Laramie Region Angler Update

2015 Edition

"Conserving Wildlife - Serving People"





Inside this issue:

Laramie Plains Lakes Lunkers	2
Laramie Region Walleye	3
Laramie River Jelm WHMA	4
Fish stocking as a management tool	5
Riparian habitat	6
AIS Program Update	7
Meet your management team	8

Look for us on



2015 Fish Regulations
Statewide and Laramie Regional changes

Several new fishing regulations went into effect with the New Year. The new fishing regulations booklet listing all changes is now on the Game and Fish website wgfd.wyo.gov. Printed copies are available at license selling agents. The new changes are highlighted throughout the booklet.

Of interest to live baitfish dealers is the change that allows transport of live baitfish into the state from approved commercial hatcheries. The regulation includes new requirements specific to live baitfish importation. The new regulation will allow those holding a commercial hatchery license or a live baitfish dealer license to import fathead minnows from Game and Fish approved commercial sources.

Other changes of note reflect a change allowing the use of corn for bait and the use of artificial lighting devices while fishing. Regulation will continue to prohibit the use of artificial light when spear gunning for game fish.

Of interest to bass anglers is the liberalization of the size limit regulation for bass on several southeastern Wyoming waters. Festo Lake and Hawk Springs Reservoir have had the bass size limit removed completely.

On Grayrocks Reservoir, the 15-inch minimum size limit has been removed. Anglers can now keep three (3) bass but only one can be over 12 inches in length.

In addition, the statewide 30-inch minimum on northern pike and tiger muskie does not apply at Grayrocks Reservoir. In 2012, 4,780 6-8 inch tiger muskies were stocked into Grayrocks Reservoir to control the abundant common carp and quillback populations. Tiger muskies are sterile and have been used historically in Grayrocks Reservoir to control non-game fish populations. Every summer since 2012 anglers have reported catching northern pike in Grayrocks Reservoir. These angler reports were verified in 2014 by the Laramie Fisheries Management Crew. To address this potentially damaging introduction, regulations were changed to encourage harvest of any northern pike captured at Grayrocks Reservoir.



Northern Pike

Until northern pike population dynamics can be better understood the creel limit on northern pike and tiger muskie in combination shall be three per day and the 30-inch minimum length limit shall not apply at Grayrocks Reservoir. The sign below will be installed in spring of 2015 to alert anglers to the presence of both species and how to proceed if they catch a northern pike. Anglers are encouraged to harvest all northern pike and contact the Laramie Game & Fish Office.

Lunkers on the Laramie Plains

The Laramie Fisheries Management Crew, samples nearly 40 standing waters (i.e. lakes, ponds, reservoirs) annually. Sampling is conducted to evaluate how fish are doing, in order to recommend any needed management changes such as regulations, habitat, or stocking. We use a variety of gear to sample fish including boat electrofishing, trap nets, trot lines, gill nets, hydroacoustics, seines, and minnow traps. In addition, we conduct creel surveys to evaluate angler catch rates, satisfaction, number of anglers, and harvest.

