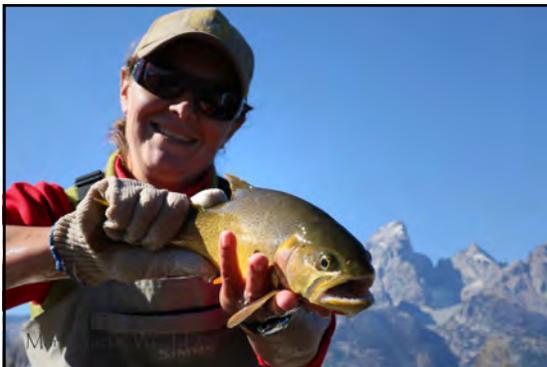




# Wyoming Game and Fish Department

## Jackson Region

## November 2015 Newsletter



### Snake River Cutthroats

The Jackson fish crew conducted a fish sampling effort on a five-mile reach of the Snake River between Deadman's Bar and Moose. While the numbers haven't been analyzed yet, there was a noticeable number of Snake River cutthroats greater than 16 inches. The fish crew was joined by volunteers Leslie Steen (Trout Unlimited), Len Carlman (Snake River Fund), Jill Thompson (Buckrail writer) and Paul Bruun (JH News and Guide writer), with the latter two resulting in some nice media coverage of the effort.





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### Infrared Elk Count

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department, in its constant effort to get the most accurate wildlife counts, recently employed using infrared cameras to count elk from the air along the Snake River corridor between Grand Teton National Park and the town of Wilson.

Game and Fish biologists and wardens have long believed this segment of the Jackson Elk Herd is rapidly growing, but it has been difficult to get a good count in the area because it is dominated by private land with many homes, making access limited from the ground and traditional aerial surveys are difficult because of a dense tree canopy. Plus, wildlife managers generally do not conduct low elevation aerial surveys in such areas to avoid disturbing private homeowners. The infrared aerial surveys are able to be flown at a relatively high elevation, approximately 3,000 feet in a fixed-wing aircraft, yet still detect animals through thick vegetation.



An infrared aerial view of elk bedded in a forested area along the Snake River north of Jackson recently.

The recent infrared survey resulted in a count of 840 animals. The results of the survey basically confirmed what wildlife managers suspected, that there is a significant number of elk, probably between 900-1,000 animals, occupying this Snake River corridor.

This high number of elk, coupled with the fact that this segment is producing calves at approximately twice the rate as the rest of the herd, causes concern for wildlife managers.



(Above) Elk living amongst private lands along the Snake River north of Jackson. (Below) A comparison of a normal aerial view and an infrared view showing how more visible animals are with infrared technology.

Controlling the growth of this segment of the Jackson Elk Herd is always going to be challenging since many of the elk are found on private land where hunting opportunities are limited. The only other two opportunities to apply hunting pressure on these elk are through the Elk Reduction Program in Grand Teton National Park during their migration or on the National Elk Refuge. To date, hunting has not proven effective at slowing the growth of this segment of the herd and managers predict it will continue to grow and make up a larger portion of the entire herd.





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A deer decoy that was set up near the Wyoming-Idaho border to address chronic wildlife violations in the area. Photos by Kyle Lash

During the two days when the decoy was set up, a total of 13 vehicles passed by with 10 of those observing the decoy. Of the 10 that saw it, four shot at the decoy. A total of four citations and five warnings were issued totaling some \$3,160 in fines. Deer Hunt Area 149 has had a history of violations due to its geographic isolation from Jackson and the rest of Wyoming.



Jackson Game Warden Jon Stephens and Jackson Wildlife Biologist Aly Courtemanch stand with the deer decoy.

## Nice Buck...or is it?

Wyoming Game and Fish law enforcement officers from the Jackson Region conducted a deer decoy operation on the west side of the Teton Range, near the Wyoming-Idaho border, in an effort to reduce the number of hunting violations occurring there. Game and Fish officials have received several complaints of out of season deer hunting occurring in the area. The buck mule deer decoy was set up two miles from the state line on October 10 and again October 16 in deer Hunt Area 149, which had closed to Wyoming deer hunting on October 7.

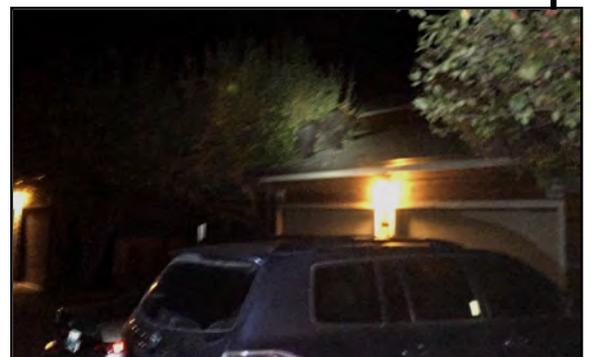


A hunter takes a shot at a deer decoy, out of season and from a public road near the Wyoming-Idaho border.

