

# Access Yes Program 2017 Annual Report



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



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

# Introduction

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

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

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

In 1998, the Walk-in Hunting Area (WIHA) Program started with a modest 27,000 private acres. By 2000, all 3 sub-programs were growing quickly and included more than 657,500 acres for hunting as well as 222 lake acres and 71 stream miles for fishing. Beyond providing public access, the program has also increased cooperation among landowners, hunters, anglers and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (Department).

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

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



## Purpose

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

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

## Program Successes

The Access Yes Program assists landowners through management of hunters and anglers, providing sportsmen places to hunt and fish and reducing agricultural damage through hunter harvest. The Department benefits through increased wildlife management opportunities, increased license sales, reduced agricultural damage and providing quality hunting and fishing access to the public. During 2017, the Access Yes Program experienced many successes, including, but not limited to:

- Providing access to 2,661,439 acres (1,683,329 acres of enrolled private and state lands, and 978,110 of public lands) for hunting within the boundaries of the WIHA and Hunter Management Area (HMA) programs. This included land in every county within Wyoming.
- Providing additional access to 175,755 acres of public lands located outside the boundaries of the WIHA and HMA which would not have been accessible without the Access Yes program.
- Providing fishing access to 3,845 lake acres and 88 stream miles through the Walk-in Fishing Area (WIFA) program.
- Continued to work with the Department IT personnel to ensure the online permission slip process continues to be user friendly for sportsmen and problems associated with obtaining permission slips for the HMAs and the National Elk Refuge (NER) are reduced.
- Issued 26,670 online permission slips to 15,072 individual hunters for access to the HMA program and the NER.
- Provided free hunting and fishing access on Walk-in Areas to anyone with the proper licenses. Many of the participants are families, contributing to the maintenance and enhancement of hunting and fishing traditions.
- Responded to 105 e-mails received through the Access Yes program website regarding hunting, fishing, or the Access Yes Program. The majority of these e-mails (74%) were responded to within one day of receipt.
- Successfully implemented the second year of the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) grant. The Department was awarded \$1,198,122 over three years to be used for contract personnel time, supplies, promotion of the Access Yes program, Access Yes easements, and long-term easements.
- Hunters surveyed during the 2016 hunting season for harvest results indicated 20% of antelope hunters (23% of nonresident, 18% of resident), 17% of deer hunters (15% of nonresident, 17% of resident), and 14% of elk hunters (12% of nonresident, 14% of resident) used either a WIHA or HMA to hunt on. This would equate to an estimated 9,166 antelope, 10,780 deer, and 8,913 elk hunters having used either a WIHA or HMA to hunt.

- Increased hunting access translates into improved wildlife population management and decreased agricultural damage through harvest.
- Increased license sales in hunt areas with difficult public access.
- Hunters surveyed during the 2016 hunting season who indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied with the opportunity provided through the WIHA or HMA programs were 83% for antelope, 77% for deer, and 74% for elk. This is a 1% decrease for antelope, a 3% increase for deer, and a 4% increase for elk from 2015.



