watercraft enforcement training on Alcova Reservoir in April.

themselves or others. Most of these operators were under the influence of alcohol, with one also testing positive for marijuana use. The Department participated in Operation Dry Water, a nationwide effort with the goal of educating the public about the dangers of BUI and encouraging boaters to designate a sober operator.

For 2017, the Department plans to continue its involvement in nationwide watercraft safety initiatives and expand local education efforts. These will include interactive watercraft safety events in several communities and presentations on water safety and life jacket use in schools throughout Wyoming.

STATE LAND ENFORCEMENT

In addition to wildlife and watercraft law enforcement, the Department has an agreement with the Wyoming Office of State Lands and Investments to enforce certain rules applying to Wyoming State Trust Land (state land). Department game wardens have the authority to enforce prohibitions of off-road travel, overnight camping, open fires and littering on state land. Most state land enforcement was incidental to hunting and fishing patrol duties. On many state land parcels throughout 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. Littering is also a problem, whether it is the dumping of large appliances/household trash or litter left behind from recreational shooters in the form of spent cartridge casings and the remains of items used as targets. 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.

STATEWIDE SUMMARY OF STATE LAND ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS

Violation	Written Warnings	Citations	Total
Off-Road Travel	12	25	37
Camping	39	11	50
Open Fires	6	1	7
Littering on State Land	6	16	22
TOTAL	63	53	116

Camping violation on state land near Cokeville.



Tree house and abandoned camp fire on state land near Steamboat Point in the Dayton area (above).



Abandoned camper on state land near Glenrock (left).

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS

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

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

Jackson Region – 5 Enforcement Personnel

(3 District Game Wardens, 1 Regional Game Warden*, 1 Regional Wildlife Supervisor)

ACTIVITY	HOURS	WATERCRAFT	
		HOURS	MILES
WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT	2,453	7	32,901
WATERCRAFT ENFORCEMENT	278	59	2,820
TOTAL	2,731	66	35,721

PROGRAM ENFORCEMENT	WARNINGS	CITATIONS	UNKNOWN SUSPECT	LAW ENF. ACTIONS
TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE	106	56	4	166
SPORT FISH	21	31	0	52
NON-WILDLIFE	19	2	0	21
AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES	5	0	0	5
TOTAL	151	89	4	244

*Alpine game warden was present November - December, 2016.

Cody Region – 12 Enforcement Personnel

(9 District Game Wardens, 1 Regional Access Coordinator, 1 Game Warden Coordinator, 1 Regional Wildlife Supervisor)

ACTIVITY	HOURS	WATERCRAFT	
		HOURS	MILES
WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT	5,689	12	79,285
WATERCRAFT ENFORCEMENT	169	55	1,831
TOTAL	5,858	67	81,116

PROGRAM ENFORCEMENT	WARNINGS	CITATIONS	UNKNOWN SUSPECT	LAW ENF. ACTIONS
TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE	169	134	19	322
SPORT FISH	17	25	0	42
NON-WILDLIFE	12	2	0	14
AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES	4	1	0	5
TOTAL	202	162	19	383

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS

Sheridan Region – 9 Enforcement Personnel

(7 District Game Wardens, 1 Regional Access Coordinator, 1 Regional Wildlife Supervisor)

ACTIVITY	HOURS	WATERCRAFT	
		HOURS	MILES
WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT	5,241	1	67,608
WATERCRAFT ENFORCEMENT	444	166	4,893
TOTAL	5,685	167	72,501

PROGRAM ENFORCEMENT	WARNINGS	CITATIONS	UNKNOWN	LAW ENF.
			SUSPECT	ACTIONS
TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE	213	251	89	553
SPORT FISH	32	35	0	67
NON-WILDLIFE	48	52	0	100
AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES	38	8	0	46
TOTAL	331	346	89	766

Green River – 11 Enforcement Personnel

(7 District Game Wardens, 2 Regional Game Wardens*, 1 Regional Access Coordinator, 1 Regional Wildlife Supervisor)

ACTIVITY	HOURS	WATERCRAFT	
		HOURS	MILES
WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT	5,248	0	88,749
WATERCRAFT ENFORCEMENT	1,040	229	6,019
TOTAL	6,288	229	94,768

PROGRAM ENFORCEMENT	WARNINGS	CITATIONS	UNKNOWN	LAW ENF.
			SUSPECT	ACTIONS
TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE	193	162	23	378
SPORT FISH	44	61	0	105
NON-WILDLIFE	50	21	0	71
AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES	68	24	0	92
TOTAL	355	268	23	646

*One regional game warden was transferred to Alpine in November.