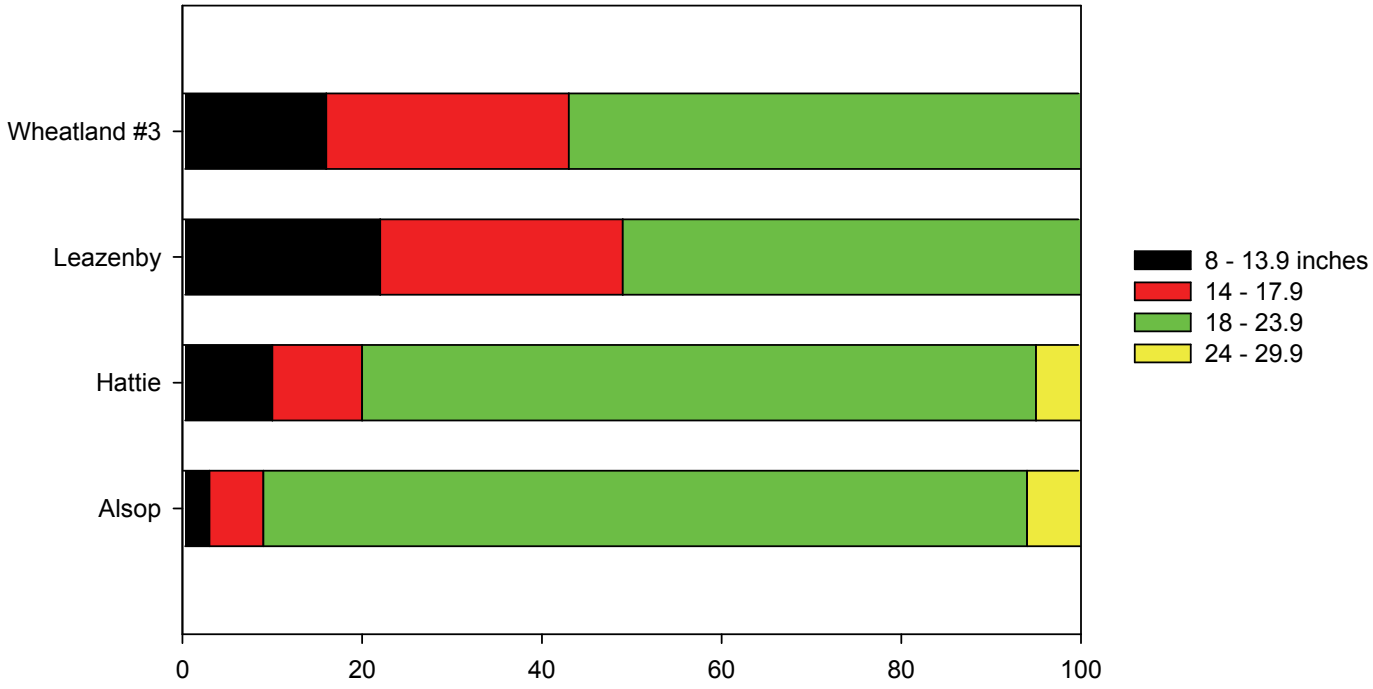


The figure below is a summary of sampling data collected at Alsop Lake, Lake Hattie, Leazenby Lake, and Wheatland Reservoir #3 in 2014. All of these lakes are stocked annually with trout; see page 5 for more information on stocking as a management tool.



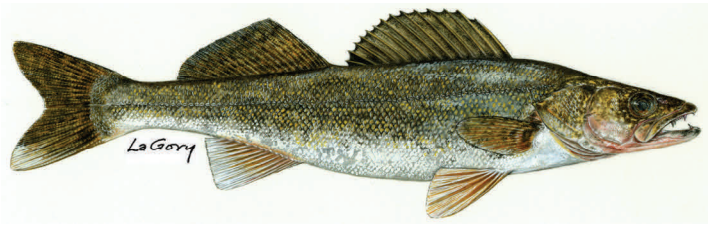
The figure below displays the percentage of rainbow and cutthroat trout caught in sampling gear for each length group. For example, at Wheatland #3, 16% of the rainbow and cutthroat trout captured in sampling gear were between the lengths of 8 and 13.9 inches, 27% were between the lengths of 14 and 17.9 inches, and 57% were between 18 and 23.9 inches.

Be sure to check fish regulations and know your public access boundaries before heading out to catch one of these lunkers. If fishing by boat, please be aware of the Wyoming Game & Fish AIS regulations (see page 8).