# Hunting and Fishing Access Programs

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

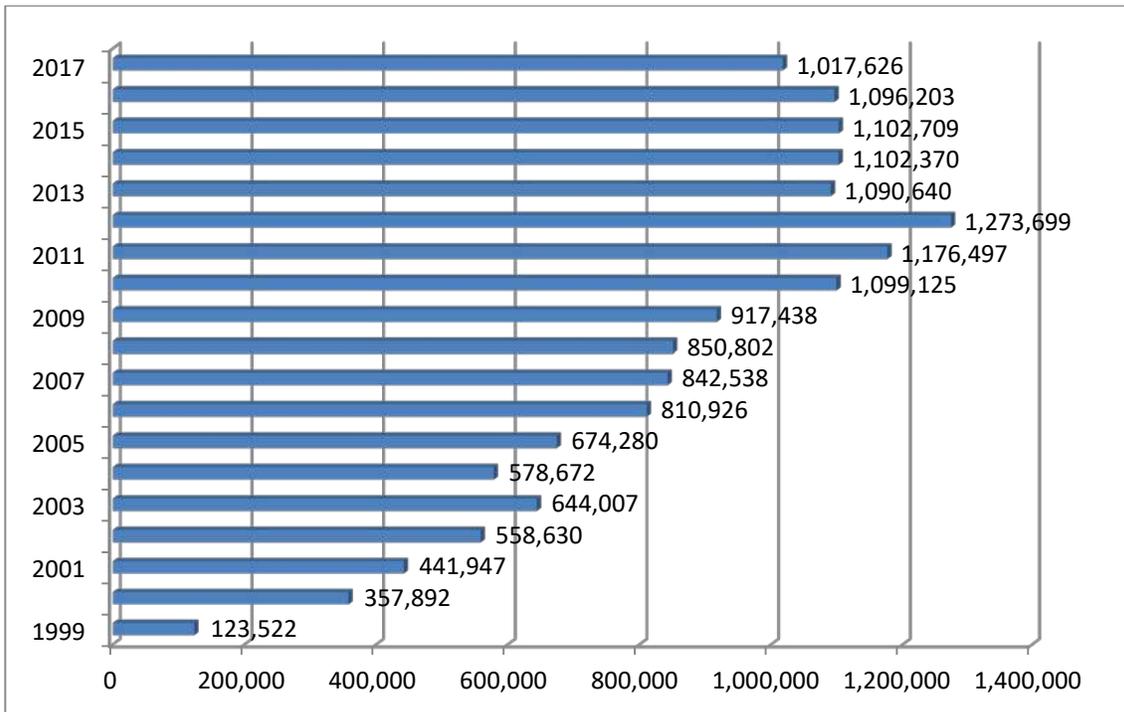
## *Hunter Management Areas*



Hunter Management Areas are access areas where each hunter must first obtain a permission slip from the Department prior to hunting. These areas are generally larger than WIAs, and usually have some level of vehicle access. Permission slips are issued through the Department’s website, and this method has proven to be a fair and popular way to distribute hunter access. On HMAs with limited access and high demand, random draws are used to assure a fair distribution of permission slips. Website distribution of permission slips is popular with nonresident hunters as they can obtain permission for HMAs prior to coming to the state to hunt. Regional office personnel and game wardens/biologists provide extra assistance to hunters needing help obtaining a permission slip. HMAs can provide unlimited, limited first-come first-served, or limited random draw hunter access permission slips. The type of HMA depends upon several factors such as: desired harvest levels, hunter participation, wildlife population numbers, landowner preference and agricultural damage. For 2017, there were 56 HMAs with 146 participating landowners encompassing 1,017,626 enrolled acres for hunting primarily big game species, but also included small game

and upland game birds (Figure 1). This is a decrease of 78,577 acres from 2016 due to the removal of the following HMAs: Big Piney, Copper Mountain, Bell Otte and Heart Mountain. In 2017, Access Yes added the Lower Sweetwater River HMA, F. E. Warren HMA and the Cherokee Park HMA. Additional acreage was added on other various HMAs throughout the Wyoming.

