



the wyoming game & fish department

CASPER REGION newsletter

Hunting

Late Season Elk and Public Meetings

Elk hunting remained open for many hunt areas in the Casper Region during December. Hunters were able to access most areas easily until significant snow fell on December 14th. Access then became limited in many areas due to deep and drifted snow. Still, hunters continued to successfully harvest cow elk in Area 19 and both cows and bulls in Area 23. Cow elk moved down in elevation and out into more open habitats and were available for harvest for those hunters with good timing.



Casper Region wildlife personnel hosted a post-hunting season public meeting in early December. The hunting public was invited to attend and provide feedback to regional wardens and biologists. Around 25 local hunters offered suggestions to improve hunting seasons that included additional youth-only hunting days for deer, recommendations for additional license types, and possible changes to season

structures and hunt area boundaries. Casper Region personnel plan to adopt some of these suggestions for the 2016 hunting season.



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Fishing

Ice Fishing and Ice Safety

Anglers in the Casper Region should expect good ice fishing opportunities this winter as long as the ice remains safe. "Don't fish alone, common sense and caution are still the best defenses when ice fishing," said Janet Milek, information specialist for the Casper Game and Fish office.

Anglers are urged to use caution when trekking out onto ice. Ice conditions can vary on a daily basis due to temperature changes and wind. "If there is any question as to ice safety, it is best to avoid a situation that could result in an accident," Milek said. Be sure to check the thickness of any ice before venturing onto it, and continue checking it every 100 to 150 feet. Four inches of clear ice is usually safe for fishing. Clear ice is stronger than cloudy or white ice, which has frozen, thawed and refrozen and is not always stable. For white ice, double the recommended thickness.

Ice fishermen should never go out on the ice alone. "It can make all the difference, having somebody there to throw a rope if you do fall through," Milek said. Low water temperatures can be life threatening this time of year and hypothermia is a serious risk for anyone who does fall through the ice. Ice fishermen should learn to recognize and treat hypothermia.



If the weather and the ice cooperate, anglers should expect good walleye fishing at Glendo Reservoir this winter, with a lot of 16-18 inch fish available. Anglers are reminded of the 15-inch minimum size limit on walleye at Glendo. Perch numbers are up from last year, but remain below average. The channel catfish population is coming back with most fish ranging between 15 to 25 inches. The ice at Glendo can be unpredictable so use caution and check thickness before venturing out.

Alcova is the new hot spot for walleye, with plenty of fish averaging 15 inches. The creel limit for walleye at Alcova is 12. The limit was increased in 2014 to allow successful walleye anglers the opportunity to harvest a few more fish and hopefully alleviate some of the predation pressure on stocked trout. "Due to a very strong year class of 2-year-old walleye, anglers can expect to catch a lot of fish in the 12-13 inch range this winter," said Matt Hahn Casper, fisheries biologist. "The age 3 year class is also better than average meaning a lot of walleye in the 16-18 inch range as well." But the fun doesn't stop there as Alcova also boasts a lot of 10-pound walleye just waiting to be caught.

Despite predation by walleye, trout fishing should still be decent at Alcova Reservoir. Anglers can expect to reel in trout up to 16 inches, with an occasional 20-incher to mix things up a bit. In addition to rainbows, Game and Fish stocked 15,000 kokanee this fall. Kokanee’s tendency to suspend over very deep water will hopefully mean less walleye predation. Kokanee will give anglers something new to fish for and could grow bigger than rainbows in the future.



Seminole Reservoir holds good numbers of walleye, which average 15 inches. “Seminole currently has a strong age-4 year class meaning there are a lot of 14 inch walleye right now”. Some 30-inch (14-pound) walleye lurk in Seminole as well, although they can be difficult to catch through the ice. There are also plenty of 16-inch rainbows, with a few 23-inch lunkers hanging around as well.

If larger trout are on your agenda, Pathfinder Reservoir is the place to go. There are plenty of rainbows over 16 inches including many over 20 inches. Browns up to 23 inches and Snake River cutthroats can also be caught. Besides trout, Pathfinder also hosts a robust walleye population, but catching them through the ice can prove tricky at this popular ice fishing destination.

