



# Wyoming Game and Fish Department

## Pinedale Region

## January 2015 Newsletter

### Elk Research Continues

Pinedale personnel in the Game and Fish Department's Brucellosis-Feedgrounds-Habitat (BFH) program spent much of January capturing elk using both corral traps and chemical immobilization at several area elk feedgrounds. Adult cow elk were fitted with GPS collars to document fine-scale movements and also Vaginal Implant Transmitters to identify elk parturition, or calving areas.

Approximately 250 elk have been trapped at fall Creek, Dell Creek and Alpine feedgrounds, and an additional 30 elk were darted from a haysled at 10 different feedgrounds this winter. Data were downloaded and will be used to continue multi-agency studies on feedground elk ecology. The collars will be refurbished with new batteries and drop-off mechanisms and redeployed this winter to continue to collect GPS data on elk.



*Pinedale Large Carnivore Biologist Zach Turnbull fastens a GPS collar to a cow elk.*



*Pinedale BFH Biologist Jared Rogerson inserts a vaginal implant transmitter to a tranquilized cow elk at the Fall Creek feedground near Boulder.*

The Game and Fish Department's BFH program personnel, with collaborators from Iowa State University and the University of Wyoming, have collected over 500 years worth of GPS collar data from elk captured on 20 feedgrounds and seven native winter range sites adjacent to feedgrounds from 2007 to 2015.

*(Right) South Pinedale Game Warden Jordan Kraft helps a cow elk regain its feet after being collared at the Muddy Creek feedground south of Boulder.*



*Casper Star Tribune photographer Alan Rogers and Outdoor Writer Christine Petersen document the elk capture for an upcoming story.*





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### Winter Elk Counts Begin

Wildlife biologists and game wardens count big game animals at different times of year based on when they are most visible and they can be classified as males, females and juveniles to get a picture of not only how many animals there are, but how the population is trending: increasing, stable or decreasing. This information helps managers design hunting seasons that will keep the population at the established population objective. Winter is the best time to count and classify elk since most of the elk in the Pinedale and Jackson regions attend feedgrounds, making them relatively easy to count. All of the game wardens, biologists and several other regional personnel chip in to count the elk as

it is a big job. While all the numbers are still being tabulated, managers are expecting numbers to be somewhat higher due to the relatively light harvest this past hunting season. Managers will present all the current big game numbers along with their proposed hunting seasons at a round of public meetings to be held later this spring. In the Pinedale region, public meetings are scheduled for the evening of March 24th in Marbleton and March 25th



South Pinedale Game Warden Jordan Kraft (front) and Pinedale Wildlife Biologist Dean Clause count elk from a horse-drawn haysled as it passes by the herd at the Muddy Creek feedground south of Boulder.

in Pinedale.



(Above) Thayne Wildlife Biologist Gary Fralick tabulates the numbers from the group after elk were counted at the McNeel Feedground near Bondurant (right).





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### Wintering Deer Herds

Big Piney Game Warden Adam Hymas reports that deer on winter ranges in his district do not have much snow to contend with. While he has noticed a few deer that have died this winter, numbers are not significant at this time.

Hymas and other regional wardens continue to patrol the deer winter ranges reporting that there are several people out viewing and photographing deer before they drop their antlers for the year. The shed antlers are also quite popular with wildlife enthusiasts. Shed hunting has become so popular and competitive that an antler hunting season was implemented to protect wintering wildlife from being harassed.

Wyoming's shed antler hunting season has been in effect since 2009 and prohibits the collection of antlers from January 1 through April 30 on all federal and state lands west of the Continental Divide.



*An example of one of the trophy class mule deer bucks in warden Hymas' district that eluded hunters this past fall.*

### Do Habitat Treatments Work?

It's a question both wildlife managers and members of the public often wonder about. Each year, state and federal biologists spend a great deal of time and money to improve habitat for a variety of wildlife species, but do these habitat treatments really work?



Last summer, Pinedale Habitat Biologist Jill Randall collaborated with a young scientist, Pinedale 8th grade student Katelyn Hayward, to answer the question of whether the sage grouse habitat treatments were really benefitting sage grouse or not. The monitoring project would also serve as Hayward's science fair project.

Her study focused on mountain big sagebrush that was being used by sage grouse as brood rearing habitat. The study was designed to determine if sage grouse use was higher in treated areas compared with adjacent untreated areas in. Hayward visited four mechanical sagebrush treatments

(mowing and aerator) and conducted pellet group counts along a 1 x 50 meter belt in three paired control and disturbed locations in each treatment. Her results indicated at most sites (n=10) the treatment had a higher count of pellet groups compared to adjacent untreated areas and at the other sites (n=2) the treatment and control pellet counts were equal.

Hayward and Randall concluded that the sagebrush treatments were working!

*(Above) Katelyn Hayward conducts pellet counts at a site showing both treated and untreated sagebrush. (Right) A sage grouse pellet group.*