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

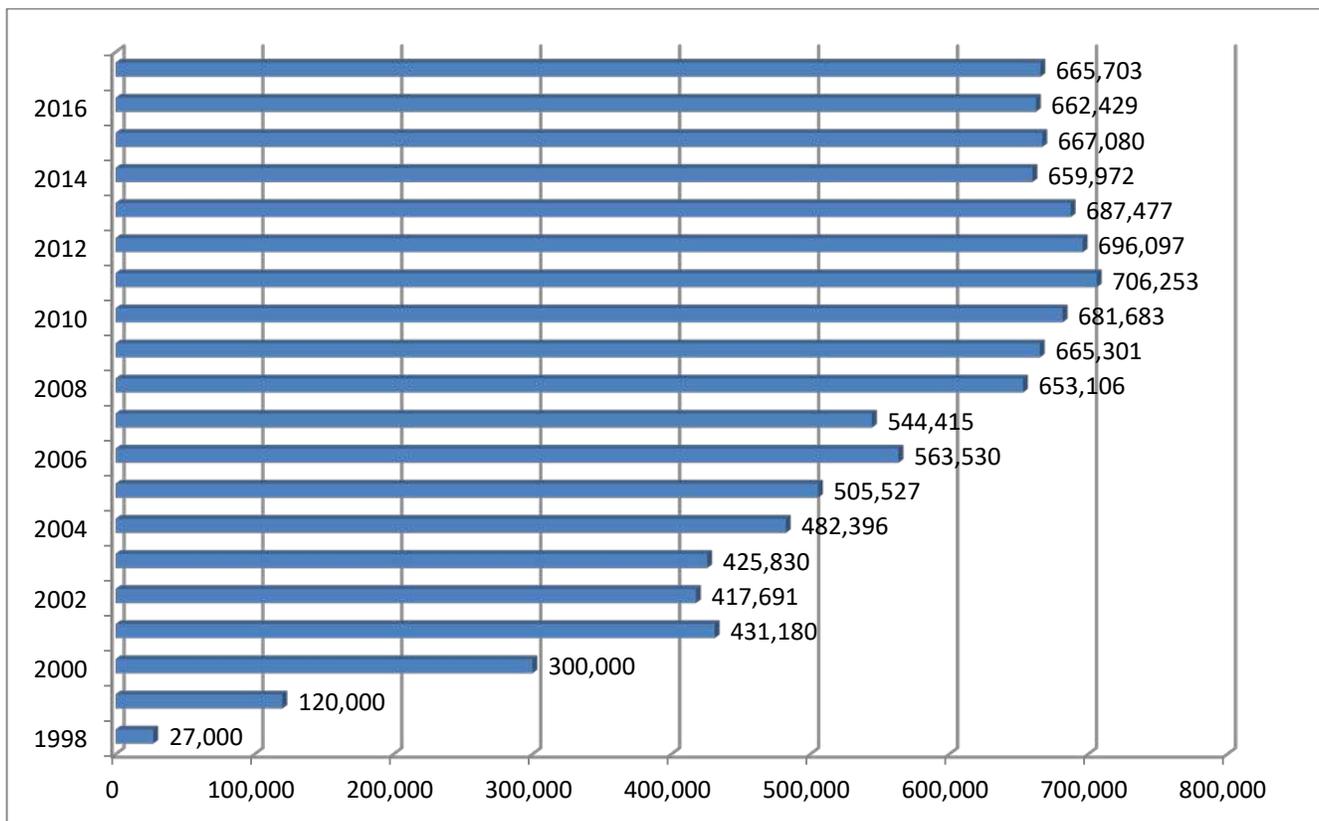


## Walk-in Hunting Areas

Walk-in Hunting Areas are parcels of land open to anyone who has a valid hunting license; no permission slip is required. These access areas are usually smaller than HMAs and, as the name implies, typically require hunters to walk in to hunt. Walk-in Hunting Areas are similar to HMAs in that landowners determine which species can be hunted and when access will be granted. For 2017, the Access Yes Program enrolled 665,703 private and state acres involving 461 landowners (Figure 2). This is an increase of 3,274 acres from 2016 due to the acquisition of some properties, and changes in enrolled boundaries. Walk-in Hunting Areas provide incredible opportunities throughout the entire state for a wide variety of game species, making it possible for hunters to enjoy free hunting access close to their home.



