

WYOMING 2016 STATEWIDE HUNTING SEASON FORECAST



PRONGHORN (antelope)

CASPER

Throughout the Casper Region, antelope herds are beginning to rebound after substantial winter losses five years ago that were followed by three years of poor fawn production through 2013. Fawn production and survival were good to excellent in 2015, marking the second consecutive year of strong herd productivity. As a result, antelope populations are noticeably increasing in several areas. However, antelope numbers remain below management goals in some areas that experienced more substantial losses between 2011 and 2013, particularly in Hunt Areas 30, 31, 70, 71, and 72. Antelope are beginning to fare a little better in northeast Wyoming (Hunt Areas 4-9, 27 and 29) where strong fawn production and good over-winter survival has fostered modest population growth. In Hunt Area 73, antelope numbers have grown considerably and now exceed population objectives.

In 2015, forage production was excellent due to another year of above average precipitation during the growing season. As a result, antelope entered the 2015-2016 winter in excellent condition for the third consecutive year. The 2015-2016 winter was variable in the Casper Region. Winter conditions were extremely mild in northeast Wyoming with relatively light snowfall and temperatures well above normal. Considering the excellent body condition of antelope going into the winter, over-winter survival should be fairly good across all age classes throughout most of the Casper Region. However, winter conditions were moderate to bordering on severe to the west and south of Casper. In these areas, higher than normal snowpack coupled with persistent cold temperatures made access to forage very difficult for wintering antelope. These conditions broke in February, with unseasonably warm temperatures melting crusted snow, enabling antelope to better access sagebrush stands on winter ranges. This late-winter warming trend likely prevented significant antelope winter losses, particularly in Hunt Area 32 (which also provides winter range for antelope from Hunt Areas 47 and 48).

Proposed 2016 hunting seasons in the Casper Region are designed to modestly increase hunting opportunity and slow population growth in northeast Wyoming (Hunt Areas 4-9, 27 and 29) and Hunt Area 73, while remaining very conservative in the rest of the Casper Region. In particular, managers intend to promote maximum population growth in Hunt Areas 25, 26, 30, 31, and 70-72 where antelope numbers remain below desired levels. Following drastic license reductions from 2011-2015, hunting success should moderately improve in 2016, as hunters will see increased antelope numbers compared to recent years. Drawing odds should also begin to improve with modest increases in the number of licenses available, although in some hunt areas it will still be difficult to draw a tag. As always, antelope hunters are reminded that asterisked (*) hunt areas have limited public hunting access and are largely comprised of private lands. In these areas, hunters should get permission to hunt private land before applying for a license, or at least recognize that hunting small isolated parcels of public land can be difficult and frustrating at times.

CODY

Pronghorn hunting in the southern Bighorn Basin will likely be better in 2016 compared to 2015. Although pronghorn numbers are still below target levels in both the Copper Mountain herd (Hunt Areas 76, 114, 115) and the 15-Mile herd (Hunt Areas 77, 83, 110), populations are increasing after two successive wet springs. In 2014 and 2015 we had record high fawn ratios for both these herds, which will translate to more pronghorn and improved hunting opportunity in 2016. There will be more licenses offered in most hunt areas for Type 1 and Type 6 permits. Type 1 or 2 licensed hunters shouldn't have a problem finding a reasonable buck to harvest.

Although pronghorn populations are below population objectives, antelope hunting should be fair to good in the northern Bighorn Basin. The 2015-2016 winter was mild, and we have not documented higher than normal over-winter mortality. Pronghorn numbers are close to population objectives in the Carter Mountain herd (Hunt Areas 78, 81, 82) which can be attributed to increased fawn production in 2014 and 2015. Specifically, in Hunt Area 82, pronghorn numbers have increased more than Hunt Areas 78 or 81, prompting a slight increase in Hunt Area 82 Type 1 licenses for 2016. Damage issues caused by pronghorn on private crop lands has subsided, therefore we are offering fewer doe/fawn licenses in Hunt Area 80. Type 1 license hunters in Hunt Area 80 shouldn't have a problem finding a reasonable buck to harvest.

GREEN RIVER

Antelope numbers increased again throughout most of the Green River Region during 2015, with the exception of localized areas with long term drought and poor habitat. Numbers remain very low in Hunt Area 96, but this is one of the few areas in southwest Wyoming where numbers haven't returned to more acceptable levels. Fawn production was particularly good again in all the western hunt areas of the region, and increased in the South Rock Springs, Bitter Creek and Baggs herds. This is following a long term decline in much of the region due to extreme drought and severe winter weather (especially in 2010-2011). Conditions during the 2015 summer and 2015-2016 winter have been above average in both temperature and moisture, which should result in another year of good fawn production.

Hunters can expect another good year of pronghorn hunting in the Green River Region in the majority of hunt areas. Buck numbers remain very good and significant opportunity exists for buck and doe-fawn hunters in much of the region.

Eastern hunt areas in the region (Hunt Areas 53 and 55 - Baggs herd unit), and (Hunt Area 57 and 58 - Bitter Creek herd unit), will have more opportunity for buck or doe-fawn licenses when compared to last year, including a new Type 2 license for any antelope in Hunt Area 57. Type 1 licenses in Hunt Area 58 will increase but remain low due to low overall pronghorn numbers and poorer buck ratios. Herd wide impacts ranging from heavy development to competition with feral horses, elk, and livestock, habitat degradation due to conversion, unsuccessful reclamation, and drought, make it unlikely the Bitter Creek herd unit will return to numbers seen prior to the 1993-1994 winter in the near future. We are seeing an increase in overall numbers herd-wide and things are looking up for this herd due to improved precipitation which dramatically improved habitat conditions. The current objective for this herd is 13,000 pronghorn.

The South Rock Springs herd unit is currently near objective, and is increasing. Doe hunting opportunities were added this year to maintain this herd at objective. Buck (Type 1) licenses in Hunt Areas 59 and 112 are being held at 2015 levels.

The Green River Region manages the southern three hunt areas in the Sublette pronghorn herd, one of the largest herds in the state that stretches from Jackson Hole to Rock Springs. Excluding Hunt Area 85 in the Jackson Region, two of these three southernmost areas (Hunt Areas 92 and 96) have the lowest densities of antelope in the herd unit. Given antelope numbers in both these areas, and the eastern half of Hunt Area 93 remain below desired numbers, doe-fawn and some buck opportunity has been eliminated or greatly reduced over the past few years. Antelope densities are much higher in the western half of Hunt Area 93, and doe-fawn opportunity there (Hunt Area 93-7) will be increased. Additionally, we are proposing a new Type 8 license to direct doe-fawn harvest to irrigated lands in this western half of this hunt area. Pronghorn densities remain so low in Hunt Area 96 that we again propose to hunt this area in combination with Hunt Area 92.

The Carter Lease herd unit remains at objective. The herd unit is comprised of Hunt Areas 94, 98, and 100. Hunt Areas 98 and 100 are intentionally managed for very low antelope numbers due to competition concerns with Wyoming Range mule deer. These areas are higher in elevation and have very good fawn productivity, and we propose to issue similar licenses as in 2015, with the exception of a modest reduction in Hunt Area 98-6 licenses. Hunt Area 94 is managed for 5,000 pronghorn. The summer of 2012 and 2013 was particularly hard on this portion of the population, with observed fawn ratios declining from an average in the 70s:100 does, to the low 30s. This, combined with losses incurred during the 2010-2011 winter, and a high harvest of female antelope, led to a population reduction. However, fawn production returned to higher levels in 2014 and 2015, which should push the population a little above objective again. Therefore, we are proposing to maintain the number of doe-fawn licenses for the entire hunt area (Hunt Area 94-Type 6), which should maintain this herd near objective. We also plan to maintain the same number of doe-fawn licenses that focus harvest in agricultural areas with antelope damage concerns (Type 7s). In response to good buck ratios, we are increasing Type 1 licenses in Hunt Area 94.

The Uinta-Cedar Mountain herd unit consists of Hunt Areas 95 and 99, which have very different habitats and pronghorn densities. The eastern area (Hunt Area 95) tends to be drier, is known for larger bucks, but has relatively low fawn production. Areas of localized damage near the Bridger Valley exist in the western portion of Hunt Area 95 and are addressed with an increased number of Type 7 licenses. The western area (Hunt Area 99) is much wetter, with significant areas of irrigated meadows. Damage concerns are higher in this area, and fawn production is much higher. Doe/fawn opportunity (Type 6 licenses) is typically high in this area, but is being reduced somewhat since this herd is now below objective. We are proposing an increase in Type 7 licenses in both hunt areas to address agricultural damage concerns, but are reducing Type 6 licenses in Hunt Area 99 due to herd status.

JACKSON

In the Jackson Region, the northern subunit of the Sublette antelope herd includes Hunt Areas 85 and 86. Although hunter success is good, Hunt Area 85 (Gros Ventre) offers very limited hunting opportunities. There will only be 20 licenses offered for the 2016 season. Hunt Area 86 (Hoback) has seen an increase in antelope during the past several years. However, hunter access is limited and the majority of the hunting opportunities are located on private lands in the Bondurant area.

LANDER

With increased fawn production and survival in 2015 pronghorn populations in the Lander Region have increased slightly, but are still down and below objective levels throughout most of the area. Of the Region's 6 pronghorn herds with population based objectives, 3 are below, 2 are above, and 1 is at objective after the 2015 hunting season. Pronghorn classifications in 2015 revealed fawn productivity, yearling buck ratios, and the overall numbers of pronghorn generally improved in 2015. This was attributed primarily to improved moisture and habitat conditions after two years of extreme drought in 2012 and 2013. It is anticipated buck quality is likely to be similar or slightly improved compared to 2015. Mature buck ratios vary throughout the Region, but are still good and hunters drawing a license should expect good to excellent harvest success.

LARAMIE

Laramie Region pronghorn herds are either increasing or stable according to population estimates. While this is a positive trend, there are still several herds (30%) within the region that are below their population management objectives. The remaining majority of the Laramie Region herds (70%) are at or above their population management objective. This is a positive trend following a significant decrease in pronghorn populations from 2010 to 2013.

