



February 2015

the wyoming game & fish department

CASPER REGION newsletter

February Hunting Mountain Lions

Casper Biologist Heather O'Brien and other field personnel checked in a high volume of mountain lions during the month of February. Local and trophy game biologists use age and sex data collected from harvested cats to make management decisions for future mountain lion hunting seasons. A few good snowfalls yielded good lion-tracking conditions, and the number of hunters registering harvested mountain lions always increases after a good snow. One hunter registered a tom with an ear tag that was traced back to a capture near Colstrip, Montana, nearly 300 miles from Casper.



Inside This Month's Issue:

February Fishing

Great Fishing at Alcova and
Pathfinder

On the Ground

Pronghorn Surveys

In the Water

Kokanee at Speas

Of Interest

February as a Wildlife Biologist,
Ferruginous Hawk, Christmas
Trees

February Fishing

Great Fishing at Alcova and Pathfinder

With the warmer winter weather we experienced near Casper this year, ice left Alcova Reservoir completely by the second week in February. Pathfinder Reservoir was not far behind and had open water for several hundred feet from shore in most spots around the marina and Bishops point.

With a change in the weather near the end of the month and cold temperatures returning, some ice came back to the reservoirs, but we will need extended cold temperatures for any safe ice to be available, which is not in the weather forecast. Anglers enjoyed the early ice-off with great success from the shore.



On the Ground

Pronghorn Surveys



Casper Wildlife Biologist Heather O'Brien conducted mid-winter pronghorn surveys along public roads in Pronghorn Hunt Areas 71 and 72 in February. A mid-winter count is conducted in this area to track herd health and evaluate how fawns are doing over the winter thus far. Survey totals were slightly higher this year than last year, and winter conditions were mild, with good forage and little snow. Antelope will still need to deal with early spring storms, but conditions so far are looking very good for winter survival.



In the Water

Kokanee at Speas

Over the past two years, the Speas Fish Hatchery has raised kokanee to be stocked throughout the state of Wyoming. Kokanee are a landlocked salmon who spend their juvenile life in a reservoir or lake and then run up tributaries in late summer and fall to spawn. In Wyoming, kokanee peak at 18 to 25 inches and are a very popular sport fish. This increase in popularity has lead fisheries managers to increase requests for kokanee stocking in the waters of their regions. With increased requests and



popularity, hatchery production of kokanee across the state has increased to add potential brood stock locations so the Wyoming Game and Fish Department can develop a consistent egg supply instate to meet the numbers of fish requested. In 2014, Speas raised 52,980 kokanee, which were stocked in designated reservoirs and lakes throughout Wyoming. In February 2015, Speas Hatchery received extra kokanee eggs from Colorado Parks and Wildlife and will stock approximately 200,000 kokanee by this fall. Included in the fall stocking is High Savery Reservoir, south of Rawlins and Alcova Reservoir, south of Casper.



Of Interest

February as a Wildlife Biologist, Ferruginous Hawk, Christmas Trees



What the public thinks a wildlife biologist does in February...but,

February is actually a busy month in the office for Wyoming Game and Fish wildlife biologists. It is a constant challenge juggling phone calls and office visits from hunters who are looking to apply for licenses. Both residents and nonresidents often rely on information provided by biologists before applying for licenses. In addition to assisting the public, biologists also spend hours behind the computer analyzing data they collected, modeling herd populations, drafting hunting seasons and writing justifications. This is the time of year recommendations for hunting seasons are made. Watch for the upcoming season setting meetings in March to hear the final results for 2015 hunting season recommendations.



Ferruginous Hawk

Biologists and game wardens across the state have been tasked with collecting observation and location data on wildlife species designated as Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). These efforts are being made to gather information about a great number of wildlife species in Wyoming for which data are lacking. In doing this, we are following requirements of the United States Congress to collect "information on the distribution and abundance of species of wildlife, including low and declining populations as the state wildlife agency deems appropriate, that are indicative of the diversity and health of the state's wildlife." Over 800 species of wildlife exist in Wyoming, and this number does not include plants and invertebrates, which do not fall within the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's authority.



SGCN designation is intended to identify species whose conservation status warrants increased management attention; and several of the SGCN in Wyoming are raptors. Raptors are birds of prey that kill using their feet and talons. The word *raptor* comes from the Latin root that means "to seize and carry away." Wyoming's open spaces provide winter, summer, and even year round homes to a variety of raptors; and recently Casper Region biologists and game wardens have been noting observations of wintering raptors in their continued efforts to record SGCN sightings.

One species of particular interest is the Ferruginous Hawk, which is classified as a Tier I SGCN species. Ferruginous means resembling rust, or rusty in appearance. These birds can be readily identified in flight when viewed from below by their often distinct, rust colored legs forming a V pattern against their normally lighter underside. They are somewhat similar in size and appearance to red-tailed and rough legged hawks; and may be seen in the same general locations as these other birds.



Ferruginous hawk habitat includes open plains and prairies. This hawk prefers dry grassland, sagebrush plains, saltbush and greasewood flats, rangeland, and desert - the perfect combination for calling much of Wyoming home. In winter, these birds often migrate to warmer climates, but we do see some spending the winter in parts of Wyoming. According to our field folks, this year's warmer and drier winter seems to be keeping a few more around.

These raptors eat mostly small to medium sized mammals such as rabbits, prairie dogs, ground squirrels, kangaroo rats and mice. But, they are also known to take birds, snakes and even large insects. They will nest on rock piles or even cairns, and in trees, nesting platforms, on cliffs, the ground and at times even on oil rigs.



Christmas Trees

During February, 6,640 pounds of recycled, mulched Christmas trees were hauled to Bolton Creek to be used as sediment traps in tributaries to Bolton Creek. In addition to sediment traps, Christmas tree mulch will be placed into headcuts to slow the movement of the headcut and further reduce erosion. Headcuts are areas of intense erosion where a stream or river cuts into the bank. This project is part of a diverse effort to reduce erosion and sedimentation into the North Platte River.