Percentage (%) of Rainbow and Cutthroat Trout caught in sampling gear per length group

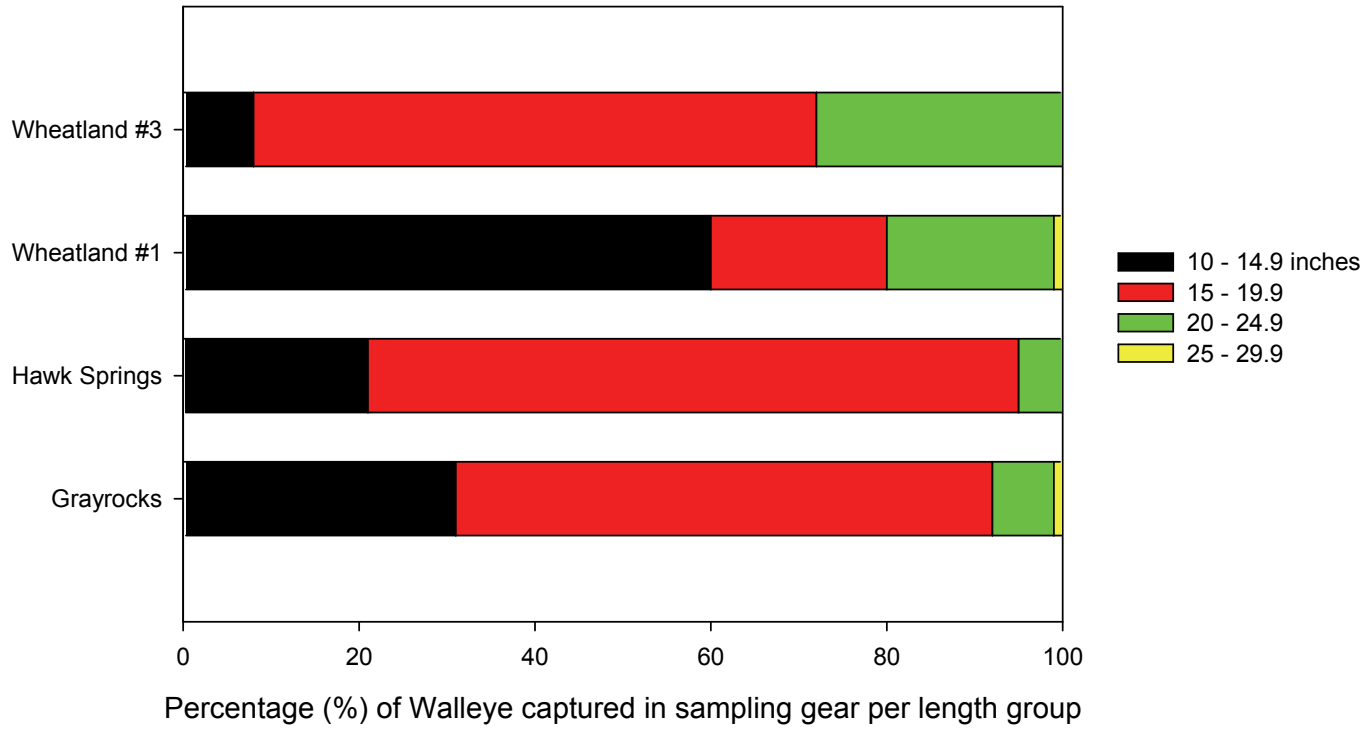
Looking for a "toothy" critter?



Walleye are one of the more popular game fish in the Laramie Region. Therefore, walleye are stocked annually into a number of different waters, including Grayrocks Reservoir, Hawk Springs Reservoir, and Wheatland Reservoir #1. These waters can provide suitable walleye habitat, but fluctuating water levels limit spawning success and necessitate annual stocking. Walleye are also present in Wheatland Reservoir #3. Wheatland Reservoir #3 receives its water from Wheatland Reservoir #2 (no public access) which was stocked with walleye between 1952-1977 and now has a limited self-sustaining population. The figure below is a summary of sampling data collected at Grayrocks Reservoir, Hawk Springs Reservoir, Wheatland #1, and Wheatland #3.