The Laramie region experienced an increase in fawn ratios this year due to an increase in properly timed moisture in the summer and fall of 2015, with ratios averaging 70 fawns per 100 does. The 2015-2016 winter was near average, suggesting increased pronghorn fawn mortality when compared to the mild 2014-2015 winter. Additionally, there have been some recent spring snow storm events that may have caused additional juvenile mortality. Fortunately, pronghorn were in excellent body condition going into winter, which should enable them to better survive these more average winter conditions.

Based on this information, Laramie Region pronghorn managers are proposing to increase harvest in some herds that are exceeding their population objectives, while continuing to manage conservatively in herds that are below, or have just recently reached, their population management objectives. Hunters should expect pronghorn hunting to improve for the 2016 season.

PINEDALE

In the Pinedale Region, the northern portion of the Sublette antelope herd includes Hunt Areas 87-91. Population estimates for this herd are below desired levels. The lower elevation sagebrush communities throughout the Region are generally in poor condition due to lack of snowpack and spring/summer moisture in 2012 and 2013. Good precipitation in 2014 and 2015 resulted in improved forage production, although shrub conditions continue to remain in poor shape. Additionally, herbaceous production was poor throughout much of the lower elevations in the southern portion of the region near Farson due to lower precipitation rates in that area during 2014. The 2015 fawn production totaled 66:100, same as the 5 year average (2010-2014) of 66:100. The total 2015 buck:100 doe ratio of 55:100 was similar to the 5 year average of 56:100. Based on mild conditions during the past three winters (2014-2016), mortality for adult pronghorn should be low on most of the winter range complexes in the region. For the 2016 hunting season, the Pinedale Region reduced permit levels slightly from 2015 which should enable pronghorn numbers to increase.

SHERIDAN

Pronghorn fawn production during 2015 in the Sheridan Region was again very good with 80 or more fawns per 100 does observed in some hunt areas. The winter of 2015-2016 has been

relatively mild, so good survival is expected. The result of better recruitment is that more licenses will be made available in parts of northeast Wyoming in 2016.

Northeast Wyoming has some of the largest pronghorn herds in the state; however some segments of pronghorn populations continue to suffer lingering effects of past drought and harsh winters so license numbers are still below historic levels in some hunt areas.

The majority of antelope hunting in the Sheridan Region is on private land. Access to private lands and landlocked public lands continues to be difficult in portions of some hunt areas where fees for hunting access are high and little or no hunting is allowed. Leasing of hunting rights to outfitters continues to limit access for hunters wanting to hunt without a professional guide or outfitter. Those hunters who are able to gain access to private land will have high success. Hunter densities on many accessible tracts of public land can be high, especially on opening day and weekends. Hunters that plan hunts later in the season often see fewer hunters.

Hunt areas in herd units with robust populations will have large numbers of licenses available in an attempt to slow or reverse population growth. In past years, hundreds of limited quota doe/fawn and limited quota any antelope licenses have gone unsold in the Sheridan Region. The large number of unsold licenses have given potential hunters the impression there might be easy access to private lands where landowners want to reduce antelope numbers, but that is not necessarily the case. Hunters desiring to hunt private land are strongly encouraged to secure permission prior to purchasing a license.

In Hunt Area 23, we propose adding Type 2, any antelope, and Type 7, doe or fawn antelope, licenses that will only be valid on private land. In the past, leftover Type 1 and Type 6 licenses were purchased by hunters that crowded onto limited amounts of public lands. The new license types will focus harvest on private lands where additional harvest is desired. Limiting the number of licenses that are valid on public lands should reduce hunter density and improve the hunting experience.

Doe/fawn seasons beginning September 1 on private land are again proposed for portions of Hunt Areas 22 and 102 to address recurrent damage situations. These seasons provide hunters who secure access the opportunity to fill doe/fawn tags before hunting pressure increases with the opening of the regular hunting season.

DEER

CASPER

Throughout the Casper Region, mule deer populations have rebounded some over the past three years following long-term gradual decline since the 1990's. Similar to antelope herds in the Casper Region, mule deer populations experienced record or near record fawn production in 2014 and continued good fawn production in 2015. Although mule deer numbers remain well below objective in nearly all herds in the Region, they have grown significantly over the past three years, especially in the Black Hills. While several more years of good fawn production, survival and yearling recruitment will be necessary to build populations to objective levels and meet public desires, the outlook for mule deer in the near future throughout the Casper Region is brighter than it has been in a long time.

In 2015, forage production was again excellent with above average precipitation during the growing season. As a result, mule deer entered the 2015-2016 winter in excellent condition for the third consecutive year. The 2015-2016 winter was variable throughout the Casper Region with relatively light snowfall in some areas and above average temperatures. Considering the excellent body condition of mule deer going into the winter, over-winter survival should be fairly good across all age classes. Although winter conditions were moderate to bordering on severe south of Casper, mule deer survival should be good as access to winter forage was not overly limited. In these areas, wintering mule deer depend primarily on taller shrubs such as true mountain mahogany, antelope bitterbrush, and willow, which remained available above the snow. Although cold and snowy conditions increase daily energetic demands for mule deer, they appear to have been relatively unaffected especially considering good body condition entering the winter. Winter conditions were more of a concern in these areas for antelope as they require Wyoming big sagebrush for most of their winter diet, which is a shorter shrub and was largely covered by crusted snow for three straight months. Regardless, cold and snowy conditions broke in February when unseasonably warm temperatures finally melted crusted snow and provided some much needed relief to wintering mule deer, especially in Hunt Area 66.

Throughout most of the Casper Region, deer hunters in General License areas should see more mule deer bucks this fall as recruitment of young bucks has improved. However, hunting seasons in these areas will remain conservative with short season lengths and antlered only deer seasons. The exception being the Black Hills, where mule deer numbers are nearing management goals. An antler point restriction will remain in Hunt Area 66 to continue restricted buck harvest. Mule deer hunters in the Douglas and Lusk areas will likely experience improved hunting and trophy availability on private lands, but continued low harvest success on public lands and hunter crowding in some areas. Doe/fawn license issuance for mule deer has long been eliminated throughout most of the Region outside of the Black Hills. Throughout the Casper Region, nonresident mule deer hunting opportunity was drastically cut over the past 10⁺ years as mule deer populations declined. Nonresident quotas for Regions B, D, and J saw reductions of 76% between 2004 and 2015. This trend is now reversing and a modest increase of 200 Region B licenses will be offered for 2016 due to improving mule deer numbers.

Despite modest increases in mule deer numbers, 2016 mule deer hunting seasons will remain conservative in most of the Casper Region. The one notable exception will be in the Black Hills, where three years of excellent fawn production and mild winters have resulted in increased mule deer numbers (along with white-tailed deer which are hunted concurrently). As a result, the Region A quota is being increased about 30% and doe/fawn license issuance will increase substantially as well. In Hunt Areas 2 and 3, the Department returned to a 30-day mule deer season last year, but 20-day General License mule deer seasons remain in effect for Hunt Areas 1, 4, 5, and 6. This management strategy should result in some additional deer harvest in all Black Hills hunt areas except the southernmost portion in Hunt Area 6 near Newcastle. Liberalization of hunting seasons in the Black Hills is designed to slow population growth, especially white-tailed deer, in an attempt to manage both species toward population objectives.

The limited quota deer hunt areas in the Casper Region will continue to see restricted license issuance as these areas are managed for high mature buck ratios and harvest success. Modest increases in Type 1 (antlered deer) licenses will occur in Hunt Areas 34 and 89 as these herds have grown and experienced increases in mature buck numbers. However, drawing odds for these coveted licenses will remain low given their popularity. The Type 1 license quota for

Hunt Area 10 (largely comprised of the Thunder Basin National Grasslands) will not change in 2016. This is the second year of a limited quota season and managers want to further evaluate the effects of the change in hunting season structure.

Outside of the Black Hills, white-tailed deer numbers remain at relatively low levels following significant declines over the past five years due to widespread outbreaks of Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD). As a result, the Department is maintaining reduced allocations for Type 3 and 8 licenses throughout the Region outside of the Black Hills. In the Black Hills, where the state's largest concentration of white-tailed deer occur, the population has increased considerably over the past three years as winter conditions have been mild, and excellent precipitation and forage production have fostered strong fawn production and survival. This should provide for continuing improvement in hunting quality and harvest success for Black Hills white-tailed deer hunters on both public and private lands. However, many landowners are now expressing concern over increased deer numbers, especially in Hunt Areas 1-3, which lie north of Interstate 90. As a result, the nonresident Region A quota is proposed to increase to 4,500 (from 3,500) licenses for 2016. Increasing nonresident opportunity is especially important for attaining desired doe harvest, as nonresidents holding Region A licenses typically harvest the majority of doe white-tailed deer on private lands within the Black Hills.

CODY

Mule deer hunting in the southern Bighorn Basin should improve in 2016 compared to last year. Although mule deer numbers still remain below objective, we are seeing improving habitat conditions. Similar to pronghorn, mule deer fawn ratios were at record highs in 2014 and 2015 for most areas. Increased moisture during the spring periods of 2014 and 2015 improved habitat conditions for mule deer, thus improving fawn numbers and survival. Because of improving deer numbers, some hunt areas will have more licenses available for both buck and antlerless deer hunting. Limited quota Hunt Areas 37, 119 and 125 should see good hunting, while areas such as 116, 118, 120 and most general license areas will likely be better than last year.

The 2013 Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) outbreak caused a significant white-tailed deer die-off in most areas of the southern Bighorn Basin resulting in fewer white-tailed licenses in 2014. However, white-tailed deer numbers have improved in some areas and white-tailed hunting opportunity will increase in most of the southern Bighorn Basin. Based on public input during the Owl Creek/Meeteetse mule deer initiative, and public concern over expanding white-tailed deer numbers, we are offering more white-tailed deer hunting opportunity Hunt Areas 116-120.