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

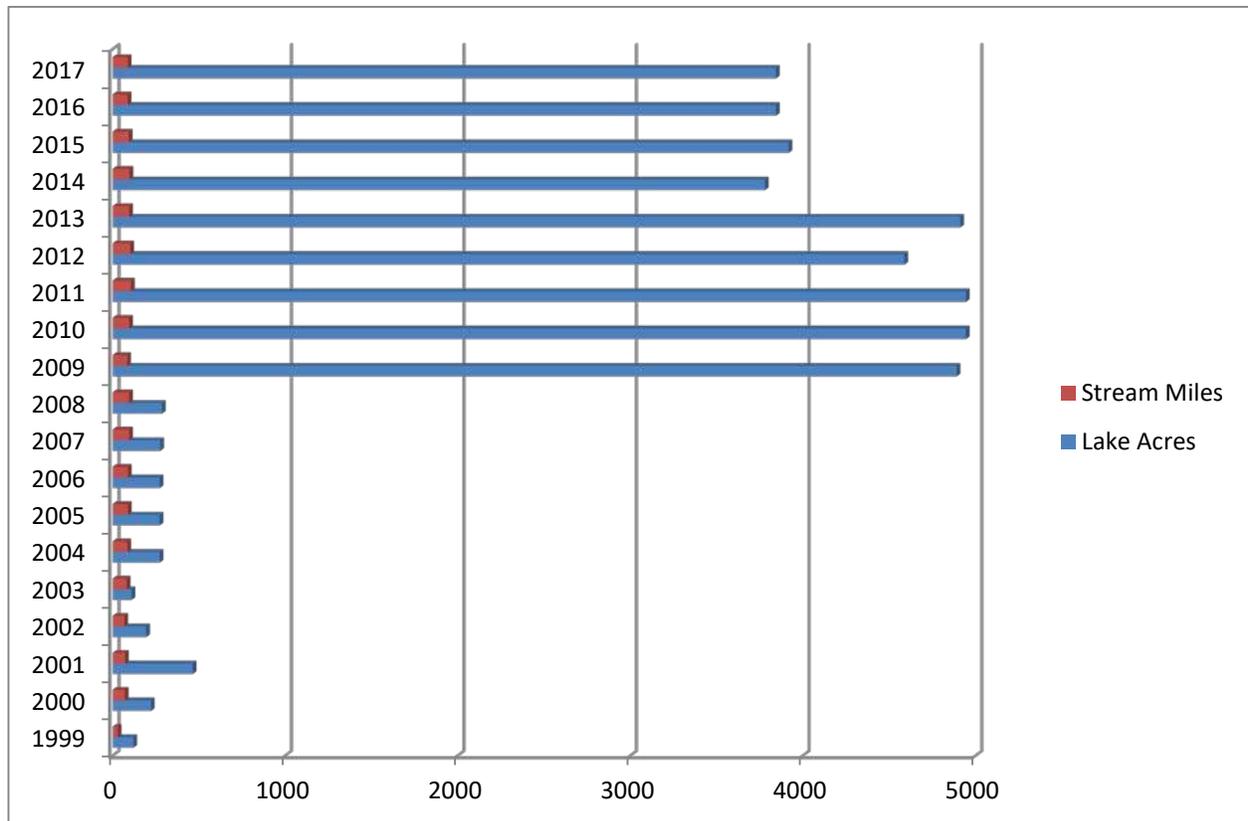


## Walk-in Fishing Areas

Walk-in Fishing Areas are similar to WIHAs in that anyone with a valid fishing license may enter the property to fish. Unless otherwise specified within Department publications, WIFAs are open year-round. Walk-in Fishing Areas in Wyoming are not as prevalent as hunting areas simply because fewer water sources exist compared to hunting areas. Nevertheless, WIFAs provide valuable fishing access, particularly during the summer months. For 2017, 3,845 lake acres and 88 stream miles were available for anglers, thanks to the 67 landowners enrolled in the WIFA program (Figure 3).