Wardens Mitch Renteria (left) and Kelly Todd on patrol at Alcova Reservoir.

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS

Laramie Region – 13 Enforcement Personnel

(8 District Game Wardens, 3 Regional Game Wardens*, 1 Regional Access Coordinator, 1 Regional Wildlife Supervisor)

ACTIVITY	HOURS	WATERCRAFT	
		HOURS	MILES
WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT	6,459	10	95,705
WATERCRAFT ENFORCEMENT	1,841	520	13,929
TOTAL	8,300	530	109,634

PROGRAM ENFORCEMENT	WARNINGS	CITATIONS	UNKNOWN SUSPECT	LAW ENF. ACTIONS
TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE	330	199	10	539
SPORT FISH	65	113	1	179
NON-WILDLIFE	128	60	0	188
AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES	115	10	0	125
TOTAL	638	382	11	1,031

*One regional game warden was transferred to Gillette in September.

Lander Region – 8 Enforcement Personnel

(6 District Game Wardens, 1 Regional Game Warden, 1 Regional Wildlife Supervisor)

ACTIVITY	HOURS	WATERCRAFT	
		HOURS	MILES
WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT	4,525	11	79,635
WATERCRAFT ENFORCEMENT	670	97	8,921
TOTAL	5,195	108	88,556

PROGRAM ENFORCEMENT	WARNINGS	CITATIONS	UNKNOWN SUSPECT	LAW ENF. ACTIONS
TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE	101	54	40	195
SPORT FISH	26	31	0	57
NON-WILDLIFE	38	17	0	55
AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES	21	5	0	26
TOTAL	186	107	40	333



Warden Bill Brinegar looks for a bullet in the carcass of an elk that was shot and left to waste.

REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS

Casper Region – 10 Enforcement Personnel

(7 District Game Wardens, 1 Regional Game Warden, 1 Access Coordinator, 1 Regional Wildlife Supervisor)

<u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>HOURS</u>	<u>WATERCRAFT HOURS</u>	<u>MILES</u>
WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT	4,892	35	68,693
WATERCRAFT ENFORCEMENT	1,446	361	16,486
TOTAL	6,338	396	85,179

<u>PROGRAM ENFORCEMENT</u>	<u>WARNINGS</u>	<u>CITATIONS</u>	<u>UNKNOWN SUSPECT</u>	<u>LAW ENF. ACTIONS</u>
TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE	184	216	32	432
SPORT FISH	61	69	2	132
NON-WILDLIFE	53	65	0	118
AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES	37	5	0	42
TOTAL	335	355	34	724

Pinedale Region – 4 Enforcement Personnel

(3 District Game Wardens, 1 Regional Wildlife Supervisor)

<u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>HOURS</u>	<u>WATERCRAFT HOURS</u>	<u>MILES</u>
WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT	2,224	20	30,221
WATERCRAFT ENFORCEMENT	93	17	891
TOTAL	2,317	37	31,112

<u>PROGRAM ENFORCEMENT</u>	<u>WARNINGS</u>	<u>CITATIONS</u>	<u>UNKNOWN SUSPECT</u>	<u>LAW ENF. ACTIONS</u>
TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE	93	79	10	182
SPORT FISH	11	10	0	21
NON-WILDLIFE	4	3	0	7
AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES	2	2	0	4
TOTAL	110	94	10	214



Warden Adam Parks inventories firearms and archery equipment forfeited by wildlife violators.

WIU AND ADMINISTRATION LAW ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS

Wildlife Investigative Unit - 6 Investigators

(5 Wildlife Investigators, 1 Wildlife Investigative Unit Supervisor)

<u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>HOURS</u>	<u>MILES</u>
WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT	8,294	77,280

<u>PROGRAM ENFORCEMENT</u>	<u>WARNINGS</u>	<u>CITATIONS</u>	<u>LAW ENF. ACTIONS</u>
TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE	1	38	39
SPORT FISH	0	0	0
TOTAL	1	38	39

Law Enforcement Administration – 4 Enforcement Personnel

(1 Chief Game Warden, 1 Deputy Chief Game Warden, 1 Law Enforcement Supervisor, 1 Law Enforcement Coordinator)

<u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>HOURS</u>	<u>MILES</u>
WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT	1,508	10,363
WATERCRAFT ENFORCEMENT	379	2,990
TOTAL	1,887	13,353

<u>PROGRAM ENFORCEMENT</u>	<u>WARNINGS</u>	<u>CITATIONS</u>	<u>LAW ENF. ACTIONS</u>
TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE	38	9	47
SPORT FISH	3	4	7
NON-WILDLIFE	1	3	4
AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES	5	1	6
TOTAL	47	17	64



Wardens in the Sheridan Region participate in firearms training on a snowy day.