For the northern portion of the Bighorn Mountains, buck numbers have been increasing however, the overall population still has not increased to numbers observed in the mid-2000s. Buck hunting should be fair to good, and antlerless deer hunting opportunity will be slightly better in the Paintrock herd (Hunt Areas 41, 46, 47), because of improved fawn production in 2015 (81 fawns:100 does). There will be limited antlerless deer hunting with a general license in Hunt Areas 41 and 47 after the buck season. The Greybull River deer herd (Hunt Areas 124 and 165) and the Shoshone River deer herd (Hunt Areas 122 and 123) should have similar hunting conditions to 2015. Shoshone River doe/fawn licenses were reduced in 2015 due to fewer damage complaints, but some licenses will remain available in areas with chronic agricultural damage combined with excellent fawn production.

Although conservative seasons are allowing deer numbers in the North and South Fork of the Shoshone River to grow as quickly as possible, populations remain below desired levels. Poor fawn production in 2014, and significant overwinter fawn mortality during the 2014-2015 winter, translated into fewer yearling bucks in 2015 and fewer 2-year-old bucks in 2016. There remain a fair proportion of older aged bucks that will be available for harvest in 2016. Opportunities to harvest a mature buck deer in Hunt Areas 105 and 106 should be good in both the late general season and the November limited quota season. Recent changes to season structures increased the percentage of older age class bucks in Hunt Area 109, but snow and cold weather is necessary to move deer into this hunt area.

The creation of a new non-resident deer region in 2015 made it necessary for non-resident deer hunters to choose between hunting migratory deer on public lands west of Cody (Region F) or hunt deer on private lands in the interior of the Bighorn Basin (Region X). This change made it easier to manage for higher deer numbers in Region F and lower deer densities on irrigated private lands in Region X.

GREEN RIVER

Mule deer numbers in the Green River Region, much like in the entire range of this species, have declined over the long-term. This is due primarily to lower average annual fawn production and recruitment. However, some populations in the Region have shown positive growth since the 2010-11 winter. Seasons in these more productive areas (the eastern and western end of the region) are being liberalized or maintained as deer numbers increase. Deer in the central portion of the region continue to decline due to poorer habitat conditions and impacts of long-term, severe drought. Barring a return to 1940-1960s era habitat conditions and significantly more precipitation, seasons will likely continue to be conservative and opportunities will continue to decline if deer numbers keep trending downward in these areas. Mule deer seasons will remain very conservative in the drier portions of the Region, including Hunt Area 131 in the Sublette herd, and the South Rock Springs hunt areas in 2016.

The Baggs mule deer herd is made up of three Hunt Areas, (82, 84 and 100). Hunt Area 84 is hunted under a very conservative limited quota season due to access concerns. Hunt Area 82 is one of the most heavily hunted deer areas in the state and is very popular with both residents and non-residents. Harvest in this area vies for the top spot on an annual basis. This portion of the herd tends to be robust, and recent improvements in fawn production and recruitment have increased deer numbers in this area, to the point we are now significantly above objective and require additional doe harvest. This population remains in an upward trend. Fawn ratios were good the last three years, as was recruitment and survival, and deer numbers have shown a noticeable increase. Winter losses in 2015-16 were light but higher than the previous two winters, when losses were barely noticeable. We propose to offer similar antlered deer hunting this year in Hunt Area 82, (twelve days) and again propose to offer combination deer/antlerless elk hunting for youth following the general season. Buck ratios remain high in light of a recent two year antler point restriction (APR) season combined with dramatically improved fawn recruitment. Increased mule deer numbers and a population that is above objective suggest increased doe harvest is warranted. Therefore, we are proposing 500 Type 6 antlerless licenses for 2016 in Hunt Area 82. Given very few deer occupy Hunt Area 100 during the hunting season (this is primarily winter range); we are again proposing a very short general season in this area.

Hunt Area 131 is a low density deer area associated with the much larger Sublette herd unit to the north. Except during winter, this area remains a low density hunt area, with low numbers of

resident deer. Only in the agricultural fields near Farson-Eden, and the west end of this hunt area along the Green River, are deer densities somewhat satisfactory to the hunting public. These areas also incur annual agricultural damage to private property. While the hunt area covers a large geographical area, deer numbers throughout the remainder of the herd are very low and unlikely to improve barring significantly increased and regular precipitation and improved habitat conditions. Habitat conditions will not support large deer densities throughout the majority of this dry, desert area. We again propose a very short hunt in this area, a restrictive 4 point APR season and eliminating all doe licenses.

The South Rock Springs herd unit (Hunt Areas 101 and 102) is managed under a conservative limited quota scenario and is a favorite (but exceedingly difficult to draw) of both residents and non-residents. Over time, opportunity has been reduced due to public desires for fewer hunters and an expectation this will result in large numbers of large antlered buck mule deer, which has proven to not be the case. The proposal for 2016 will be the same as in 2015, a season with significantly reduced hunter opportunity due to declining deer numbers and concerns about buck quality. There has been nearly no doe harvest in this herd unit since 1994 and this population has not responded due to limitations in habitat and low fawn production and recruitment. Doe deer in this herd, recently captured for the Deer and Elk Ecology Research (D.E.E.R) project average 60 pounds lighter than adjacent herds and have very limited fat deposition, a condition not conducive to raising or recruiting healthy fawns. Despite very conservative seasons with minimal license allocation that allow for maximum population growth, the hunting public continues to request additional reductions in licenses.

While significant losses occurred in the western $\frac{1}{3}$ of the region during the 2010-11 winter, mule deer numbers have recently increased due to good survival and improved fawn numbers from 2012 to 2015 in both the Uinta and southern portion of the Wyoming Range herd units. These areas include Hunt Areas 132, 133, and 168 (Uinta herd unit) and Hunt Areas 134 and 135 (Green River portion of the Wyoming Range herd). Significant deer losses occurred in both areas in 2007-08 and again in 2010-11. Additionally, losses were likely heavier during the 2012-13 winter in the Uinta herd than the Wyoming Range, due to poorer summer, transition, and winter habitats. A combination of very limited doe harvest, and recent improved survival and fawn production has led to increased deer numbers and increased populations trends. Herd growth is punctuated at intervals (usually every three-four years) with significant winter losses, but we are entering the 6th year of below average (maybe average in 2015-16 winter in some areas) mortality and increased fawn recruitment. While we would like to see more deer to satisfy public demands in these herds, deer numbers have been given unlimited potential for growth, and are likely at capacity. Predator control efforts are very high in both herd units, but we have seen limited corresponding increase in deer numbers. We continue to propose relatively conservative antlered only deer seasons and there are APR seasons in Hunt Areas 132, 133, 134, and 168. Hunt Area 132 has been under an antler point restriction for a number of years. This is a popular season with the local hunting public. Since buck ratios are very good already throughout most of these areas, a full two week season is again warranted.

Due to a recent increase in observed white-tailed deer in most Regional hunt areas, the harvest of any white-tailed deer will be permitted during general seasons.

JACKSON

The Wyoming Range Deer Herd (Hunt Areas 134, 135,143-145) is designated as a special management strategy herd which focuses on providing high quality hunting opportunities,

mature age class deer, and high buck:doe ratios (30-45: 100). Post season surveys in December 2015 indicated that fawn survival was below desired levels with 61 fawns: 100 does observed compared to 77 fawns:100 does observed last year. Buck ratios continue to remain at some of the highest levels documented in Wyoming. This year observed buck:doe ratios were 41 bucks:100 does. Deer numbers have increased slightly after three years of high over winter survival among all age/sex classes. Hunters should anticipate seeing bucks that are 3-8 years of age, and exceptional antler growth.

The southern portion of the herd unit will offer 14 days of antlered deer hunting in Hunt Areas 134 and 135. In Hunt Area 134 an antler point regulation will allow hunters to take antlered mule deer with three points or more on either antler. In Hunt Area 135 hunters will be permitted to take antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer. General license hunting opportunity for antlered mule deer will run from September 15 - October 7 for Hunt Areas 143-145. In Hunt Area 145, a total of 60 Limited quota Type 3 licenses valid for any white-tailed deer will be in place from November 1-30, and unused Type 3 licenses valid for antlerless white-tailed deer will continue from December 1 – January 31.

No changes are proposed for the 2016 nonresident quotas for both Regions G and H. In 2012, quotas were reduced 200 for Region G and 400 for Region H. A total of 600 and 800 licenses will be issued for nonresidents in Regions G and H, respectively. Reduced nonresident quotas combined with fewer days to hunt on a general license will help meet the “special” management criteria of maintaining at least 30 bucks:100 does and maintain quality bucks in the population.

The Targhee deer herd is a small population on the west side of the Teton Range that is managed to provide recreational hunting opportunities. Population growth of this herd is limited by winter range and habitat loss from residential developments. Most crucial winter ranges are situated in Idaho and options to allow this population to grow are limited. In 2015, hunters reported a 25% success rate. Proposed hunting seasons in 2016 include a general license season for antlered deer from September 15 through October 7. In addition, a Type 8, limited quota license will be offered in 2016, valid for doe or fawn white-tailed deer. Fifty licenses will be available.

LANDER

Similar to pronghorn, mule deer populations have markedly declined over the last several years due to poor fawn productivity. But, increased fawn production (and likely survival) were realized in 2015. As many as 90 fawns:100 does were observed (the Sweetwater herd unit, Hunt Areas 96 and 97) and in the Ferris herd unit (Hunt Area 87) a 100% increase in fawn numbers were observed again in 2015 compared to the low of 29 fawns :100 does in 2013. Regardless, of the 5 herds within Lander Region with population based objectives, all remain below objective after the 2015 hunting season. Concurrent with increased fawn survival, generally throughout the region buck to doe ratios increased. With increased fawn production and survival hunters observed more deer in 2015 than in previous years. Similar observations should be realized in 2016 if winter weather remains mild. Hunters will have opportunity for increased harvest (mostly young bucks) as mule deer numbers increase and no antler point restrictions are in place. Though with increased fawn production, all mule deer populations in the Lander Region continue to struggle and is most likely attributable to relatively low fawn survival. A case in point is the Sweetwater herd unit where the past two years fawn ratios have been 95 fawns:100 does and 90 fawns:100 does respectively, yet this population remains stable. As a result, seasons are similarly conservative in 2016. Hunters will continue to experience shorter seasons and markedly reduced doe/fawn licenses.