Regional Game and Fish officers have identified it as a problem area and have increased their presence there and periodically used such special operations. Similarly, in 2013, a deer decoy was used and it resulted in three citations and three warnings being issued. "We don't use decoys a lot," says Jackson Game Warden Kyle Lash. "But when we have certain problem areas such as this, they have proven to be pretty effective. They're effective in that they put the wildlife, the game warden and the violator all at the crime scene at the same time. They're just a good tool to keep hunters playing by the rules."

## Bear on the Roof...

Jackson Large Carnivore Biologists Mike Boyce and Sam Stephens responded to several bear conflicts over the course of the summer, including two black bears in occupied homes. One of the most recent incidents involved multiple black bears that were feeding on ornamental crabapples in a residential area north of Jackson. Boyce, joined by Game warden Kyle Lash and BFH Biologist Ben Wise, darted a large male black bear that ended up on the roof of the residence. The bear was successfully relocated.





### Jackson Lake Lakers

The Jackson fish crew conducted their annual trophy lake trout netting on Jackson Lake. Through a combination of electrofishing and netting, 73 lake trout were tagged on Jackson Lake. Twenty additional lake trout were previously tagged. The biggest lake trout was 41 inches and 30 pounds, and nine fish were over 20 pounds.



If caught, anglers can redeem the tags with information on the size and location of the catch for \$25. Surprisingly, the first fish ever to receive a \$25 reward tag was recaptured. This fish was tagged on Oct 27, 1995 and was 27.3 inches long and weighed 6.5 pounds. This year, 20 years later, the lake trout had grown to 40.5 inches long and 27 pounds. After his first tagging experience in 1995, the fish had disappeared and avoided all netting and angler's hooks until this year. Fish managers replaced his tag and released him with all the others.



Photos (Above right) Jackson Fisheries Technician Jon Heckel hoists a Jackson Lake lunker before release. (Left and Right) Volunteer Jean Bruun measures and releases a tagged trophy lake trout. (Above left) The first \$25 tag, placed 20 years ago in 1995, was recovered and replaced.



### A Rare Find...

While sampling Cody Creek, a spring creek tributary to the Snake River, an albino sculpin was captured. No albino fish have ever been observed previously in the region.

*An rare albino sculpin captured (right) compared to a normal sculpin (far right).*





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## Star Valley Happenings

**Afton Game Warden Todd Graham** responded to a call of a large bull elk that had gotten its antlers tangled in a fence and died (left). Graham tagged the head for the landowner near Etna.

Graham also responded to a report of a dead cow moose in Tom's Creek northwest of Auburn, WY. A preliminary necropsy showed that the cow was in very poor condition and the carotid artery worm *Elaeophora* was present. Warden Graham removed the head and sent it to Jackson for additional disease investigation.

In October, Afton Game Warden Todd Graham conducted a total of 62 hunter field checks consisting of 59 big game animals and three black bears.



## Hunter Checks

**South Jackson Game Warden Kyle Lash** checked these duck hunters (above) who were having some success on the ponds at the South Park Wildlife Habitat Management Area and these successful elk hunters on the Hunt Area 89 opener (right).

Warden Lash responded to several hunter trespassing calls during the month of October. In two situations hunters were issued citations for hunting on private land without permission. The cited hunters also lost the game they took illegally, one being a moose and the other an elk.



**North Jackson Game Warden Jon Stephens** reports generally good compliance this hunting season. However, two cases worth noting include a deer shot and left near the Jackson airport and an over limit of bighorn sheep. A resident north of Jackson called 911 when they heard a gunshot and observed a man standing in their yard wearing orange and holding a rifle. When the homeowner confronted the man, who had shot an 8X7 buck mule deer in their backyard, the man quickly jumped into his vehicle and left. With assistance from the Teton County Sheriff's Office, the perpetrator was located, interviewed and cited on several charges.

A pair of elk hunters discovered a big horn sheep carcass left to waste in the Gros Ventre near Lower Slide Lake. The 7-year-old ram was discovered approximately 100 yards upslope of a second bighorn sheep that had been field-dressed the day before by a licensed sheep hunter. The sheep hunter was interviewed and found to have unknowingly shot both rams. The sheep hunter was cited for taking an over limit of big game.



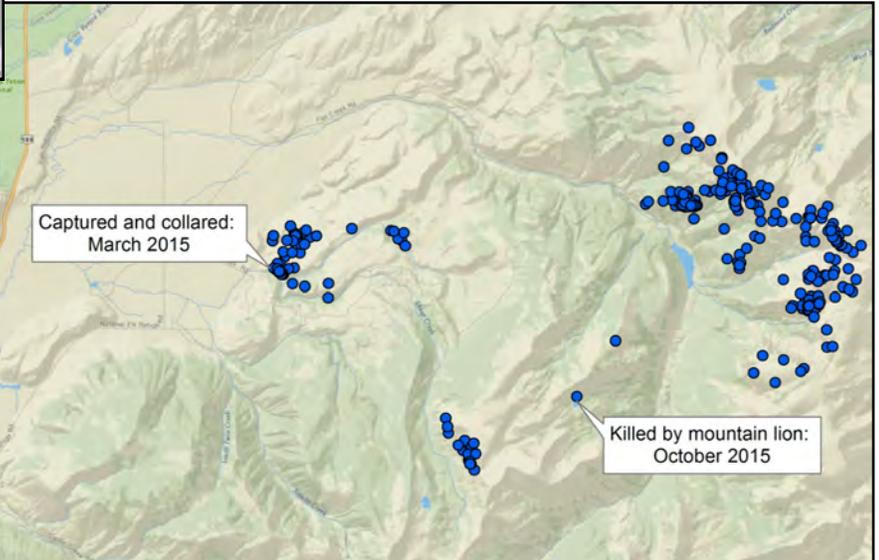
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## Data Recovered...