Don’t forget to buy your 2016 fishing license and conservation stamp prior to your first fishing trip of 2016.

Anglers should be aware of the special winter ice fishing provisions and also be aware of regulations concerning fishing with live minnows. Live baitfish shall not be transported out of the designated use area as listed by the WGFD on the live baitfish

receipt. More information about the use of live baitfish and the special winter ice fishing provisions can be found in the 2016 Wyoming Fishing Regulations and online at wgfd.wyo.gov.

On the Ground

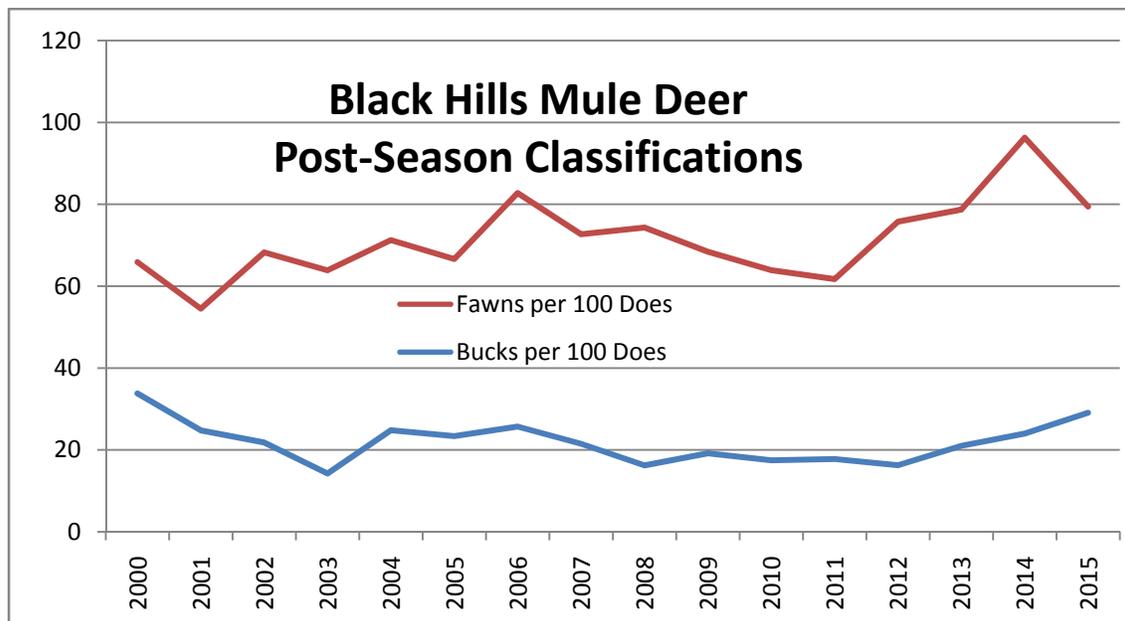
Deer Surveys

During November and December, wildlife personnel from the Casper and Sheridan Regions worked from helicopters and the ground to conduct mule deer classifications in the Black Hills and Cheyenne River Herd Units. After hitting what was probably a 30+ year low in deer numbers in 2013, things have improved significantly the past two years, as fawn production and survival was outstanding again this year.