STATEWIDE LAW ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS

82 Law Enforcement Personnel

ACTIVITY	HOURS	WATERCRAFT	
		HOURS	MILES
WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT	46,543	96	630,440
WATERCRAFT ENFORCEMENT	6,360	1,504	58,780
2016 TOTALS	52,903	1,600	689,220
2015	49,136	1,253	618,207
2014	46,619	1,371	589,140

PROGRAM ENFORCEMENT	WARNINGS	CITATIONS	UNKNOWN SUSPECT	LAW ENF. ACTIONS
TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE	1,437	1,069	226	2,732
SPORT FISH	280	379	3	662
NON-WILDLIFE	353	225	0	578
AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES	295	56	0	351
2016 TOTALS	2,365	1,729	229	4,323
2015	2,490	2,032	265	4,787
2014	2,248	1,924	237	4,409

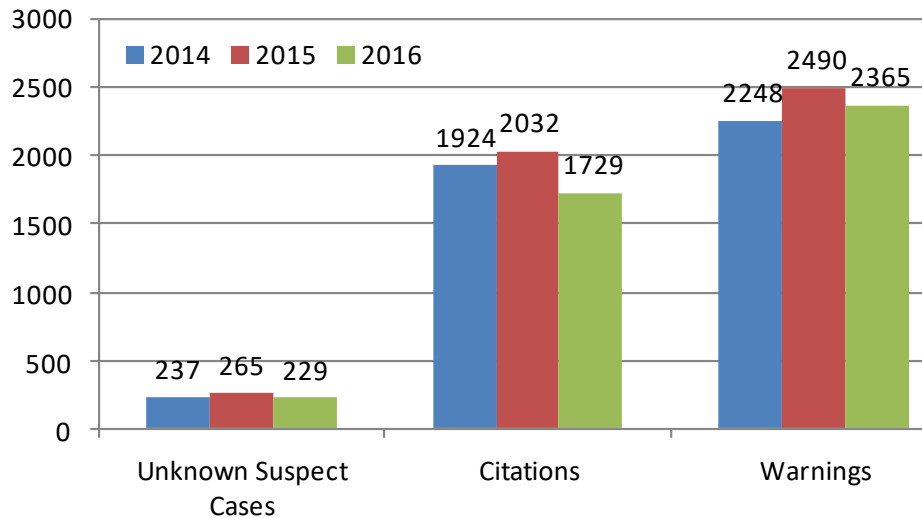
Warden Matt Withroder conducts an interview with Casper's News 13 about boating safety.



STATEWIDE LAW ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS

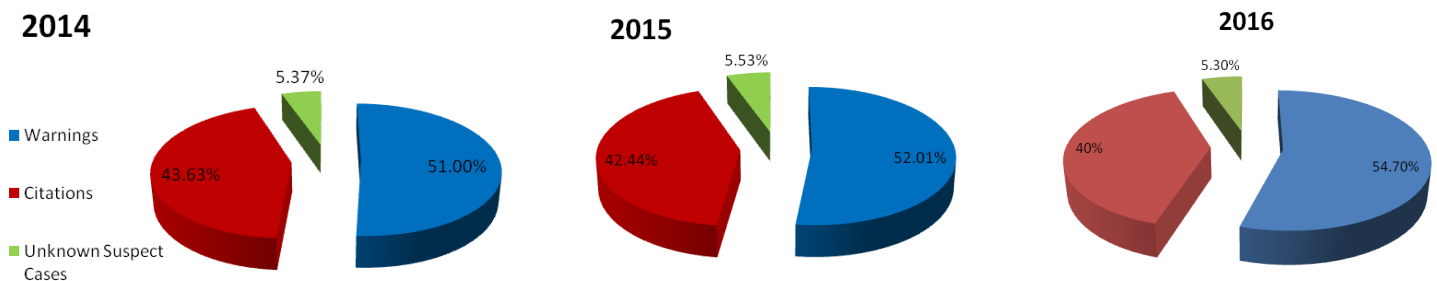
Three-year Comparison of Violations

This chart compares the number of investigated wildlife violations from 2014-2016 by type of action taken: citation, written warning or no action (unknown suspect cases). The number of documented violations statewide has remained relatively consistent throughout this time period, with some variation from year to year. There were approximately 460 fewer documented violations in 2016 from 2015. There are many possible reasons for this, including shifting patrol efforts and work time spent addressing complex investigations or non-enforcement activities. Some wardens commented that increased Department efforts to improve compliance with Conservation Stamp requirements led to fewer violations encountered in the field.