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

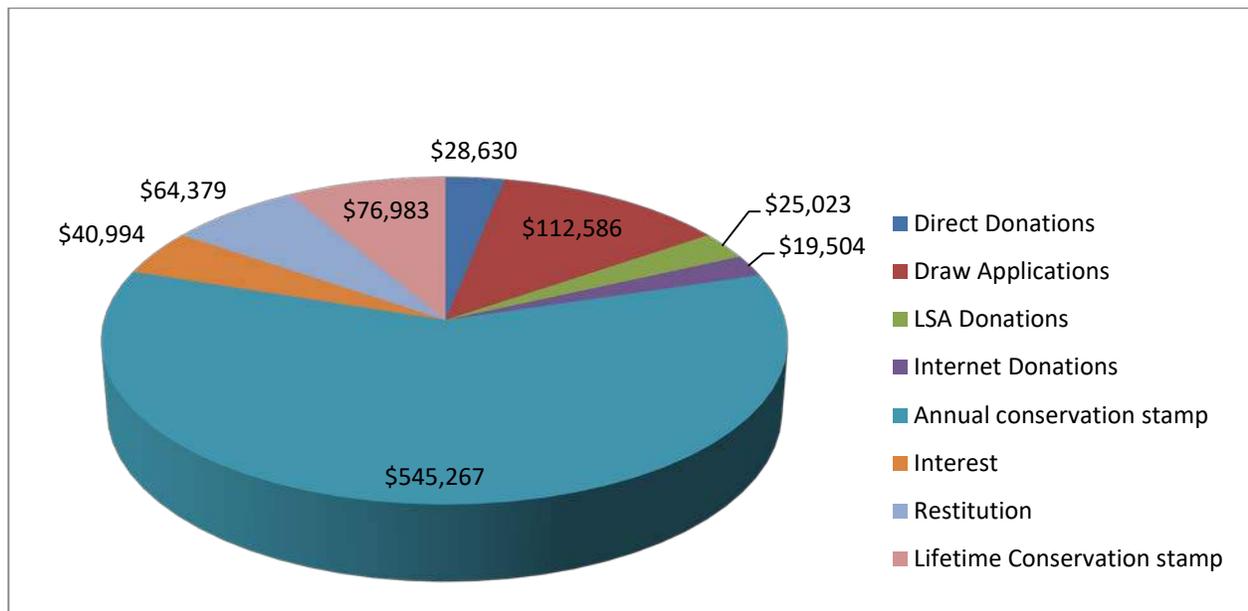


# Program Funding

The Access Yes Program is funded by Department and Access Yes Program funds. Department funds, primarily from license sales, fund the daily operations including personnel. Revenue for the Access Yes Program account is generated from the sale of lifetime and annual conservation stamps, donations from organizations, individual hunters and anglers, state wildlife restitution amounts from court-imposed sentencing of wildlife violators, and interest (Figure 4). Except for a few exemptions, every hunter and angler must purchase an annual conservation stamp, unless a lifetime conservation stamp has been purchased previously. A portion of the sale of these stamps is deposited into the Access Yes account (\$2.50 per annual stamp and half of each lifetime stamp). These two sources generate the majority of the funds each year, and in Fiscal Year 2017, they generated \$622,250.

Easement payments made to landowners are funded through the Access Yes Program. Authorized by state statute, funds collected through the Access Yes Program may only be utilized for acquiring easements with landowners. In 2017, the Access Yes program paid \$904,887 to landowners for hunting and fishing access. Every dollar spent provided approximately 3.1 acres of access.

**Figure 4. Access Yes Funds Received in Fiscal Year 2017**



Donations to Access Yes provide another valuable source of funds. During Fiscal Year 2017, direct donations from conservation groups and organizations totaled \$27,149 indicating the importance these groups place on access. These organizations include: Wyoming Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, Fremont Beverages, National Wild Turkey Federation, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Pheasants Forever Inc, Cheyenne Field Archers, Bowhunters of Wyoming, Wyoming Flycasters. Additional donations totaling \$1,480.63 were made by individual hunters at Department regional offices. Direct donations decreased from Fiscal Year 2016 by \$6,395. These direct donations vary year-to-year based on changes in large donations from individual conservation groups. Hunters and anglers can also make donations to Access Yes when applying for or purchasing licenses; either in person at a license selling agent, or when purchasing a license through the internet. These sportsmen contributed a total of \$157,113 in Fiscal Year 2017, an 11.3% increase from 2016 donations, which in large part may have been due to the “rebranding” of the Access Yes program. Overall, during Fiscal Year 2017, the Access Yes Program received \$913,366, an increase of \$15,489 (1.7%) from 2016 (Figure 5).