Continued any white-tailed deer seasons are in place in the Dubois, Lander, Riverton, and Jeffrey City areas. Extended seasons in the South Wind River herd unit (Hunt Areas 92, 94 and 160) for white-tailed deer offers more hunting opportunity. However, throughout much of the Region white-tailed deer numbers remain relatively low due to an apparent Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) outbreak two years ago. As a result, license issuance for white-tailed deer specific licenses remains similar to that in 2015.

LARAMIE

Mule deer populations remain below established population objectives throughout the Laramie Region. Fawn ratios increased in several herds within the region, and for those that decreased slightly, ratios still were higher than the previous 10 year average. Managers believe the slight decrease in fawn ratios observed in some areas were likely an artifact of last year's higher fawn ratios which lead to a large number of yearling does that did not have fawns. The regional average fawn ratio was 70 fawns per 100 does. Buck ratios increased across the region, with some ratios in the 50s for bucks per 100 does, and all buck ratios exceeding 30 bucks per 100 does. The Platte Valley and Sheep Mountain priority MDI herds both experienced an increase in population and buck ratios from the previous year.

Mule deer populations within the Laramie Region again benefited from appropriately timed precipitation throughout the 2015 spring and fall seasons, with animals coming into harvest check stations in very good body condition. The 2015-16 winter has been closer to average, and more severe than the mild winter of 2014-15. Winter mortality for mule deer fawns is likely higher this year than last winter, however, with good body condition hopefully mitigating this mortality to some extent.

Based on this information, Laramie Region mule deer managers are proposing no changes in mule deer seasons for this year. Mule deer populations are currently increasing, and managers would like to continue to manage herds conservatively until they reach or exceed population management objectives.

Southeastern Wyoming white-tailed deer seasons are designed to provide opportunity during the mating period and reduce damage to private property. Liberal seasons provide abundant opportunity, but the majority of white-tailed deer occupy riparian areas on private land. While biological data is limited, white-tailed deer populations appear to be increasing across the region based on harvest information. The region is proposing to increase white-tailed deer hunting opportunity in some areas.

PINEDALE

Portions of two mule deer herds are managed in the Pinedale Region: Sublette, and Wyoming Range. The Sublette and Wyoming Range Deer Herds are two large populations with special management strategies designed to provide high quality hunting opportunities, older age class deer, and high buck:100 doe ratios (30-45 : 100). For the Sublette Herd, this population decreased below the post-hunt population objective in 2004 following significant winter losses when fawn mortality was estimated at 75% and adult mortality at 20% coupled with continued declines on the Mesa winter range (-40% from 2000 to 2014). This herd unit has remained below desired population objective levels since 2004. Despite improved spring moisture and improved shrub productivity from 2009 to 2011, deer losses were extreme from the 2010-2011 winter with an estimated 70 % fawn loss. Dry conditions during 2012 and 2013 resulted in poor

production for winter habitats followed by improved moisture and forage production in 2014 and 2015. Good fawn survival during the past three winters has resulted in population growth.

The goal of the 2016 hunting season for the Sublette mule deer herd (Hunt Areas 130, 131, 138-142, 146, 150-156, 162) is to increase overall deer numbers and maintain buck harvest opportunities. A standardized season (September 15th to October 7th) for most general license hunting seasons in the Sublette herd unit is again proposed in attempts to spread out hunting pressure. Overall, population estimates for this herd unit remain below the population objective of 32,000 animals and the buck:100 doe ratio remain within management goals at 43:100.

The Wyoming Range Deer Herd (Hunt Areas 134, 135,143-145) is designated as a special management strategy herd which focuses on providing high quality hunting opportunities, mature age class deer, and high buck:doe ratios (30-45: 100). Post season surveys in December 2015 indicated lower fawn survival than the previous four years, however 2+ year old bucks are anticipated to survive the winter in good condition. Buck ratios continue to remain at some of the highest levels documented in Wyoming. This year observed buck:doe ratios were 39 bucks:100 does. Hunters should anticipate seeing bucks that are 3-8 years of age, and exceptional antler growth.

The southern portion of the herd unit will offer 14 days of antlered deer hunting in Hunt Areas 134 and 135. In Hunt Area 134 an antler point regulation will allow hunters to take antlered mule deer with three points or more on either antler. In Hunt Area 135 hunters will be permitted to take antlered mule deer or any white-tailed deer. General license hunting opportunity for antlered mule deer will run from September 15 - October 7 for Hunt Areas 143-145. In Hunt Area 145, a total of 60 Limited quota Type 3 licenses valid for any white-tailed deer will be in place from November 1-30, and unused Type 3 licenses valid for antlerless white-tailed deer will continue from December 1 – January 31.

No changes are proposed for the 2016 nonresident quotas for both Regions G and H. In 2012, quotas were reduced 200 for Region G and 400 for Region H. A total of 600 and 800 licenses will be issued for nonresidents in Regions G and H, respectively. Reduced nonresident quotas combined with fewer days to hunt on a general license will help meet the “special” management criteria of maintaining at least 30 bucks:100 does and maintain quality bucks in the population.

In addition to mule deer hunting opportunities, “any white-tailed deer” seasons will again be offered. White-tailed deer numbers along many of the major river corridors appear to be stable to increasing. Subsequently, for 2016 a Limited Quota Type 3 license will be offered in Hunt Areas 138-140, 142-143 from October 1 to November 30. This Type 3 license can be purchased in addition to a statewide general deer license.

SHERIDAN

Mule deer populations in the Sheridan Region are well below the population management objectives in all four herds. Continued concern about mule deer populations is evident from responses to landowner and hunter harvest surveys conducted following the 2015 hunting season. Many landowners stated that mule deer populations were below desired levels and they wanted the same or more conservative seasons. Observations by WGFD personnel during harvest field checks and classification surveys confirm that mule deer populations are low in several parts of the Sheridan Region however some recovery to populations has occurred.

Mule deer fawn production in the Sheridan Region during 2015 was very good for a second year. More than 80 fawns per 100 does were observed in some hunt areas. The winter of 2015-16 has been relatively mild, so good survival is expected. The result of better recruitment is that mule deer populations are expected to increase but still remain below objective.

Access to hunt mule deer, particularly buck mule deer, has become severely limited as much of the private land and access to landlocked public land has been leased by outfitters. Several ranches that traditionally accommodated nonresident hunters willing to pay access/trespass fees and allowed limited hunting by residents, no longer are available. Conversations by field personnel with some landowners indicate that hunting opportunities will again be limited in 2016. Even though mule deer populations may be lower than desired, overall buck to doe ratios in Sheridan Region herds are quite high because relatively few bucks are being taken on private land. Hunter densities on many accessible tracts of public land can be high, especially on opening day and weekends. Hunters that plan hunts later in the season often see fewer hunters.

To address concerns regarding deer populations and hunter access to private and public lands, mule deer seasons have been designed to provide needed flexibility. Proposed seasons will allow harvest of does and fawns in private land situations where there are damage concerns, will attempt to match the number of hunters with access to private lands, and should reduce harvest on accessible public lands. The Region Y nonresident quota was reduced in 2015 and season length shortened in Deer Hunt Areas 25 & 28. Conservative seasons are again proposed for 2016 in Region Y hunt areas. Because of good fawn production for two years within nonresident Region C we have proposed a modest increase (+100 licenses) to the Region C quota.

White-tailed deer in the Sheridan Region experienced disease die-offs in 2006, 2007, 2011, and again in 2013. Because of the die-offs, very liberal seasons, and some harsh winters the number of white-tailed deer is lower in parts of the region compared to a few years ago. Hunter access for white-tailed deer hunting was more difficult in 2013 through 2015 as landowners saw fewer white-tailed deer following the 2013 EHD outbreak. However, in some places there continues to be fairly high densities of white-tailed deer and good production during the past two years has allowed some recovery.

We have proposed liberal white-tailed deer seasons with the hope of continuing to apply pressure to the population. We proposed to increase the Hunt Area 24 Type 3 license quota by fifty. Due to recurrent damage situations, doe/fawn white-tailed deer seasons are again proposed to begin on September 1 in Hunt Areas 24, 27, 29, 30 and 33. Doe/fawn white-tailed deer seasons are proposed to end on December 15th. In Hunt Area 24 near Sheridan an “unlimited” number of Type 8 doe/fawn licenses will be available, which means hunters and landowners will not have to worry about available licenses selling out. Hunters can again purchase an unlimited number of Type 8 doe/fawn licenses after the draw in certain hunt areas to address damage situations.

We have observed a trend where some ranches are catering more toward outfitted white-tailed deer hunts which makes it more difficult for residents to find places to hunt white-tailed deer, especially bucks.

CASPER

Elk numbers remain at or above objective levels in all herds in the Casper Region. Elk season recommendations therefore continue to be extremely liberal in terms of season length and license issuance. In recent years, elk harvest have approached or exceeded record levels in many Casper Region herds. The Casper Region continues to provide excellent bull elk hunting opportunities, with many areas continuing to provide excellent harvest success on “any elk” licenses and good trophy quality. Antlerless elk hunter success continues to be good in most of the Region, although high hunter densities on public lands often result in reduced hunter success in the early fall. In the Laramie Peak / Muddy Mountain elk herd (Hunt Areas 7 and 19); overall elk harvest continues to be very strong as excellent cooperation with landowners has resulted in good hunter access for cow elk on private lands along with expanding Walk-In-Area and Hunter Management Area opportunities. Elk hunting in the Laramie Range should continue to be good this coming fall, and antlerless seasons will again go through January in both Hunt Areas 7 and 19. Antlerless hunting opportunities will extend through mid-December in Hunt Areas 23, 120 and 122. Elk hunting in the Black Hills continues to be variable, as hunters with access to elk on private lands have been doing well while public land hunters in Hunt Area 116 have had little success as most elk occupy private lands in that area. Given the change to general license hunting in Hunt Area 116, the Department would like to remind hunters that the conversion to a general license season was primarily an attempt to increase elk harvest on private lands. Elk densities on public lands have always been low during the fall months as hunting pressure and human activity quickly displace elk to private lands. Expectations of harvesting an elk on national forest in Hunt Area 116 should therefore be tempered. License quotas for Hunt Area 1 will remain at reduced levels as overall harvest success has been lower than desired in recent years. Overall, season recommendations for 2016 will continue to maximize female harvest throughout the Casper Region within the constraints of public access, while also providing good trophy quality in most areas. Those hunters willing to expend the effort should continue to enjoy remarkable numbers of elk and good success if the weather cooperates.