Percentage of Law Enforcement Actions

These charts illustrate the law enforcement actions by percentage of citations, warnings and unknown suspect cases. In a typical year, Department law enforcement officers issue more warnings than citations, often taking the opportunity to educate people who may have inadvertently committed violations with warnings. A warning documents that a violation occurred but doesn't result in fines or loss of hunting privileges.



WILDLIFE FORENSICS LAB

The forensics section of the Department's Wildlife Forensic and Fish Health Laboratory provides law enforcement forensic services (analytical and technical) to aid wildlife law enforcement personnel and management biologists in Wyoming and nine other states.

Forensics lab personnel employ a variety of techniques, including DNA analysis, to test evidence items collected during investigations. Analyses include species identification of hair, blood or tissue samples, gender identification of blood or tissue, individual animal identification, tissue matching and other tests. A detailed report of each test is compiled and provided to the requesting officer. Lab personnel are often called upon to testify in court during trials of defendants charged with wildlife violations.



Packaged meat seized as evidence and awaiting testing at the forensic laboratory.

A total of 11,114 analytical tests were performed on 452 forensic samples for 63 law enforcement investigations. In several of these cases, defendants were charged and pled guilty or were found guilty in a court of law. Results from forensic tests were used to obtain a minimum of \$11,705 in fines and restitution, which does not include pending fines, restitution or forfeitures. There were approximately five cases of lost hunting privileges with one lifetime suspension. There are 37 cases awaiting

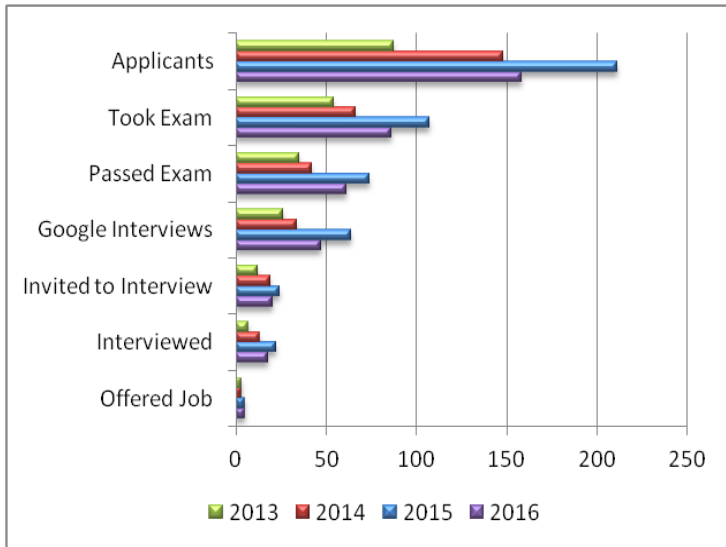
court appearances or still under investigation. In 12 cases, no legal action was taken, the case is on hold, no biological material could be retrieved from the evidentiary item, the suspect was vindicated or the case was settled without forensic testing.

GAME WARDEN APPLICANT TESTING

All game wardens are selected by competitive examination, per Wyoming statute. The first step to becoming a Wyoming game warden is the earning of a bachelor's degree in wildlife management, biology, zoology or a closely related field. Applicants must pass an online written exam consisting of general wildlife management knowledge, wildlife identification and questions about Wyoming wildlife statutes and regulations. Candidates who successfully pass the exam must complete a life history questionnaire, after which they may be invited for a preliminary interview using Google Hangouts. This determines which candidates will complete an in-person interview, personality profile testing, psychological testing and polygraph examination. Candidates offered a game warden position undergo a thorough background investigation and must successfully graduate the Wyoming Law Enforcement Academy's (WLEA) 14 week, 595 hour Peace Officer Basic course prior to working as a Department law enforcement officer. Individuals who successfully complete this hiring process can take great pride in the fact they have achieved the high standards required to become a Wyoming game warden.