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

<b>ACCESS- SUMMARY OF FUNDS RECEIVED</b>									
<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Total Access fund Receipts</b>	<b>Direct Donations</b>	<b>LSA Collections</b>	<b>License Draw Donations</b>	<b>Internet Sale Donations</b>	<b>State Restitution</b>	<b>Lifetime C-stamp</b>	<b>Annual C-stamp**</b>	<b>Interest*</b>
FY 2017	913,366	28,630	25,023	112,586	19,504	64,379	76,983	545,267	40,994
FY 2016	897,877	35,025	20,396	103,789	15,174	67,311	77,705	541,337	37,143
FY 2015	895,524	19,909	19,990	101,951	15,163	79,701	72,110	542,534	44,166
FY 2014	960,314	76,570	25,705	92,402	15,280	109,955	71,207	534,508	34,687
FY 2013	908,837	37,827	23,347	88,058	14,426	58,135	82,308	530,694	74,042
FY 2012	924,801	16,675	22,232	97,032	12,244	82,578	53,789	589,691	50,560
FY 2011	897,862	13,744	18,100	85,332	10,305	96,226	52,887	513,977	107,291
FY 2010	909,072	31,215	20,697	85,962	11,541	122,591	51,051	528,037	57,978
FY 2009	882,935	32,032	27,545	90,255		87,859	57,098	539,559	48,587
FY 2008	879,512	45,261	27,350	104,025		104,962	95,674	444,805	57,435
FY 2007	761,297	20,078	25,952	97,362		74,916	63,662	442,699	36,628
FY 2006	710,736	7,466	26,213	92,281		71,340	48,385	432,820	32,231
FY 2005	645,468	4,862	24,894	89,118		50,295	36,965	409,151	30,183
FY 2004	654,354	7,697	25,922	91,481		62,721	12,975	429,776	23,782
FY 2003	607,282	11,648	26,250	105,393				443,172	20,819
FY 2002	632,814	12,690	31,831	106,000				460,009	22,284
FY 2001	312,003	6,862	35,296	97,361				161,601	10,883

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

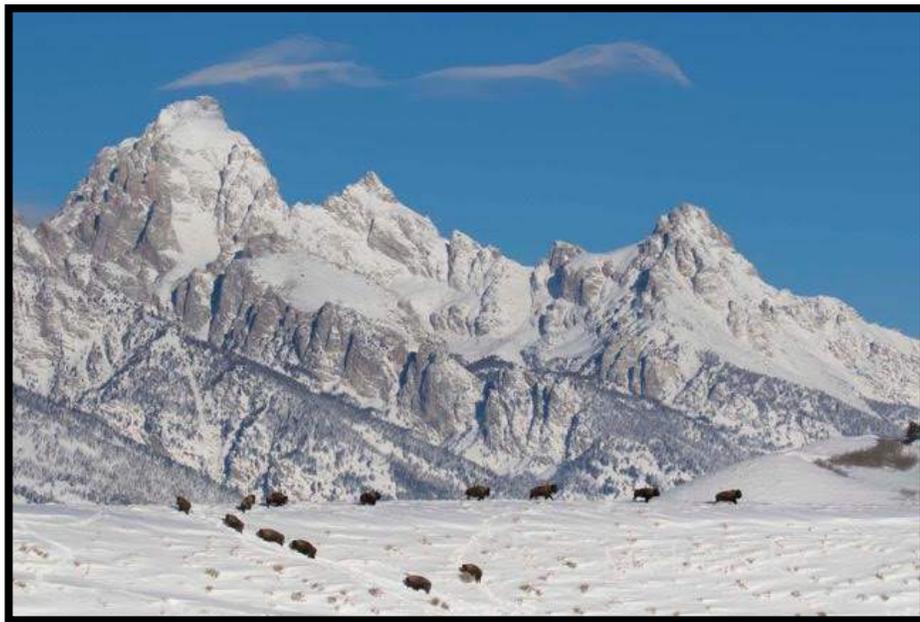
\*\* This amount represents the funds deposited for annual conservation stamp sales in each respective fiscal year. The revenue is recognized when received, not when the sale actually occurs.