CODY

Based on 2015/2016 winter trend counts, some elk subunits in the southern Bighorn Basin are approaching herd population objectives due to record harvest levels during the past several years. Although elk numbers may be declining, we are still over objective in most of the southern Bighorn Basin elk herds. As in the past, we will again offer ample opportunity for antlerless elk hunting in the southern Bighorn Basin, along with some very good quality bull hunting in most areas. Hunters are reminded to collect blood from their harvested elk for brucellosis sampling and can get blood sampling kits from WGFD field personnel or the Cody Regional office.

The North Bighorns elk herd remains healthy and productive, and there should be a good opportunity to harvest an elk again in 2016. We have checked many older age class bulls in the past years’ harvest, and predict it should be good again for those hunters with a Type 1 tag. Harvest success usually depends on the arrival of cold and snowy weather to move elk to accessible locations. We are offering a similar number of licenses compared to 2015 and a December hunt in Hunt Area 41 that should increase cow elk hunter success in 2016. While elk distribution in Hunt Area 41 may have discouraged many hunters over the past few years, we changed season structure this year to allow more antlerless elk hunting opportunities. Based on 2015/2016 winter trend counts, elk numbers in Hunt Area 39 have increased in the past 2 years,

and we are offering more Type 1 hunting opportunity by changing the “antlered elk” license to an “any elk” license.

Most elk populations near Cody are near population objectives, and most season recommendations adopted in 2013 (during the Cody Elk working group process) for Hunt Areas 55, 56, 59, and 60 will remain in place for 2016. Hunt Area 55 will remain limited quota hunting, but we expanded the general license season for non-wilderness areas in Hunt Areas 56 and 59. We removed the spikes excluded regulation in all areas since overall bull numbers are holding steady and few spikes are harvested most years. The rifle opening date for Hunt Area 60 will stay at September 20, and we will offer fewer antlerless elk licenses Hunt Area 61 since elk numbers are at objective. We also simplified antlerless elk seasons in Hunt Area 56 with no split between the North Fork and the South Fork. We will offer an opportunity to hunt antlerless elk (Hunt Area 56 Type 4 license) in October to reduce numbers of non-migratory elk. We will increase elk hunting opportunity again in Hunt Area 66 to reduce elk numbers on agricultural land along and adjacent to the Greybull River (including leftover Hunt Area 61 Type 2 licenses for bull elk.) As a reminder, elk Areas northwest of Cody (Hunt Areas 51, 53, 54) were changed dramatically in 2014 to better manage migratory and non-migratory elk population segments. As part of this effort, Hunt Area 51 now has 2 license types for bulls, a Type 1 license for south and west of the Clarks Fork River and a Type 2 license for north and east of the Clarks Fork River. Please review the 2016 elk hunt area map closely prior to applying for your license, or call the Cody Regional Office for a more detailed explanation.

GREEN RIVER

The Green River manages six elk herd units and twelve hunt areas, under varying management schemes. With the exception of the West Green River herd, most elk herds are above post-season population objectives. Most general license herds in this region have liberal “any elk” seasons, followed by general license “antlerless” seasons, and also have liberal numbers of antlerless licenses or additional cow/calf licenses. General license elk herd units in this region include: West Green River (Hunt Areas 102-105), Uinta (Hunt Areas 106 and 107), and Sierra Madre (Hunt Areas 13, 15, 21, 108, and 130). Hunting will remain good in all of these areas, but seasons are becoming significantly more conservative in West Green River as the population is near objective. We will continue with very liberal seasons in both the Sierra Madre and Uinta herd units until objectives are achieved. Elk herds above objective have a potential to negatively impact other species, and are often in conflict with agriculture operations. These conflicts range from direct loss of stored crops to disease concerns, primarily brucellosis. Elk seasons have been dramatically liberalized during the past decade in an effort to check growth and return numbers to appropriate levels.

The Green River Region also manages two herd units under limited quota special management, which provides high bull ratios and older-aged males. Both the Steamboat (Hunt Area 100) and the South Rock Springs (Hunt Area 30-32) herds are under special management guidelines and seasons are managed conservatively to maintain a quality experience for the hunting public. Both herds are very popular with the hunting community. In the case of the South Rock Springs herd, we are constantly balancing the needs of this species with the needs of the South Rock Springs mule deer herd, also under special management. While one likely has negative impacts on the other, the need for this balance is difficult to achieve. We have been much more aggressive in managing both herds in recent years, with significant cow harvest. Recent field data suggest significantly more licenses are needed in the Steamboat herd, especially for antlerless elk to address increasing population trends.

Opportunity in the Petition herd unit (Hunt Area 124) was increased for both bulls and cows in 2012 and 2015 in response to public comments and concern over growing elk numbers and impacts to deer and pronghorn. We are proposing additional increases in response to growing elk numbers and concerns for competition with other native ungulates, and will offer more cow hunting opportunity on and around the Tipton HMA to reduce landowner conflicts.

JACKSON

With the Fall Creek herd at the desired population objective, antlerless hunting opportunities will be scaled back this year. Hunt Areas 84 and 85 will have a limited number of cow/calf licenses. In order to increase antlerless elk numbers throughout the herd unit, the general license “any elk” season will open September 26 and close October 9. General license antlered elk, spikes excluded hunting will run September 26 through October 31. With a 20 bull to 100 cow ratio, hunters should have a reasonable opportunity to harvest a bull elk. In addition, this is the third year of general license hunting for any elk, with a spikes excluded restriction. This limitation will allow more yearling bulls to be recruited into the population. Type 6 cow or calf only licenses will continue to be valid into November in Hunt Area 84 to address damage to private land.

In the Afton herd, Hunt Area 89 ‘any elk’ seasons are proposed for October 15 to October 17 and antlered seasons will again extend through October 31. The increase in hunting opportunity in the lower Greys River (Hunt Area 89) is a result of higher elk numbers on the Greys River feedground at Alpine and on native winter ranges in Greys River. In Hunt Area 90, liberal seasons into November and limited quota cow or calf tags are again being proposed to address an increase in elk numbers in the Upper Greys River.

In the Jackson herd, 10,668 elk were counted during the 2016 mid-winter survey. While the population is near the objective of 11,000, portions of the herd that migrate from Yellowstone National Park, the Teton Wilderness and the Gros Ventre drainage are below objective.

Conservative hunting seasons are proposed for Hunt Areas 70, 71, 79, and 81-83 to address low recruitment while trying to maintain bull numbers. In the southern portion of the herd unit in Hunt Areas 75, 77, 78 and 80, liberal antlerless elk seasons are proposed to address growing elk populations that summer along the Snake River corridor in southern Grand Teton National Park and subdivisions in Hunt Area 78. In Hunt Area 78, Type 1 licenses will be valid off national forest beginning on August 15 in 2016 and valid in the entire hunt area beginning September 26. Hunt Areas 75 and 79 Type 1 (antlered elk) licenses were eliminated in 2012. Hunters will continue to have opportunities in Hunt Area 75 with cow/calf licenses. In addition, the Antelope Flats area will remain open until November 30. Hunt Area 75 Type 4 hunters will also be permitted to hunt in Hunt Area 79 until October 31. The area known as the Snake River Bottom in Hunt Area 75 will be closed again this year. The Department’s Hunter Management Access system will again be used to allocate permits for the National Elk Refuge (Hunt Area 77). Hunters will be allowed to access the National Elk Refuge and hunt along the Gros Ventre River west of the Gros Ventre Campground in Grand Teton National Park. Sportsmen holding Refuge permits will also be allowed to access the National Elk Refuge in this area. Hunt Areas 70 and 71 in the Teton Wilderness will close on October 31 in 2016.

It is anticipated that the 2016 hunt season will focus hunting pressure on southern segments of the Jackson elk population that remain over objective. In addition, lower calf production

observed over the past several years will continue to influence recruitment and contribute to the conservative hunting seasons proposed for this population.

The Targhee elk herd is a small population on the west side of the Teton Range that is managed to provide recreational hunting opportunities. Most crucial winter ranges are situated in Idaho and options to allow this population to grow are limited. In 2015, hunters reported a 30% success rate. Proposed hunting seasons in 2016 include a general license season for antlered elk, spikes excluded from September 20 through October 25.

LANDER

Like much of Wyoming, elk populations are doing well across the Lander Region. Calf production remains on par with previous years and should result in continued robust elk numbers. Similarly, observed bull to cow ratios remain strong over most of central Wyoming. If favorable weather conditions are realized during the fall season, hunters should experience excellent harvest opportunity and success in all hunt areas. With elk herds near or above objective in almost all locations in the Lander region, most hunt areas are being managed to reduce populations toward management objectives.

LARAMIE

Elk populations within the Laramie Region remain above management objectives and calf and bull ratios remain high. All elk herds within the region are increasing or stable when compared to last year's population estimates. Elk herds within the region continue to be highly productive with ratios averaging 40 to 45 calves per 100 cows.

The favorable 2015 spring/fall conditions and appropriately timed precipitation have benefited elk herds greatly. While the winter of 2015-16 is more severe than 2014-15, it is not enough to cause significant mortality to elk calves.

Laramie Region elk managers are proposing to continue liberal elk seasons until herds reach their population management objectives.

PINEDALE

There are 4 elk herds managed in this region. While liberal seasons have been in place for several years, changes are proposed for several of the herds near Pinedale to address changes in the overall population trends.