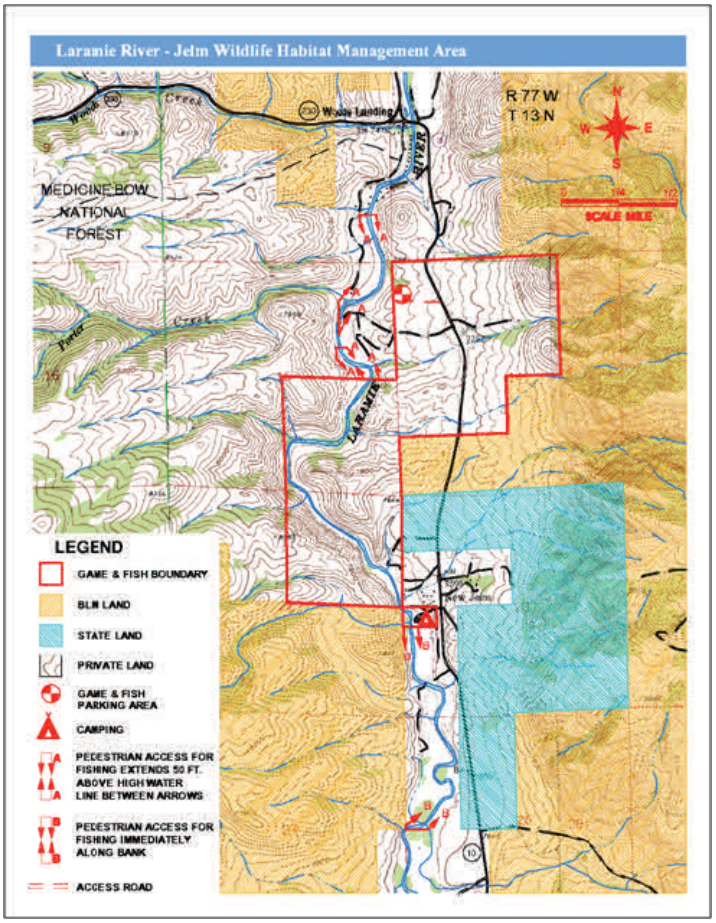
The figure shows the percentage of walleye caught in sampling gear for each length group. For example, at Wheatland Reservoir #1, 60% of walleye captured in sampling gear were between the lengths of 10 and 14.9 inches, 20% were between 15 and 19.9 inches, 19% were between 20 and 24.9 inches, and 1% were between 25 and 29.9 inches. Walleye can be caught year-round at these waters, but there are times when the walleye bite is better. These "bites" occur in June at Grayrocks Reservoir, March through May at Hawk Springs, May to June at Wheatland #1, and June to July at Wheatland #3. Grayrocks Reservoir, Hawk Springs Reservoir, and Wheatland Reservoir #1 have abundant walleye populations, but all these waters offer the potential to catch walleye ≥ 20 inches.

Be sure to check fish regulations and know your public access boundaries before heading out to catch one of these toothy critters. If headed out by boat, please be aware of the Wyoming Game & Fish Department AIS regulations (see page 8).



Get to know your Public Access Areas - Jelm WHMA

The Wyoming Game & Fish Habitat and Access Branch is responsible for the management of lands and access areas that are owned or leased by the Department. Through responsible management and maintenance of public access and wildlife habitat management areas the Habitat and Access Branch provides quality wildlife habitat and places to hunt and fish. The Laramie Region contains 35 Public Access Areas and 11 Wildlife Habitat Management areas (WHMA), which total 94,889 acres. Habitat types include wetlands for waterfowl to big game winter ranges. One of the Laramie Region habitat areas is the Jelm WHMA located one mile south of Woods Landing. The area was purchased in 1948 and includes 720 acres of fee title land and 140 acres of easements. The Jelm WHMA provides crucial mule deer winter range, hunting access, and over two miles of fishing access on the Laramie River. The Laramie River inside the Jelm WHMA is home to a robust wild brown trout fishery. The fishery is managed through a combination of habitat evaluations and improvements, fishing regulations, creel surveys, and fish population monitoring.