In 2016:

- Testing was offered online only
- 158 people applied - 18 not qualified, 54 never registered/submitted qualifying paperwork
- 86 took exam
- 61 passed exam - 70% pass rate
- 47 Google interviews conducted
- 20 invited for in-person interview
- 18 interviewed
- 5 offered job - 6% of applicants taking the exam



The above chart shows a comparison of game warden applicants, exam takers, interviewees, and hires for calendar years 2013-2016. On average, less than 5% of applicants are offered game warden positions at the end of the hiring process.

GAME WARDEN TRAINING

Department law enforcement officers throughout the state completed their annual firearms and custody and control training and qualifications. All officers must qualify with their duty handguns, rifles and shotguns twice a year. Officers are also required to demonstrate proficiency in core skills used for self defense and controlling suspects, such as handcuffing and takedown techniques. Additional training included various shooting drills, use of force scenarios and legal updates related to law enforcement. In 2016, the Department’s policies governing law enforcement firearms and non-deadly force weapons (batons and pepper spray), in addition to Department law enforcement training policies, were updated and modernized after internal review and external review by WLEA staff.

Five game wardens hired as a result of the 2015 game warden exam process; Dylan Bergman, Kristen DaVanon, Justin Dodd, Mitch Renteria and Rob Shipe, graduated from the WLEA as certified peace officers in March, 2016. In April, they attended training conducted by Department training officers and law enforcement staff to prepare them for the upcoming boating season. Training topics included watercraft accident investigation techniques, watercraft patrol, BUI detection, fishing enforcement and watercraft/fishing statutes and regulations. They also received practical training in water survival, boat handling and patrol scenarios. In August, the five new wardens attended a second training session to prepare for the fall hunting seasons. Training topics included review of Game and Fish statutes and regulations, patrol techniques, IGT guidelines and issuance, check stations, the Access Yes Program, general wildlife law enforcement, collection of evidence, crime scene investigation and various other game warden duties. In addition to these intensive training sessions, new game wardens spent a considerable amount of time in their respective regions receiving on-the-job training from other Department employees. Five new game wardens were hired in 2016. Ryan Bagley, Luke May, Trevor Meadows, John Pokallus

Department supervisors and district game wardens join five new game wardens at WLEA POB graduation.





Sheridan Region wardens during custody and control training. and Levi Wood will complete their law enforcement training in the spring of 2017.

On a national level, Chief Game Warden Brian Nesvik and Deputy Chief Game Warden Scott Edberg continue to be very engaged as steering committee members, instructors and executive advisers in the National Association of Conservation Law Enforcement Chiefs (NACLEC) Leadership Academy. The academy's mission is to build a stream of leadership in the conservation law enforcement community with the capacity to solve complex and continually evolving challenges in the efforts to protect fish, wildlife and natural resources, now and in the future. Cody Region Wildlife Supervisor Alan Osterland attended the Leadership Academy in 2016 and joins the ranks of Laramie Region Wildlife Supervisor Rick King and Pinedale Region Wildlife Supervisor John Lund as Department graduates.

Some of the most enjoyable, rewarding, yet dangerous work that Department law enforcement officers are tasked with is patrol of Wyoming's vast backcountry wildlife habitats on horseback. It is important that officers and their horses are well trained and prepared for difficult situations they may face in the backcountry. In May, several game wardens and wildlife biologists from throughout the state attended a week of horse training in Pinedale.



Warden Jordan Winter navigates an obstacle as part of the Department's horse training in Pinedale (above). Chief Game Warden Brian Nesvik demonstrates how to properly tie a box hitch (below).





Game wardens listen to instruction during horse training.

Training topics included basic horse safety, basic and advanced horsemanship, horse and rider desensitization, packing and knot tying, backcountry horse use, horse care and first aid. During the week, the trainers spent a lot of time building the “herd mentality” among the horses and using a wide range of obstacles to build the confidence of the horses and riders. Some of the obstacles included riding the horses over plastic tarps, over tires and through bed sheets hanging from an arched gate. Horses were also exposed to loud sounds, such as sirens and firecrackers. The final day of the training included a timed obstacle course completed by two-person teams and their horses. The obstacle course incorporated many of the training sessions from earlier in the week and included saddling and packing a pack horse using the proper hitches and knots taught during the course. As an extra benefit of this excellent training, the horses and riders were ready to participate in several summer parades throughout Wyoming, including the Cheyenne Frontier Days Parade.

EQUIPMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

The Department continues to explore the latest technology and innovations in wildlife law enforcement techniques to accomplish its mission of conserving and protecting wildlife. The Department is in the process of deploying tablet computers to all field law enforcement personnel. Many game

warden duties are done from a computer, such as writing case reports, researching suspect license history and obtaining criminal records. Equipping officers with tablets will allow them to remain in the field while conducting these activities, increasing their overall efficiency.

The Department has invested in numerous trail cameras, which assist wardens in monitoring specific locations for wildlife violations and identifying possible suspects. Department law enforcement officers also use a wide range of other cameras and optics, including body worn cameras, thermal imaging and night vision.

In November, the Department replaced the .40 caliber Glock pistols issued to law enforcement officers, which had been in service since 2002. Many of these pistols were showing significant wear after having tens of thousands of rounds fired through them during training. The replacements are updated Glock Gen4 .40 caliber pistols. By trading in the old pistols and nearly 60 rifles that were forfeited to the Department in poaching cases, the new pistols were obtained at no additional cost to the Department.



Sheridan Wildlife Investigator Scott Adell photographs a crime scene.

STOP POACHING PROGRAM

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

In 2016, 512 tips were received from members of the public via the Stop Poaching Hotline, a text tip line and the Department website. Game wardens followed up on these tips, and in many cases, no violation could be determined. In several instances, wardens were able to identify wildlife violations and possible suspects. Investigations led to 63 citations and 13 warnings being issued to violators. Defendants charged as a result of tips made to the Stop Poaching Program paid \$85,170 in fines and restitution.

To draw attention to the Stop Poaching Program and the Department's law enforcement mission, several wardens rode in one of the Cheyenne Frontier Days parades, featuring the horse-drawn "Poach Coach."

Game wardens pose with the "Poach Coach" at Cheyenne Frontier Days.



WYOMING WILDLIFE PROTECTORS ASSOCIATION

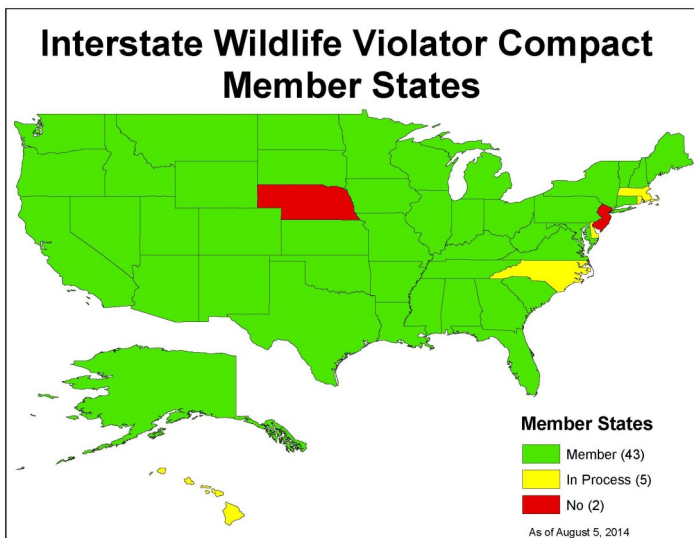
To encourage reporting of wildlife violations by the public, the Department has partnered with the Wyoming Wildlife Protectors Association (WWPA). The WWPA began in 1983 and is a registered non-profit organization. The sole purpose of the WWPA is to manage a reward account and provide monetary rewards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

Many of the successful investigations and prosecutions of wildlife violators in Wyoming would not have been possible without the information provided by concerned citizens. Often, informants are turning in a friend or family member, which can be difficult and shows their genuine concern for Wyoming's wildlife resource. Department enforcement officers may submit a reward recommendation request based on a reward payment schedule listed in the WWPA Constitution. A total of \$15,500 in rewards was paid to individuals who provided information leading to the conviction of wildlife violators.

WILDLIFE VIOLATOR COMPACT

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

There are currently 44 member states and four more states are in the process of joining the compact. Nationwide in 2016, there were 5,706 new license suspensions entered in the IWVC, including 102 from Wyoming. Several cases initiated in 2016 are awaiting court proceedings and may lead to further license suspensions once completed.