The Piney Elk herd has exceeded the population objective over the last several years and liberal seasons were in place. However lower elk numbers were observed this past winter and managers have proposed to reduce limited quota licenses and shorten the general elk season. Hunt Areas 92 and 94 will open October 1st for Type 6 cow/calf licenses and extend to January 31 in restricted portions of each hunt area. A Type 7 cow/calf only license will allow hunters to take advantage of the month of November to harvest an elk north of Middle Piney Creek in Hunt Area 94. There will be 600, Type 6 cow or calf licenses available in Hunt Areas 92 and 94 combined. The general license season will close on November 10 for antlerless elk.

Elk numbers in the Pinedale herd remained similar in 2015 and hunting seasons were designed provide antlerless harvest similar to the Piney and Hoback elk seasons. Changes are proposed to maintain a closing date consistent with the Piney elk seasons. The 2016 seasons are still

designed to target “antlerless” elk and lower population levels but the general season will close on November 10 instead of November 20.

The 2016 hunting season in the Hoback herd will offer general license “any” elk hunting through October 31 in Hunt Area 86 and south of Highway 191 in Hunt Area 87. In Hunt Area 87 north of highway 191, “any” elk hunting will run from October 15 to October 21 and “antlered” elk hunting will run from October 22 to October 31. This herd is being managed to provide recreational opportunities while maintaining quality bull:100 cow ratios. The 2016 season will remain conservative in attempts to build elk numbers and a shortened general antlerless elk season is proposed for the area south of Highway 191 due to lower elk numbers on the McNeel feedground. Instead of closing on November 15 the season will close on November 6 in this area.

For the Upper Green River herd, 2016 hunting seasons will remain similar to 2015. This herd is slightly above the stated objective of 2500 elk. In an attempt to limit population growth, 730 Type 4, 5, 6, and 7 “antlerless” licenses will be available for all Hunt Areas (93, 95, and 96) combined. This herd is managed with a combination of general and limited quota licenses to meet management objectives.

SHERIDAN

The Sheridan Region manages part or all of four elk herd units. Proposed elk seasons have been designed to once again give ample opportunity to harvest elk in those areas where populations are over objective, while still considering those hunt areas within herd units that have numbers near desired levels. Limited access to private lands for elk hunting has been the primary factor contributing to herds exceeding management objectives. Hunters who gain access to hunt or cross private lands are once again expected to have high success. Mature bulls are available in all hunt areas and hunters have a reasonable chance of harvesting a “trophy” bull.

Along the Bighorn Mountains, elk find refuge on private lands. In Hunt Area 37, several hundred elk avoid hunters by moving to private lands. It is proposed that the Type 6 cow or calf season be opened off the national forest on September 1 with the entire hunt area opening October 1 and closing November 30. Because the Type 6 season will only be open off national forest in September it is proposed that the Type 9 archery only licenses be valid in the entire hunt area. A Type 7 cow or calf elk season is proposed to run December 1-31 off national forest lands to target elk on private lands.

In Hunt Areas 33, 34, 35 and 36 we are proposing the antlerless elk hunting seasons run longer in an attempt to increase harvest. In Hunt Area 33 near Kaycee, we have proposed to start the Type 6 cow or calf season later to spread out hunters. In Hunt Area 34, we are proposing to open the Type 6 season earlier in a portion of the hunt area to address damage issues on private land.

In Hunt Area 38 we are proposing to open the Type 4 season October 1-10 for the entire hunt area and then after a short closure, re-open on October 15, also for the entire area. It is proposed that a Type 6 cow or calf season again be open from November 16 to December 31 on private land to address damage issues.

Hunt Areas in the eastern part of the Sheridan Region include Hunt Areas 2, 113 and 123. In Hunt Area 2 more emphasis will be placed on harvesting female elk with 50 Type 6 cow/calf

licenses offered in addition to fifty Type 4 antlerless elk licenses. Hunt Area 113 will be closed in 2016. Hunt Area 123 will only be open for a Type 4 antlerless elk season.

Hunt Area 129 will again be open for general license elk hunting. We are recommending that the general season be open for “any elk” during part of the season and then for “antlerless elk” during the remainder of the season. Type 6 reduced price cow/calf licenses will also be issued. Elk are in small, scattered herds throughout this hunt area mostly on private land. Finding access to hunt is very important prior to going hunting in Hunt Area 129. Hunt Area 129 is not considered a “destination hunt”, but rather offers more of an opportunity for hunters living nearby to capitalize on when elk become available for harvest.

MOOSE

CODY

The moose population in Hunt Areas 9 and 11 (Absaroka Mountains) remains at low densities, but hunters who are lucky enough to draw a license should have good success harvesting a bull. Harvest success for these moose areas still averages above 85%, with most hunters harvesting a mature bull. The 2016 season should again have good success with nice (+45”) bulls being available.

GREEN RIVER

Moose populations declined in the mid-2000s throughout the Green River Region and other herds in western Wyoming for unknown reasons. Similar population declines have been observed in many moose populations across North America, but to date, scientists have been unable to determine the exact cause. The Green River Region responded to declining populations by eliminating all antlerless moose hunting opportunities. Antlered moose hunting was significantly reduced as well. Until moose populations rebound, moose hunting will remain conservative in southwest Wyoming, including Hunt Areas 26, 27, 33 (reopened in 2014), 35, 36, 40 (season is closed in Hunt Area 44). Moose populations are starting to show a little positive growth over the past four years.

In the Green River Region, moose numbers (and opportunity) are highest in the Lincoln herd unit (Hunt Areas 26, 33, 36, and 40), especially in Hunt Area 26. A few very large (50+”) Shiras bulls are harvested in this herd on an annual basis, and hunters enjoy selecting from a good number of bulls.

JACKSON

In the Sublette Moose herd, management direction in the past has focused on maintaining license numbers in Hunt Areas 10, 20, 21, and 23. Mature bulls, that are 4 years of age or older, are consistently being harvested in these areas. The opportunity to harvest a trophy class Shiras moose has increased in recent years in Hunt Areas 10, and 20. Throughout these hunt areas the average antler spread continues to approach 40 inches. Because of the anticipated warm weather projected for this fall, hunters should plan on hunting when temperatures are the coolest and moose are likely to be feeding – at first light and early evening. Due to poor hunter success in Hunt Area 21 over the last two hunting seasons, license holders in Hunt Area 21 will also be allowed to hunt in Hunt Area 10.

Conservative 2016 hunting seasons will be maintained for the Targhee Moose herd unit in the combined Hunt Areas 16 and 37. Hunter success was high in 2015 (80%), however average days per animal harvested was 13.5, compared to 4.0 in 2014. Low moose densities remain a concern in this herd unit. Hunting seasons in 2016 will offer 5 antlered-only licenses for the combined Hunt Area 16 and 37.

The Jackson herd continues to be a concern. Two-hundred and thirteen moose were classified during the 2016 mid-winter trend count. License quotas in the Jackson Herd have decreased from a high of 495 in 1991 to 10 in 2013. In 2011, Hunt Areas 7, 14, 15 and 32 were closed because of low calf: 100 cow ratios and declining population trends. Hunt Areas 17 and 28 were combined in 2012 and will again offer 5 antlered moose licenses in 2016. This combined hunt area will again open on September 15 in 2016. In the upper Gros Ventre drainage, Hunt Area 18 will remain at 5 antlered moose licenses and open on October 1. Conservative seasons are again proposed to address declining population trends. Calf: 100 cow ratios have increased during past four years, which is a sign the herd may begin to grow again. This herd will be closely monitored in future years to evaluate population numbers and determine whether additional licenses can be offered.

LANDER

Populations in both of Lander Region's moose herds are considerably below desired objective levels and continue to struggle. The Lander Moose herd unit (Hunt Areas 2 and 30) trend is declining and observed calf and bull ratios declined again in 2015. Overall herd performance and population size continue to be major concerns for Lander Region personnel. The Dubois herd unit (Hunt Area 6) seems to be stable. Seasons for 2016 will be identical to those in 2015 and hunters fortunate enough to draw a license should expect reasonably good harvest success depending on their trophy expectations.

LARAMIE

The Snowy Range herd unit (Hunt Area 38 and 41) stretches across southern Wyoming, along the Colorado border, from Baggs to Cheyenne. Moose are found year-round in areas on Pole Mountain, Sierra Madre Mountains, and most notably, the Snowy Range Mountains. This license is highly sought after by moose hunters looking to harvest mature bull moose.

In March 2015, 30 adult cow moose were fitted with GPS collars to study their movements, body condition, and habitat use. During the 2015-2016 winter, these moose were recaptured and their body fat was measured to determine their overall conditioning and health. This study will continue through spring of 2017. The results will be used by Laramie Region moose managers to better manage this moose population.

Additionally, Laramie Region personnel conducted a moose sightability survey for the Snowy Range moose that resulted in a minimum population estimate of 300 moose. Currently, the herd management objective is under review for the Snowy Range herd.

Laramie Region moose managers are proposing a slight reduction in cow moose licenses for the 2016 season.

PINEDALE

The Pinedale Region manages the majority of the Sublette Moose herd unit which is designed to provide recreational opportunities and maintain high bull: 100 cow ratios. Mid-winter aerial counts for the Sublette herd show a stable to slightly increasing population trend since 2006, although trend counts dropped in 2014 and 2015. The decline in the observed number of moose was most likely due to low snow levels and the timing of the aerial survey and therefore not reflective of declining moose numbers. The 2016 seasons are designed to maintain quality bull ratios (+50:100) while stabilizing overall moose numbers. Since 2002, a total of 400 permits (-63%) were eliminated which has helped reverse the downward trend seen in this population.

SHERIDAN

The Sheridan Region will have moose seasons in both Hunt Area 1 and Hunt Area 34 of the Bighorn Moose herd during 2016. Ten Type 1 any moose licenses and five Type 4 antlerless moose licenses will be issued in Hunt Area 1 which is the same number of licenses as 2015. In Hunt Area 34, five Type 1 any moose and five Type 4 antlerless moose licenses will be issued which is a reduction of five Type 4 licenses. Hunt Area 42 which is part of the Bighorn moose herd but located in the Cody Region on the west side of the Bighorn Mountains will be open with five Type 1 any moose licenses available. Governor's moose licenses will not be eligible for the Bighorn Mountains in 2016 as no license type has more than 10 licenses available.