The trout population is sampled every three years, with the last sampling event occurring in 2014. Currently, there is an estimated 1,470 brown trout per mile, with a healthy biomass estimate of nearly 770 pounds of brown trout per mile. Brown trout average over 11 inches in length, with some brown trout > 20 inches. Over half of the sampled brown trout were ≥ 12 inches in length. The Jelm WHMA offers exceptional fishing opportunities for wild brown trout. Check out this WGFD YouTube video on the sampling event in 2014 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YTmcLTf8NNI



Importance of fish stocking to management

Fish stocking is an important tool in fish managers "tool box". There are several reasons trout stocking is needed in lakes and reservoirs. Most trout species need flowing water over clean gravel in order to spawn and reproduce. In many reservoirs and lakes these conditions do not exist and trout cannot reproduce successfully. Trout and other various species produced or raised by the Department's Fish Culture Section are used to make up for the lack of natural reproduction and to provide recreational angling opportunities. Most publically accessible lakes and reservoirs that lack sufficient fish spawning habitat require fish stocking. Most streams in Wyoming that are managed as wild fisheries are not stocked.

Trout produced for stocking in Wyoming come from 10 fish hatcheries and rearing stations located around the State of Wyoming. These hatcheries maintain brood stocks to supply eggs or collect eggs from wild sources and raise them to stocking size. Department hatcheries produce brood stocks of three strains of rainbow trout, four species of native cutthroat, brown trout, brook trout and lake trout. Wyoming also has the only golden trout brood stock in existence. Wild sources of eggs are used for grayling and kokanee salmon. For more information of Wyoming fish hatcheries visit https://wgfd.wyo.gov/web2011/fishing-1000429.aspx.

What fish are stocked, where they are stocked and when they are stocked depends on the biology, productivity, fishing pressure and angler preference of an individual lake. Production capabilities of the Fish Culture Section determine which hatchery will raise fish for each lake. This planning occurs three years in advance of the actual stocking.

Wyoming Game and Fish Department fish hatcheries will stock 722,000 trout weighing a total of 87,000 pounds in the Laramie Region in 2015. These trout will be stocked in 65 lakes and reservoirs throughout Southeast Wyoming. Trout are stocked at various sizes ranging from 2-inch fingerlings to 9-inch catchables. The 9-inch trout are stocked in low productivity waters with heavy fishing pressure. These are lakes or ponds where biological factors or fishing pressure limit growth and survival. Examples of "catchable" fisheries are community fisheries like Huck Finn Pond where rapid angler harvest requires stocking 5,000 trout over three occasions and several months. Or larger, "catchable" waters



Stocking rainbow trout at Crystal Reservoir in Curt Gowdy State Park

like Granite and Crystal reservoirs, where each are stocked with a total of 30,000 9-inch trout spread out over three different stocking events from April through June. At Sloans Lake within the City of Cheyenne 3,500 9-inch trout are stocked in the early spring and 2,500 in the fall. Sloans Lake also is stocked with large brood trout as an added bonus for anglers.

Most fish in the Laramie Region are stocked at smaller sizes and expected to grow. An example where smaller fish are stocked is Lake Hattie. The stocking recommendations for Lake Hattie are more diverse and include; 5,000 brown trout, 20,000 Bear River cutthroat, 145,000 rainbow trout and 50,000 kokanee salmon. These fish are stocked at 4-inches and grow for two or three years before anglers catch them.

Saratoga Lake requires slightly larger (7-inch) trout than Lake Hattie but not as large as lakes like Sloans Lake. At Saratoga Lake, 30,000 7-inch rainbow trout are stocked annually.

Most Laramie Region lakes and reservoirs are stocked annually. Warm water species like channel catfish and bass and cool water species like walleye are obtained by trading trout eggs and fish with other states and the Federal hatchery system.

