



the wyoming game & fish department

# CASPER REGION newsletter

## February Fishing Ice Fishing in the Casper Region

Ice fishing continues to be popular on local waters with reports from fisherman being hit and miss.

The HAWG ice fishing contest at Pathfinder Reservoir sold 663 tickets; 280 trout and 59 walleye were entered. Ice conditions were better this year with only one ATV/Razor going through the ice, compared to seven last year.

In the Casper Region, anglers using live baitfish have the option of purchasing either wild caught or commercial produced baitfish. Commercially produced baitfish are fathead minnows from a Game and Fish approved hatchery, and wild caught are native minnows seined in the wild. Remember, if you have minnows you need to have a receipt. Also remember, there are different rules



and regulations for commercially produced versus wild caught baitfish. Remember to check the 2016 Wyoming Fishing Regulations or call (307) 473-3400 if you have questions.

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## Behind the Badge

### Casper Pronghorn Poaching Update

A pronghorn antelope poaching case was recently adjudicated from events that occurred in October. A brief vehicle pursuit, multiple interviews, the use of a language interpreter, and collection of both physical and electronic evidence, resulted in seven men being arrested by West Casper Game Warden Daniel Beach. As the investigation grew, Beach was assisted by a team of local game wardens.



Questioning occurred over a period of three days. The suspects led wardens to believe that the four initially confiscated pronghorn antelope were all that were killed, but Beach had a confiscated cell phone video that he felt told a different story. Through the use of an interpreter, Beach was able to hear the suspects give verbal confirmation they had hit and killed the pronghorn, even though the video did not show the shot animal. Game Wardens Beach and Cody Bish used the video to confirm the location of the shooting by identifying local landmarks, and even the patchwork on the road surface. Once they found the exact location of the shooting, they were able to locate the poached pronghorn and bring wanton destruction charges against the suspect.



In total, all suspects were charged with 29 different poaching violations including wanton destruction of big game, take pronghorn without a license, wrong area, wrong sex, fail to tag, shooting from a roadway and taking big game from a motor vehicle. All the suspects eventually plead guilty resulting in \$33,365 in fines and restitution, forfeiture of a .30-06 rifle and a combined loss of 32 years of hunting, fishing and trapping privileges.



## On the Ground

### Native Tree Planting ,Elk Classification Flights, Winter Conditions

Game and Fish recently planted over 400 native trees and shrubs in a Cheyenne River tributary. Planting will continue on adjacent lands this April. This system has lost much of the native woody component which provides great habitat for mule deer and a wide variety of non-game species. These projects are adjacent to on-going upland habitat projects which aim to restore the native sagebrush component and reduce cheatgrass.



Casper Region game wardens and biologists flew elk classification surveys in mid-January. Conditions were excellent during the elk Hunt Area 19 flight, and over 1,500 elk were observed. Elk in large groups are flown over at a distance and recorded with a video camera. This footage is then evaluated on a computer in slow motion to better capture the composition of the herd. Game wardens and biologists classify elk into total number of cows, calves, spikes and mature bulls. This important information is used to determine the population trend as well as the quality of bulls left after the hunting season. The resulting data helps determine what hunting seasons and license numbers will be for the upcoming fall.



The winter of 2015-2016 has been above average with regards to snowfall in parts of the Casper Region, and it may be impacting overwinter survival of wildlife in some areas. While areas to the north and east of Casper have had lower snow accumulations, Casper Mountain, Muddy Mountain, and the Bates Hole area have seen significant snowfall and accumulation. Lighter winds in these regions allow snow to pile up and persist, rather than blowing free and exposing areas for big game to forage. Pronghorn wintering in Bates Hole (Hunt Area 32) have become highly concentrated in the few places where snow has drifted and exposed forage on hillsides. Deer are faring better, as they put on fat in the fall to help them survive harsh periods when food is scarce and the shrubs they eat are taller and readily available above the crusted snow layers. Warmer temperatures in February have melted quite a bit of snow west and northwest of Casper, but deeper snows are still present in Bates Hole and Muddy Mountain. It will likely take quite a bit longer for these areas to open up this spring, but hopefully the persistent snow pack will provide lasting moisture and a good green-up at higher elevations this spring.



## In the Water

### Bryan Stock Trail Pond

Tillett Rearing Station recently brought around 200 brood cull rainbow trout (average size 18 inches) to Bryan Stock Trail Community Fishing Pond (Lake McKenzie Park). Pat Long, Senior Fish Culturist, hauled the fish safely for five hours before fisheries manager Matt Hahn stocked the fish in Casper. It was a cold, windy day and the fish were ready to be in their new home. Pat and Matt used a chain-saw to cut through eight inches of ice on the pond.



## Of Interest

### Rough-legged Hawks, Public Meetings

Lusk Game Warden Brady Vandenberg dealt with three injured rough-legged hawks on separate occasions along the highways near Lusk. It appears the hawks are hunting along the roads or scavenging road-killed rabbits due to their high numbers this year. Unfortunately he was unable to save two of the hawks, but the third was sent to a rehabilitation facility.



Rough legged hawks are fairly large hawks with broad wings; they are common winter visitors to Wyoming but breed in Canada and Alaska during the summer. While hunting, they appear to hover as they scan the ground below.



The Wyoming Game and Fish Department will hold a public meeting and a series of open houses throughout the Casper Region to address 2016 hunting season proposals for big game, small game, game birds, waterfowl and bison.

A public information gathering meeting will be held from 6-9 p.m. Thursday, March 17 at the Casper Game and Fish office, 3030 Energy Lane.

There will be a formal presentation of the Casper Region hunting season proposals and management recommendations at this meeting. During the open houses, Game and Fish personnel will be available to discuss the proposed 2016 hunting seasons for local hunt areas. Open houses will be held at the following locations:

- Sundance: 4-6 p.m. Monday, March 14 in the basement of the Crook County Courthouse
- Hulett: 7 p.m. Monday, March 14 at the Hulett Community Center
- Newcastle: Tuesday, March 15, 6 p.m. at the USDA Forest Service office
- Lusk: 5 p.m. Wednesday, March 16 at the Niobrara County Courthouse, Commission Room
- Douglas: 6-8 p.m. Wednesday, March 16 in the basement of the Converse County Courthouse

Interested persons can submit comments in writing at these meetings, submit comments online at [wgfd.wyo.gov](http://wgfd.wyo.gov) or mail them to: Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Attn: Regulations, 3030 Energy Lane, Casper, WY 82604. Written comments must be received by 5 p.m. Friday, March 25 and will be presented to the Game and Fish Commission prior to their hearing at their April 21-22 meeting in Casper.

WGFD supports the Americans with Disabilities act. Every effort will be made for reasonable accommodations by contacting the nearest Game and Fish office.

