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the wyoming game & fish department

LANDER REGION newsletter

With the lions

How does lion management work?



A hound's eye view of a mountain lion treed for monitoring purposes. A sample was obtained from the mountain lion by dart and then the lion safely fled the area. (The hound "Cat" is Large Carnivore Biologist Luke Ellsbury's)

Mountain lion management in Wyoming has been a hot topic lately, and one worth mentioning this month.

As per the Wyoming Game and Fish Mountain Lion Management Plan (2006), *"The goal of mountain lion management in Wyoming is to sustain mountain lion populations ... to provide for recreational/hunting opportunity, maintain ungulate populations at established objectives or in line with current habitat conditions, and minimize mountain lion depredation to pets and livestock and reduce the potential for human injury..."*

Mountain lions are managed on a three-year cycle in order to evaluate population trends over that time. Lion hunt areas are managed with a mortality *limit* versus *quota*. The mortality limit is the threshold to maintain the population objective and not a target number that needs to be reached for management success.

This harvest year (2015/16) represents the third year of the current three-year cycle. Annual mortality data for the last three harvest years will soon be analyzed to determine population trends across the state to develop harvest objectives for the next three

years. Large carnivore managers will be meeting with regional biologists and wardens this spring to discuss updated harvest limits and objectives. Look for public meetings late this spring or early summer to present the mortality limit and objective proposals.

In addition, the large carnivore section initiated mountain lion monitoring in the Green River region. According to Large Carnivore Biologist Justin Clapp, "Data gathered from these efforts will provide information to better understand our local mountain lion populations and evaluate mountain lion management strategies and monitoring criteria. The timing is also advantageous because the Game and Fish can collaborate with the University of Wyoming on research being conducted on deer and elk in the same areas. It is our intent that these efforts complement each other and our understanding of wildlife population dynamics in the region."

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Out of the case files

Bald eagle shot



South Riverton Game Warden Brad Gibb has started working on a case involving a bald eagle that appears to have been shot. Brad responded to a call in the Riverton area about a sick eagle sitting in corrals, unwilling or unable to fly. Once the eagle was captured it was transferred to Ironside Bird Rescue, a raptor rehabilitation center in Cody.

X-rays revealed multiple pieces of lead shot in the breast and digestive track (bright white dots in the images below) and blood tests revealed some level of lead poisoning. For a couple weeks, the bird appeared to be getting better, gaining weight and flying, then sadly and unexpectedly he went blind (common side effect of lead poisoning), was unable to stand, and died.

Gibb is coordinating with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service special agents and the case is ongoing.



Under the ice

Enforcement and education at a fishing derby



Lander region fisheries biologists and game wardens conducted a coordinated enforcement and education effort during the Wild West Winter Carnival fishing derby on Boysen Reservoir. Overall, compliance was good, but we did have the opportunity to talk to several individuals about correctly identifying sauger and wall-eye as well as have several discussions about bait fish regulations. A few live bait fish issues were discovered that will be worked on over the next couple of months.



On the mountain

Looking for bighorns



Wildlife Biologist Greg Anderson and Education Specialist Rene Schell classified bighorn sheep on foot in January. They climbed Whiskey Mountain looking for about 60 sheep that were not found during helicopter classification flights. Despite a few patches of deep snow and 60 mile per hour gusts at the top, 40 sheep were located and classified. Greg was sure the last 20 were “just over the next ridge,” but shadows were getting long and they headed back to the truck.

Look for an update on all the bighorn sheep in the Region over the next few months as some will be trapped for disease testing and collaring and others relocated to supplement existing populations.



Check out the Lander Region Webpage for more great information!