Hunting seasons over the past few years are believed to have reduced the population of moose in the Bighorn Moose herd. This was done to address concerns about heavy use of willows and it is expected the 2016 season will likely stabilize the population. Those individuals fortunate to draw a license for any of the Bighorn moose hunt areas have a good opportunity to harvest a moose and it is expected some large, mature bulls will be taken. Access to hunt is excellent as most moose in the herd unit are found on the Bighorn National Forest.

BIGHORN SHEEP

CASPER

Bighorn Sheep Hunt Area 20 encompasses the Wyoming portion of the South Dakota/Wyoming interstate Elk Mountain bighorn sheep herd. Since 2009, there has been at least one sheep license issued each year on the Wyoming side, which was increased to two in 2014. Since inception of a hunting season in Hunt Area 20, hunters have experienced 100% success, with most hunters harvesting very nice rams. In fact, most harvested rams from Hunt Area 20 have met minimum Boone and Crockett scoring requirements. Given hunter success the past seven years, good sheep distribution on publicly accessible lands, and a very high mature trophy-class ram ratio, the Department is again proposing to issue two licenses for the Wyoming side for the 2015 season. Two licenses will again be issued on the South Dakota side for the same reasons. We continue to anticipate good hunter success and excellent trophy availability for Hunt Area 20 license holders for the foreseeable future.

CODY

The effects of the bighorn sheep die-off in Hunt Area 5 are still evident with fewer mature bighorns counted during winter flights. Between 2011 and 2013, classification/trend flights conducted in Hunt Area 5 suggested a 40-50% decline in the number of sheep compared to the

previous 10-year-average. Because of the decline in bighorn sheep numbers, the license quota was significantly reduced. Hunters lucky enough to draw a Hunt Area 5 license will have to put in more effort in finding older age class rams (compared to previous years.) Although sheep numbers are down in Hunt Area 5, successful hunters harvested good rams in 2015, with an average harvest age of 7-8 years.

Overall, bighorn sheep hunting in the Absaroka Mountains should be good again in 2016 for those lucky enough to draw a license. In 2015, the average age of harvested rams in Hunt Areas 1-4 was 7-8 years old. License adjustments made in Hunt Areas 4 and 5 have helped preserve the age distribution of rams and maintained hunter success. In Hunt Area 12 (Devils Canyon), the bighorn sheep herd continues to increase and we are offering 6 licenses (up from 4 in 2015) for the first time in 2016. Past hunters have all harvested mature rams (6-8 years) so hunting should be very good for the 5 resident and 1 nonresident hunter lucky enough to draw one of the coveted licenses for this small herd.

JACKSON

The Targhee sheep herd is estimated at approximately 125 sheep. Aerial surveys are completed at least once every 5 years, depending on funding availability. A survey was conducted in February 2016, during which 46 sheep were classified (1 yearling ram, 19 adult rams, 20 ewes, and 6 lambs). The previous survey was March 2015, when a total of 57 sheep were classified (3 yearling rams, 28 adult rams, 20 ewes, 6 lambs). From 2006 to 2011, one ram was harvested each year, no rams were harvested in 2012, and one ram was harvested in 2013, 2014, and 2015. Hunter success is limited by the difficult terrain, low sheep numbers, and movements into Grand Teton National Park. This herd appears to be limited by poor quality, high elevation winter habitat. Sheep hunting opportunities for the Targhee herd will again be offered in 2016 with 1 resident license and 1 nonresident license.

In the Jackson Sheep herd, managers began detecting pneumonia in the sheep population in early summer 2012. Some winter ranges in the Jackson and Gros Ventre areas may have experienced a 30% decline in the overall number of sheep. Lamb:ewe ratios also declined to 21 lambs:100 ewes from 50:100. The 2016 mid-winter trend count indicated the population is rebounding, with a lamb:ewe ratio of 41:100 and 379 total sheep classified. Ram:ewe ratios remain relatively high at 48:100. Forty-nine rams were observed with $> \frac{3}{4}$ curl horns during the survey. Hunter success in 2015 remained high at 82%. Due to the population rebound and ram:ewe ratios, managers are planning to increase licenses for 2016. The 2016 hunting season proposes 12 licenses in Hunt Area 7. There will be 9 resident licenses and 3 nonresident licenses available.

LANDER

Lamb production continues to be a concern in the Whiskey Mountain bighorn sheep population, as it decreased to 25:100 in 2015. Lamb productivity has been depressed in the herd unit for over 20 years and while it has certainly impacted population growth, there are still plenty of rams for harvest. So, hunter success in 2016 shouldn't be impacted. In fact, the ram to ewe ratio in 2016 increased and remains strong at 47:100 and is slightly above average. No changes in license quotas are slated for 2016 hunting seasons in an effort to continue building quality into this herd. Sheep hunting in Hunt Area 9 can be extremely difficult and will require a lot of effort to locate mature rams. Success in 2015 was 50%. Department personnel reconnaissance of the area in late summer 2015 confirmed presence of several mature, quality rams.

Hunt Area 22 (Dubois Badlands) will once again be open for hunting “any ram” in 2016. Four licenses will be valid to hunt in Hunt Area 22 from September 1-30. After September 30, these licenses will also be valid in Hunt Area 5.

Hunt Area 17 (Ferris/Seminole Mountains) and now Hunt Area 26 (Bennett Mountains) will be open for the fourth year in 2016. We are proposing to allow the harvest of two rams (1 for a resident; 1 for a non-resident). The Ferris/Seminole herd has been doing well since the supplemental releases in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2015, and most recently in February, 2016. With this latest augmentation it is estimated there will be ~140 sheep in the population after the lambing season. It is expected the license recipients will have excellent opportunity to harvest a ram.

LARAMIE

The Laramie Peak sheep herd (Hunt Area 19) continues to offer trophy quality rams for those hunters who draw a tag. Sheep licenses will again be available for the Douglas Creek and Encampment River sheep herds (Hunt Areas 18/21) this year. These herds do not have large enough populations to be hunted every year, so managers propose hunts within these hunt areas on alternating years to provide opportunity in line with the resource available. Additionally, the Laramie Region added a new bighorn sheep hunt area, Hunt Area 26. Sheep Hunt Area 26 will allow additional opportunity for hunt area 17 hunters to pursue bighorn sheep this year.

The Department is accepting comments on the herd objectives for the Douglas and Encampment bighorn sheep herds (Hunt Areas 18 and 21).

PINEDALE

There is one sheep herd (Darby Mountain) plus a portion of the Whiskey Mountain herd managed by Pinedale regional personnel. The Darby Mountain herd (Hunt Area 24) will be opened for the first time since the season was closed in 2013. A total of one license for any ram will be issued in Hunt Area 24. In the Pinedale portion of the Whiskey Mountain hunt areas 8/23, permit levels will remain at 12, but the season length will be extended to October 31 (Sept. 1 – October 31) to provide additional hunter opportunity.

MOUNTAIN GOATS

CODY

Mountain goats in Hunt Area 1 are currently doing well and populations are remaining relatively stable in some areas, while increasing in other areas. The creation of Hunt Area 3 increased hunter opportunity for hard to access backcountry areas with increasing mountain goat populations that now exceed that of Hunt Area 1. There are some concerns that mountain goats may impact bighorn sheep that share high elevation winter ranges with goats thus prompting an increase in goat licenses in Hunt Areas 1 and 3. To minimize hunter crowding in Hunt Area 3, we are offering a Type 2 license valid only for the month of October in 2016. Access to goats in the late season can be tricky, but this should provide opportunity for those willing to put in the extra effort.

JACKSON

Hunt Area 2 encompasses the Palisades goat herd which is an extension of Idaho’s Palisades mountain goat population that has expanded into Wyoming. A hunting season was initiated in

1999 with 4 permits. In 2015, permits increased from 8 licenses to 12 licenses, valid for any mountain goat with the season running from September 1 to October 31. The hunt area was expanded in 2014 to include lands north of Wyoming Highway 22 and west of the Grand Teton National Park. The same season structure will be maintained for the 2016 hunting seasons. The expanded area was created to address mountain goat expansion into the area.

An August 2014 aerial survey located 165 goats on Wyoming summer ranges. During the last several years, record book goats have been taken in this herd unit. Reproductive rates over the last several years indicate the population is productive and continues to remain above the population objective. Hunters should expect to find goats in steep, rocky terrain with long trips of more than 10 miles from any roads.

BISON

JACKSON

In the Jackson Bison herd, Hunt Area 2, Type 1 and Type 4 hunters can expect the season to run from August 15, 2016 to January 10, 2017. This year however, National Elk Refuge (NER) permits will be available at the Jackson Regional Office through the end of January 2017 or until supplemental feeding on the NER is deemed necessary. The January 31, 2017 extension is proposed to allow for additional hunting opportunities should forage and weather conditions delay the onset of supplemental feeding of elk and bison on the NER. A total of 50 Type 1 licenses and 245 Type 4 licenses will be issued by a random drawing. Winter counts indicate that harvest levels have reduced the overall numbers of bison in the herd. The population is estimated to be 666 animals. The post-season calf:cow ratio remained high this year, at 51:100, and the bull:cow ratio rebounded from a low of 55:100 last year to 93:100 this winter. However, most of the bulls in the population are in younger age classes; therefore bull licenses will remain conservative in 2016 to maintain bull quality in the herd. Additional harvest is warranted to continue moving the population toward the 500 objective. Cow/calf hunters should be aware that almost all of the harvest on this license occurs on the NER. Harvest success was exceptionally high in 2014, at 93% and days per animal was low at 3.0 days per animal harvested. However, harvest success was average in 2015 at 74% and days per animals were 10.2. The majority of the harvest occurred during the last two weeks of the season in 2015. This was caused by different snow conditions in 2014 and 2015 that dictate when bison migrate to the NER. Hunters wishing to hunt on the NER will have an opportunity to apply for a Refuge permit on the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's web page beginning in July, 2016. Additional information on National Elk Refuge permits will be available to successful applicants by contacting the Jackson Regional Office.