## VPA-HIP Grant

In 2017, the Department implemented the second year of a three year Voluntary Public Access & Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) grant from the National Resource Conservation Service. The VPA-HIP grant benefits the Access Yes Program by providing funding for hiring additional contract personnel, leasing of vehicles, signing supplies, commercial printing, program advertising, and easement payments. The Department hired five contract personnel positions for a six-month period (mid-May through mid-November). Access technicians signed 1.91 million acres on HMAs, 651,129 acres of WIHAs, 272 lake acres of WIFAs, and 44 stream miles of WIFAs. As the access technicians transitioned from signing access areas in the summer to assisting sportsmen in the fall. They contacted 1,872 sportsmen and 155 landowners throughout the fall hunting season. These contacts with sportsmen and landowners enhanced the Department's relationship with sportsmen and landowners, all while highlighting the Access Yes Program.

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

*This material is based upon works supported and funded by the Natural Resource Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under number 69-3a75-16-517. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.*



## **The National Elk Refuge**

The Access Yes Program has been administering permission slips for elk hunting on the NER since 2008 and added wild bison hunting access opportunity in 2014. The permission slip application process is on the Department's Access Yes HMA web page. Hunters from across the country are able to apply and print out their permission slips regardless of their location.



The application period starts in July and continues through the end of the elk and wild bison hunting season. There are initial draws for permission slips in September, with additional weekly alternate permission slip drawings during the hunting season in October for elk hunters and November for wild bison hunters. The application process is more complex than other HMAs throughout the state due to weekly drawings, but it allows hunters maximum opportunity to increase their chances of a successful hunt. During the 2017 hunt on the NER, there were 175 permission slips issued for bison and 1,217 permission slips issued for elk.

## **Additional Access Yes Programs and Services**

The Access Yes Program continues to modify its programs to benefit landowners, hunters, anglers and the Department. For example, one ongoing service is the Hunter/Landowner Assistance Program that matches landowners who desire additional harvest with hunters looking for a place to hunt. This program was developed as an avenue to assist landowners who wanted increased harvest of big game animals on their private property without having to enroll in one of the existing access programs. The program operates by posting landowner contact information on the Department's website where hunters can contact them directly to secure their own access. Landowners do not receive any compensation from the Department, and all details pertaining to access to their property is arranged between the landowner and the hunter. Once a landowner obtains the desired harvest, their information is removed from the website. Landowners are added and removed throughout the hunting seasons. For 2017, there were 45 landowners participating to allow access for antelope hunting, 45 participating to allow access for deer hunting, five allowing access for elk hunting, two allowing access for turkey hunting, and three allowing access for sandhill crane hunting. Participation in the program was slightly higher in 2017 than in 2016, and this program has been very successful in providing assistance to landowners while increasing hunting access. Some landowners choose not to have their information on the website during subsequent years because the number of game animals has returned to acceptable levels or they have returning hunters who provide needed harvest.

Recognition of landowners who provide access is an important aspect of maintaining sportsman/landowner relationships. The Access Yes Program coordinators participate as facilitators in the Access Recognition Program. This program, a joint program of the Wyoming Board of Agriculture (Board), the Commission, and Wyoming Wildlife – The Foundation, recognizes landowners who provide access to or through their property to hunters and anglers. The state is divided into four quadrants, and the regional access coordinators facilitate this selection by working with the four quadrant committees to select a quadrant winner each year. The quadrant committees are comprised of Board and Commission members. Each of the four winners is recognized at the annual Wyoming Stock Growers winter meeting. The recipients each receive a plaque and a check for \$2,000. Funding for the program is provided by Commissioner donated licenses. The four recipients of the 2017 Access Recognition Program award were: Buyok Ranch of Sheridan, Hopkin Family of Powell, Farthing Ranch of Cheyenne, and Faddis Ranch of Evanston.