<https://wgfd.wyo.gov/Regional-Offices/Lander-Region>

And sign up to receive the newsletter electronically

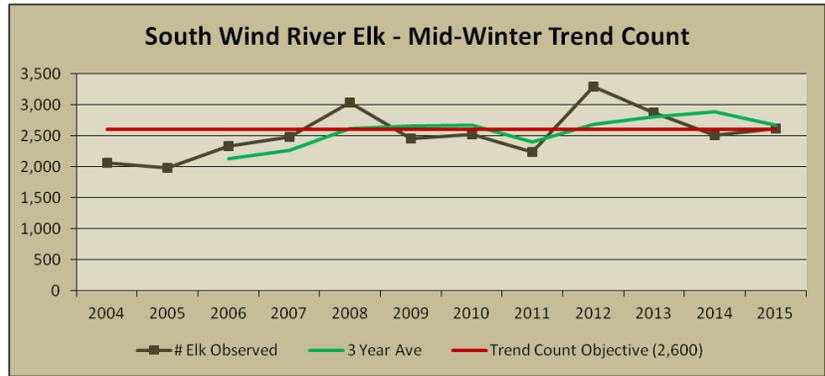
<https://wgfd.wyo.gov/email-sign-up>



In the Elk

Population counts

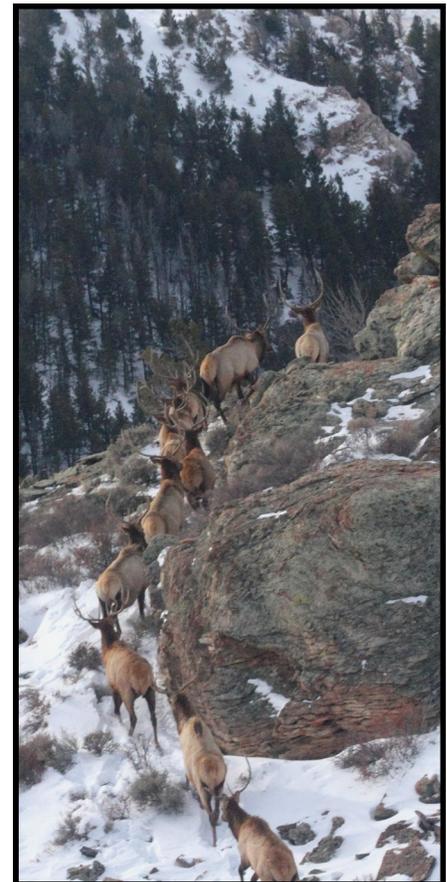
South Wind River and Green Mountain elk surveys have been completed. In the South Wind River herd unit a total of 2,621 elk were observed between Hunt Areas 25, 27, 28, and 99. This is almost exactly the same as the 3-year average trend count and shows the herd right at objective. The ratio of 28 bulls/100 cows is the 3rd highest since 1994, with a calf/cow ratio of 30 calves/100 cows.



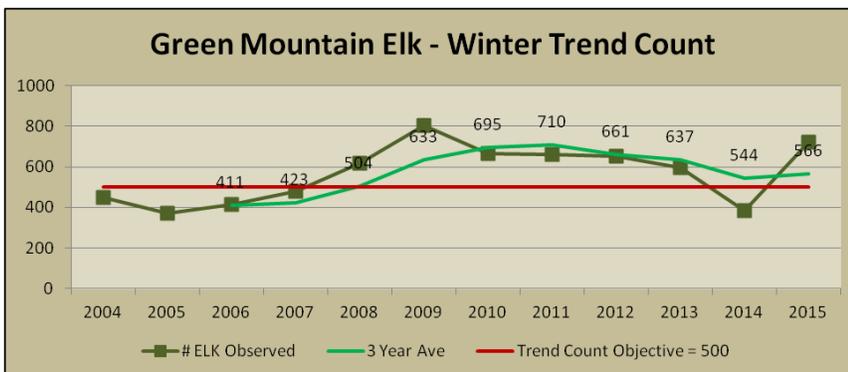
In Green Mountain, 630 elk were observed in Hunt Area 24, mostly on or near Green Mountain. Nearly 100 elk have been observed along the Sweetwater River in Hunt Area 128, putting the total of over 720 elk about 44% over the mid-winter trend count objective of 500 elk. The 3-year trend count average of 566 is only 13% above objective. More bulls were observed this year than in 2015.