Jackson Game Warden Jon Stephens and Wildlife Biologist Aly Courtemanch (Left) spent 15 hours hiking through knee-deep snow over Table Mountain to retrieve two radio-collars from big-horn sheep that had died. One of the sheep had died last spring in Flat Creek and the second had gone on mortality signal just two days before the hike. Sheep 523 (locations on map below) had been captured and collared in Curtis Canyon last winter as part of a new study. Her collar was programmed to send an email alert to researchers if it remained motionless for eight hours, indicating a likely mortality. Jon and Aly found clear evidence that the ewe had been killed by a mountain lion (Lower left).



## Working the Hunting Season

South Jackson Wildlife Biologist Gary Fralick spent time in the Wyoming and Salt Ranges monitoring the mule deer fall migration as deer began to move from the Greys River to the east slope of the Wyoming Range. Gary also checked 115 mule deer and over 80 elk during the hunting season,

while contacting over 1000 hunters and handing out 500 public informational handouts on the Wyoming Range Mule Deer Initiative.





### Flat Creek Remodel

Thanks to a number of local partners, a project to improve fish habitat on Flat Creek, within the National Elk Refuge, is in its third year. The objectives of the Flat Creek National Elk Refuge Enhancement Project are to remove past in-stream structures, reduce sediment, and increase habitat for native fish. This blue ribbon trout stream, known for its trophy-class cutthroat trout, has experienced a variety



of alterations over the past century. Fish habitat structures were installed in the 1980s to create additional hiding cover for trout. These structures have out-lived their life-span and are being replaced with new structures.

The Flat Creek enhancement project calls for treatment of 3.5 miles of stream with work occurring during the months of September through November to avoid cutthroat spawning and fall hunting. The final product will be a stream with more meanders, undercut banks, and deep pools that hold more of the hefty trout Flat Creek is famous for. The project is a partnership between Jackson Hole Trout Unlimited, National Elk Refuge and Fish Hatchery, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Snake River Fund, Teton Conservation District, WY Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust, Habitat Trust Fund, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, Western Native Trout Initiative, Patagonia, Teton County Weed and Pest, and the National Elk Refuge.



### Kelly Warm Springs Overhaul

The Jackson Fish crew assisted Grand Teton National Park in removing a variety of exotic aquatic species in Kelly Warm Springs. The unusually warm waters have been illegally stocked with a number of species that normally wouldn't survive in Jackson Hole, including goldfish and bullfrogs.





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### Wounded Warrior Hunts

With licenses donated by other hunters, two wounded veterans realized life-long dreams of taking elk in the Jackson Region this fall.

Staff Sgt Shaun Meadows, U.S. Air Force ret, has always had a love for the great outdoors, particularly hunting and fishing. In particular, Shaun had a life-long dream of going on an old time, canvas wall tent, elk hunt. Wounded Veteran Shaun Meadows harvested an awesome 6x6 bull elk on the first evening of his hunt.



While Sgt Maj Ray Mackey, U.S. Marine Corps ret, was serving in Afghanistan conducting Operation Enduring Freedom, he was looking forward to retiring from the Marine Corps and going on his first elk hunt. But when an IED confined him to a wheelchair, he thought his opportunity to hunt elk was likely over. Wounded Veteran Sgt Maj Ray Mackey also took a beautiful 6x6 bull elk.

Both of these men realized their dreams and made life-long memories thanks to the generosity of former Game & Fish Habitat Biologist Steve Kilpatrick, the Wyoming Wildlife Federation, the Jackson Hole Chapter of Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Mr. & Mrs. Carlton Loewer of Black Powder Guest Ranch in Alpine, WY, Timberline Taxidermy, Jackson Hole Buffalo Meat Company and Advanced Custom Electric in Jackson Hole.



(Above L&R) Jackson Game Warden Kyle Lash presents Staff Sgt Shaun Meadows with his elk license and Shaun poses with his elk. (Left) Jackson Game Warden Jon Stephens presents Sgt Maj Ray Mackey with his elk license and Ray poses with his elk (Right).



### Fencing for Bears

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department in Jackson has partnered with the Bridger Teton National Forest and Teton County Integrated Solid Waste and Recycling to keep bears out of the carcass disposal area at the trash transfer station south of Jackson. Personnel from the three agencies gathered to construct a seven-strand electric fence intended to keep hungry bears from attempting to dig up the carcasses.