Elk herds that exceed Commission population objectives are a major concern for landowners and the Department, and getting these populations towards objective are a high priority for the Department. The Department's main method to decrease an elk population is hunting, but elk hunting access on private lands remains limited in many areas of the state. To address over objective elk populations and private landowner access concerns, the Department, in 2010, initiated a new program called the Hunter Management Access Program (HMAP). The HMAP was designed to increase antlerless elk harvest at specific locations by coordinating with landowners to allow controlled and monitored hunting access. The Department hires a Hunt

Management Coordinator (HMC) to facilitate hunting by directing, monitoring and assisting small groups of hunters as they elk hunt.

During the 2017-18 hunting season, the Laramie Peak HMAP continued for the fifth year in Elk Hunt Area 7. This HMAP was once again somewhat of a “hybrid” design, as there was no specific "Laramie Peak HMAP" or special permission slips. The HMC efforts on the Laramie Peak HMAP focused on and around the existing Pinto Creek, Menter Knob, McFarlane HMAs, the Mule Creek Public Access Area, and Albany County WIHAs #2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, and 12. During the 2016-2017 season, the HMAP directly or indirectly assisted in the harvest of 42 antlerless elk.



Also, during the 2017-18 hunting season, another HMAP was started in the Black Hills area. Elk Hunt Area 117 and Deer Hunt Area 1 were included in this HMAP. The HMC concentrated on property east of Osage for elk and at the base of Devils Tower for deer. The goal on the Black Hills HMAP was to reduce elk and deer numbers in order to reduce damages to private lands, as well as increase hunter success. In the 2017 deer season, 74 antlerless white-tailed deer were taken with the HMC and roughly another 30 were taken independently on the same property. During the 2017-18 elk season, 53 elk were taken with and an additional 18 without the HMC to date.

The HMC was charged with locating and monitoring elk herds and communicating and coordinating with landowners in order to assist hunters in successfully harvesting elk. The overall goal was to enhance access to elk herds off of the Access Yes program properties and increase cow elk harvest success. The HMC worked with landowners to allow hunters access to private land, which also moved elk onto accessible public lands for additional harvest. The HMC also assisted with documenting hunter harvest, collecting brucellosis and CWD samples for testing and ensuring compliance with the Access Yes Program regulations and rules on state and participating private lands. A final report for these two 2017-18 HMAPs will be available in late March, 2018.

## **Challenges Facing the Access Yes Program**

Two challenges continually facing the Access Yes Program are limited personnel and long-term funding. Maintaining or increasing access areas is difficult with limited personnel dedicated toward this effort. Additionally, with the long hunting seasons and overlap of season dates between species, providing a Department presence on the enrolled Access Yes properties with limited personnel is very difficult. Seasonal contract technicians hired during the summer, and temporarily extended into the fall through the VPA-HIP grant, provide much needed assistance to regional access coordinators with sign maintenance and landowner/hunter/angler contacts. Additionally, game wardens and wildlife biologists provide assistance with on-the-ground landowner contacts, signing and patrolling. With ever-expanding workloads, regional access coordinators have difficulties in adequately maintaining signs and having a presence on enrolled properties.

A stabilized long-term funding source would benefit the Access Yes Program. The Access Yes Program provides funds for access easements. During the last five years, however, easement payments to landowners have nearly reached the total allocated Access Yes funds. This means the Department has limited ability to add more access. Additionally, new and innovative ways to encourage landowner involvement beyond the monetary payment need to be explored.



landowners for access.

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