Bull elk group. Photo by Stan Harter.



Bull elk group. Photo by Stan Harter.



Highway crossing



Elk have been a common occurrence on U.S. Hwy 28 near South Pass this winter, crossing almost everyday. Thank you Wyoming Department of Transportation for putting alerts on your signs, and thank you motorists for slowing down!



Improving habitat

Christmas trees at Ocean Lake



Volunteers and staff place Christmas trees on Ocean Lake to benefit the fishery. Photo provided by The Riverton Ranger..

Regional personnel and volunteers helped the Fish Division and Habitat and Access crew along with Fremont County Solid Waste and Inberg-Miller Engineering with placing Christmas trees on Ocean Lake.

Approximately 25 people spent the morning of January 30th placing 375 recycled Christmas trees on the ice at Ocean Lake as part of an annual sport fish habitat project. Bundles of ten trees were wired together and attached to cinder blocks as weights. They will sink to the bottom when the ice melts and provide structure where sport fish such as walleyes, yellow perch, and black crappies congregate. Ocean Lake is shallow with a silt bottom and does not have much habitat (like drop-offs, rocky shorelines or aquatic vegetation beds) to attract schools of fish. The Christmas tree structures benefit anglers by providing places that attract fish and in turn provide better angling opportunities.

Since the project began in 1985, an estimated 11,000 Christmas trees have been sunk into Ocean Lake. The tree branches likely last only two to three years before they decay to just a trunk, so putting new trees in the lake every year helps to maintain old structures.

Over the years, most trees have been placed on the ice approximately ¼-mile north of Long Point boat ramp. Although the trees usually sink at that location, high winds during ice-off sometimes blow the ice sheet with the trees to other locations in the lake. When the trees do not sink near Long Point, some Ocean Lake anglers are ambitious enough to use depth sounding devices to find the newly sunk trees and have their own secret fishing spot.



Animal rescue

Stranded elk

Recently, concerned ice fishermen called the Wyoming Game and Fish Department and the Wind River Tribal Fish and Game when they saw two elk get stuck on Pilot Butte Reservoir while trying to cross with the rest of the herd. The Reservoir lies northwest of Riverton and is within the exterior boundary of the Wind River Indian Reservation. Tribal Warden Art Lawson called Large Carnivore Conflict Supervisor Brian DeBolt who was nearby duck hunting and able to respond quickly. Along with help from several ice fishermen on site, Brian was able to hobble, blindfold, place into a sled and pull to shore one yearling bull. The second yearling cow was euthanized due to the extent of the injuries she sustained from repeated falls on the ice. Riverton Wardens Brad Gibb and Jessica Beecham responded as well and were able to field dress and donate the meat from the yearling cow. A big thank-you goes out to the concerned citizens who called and assisted that day!



Under the direction of Game and Fish, volunteers assist in moving a yearling elk off the ice.



On the ground

Sage grouse

Sage-Grouse GIS Analyst, Nyssa Whitford has been working on planning and logistics for the 30th Western State Sage and Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse Workshop to be hosted by the Department this summer. The workshop will be in Lander June 13-16. Up to 200 biologists, managers, researchers and grouse enthusiasts are expected to attend. More information can be found at: http://www.wafwa.org/workshops/sage_and_sharp-tailed_grouse/



SAVE THE DATE
30th SAGE AND COLUMBIAN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE WORKSHOP
BRINGING IT HOME

WHEN: JUNE 13-16, 2016

WHERE: LANDER, WYOMING

WHO: BIOLOGISTS, LAND MANAGERS, SAGEBRUSH ECOSYSTEM ADVOCATES, RESEARCHERS, NGOs, UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND ADVISORS.

WHAT: A BIENNIAL GATHERING OF SAGE AND COLUMBIAN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE PROFESSIONALS SHARING CURRENT MANAGEMENT AND RESEARCH.

