



Wyoming Game and Fish Department

Jackson Region

February 2015 Newsletter



Jackson Lake Ice Fishing

Ice fishing seems to be one of those activities you either like, or you don't. Those who do like it, seem to be die-hards. I guess you have to be, to sit and watch over a hole in the ice for hours on end, hoping a fish swims by your bait AND he's hungry.



The most popular ice fishing spot in the Jackson Region is Jackson Lake and February was pretty slow out on the lake. However, one angler did pull a 25 pound lake trout through the ice and then released it back into the lake. Every year there are some really nice lake trout caught.

Fish managers note that the slower fishing in February isn't unusual and catch rates typically improve as winter wears on, which is what they have been seeing lately. On average, managers like to see a catch rate of .5 fish per hour for ice anglers. February's creel data showed a catch rate of .4 fish per hour. Last year, the catch rate bumped up to .74 trout per hour in March, so now is a good time to go fishing.

Anglers will want to get after it pretty quick while the ice is still

good. Ice conditions typically begin to get a little "iffy" in late April, but with the unseasonably warm winter we've had this year it will likely begin deteriorating in early April or before.

(Above) Jackson Game warden, Kyle Lash, visits with a group of ice fishermen on Jackson Lake. (Above Right) Brandon Smith, of Jackson, pulls a nice lake trout through the ice. (Right) A typical, tasty, Jackson Lake laker.





An interagency team of wildlife managers count elk as they slowly roll down through the herd on the National Elk Refuge.

Counting the Herds

Winter is typically the time when wildlife managers conduct their big game counts because big game animals are concentrated on their winter ranges. This makes it easier for wildlife managers to get a good count on the herds, which can be quite large. Counts are conducted from both the ground and the air. Managers not only count the total number of animals, but also classify them as males, females and young of the year.

The Jackson elk herd is the largest in the state at around 11,000 animals and the annual count always generates a lot of interest, from both the public and the media. The National Elk Refuge has the largest concentration of elk

in the herd making it both spectacular and challenging. It is usually an interagency effort involving over 20 people to complete. This year, there were some 8,500 elk counted on the elk refuge, with another 2,500 counted in the Gros Ventre and Buffalo Valey areas, bringing the total to right at the population objective of 11,000.

In addition, classification counts were conducted on bison, moose, big-horn sheep and mountain goats.

The 2014 bison hunt harvest was the highest on record at 299 animals taken. The robust hunt season was welcome, as managers have struggled to bring the Jackson bison population down toward the objective of 500 animals. This winter there a total of 691 animals counted in the herd. That number is expected to climb to approximately 750 once the calves are born this spring, so managers will propose similar hunt seasons focusing primarily on cows to bring the population closer towards the objective.



Jackson Public Information Specialist Mark Gocke conducts an on-camera interview with Local News 8, out of Idaho Falls, ID, explaining the count and how it fits into the hunt season-setting process.





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Conserving Wildlife, Serving People



Jackson Moose Herd



The Jackson moose herd has been in decline for nearly two decades now. As with any big game population, the number of calves being seen gives managers an indication of the future trend for the herd. In 2008, the number of calves hit an all-time low at just 15 calves per 100 cows. Since then, the calf ratio has been slowly increasing, climbing to 37 last year. This year that number dipped down slightly to 33. The overall population is estimated at approximately 450 moose in the herd.

Jackson Bighorn Sheep


After suffering pneumonia outbreaks in 2002 and 2011, the Jackson bighorn sheep herd continues to rebuild, now to an estimated population of 400. Winter surveys showed a lamb ratio of 36 per 100 ewes. Wildlife managers captured and collared 10 ewes in the herd last winter. Tissue samples revealed that they carried the pathogens that often lead to pneumonia outbreaks across the Rocky Mountain west. It is planned to capture and collar another 10 bighorn ewes in March.





