



September 2016

the wyoming game & fish department

# CASPER REGION newsletter



## September Fishing Along the North Platte River

While fishing has been slow at Alcova, it seems that walleye fishing at Pathfinder is good. Both game wardens and fisheries biologists report checking several large walleye on Pathfinder in recent weeks. Pathfinder boasts one of the highest densities of walleye and a population with the highest percentage of trophy-sized walleye of any reservoir in Wyoming. Alcova and Seminoe are not far behind Pathfinder in offering quality walleye fishing.



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Cooling water temperatures means increasing trout activity particularly near the shores of reservoirs. Fall fishing produces some of the highest catch rates for trout in Seminoe, Pathfinder and Alcova reservoirs.



*anglers on the North Platte catch fish at the same time*

Anglers also report good trout fishing on the North Platte River below Gray Reef, and don't forget about the Miracle Mile. Currently there are very good numbers of rainbow and brown trout. The most recent

survey, conducted this summer, estimates 2,900 trout per mile. Also as water temperatures cool, brown trout begin

moving into the Mile from Pathfinder Reservoir to spawn, so fishing can only get better. Brown trout spawning in the Mile peaks around Thanksgiving.

## On the Ground

### Pronghorn Antelope Classifications

Casper Region wildlife biologists and game wardens conducted pronghorn antelope classification surveys during late summer/early fall. The information collected during these surveys provides key information about antelope populations Game and Fish uses to develop hunting season structure and license numbers for the following year. In hunt areas around Casper, results were variable, with some antelope herds showing high numbers of fawns, indicating good herd health and population growth. Other areas had lower numbers of fawns than expected, especially given the mild winter and good spring moisture. Regardless, decent fawn production should allow all herds around Casper to continue to grow if over-winter survival is normal this year.

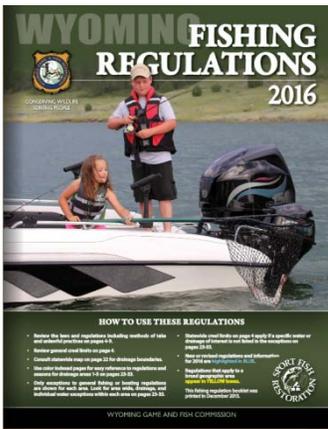


Near Douglas and Lusk, survey results were also variable. Northern portions of Converse County including Hunt Areas 26 and 29 are still experiencing excellent fawn production and recruitment at over 80 fawns per 100 does. Buck availability is also high in 2016 with over 60 bucks per 100 does. Hunt Area 30 in southern Converse County has not experienced as significant of an improvement in fawn production with 60 fawns and 36 bucks per 100 does. However, the discrepancy between these areas is typical and may be related to differences in habitat and predator abundance.

Well over 5,000 pronghorn were classified in the Black Thunder Herd (Cheyenne/Niobrara River Drainages). Overall antelope numbers appear to be up in many areas, and fawn production was good with 73 fawns to 100 does. High numbers of yearling antelope indicate winter survival and fawn recruitment continues to be strong. Fawn production the past three years has been very good, and survival of 2015 fawns was excellent as typified by a yearling buck to doe ratio nearing 24 bucks to 100 does. Total buck to doe ratio is also very good at 49 to 100, which was higher than anticipated due to the mild winter last year and many male fawns being recruited into the adult segment of this herd. Horn growth has been better than anticipated as well.



# Behind the Badge Over Limit of Fish, Tackle Use and Litter



Game wardens have reported ongoing issues with anglers using bait where only artificial flies and lures are allowed, over limit of fish and littering near Casper waters this summer. Anglers are reminded to check their regulations before fishing on the North Platte River as the regulations differ from area to area along the river.



*over limit of fish near Cardwell on the North Platte River*



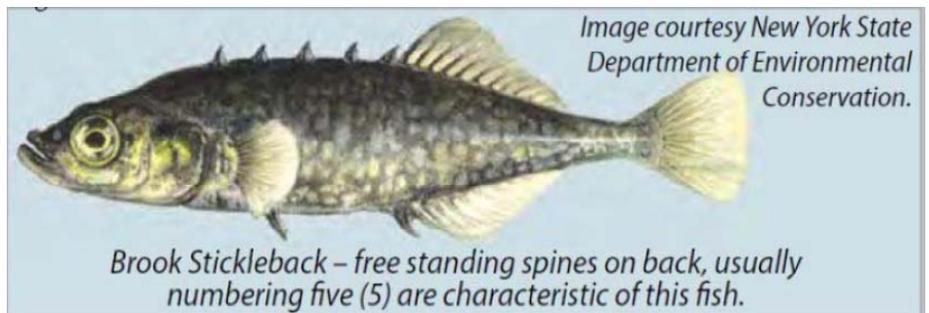
*litter from anglers using bait where it is not legal*

## In the Water

### Brook stickleback Update, Glendo Trend Surveys, Boat Assistance

Fisheries Biologist Matt Hahn worked to document the distribution of brook stickleback in the headwaters of the South Fork of the Powder River. Brook stickleback are an aquatic invasive species that we believe were originally brought to Wyoming with livebait from the Dakotas where they are native.