Improving the Ribbon of Green next to the Stream by Christina Barrineau

Have you ever heard the plants growing next to a river called the "ribbon of green next to the stream"? These grasses, shrubs, and trees are also known as the riparian area. Riparian habitats are influenced by soils and water, which is why some ribbons of green next to a stream are small and others are very big. Riparian areas are important wildlife habitats, and provide many benefits to aquatic critters too. We often find cottonwood trees and willows helping provide the ribbon of green in Wyoming. As the Laramie Aquatic Habitat Biologist, I'm working to improve stream fish habitat and riparian habitat for our aquatic resources.

You may be wondering how we go about improving the ribbon of green next to the stream. Each project is different because plant species, soil types and water may vary. Some riparian projects require in-channel or streambank improvements first, which are active restoration efforts. A recent example of this approach is willow planting along the Laramie River Greenbelt following streambank stabilization. For other projects, we may take a passive approach and create fenced riparian pastures to give plants better opportunities for growth under new grazing management. Over the last few years, we've used a combination of active and passive riparian restoration along the Encampment River to help improve its ribbon of green. In fact, WGFD is partnering with Stantec Consulting Services Inc., Trout Unlimited, and other partners to research strategies for riparian improvements along the Encampment River.



Planting native plant species along the riparian area of the Encampment River

Enhancing the ribbon of green following active channel restoration has not been easy along the Encampment River. Large cobble with very little soil has limited revegetation efforts. In 2014, six riparian habitat study plots with over 270 native shrubs were installed on the banks of the Encampment River. Within each plot, native plant species were planted. Species planted included river hawthorn, Booth's willow, geyer willow, park willow, water birch, thinleaf alder, redosier dogwood, chokecherry, wood's rose, and golden currant. We are hoping these plants will grow to provide food and cover for wildlife, but also trap sediments when the river floods. It's the trapped sediments that will help new vegetation to grow.



Native plant species in their tubes, which provide a greenhouse type of environment

Within each plot are two different treatments. One group of plants received top soil and fertilizer while the other group only received sand. A 4 foot high tree tube was placed around each plant to protect it from browsing and to offer it a greenhouse environment. It was hard work digging holes in large cobble, and I'm looking forward to this spring and summer to see if the plants made it through the winter. Riparian efforts will continue this summer and fall along the Encampment River with willow staking and shrub plantings. If you're interested in volunteering, contact the Laramie Regional WGFD office.

The fight against the invaders: AIS Program update by Travis Kinsell

As the 2015 boating season gets underway, here is an update on what has been happening with the aquatic invasive species (AIS) program. In 2014 we continued focusing inspection efforts on border locations to help people meet the inspection requirement as they enter Wyoming. As was the case last year, any watercraft entering Wyoming is **required by law** to get an inspection before launching on Wyoming waters from March through November. Resident boaters who have not left the state do not need to get an inspection unless they encounter a check station on their route of travel. Perhaps the most important thing to be aware of this year is there are two new suspect waters within a short drive of the Wyoming border. Veligers (larval mussels) were recently detected in Angostura Reservoir, South Dakota and Deer Creek Reservoir, Utah. As with any infested water, if you boat on either of these waters you must have your boat inspected before launching in Wyoming again regardless of the time of year. A list of known infested waters can be found at; https://wgfd.wyo.gov/web2011/imgs/QRDocs/AIS_INFESTED_WATER.pdf.

In Wyoming, check stations will continue to operate at port of entries, and on a rotating basis at major waters during the peak boating season from April 25th through mid-September. The check station at Glendo Reservoir will continue to be operated Wednesday through Sunday throughout the summer. Please remember if you get your inspection at a port of entry on your way to Glendo, you still need to stop and show the receipt from the inspection to the check station attendants at Glendo. The check stations at the Laramie Highway 287, Interstate 25 and Interstate 80 port of entries will be operated seven days a week, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Wednesday, and 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. Thursday through Sunday throughout the season. Inspections will also be conducted periodically at Grayrocks, Guernsey, Granite, Hawk Springs and Seminoe reservoirs, as well as other local waters. A list of certified inspection locations and times of operation can be found at https://wgfd.wyo.gov/web2011/fishing-1001292.aspx.