NEW LEGISLATION AFFECTING LAW ENFORCEMENT

Bill enacted during the 2016 Legislature:

Senate Bill

SF0075 Criminal Trespass to Collect Data - Amendments

Signed into Law by the Governor 3/3/2016

Summary: This bill requires individuals, including Game and Fish personnel, to obtain written or verbal permission to enter or cross private land to collect resource data. This original bill (W.S. § 6-3-414) was passed into law in the 2015 legislative session. The amendments to this bill change the word “open” land to “crosses private” land. The amendments also expand the definition of “collect” to include the recording of a legal description or geographical coordinates of the location of the collection. These amendments do not change the Department’s approach to collecting resource data. Department personnel have always operated under the guidance of obtaining private landowner permission before collecting resource data and the new amendments do not change the Department’s operations.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Several Wyoming game wardens were recognized in 2016 for their outstanding service to the state by the Department and other organizations.

2016 Wyoming Game Wardens Association Officer of the Year - Dustin Shorma, Dayton Game Warden

2016 Shikar-Safari Club Wildlife Officer of the Year - Adam Hymas, Big Piney Game Warden

2015 Wyoming Game and Fish Department Lifetime Achievement Award - Tim Fuchs, Jackson Regional Wildlife Supervisor

2015 Wildlife Division Employee of the Year - Rick King, Laramie Regional Wildlife Supervisor

Wyoming Law Enforcement Academy POB Honor Graduate - Dylan Bergman, Casper Game Warden

RETIREMENTS

Steve DeCecco, Green River Regional Wildlife Supervisor - 36 years of service

Sheridan Regional Supervisor
Joe Gilbert retired in 2016 with
35 years of service.

Joe Gilbert - Sheridan Regional Wildlife Supervisor - 35 years of service

Scott Adell - Sheridan Wildlife Investigator - 15 years of service

PROMOTIONS

Todd Graham -
Afton Game Warden to Green River Regional Wildlife Supervisor

Craig Smith -
South Cody Game Warden to Sheridan Regional Wildlife Supervisor

Game Warden to Senior Game Warden

Adam Parks - West Casper District

Linnea Sailor - East Rawlins District

Brooke Weaver - North Gillette District

Jordan Winter - Medicine Bow District



Green River Regional Supervisor Steve DeCecco (right) retired in 2016 with 36 years of service.

HONORING THE FALLEN



Game Warden Kirk Inberg



Grizzly Biologist Kevin Roy



Pilot Ray Austin

This year marked the 25th anniversary of the plane crash that killed two Game and Fish Department employees and a contract pilot. On the morning of October 16, 1991, Game Warden Kirk Inberg and Biologist Kevin Roy, along with their pilot, Ray Austin, were attempting to locate a radio-collared grizzly bear that an elk hunter may have wounded when their plane went missing. An extensive search took place but the wreckage wasn't found for almost four years, when two elk hunters on Soda Mountain between Togwotee Pass and Yellowstone National Park found the crash site in heavy timber. Evidence at the site suggested the plane had gone down at a steep angle and all three men were killed upon impact. A brass plaque has been placed at the crash site to commemorate the tragic crash, and in 1992, the East Fork Wildlife Habitat Management Area near Dubois was renamed in honor of Inberg and Roy.

On May 20, 2016, a memorial ceremony was held at the WLEA to honor fallen officers from across the country. Game wardens joined officers from other Wyoming law enforcement agencies at the ceremony. The names of the 144 law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty in the United States in 2015 were read, as well as the complete list of names of the 62 fallen officers from Wyoming. There are nine former Wyoming game wardens on the Wyoming Peace Officer Memorial.



John Buxton - 1919	Francis Gradert - 1973
Charles "Ted" Price - 1921	Cliff Stevens - 1983
Bill Lakanen - 1945	Kirk Inberg - 1991
Don Simpson - 1945	Kay Bowles - 1992
Charles Calvert - 1965	

HONORING THE FALLEN

Also on May 20, 2016, the Wyoming Game Warden Association Honor Guard participated in a fallen officer memorial ceremony in Cheyenne, performing a 21-gun salute, playing “Taps” and joining a procession of law enforcement vehicles representing many Wyoming agencies.



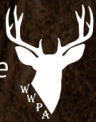


Conserving Wildlife
Serving People

**Wyoming's wildlife belongs to you. Help protect it!
Report all wildlife violations.**

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

Rewards are provided
by the Wyoming Wildlife
Protectors Association



**STOP
POACHING**

Help us Stand Watch 1-877-WGFD-TIP