Hahn documented two new locations that indicated they had been moved above barriers. Surveys will continue through the fall throughout the drainage above barriers and in isolated ponds before treatments are planned for this invasive species.





*Casper Fisheries Management Crew and volunteers working up fish at Glendo during summer of 2016*

In June, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department received and stocked over 9 million walleye fry in Glendo. In recent years, walleye spawning success has been poor in Glendo due to high runoff. Walleye were first introduced in Glendo in 1972, last stocked in 1974, and for 40 years the walleye population has been supported by natural reproduction. Fisheries Biologists Gordon Edwards, Matt Hahn and crew completed annual gill netting at Glendo with help from many volunteers. Young of the year walleye are not captured well by our gear so it is too early to tell if there will be as a strong year class this year. Very strong year classes of white crappie, yellow perch and channel catfish were found suggesting good fishing for these species in the future. While total numbers of walleye are down, good numbers of 13 to 14-inch and 18 to 22-inch walleye were found.



Game Wardens Gary Boyd and Dylan Bergman assisted a kayaker who fell into the water on Alcova Reservoir. Due to the waves created by strong winds, he was unable to get back into his boat and the wind blew him several hundred yards before he abandoned his boat and swam to shore. He inhaled a small amount of water, and had he not been wearing a life jacket, there is a strong possibility the outcome could have been much more grim.



*Glenrock Game Warden Gary Boyd assists a kayaker on Alcova*

## Of Interest Injured Raptors

Douglas Wildlife Habitat Biologist Willow Steen took the Wildlife Society fellow Jace Cussins for a day in the field classifying antelope, making landowner contacts and responding to injured wildlife calls. One call was from a rancher regarding an orphaned raptor. Upon investigation, the bird appeared very weak and there was no evidence of any nest within the area. Further, the bird appeared much younger than what it should have been this time of year. The bird was retrieved, fed and sent to the bird rehabilitator in Cody. The raptor was identified as a northern harrier.



Casper Wildlife Biologist Heather O'Brien also had some encounters with raptors. An injured burrowing owl was brought to the Casper office after it was found alongside a public road. The owl was taken to a local vet for x-rays. The x-rays showed the owl had a dislocated shoulder, likely from colliding with a vehicle. The little owl was taken to the rehabilitation facility in Cody, but was not expected to recover fully. Surprisingly, the owl amazed everyone by recovering its ability (and agility) to fly within less than two weeks! The owl was so well-recovered that it was even difficult for the rehabber to capture in its barn space. Once captured, the burrowing owl was transported back from Cody to Casper, where it was released back into its home territory.



*burrowing owl eating meal worms before release near its burrow*



*Wildlife Biologist Heather O'Brien with red-tailed hawk*

Fledgling hawks and owls often get themselves into trouble or do a poor job of hunting and feeding themselves when they are first on their own in late summer. This was the case for one young red-tailed hawk and one young Swainson's hawk. Neither was injured, but rather, were just not very good yet at hunting. The red-tailed hawk was released back to where its parents found it and could feed and teach it more. The Swainson's hawk was taken to a rehabber to further train before releasing it with other Swainson's hawks for the fall migration.



*Swainson's hawk on its way to rehabilitation*



## In the News

### West Nile Virus

West Nile Virus (WNV) positive birds are becoming more common this time of year. Last month we reported a Northern Flicker with WNV from Laramie and in August we documented a WNV positive crow from the Casper. Remember to protect yourself by using insect repellent whenever you are outdoors.

West Nile Virus (WNV) is mosquito-borne virus of birds that also causes illness and death in many species, including horses and humans. The primary hosts of the WNV are wild birds of almost all families, but other species become infected after being bitten by an infected mosquito. Transmission is seasonal with the majority of cases in Wyoming occurring in the late summer. Temperature has a major influence on WNV transmission and, consequently, infection rates are higher during years when the late summer temperatures are above average. Elevation also influences temperature, especially night-time temperatures when *Culex tarsalis* feeds. Transmission rates in Wyoming are typically higher at elevations below 6,000 feet. WNV is only spread by insect vectors; it is not transmitted person-to-person or bird-to-person. In Wyoming, the primary vector for WNV is the nocturnal mosquito *Culex tarsalis*.



dead crow collected in Casper tested positive for West Nile Virus

West Nile Virus infection can cause significant mortality in avian species such as crows, jays, magpies, hawks, owls, and eagles. Sage grouse are particularly susceptible to WNV infection and significant mortality events have occurred in the Powder River Basin. This disease does not typically cause morbidity or mortality in big game animals in Wyoming.

Precautions should be taken to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes particularly during the peak transmission periods. Most humans infected with the virus develop no symptoms or mild infections, but WNV can sometimes cause serious, life-threatening disease. Mild symptoms include fever, headache, and body aches that usually go away on their own, but some people develop a high fever, convulsions, and even paralysis. Death rates associated with severe WNV infection range from 3-15% and are highest among the elderly. There is no treatment for avian species infected with WNV, but vaccines are available for use in horses; there is no specific human treatment or vaccine. The most effective way to prevent WNV is to wear mosquito repellent whenever outside in mid to late summer.