During the 2014 boating season, WGFD AIS inspectors performed over 43,000 inspections on watercraft originating from all 50 states and Canada. Of those, 2,087 were considered high risk and 880 required decontamination. The majority of decontaminations were performed on boats with standing water in the motor. Ten watercraft had confirmed zebra or quagga mussels attached and were completely decontaminated. The mussels were determined to be dead on all of those vessels.

Zebra and quagga mussels are not the only threats to our waters. New Zealand mudsnails, Asian clams, brook stickleback and curly pondweed are already present in some of our waters. While curly pondweed has not been detected in the Laramie Region yet, it has been discovered in at least one new water each year since 2012. It is important that everyone does their part to keep invasive species from spreading. Please remember to Drain, Clean and Dry your watercraft and fishing equipment: √***DRAIN*** water from live wells, ballast tanks and the bilge; √***CLEAN*** mud from wading boots and anchors, and plants from the trailer; allow your equipment to √***DRY*** before taking it to another water.



Help protect Wyoming's water resources



Wyoming Game & Fish Department

Wyoming Game and Fish Department
Steve Gale and Lee McDonald
Regional Fisheries Biologists
528 South Adams
Laramie, Wyoming 82070
Phone: 307-745-4046
Email: steve.gale@wyo.gov
leland.mcdonald@wyo.gov

Wyoming's Free Fishing Day

June 6, 2015

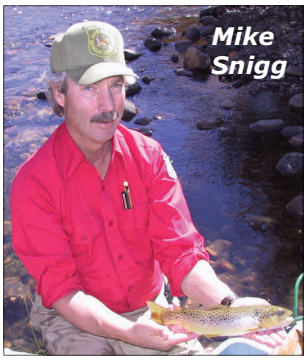


WE'RE ON THE WEB!
HTTP://WGFD.WYO.GOV

"Conserving Wildlife — Serving People"

Many Thanks to Newsletter Contributors: Steve Gale, Lee McDonald, Christina Barrineau, Mike Snigg, Dave Lewis, and Travis Kinsell. Photo credits: Steve Gale, Lee McDonald, Travis Kinsell, and Christina Barrineau. Color illustrations of game fish used in this newsletter provided by artist Michelle LaGory.

Laramie Fisheries and Aquatic Habitat Management Crew manage and conserve your aquatic wildlife and habitat in over 5,500 miles of streams and rivers, and in over 300 publically accessible lakes and reservoirs in an area that is over 13,000 square miles.



Mike Snigg has been on the Laramie Fisheries Management Crew since 1985 and has been the Regional Fisheries Supervisor since 2003. Mike has nearly 40 years with the Department. After obtaining his Bachelor's from Simpson College in Iowa, he received his Master's from UW.



Lee McDonald transferred to the Regional Fisheries Biologist position from the Fish Culture Section in 2006. Prior to this assignment he was Superintendent of the Como Bluff Fish Hatchery in Rock River. Lee has nearly 40 years with the Department. He received his BS in Fishery Science from Colorado State University.



Steve Gale was hired as a Regional Fisheries Biologist in 2005. Steve received his Bachelor's in Fisheries and Wildlife Management from the University of Nebraska and his Master's in Fisheries Management from Montana State University.



Christina Barrineau was hired as the Regional Aquatic Habitat Biologist in 2004. Christina received her Bachelor of Science degree from Warren Wilson College in North Carolina and her Master's in Zoology from the University of Wyoming.



Travis Kinsell has been with the aquatic invasive species program as a AIS specialist since 2012. He received his Bachelor's in Wildlife Biology, with a minor in GIS from Colorado State University, and his Master's in Natural Resource Sciences specializing in Applied Ecology from the University of Nebraska.