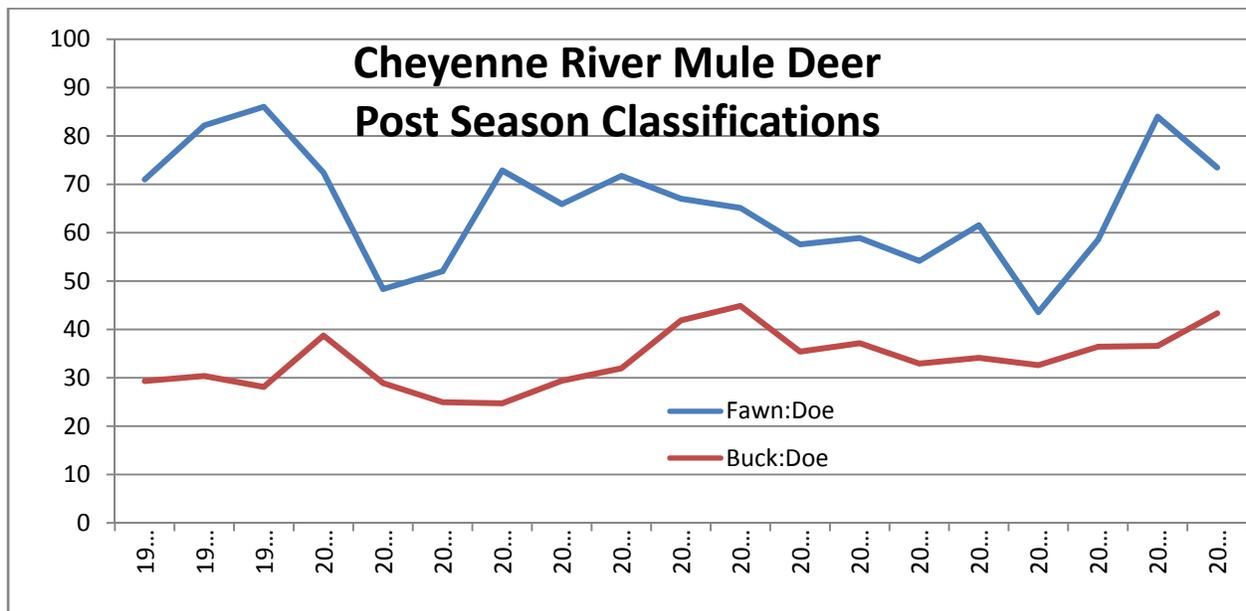




In the Black Hills, lower deer densities and pine cover continue to make locating deer difficult with fewer deer being seen than hoped. However, a follow up effort on the ground enabled us to reach classification objectives. Local game wardens and biologists classified over 1,900 mule deer from the ground and air. We found the herd had 70 fawns for every 100 does, which was down from the all time high of 96:100 last year, but still better than normal. There were also a lot of yearling does that didn't have fawns at side as they don't typically have their first fawns until they are two years old. The number of bucks observed increased from 24 per 100 last year to 29:100 this year, and with significantly more yearling bucks in the population. While low by most Wyoming standards, the buck:doe ratio has increased thanks to reduced hunting pressure and is now above the range of its historical average.



Moving south into the Cheyenne River Herd Unit, personnel classified just under 3,000 mule deer. Fawn survival was a bit lower than in the Black Hills with 73 fawns being found for every 100 does observed. This is above the long-term average of about 66 fawns per 100 does. With continued, good over-winter survival, this herd should continue to rebound in the coming year. A long-term decline in fawn productivity and survival, due to habitat and species composition changes over the past 50-years, has really inhibited this herd. Another bright spot here is that the observed buck:doe ratio was 43:100, which is 16% above the long-term average for this herd. Again, reduced harvest pressure and increased fawn production and survival in 2014 has enhanced buck:doe ratios, and some nice quality bucks were seen.



Of Interest

Injured Deer

Casper Biologist Heather O'Brien received a series of phone calls from Casper residents reporting a buck mule deer with an injury to its back foot. Reports varied in identifying the object as a trap, a tangle of cables, or something else. It was clear, unfortunately, the buck was suffering from an infection and likely in considerable pain. After being euthanized, it was also apparent that his body condition had deteriorated significantly. The object stuck around the buck's back foot was at first hard to identify and had to be sawed off for closer inspection. Upon removal, it became clear that the object was in fact the lid to a travel mug! The buck had somehow managed to step in the middle of the lid- lodging it around its "wrist" or fetlock joint and causing cuts and infection. It was a shame to see such an impressive deer (antlers were 31 inches wide with heavy mass and a non-typical "kicker" on one side) fall victim to injuries from a simple piece of litter.