UPLAND GAME BIRDS - SMALL GAME

CASPER

Sage-grouse numbers have increased significantly in the Casper area over the past three years, and continue to be on the upswing. Following substantial declines from 2006-2013, sage-grouse numbers have rebounded with improved chick production and survival. Wings from harvested grouse in 2014 suggested the number of chicks per hen resulted in the best chick productivity in

the Casper/Shirley Basin area since 1998. Unfortunately, chick production appeared to decline in 2015, which may have been due to cold wet weather around the peak of hatching. Regardless, recent growth in sage-grouse numbers can be attributed to the excellent moisture received over the past couple of years and the resultant good rangeland productivity. This growth provides the necessary cover and food for ground nesting birds such as sage-grouse and other small game. The dramatic increase in cottontail rabbit populations (which have been positively correlated with sage-grouse population trend) over the past few years has also bolstered sage-grouse numbers as high cottontail densities reduce predation pressure on sage-grouse. As sage-grouse populations continue to rebound, hunters in the Casper area should again expect to see improved bird numbers, especially in areas west and south of Casper. Sage-grouse populations in northeast Wyoming are relatively small and isolated, with very conservative hunting seasons in place in some counties while other areas remain closed. Blue grouse numbers in the northern Laramie Range were excellent over the past two years, and should continue to be good in 2016. Hungarian partridge numbers also increased in some portions of the Casper Region in 2015, and should do well again this year. However, upland game hunters should not expect to see high densities of “huns” in this part of the state as much of the Casper Region is not considered good Hungarian partridge habitat. In the Black Hills, ruffed grouse numbers have also increased over the past two years, and may again be up in 2016, although this can be highly variable from year to year. Hunters willing to work hard and hunt aspen and birch dominated areas should be able to find a few ruffed grouse for the dinner table.

Cottontail rabbit numbers have increased dramatically throughout the Casper Region, as they are at or near the peak in their population cycle. Extraordinarily high cottontail densities resulted in excellent hunting opportunity throughout the region during the 2015-2016 winter. Cottontail hunting should again be excellent in 2016 unless their high densities result in a significant die-off this coming summer as a result of disease (i.e. tularemia).

CODY

Success for upland game bird hunting in the Bighorn Basin will depend on the timing of both spring and summer moisture events in 2016. Upland bird hunting in 2015 was better than previous years, with many hunters finding fair numbers of huns, chukars, grouse and pheasants. This past winter was relatively mild, so there should be a good carryover of birds from 2015 to help with the 2016 production. Bird hunters need to remember, hunting has little to no affect on upland bird populations, and that weather and habitat play a much more significant role than hunting by influencing nesting success and chick survival.

GREEN RIVER

The 2016 upland game bird seasons for the Green River region are similar to last year. Forecast is subject to change since annual production of young has such a great influence on upland game and small game populations.

Sage-grouse hunting in the Green River Region should be good due to recent increases in grouse numbers. Mountain grouse (ruffed grouse and blue grouse) will vary by locality, although some pockets of good hunting is likely to occur.

Cottontail rabbits appeared to have peaked throughout much of the region last year, and that trend should continue, yielding some very good hunting opportunities. Hunters should take advantage of this opportunity while it lasts, because cottontails are cyclic and numbers will soon begin to decline. Snowshoe hares, a species that receives very little harvest pressure in the Green River Region, are numerous in some of the higher elevations of the southern Wyoming Range,

Uinta, and Sierra Madre mountains, providing additional hunting opportunity. The Green River Region has limited opportunity for squirrel hunting, with the exception of red squirrels.

JACKSON

Mild winter conditions and the absence of prolonged cold with deep snow should allow for a good start to the grouse nesting season in 2016. Similar to other years, sportsmen will likely find localized populations of grouse that have reproduced well during the year.

There is a healthy population of snowshoe hares within the Region; however, several areas of the Bridger Teton National Forest are closed to winter access beginning either December 1 or December 15. Hunters should check with the Bridger Teton National Forest for details of their winter travel plan.

LANDER

Seasons for other upland game birds will be similar to previous years. Overall, blue and ruffed grouse numbers remained stable during 2015. Of particular note were the increased numbers of chukars and hungarian partridge observed by hunters and Department personnel during the 2015/16 hunting season. With continued mild winter conditions we'll likely see similar or increased numbers in 2016/17. Sage-grouse numbers throughout the region will likely remain similar to that observed in 2015 and hunters should expect similar success.

The Sand Mesa and Ocean Lake Wildlife Habitat Management Areas, and the one-day youth hunt at Sand Mesa proved to be very popular with pheasant hunters and will be continued in 2016. This year's youth hunt will occur on Saturday, November 19th. Bird farm pheasants will again be released at the Sand Mesa and Ocean Lake Habitat Units through November.

Cottontails, snowshoe hares, and red squirrels appear to be similar to that in 2015 within the Lander Region. For those interested in pursuing these animals, hunting conditions should again be good in 2016.

LARAMIE

Sage grouse populations appear to be on the upswing over the past 2 years. Increased chick production and favorable conditions have enabled populations to increase over this period. Sage grouse populations overall will require several years of favorable conditions and chick production to increase populations significantly, but the past two years have been a step in the right direction. If spring production for 2016 continues like in 2015, sage grouse hunters should expect similar if not improved hunting to last year. Spring 2016 has proven to be more wintery than 2015 so far.

Upland bird production increased last year across most species. Upland bird populations appear to be higher than the previous few years. Upland bird hunting should be similar to improved from last year's hunting. This is again assuming the spring of 2016 is favorable for nesting and brooding.

Cottontail rabbit numbers have increased dramatically over the last year in the Laramie Region. Hunters should expect to see high rabbit densities and excellent hunting in the 2016 season.

PINEDALE

The 2016 upland game bird seasons for this region are similar to last year. Sage grouse seasons will again run later in September in an attempt to reduce the vulnerability of hens with broods. Sage grouse numbers increased during 2015, and further increases are anticipated in 2016, which should result in very good harvest opportunities.

Blue and ruffed grouse seasons are the same as in past years. Ruffed and blue grouse production has been variable throughout the region.

SHERIDAN

Upland game bird hunters seemed to have had fair success in 2015. Blue grouse hunters found good numbers of birds in the Bighorn Mountains. Sharp-tailed grouse and Gray Partridge numbers were up. The relatively mild winter of 2015-16 should have a positive impact on game birds. Good weather during the 2016 nesting season will be key to maintaining or increasing populations of all game birds. A sage-grouse hunting season in Hunt Area 4 has been proposed for September 17 – 19, 2016.

Pheasants from the WGFD Sheridan bird farm will continue to be released on some Walk-In Areas and other public lands in the Sheridan Region. A youth only hunt day will be held November 19, 2016 on the Bud Love Wildlife Habitat Management Area near Buffalo.

TURKEY

CASPER

Following a severe winter five years ago and consecutive years of below-average poult production, wild turkey numbers and harvest have declined considerably in the Black Hills. However, poult production modestly improved the past two years and has resulted in some increased bird numbers. However, harvest success has remained very low. Given improved turkey production and mild winter conditions, turkey hunters should expect to see a few more birds during the 2016 spring and fall seasons. Given the majority of spring harvest is comprised of 2-year old toms, hunters should notice an uptick in spring gobbler numbers, but overall wild turkey numbers in the Black Hills are likely still half of what they were in the late 2000's. As such, the Department has again recommended a General License, one-tom bag limit through at least the spring of 2017, and will continue to do so until this population increases significantly. Based on public input acquired through an extensive survey conducted in the fall of 2011, and results from a gobbler mortality study, Type 3 licenses will only be issued in Hunt Area 1 in years when turkey numbers are strong, and will be discontinued in years when bird numbers are depressed.

In the remainder of the Casper Region, wild turkey densities remain relatively low compared to past population peaks, and most of these birds are found on private land. Turkey populations have noticeably increased over the last two years in the Douglas and Lusk areas, and can provide some good hunting opportunity in the Laramie Range and on private land along cottonwood bottoms in the Cheyenne River drainage.

CODY

The first ever general license spring turkey hunting season occurred in 2015 for Hunt Area 4. Because of this, more hunters took advantage of turkey hunting. Harvest of tom turkeys doubled in Hunt Area 4 compared to previous years, but hunter success only declined slightly. We are seeing an expanding population of turkeys in two areas of the Bighorn Basin, so if hunters scout and ask and ask for landowner permission beforehand, they should be able to find a good place to hunt turkeys.

LANDER

Lander Region will hold its twelfth hunting season for wild turkeys in fall 2016. In January 1988, Department personnel trapped 41 wild turkeys on the 3T Ranch in Johnson County, Wyoming. These birds were subsequently released along the Wind River south of Boysen Reservoir in Fremont County. Since their release about 20 years ago, turkeys along the Wind River have moved between private lands and lands managed by the Bureau of Reclamation. Currently, Department personnel believe there are enough birds to support a limited hunting season. Due to major access constraints across the WRIR, however, it will be extremely difficult for the general public to hunt these turkeys.

LARAMIE

Turkey populations appear to be increasing over that past few years. Poult production seems to be up from last year's field observations. Assuming spring 2016 conditions are favorable for nesting and brooding, hunters should expect similar if not improved hunting form last year. The Laramie region is not proposing any changes to the turkey seasons.

SHERIDAN

Fall (2016) and spring (2017) wild turkey general license seasons are recommended for Hunt Areas 1 and 3. Campbell, Johnson and Sheridan counties comprise Hunt Area 3. For the fall of 2016 and spring of 2017, Type 3 licenses will again be available in Hunt Area 3. Hunters will be able to obtain the Type 3 license as a second or third turkey license. Type 3 licenses provide additional opportunity for hunters that have access to private land where turkeys are present.

Turkey populations appear to be at a moderate level in the Sheridan Region. Some damage complaints have been received in the Sheridan Region and some landowners have expressed a willingness to take hunters. However, access to hunt turkeys is more difficult as some ranches have turned to outfitted hunts. Almost all wild turkeys in the Sheridan Region are found on private land, so getting access to hunt is the key to success.