Living in Large Carnivore Country



2015 Seminar Schedule



Join us for a two hour seminar:
April 15th Jackson, 5:30-7:30 p.m.
Teton County Library, Jackson



Talking Wildlife Management

Jackson Information & Education Specialist Mark Gocke discusses the top wildlife management issues in Jackson Hole to a group of approximately 25 graduate students at Teton Science School in Jackson.





Trumpeter Count

Wyoming Game and Fish Department nongame biologist, Susan Patla, recently conducted an annual winter survey for trumpeter swans and other waterfowl in the Pacific Flyway portion of western Wyoming. The annual aerial survey is coordinated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the states of Idaho and Montana to obtain a count of all trumpeters in the Rocky Mountain population in the western United States. The majority of these swans winter in the tri-state area of eastern Idaho, western Wyoming and southwestern Montana with small groups also found in Nevada and Oregon.

Overall, a total of 6,775 swans were counted in the tri-state area, which is a 26% increase from 2014 when 5,368 birds were counted. Typically, over 90 percent (more than 5,000) of the wintering swans are migrants from interior Canada where nesting populations have shown strong growth for the past few decades.

This year, Patla counted a total of 931 swans in western Wyoming, or 14% of the total tri-state wintering population. An additional 168 swans were counted in Yellowstone National Park. The numbers counted in WY outside of YNP are almost identical to the previous five year average. The total number of swans counted by drainage included: Snake River (515), Green River (211), and Salt River (119).



Moose Call

Jackson Game Warden Kyle Lash visits with the owners of a business in Jackson about a yearling moose that appeared to be feeling a little under the weather and had decided to bed down in front of their door. It was decided to just let the moose hang out as they were able to direct the public through another doorway.



Elk Research Continues

Jackson and 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 elk feedgrounds. Adult cow elk were captured and fitted with GPS collars to document fine-scale movements and vaginal implant transmitters (VIT) to identify elk parturition, or calving areas.

In addition, each elk was bled to continue long-term brucellosis seroprevalence trend

data. This information is also useful for developing seasonal range maps, determining areas of high brucellosis transmission risk and providing land managers with additional information to make important resource management decisions.

A total of 459 elk were handled this winter including capture efforts at Alpine, Dell Creek, Fall Creek and Muddy Creek feedgrounds. Several additional elk were darted from a haysled at 12 different feedgrounds. A total of 52 GPS collars and 48 VITs were deployed and will be used to continue multi-agency studies on feedground elk ecology. Additionally, 274 yearling and adult cow elk were bled to test for exposure to *Brucella* bacteria.

Impressively, the Game and Fish Department's BFH personnel have handled over 13,500 elk since 1993 (including recaptures). Since 2006, the program has deployed a total of 579 tracking collars (both GPS & VHF) on elk in northwest Wyoming, quite likely more than any other entity. This has resulted in an extensive database of elk movements, calving areas and elk ecology in general.



Mark Gocke, WGFD



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(Above Left) Big Piney BFH Biologist Eric Maichak prepares a blood sample to test for exposure to *Brucella* bacteria. (Above) Jackson BFH Biologist Ben Wise fits a GPS collar on a tranquilized cow elk. (Left) Wise releases a calf elk after processing at the Alpine elk feedground.



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Winter Fishing

Jackson Game Warden Kyle Lash checked anglers on the Snake River in February. Some anglers were unaware that on most of the Snake River all cutthroat trout shall be released to the water immediately from November 1st through March 31st. The cutthroat trout at right were seized from a six-year Jackson resident fishing the Snake River near Hoback Jct. who told Warden Lash he had simply gotten in a hurry and forgot to check the fishing regulations for the Snake River.



Warden Lash also checked this happy angler (Left) who had just landed this hefty lake trout on the Snake River below the Jackson Lake dam.



On the Trapline

On February 25th Afton Game Warden Todd Graham picked up a very emaciated mountain lion kitten that was found along the Crow Creek Road near Fairview, WY. The kitten was in such poor condition that it allowed the people to pick it up and take it home. The kitten was able to eat and was transported to the Thorne-Williams Wildlife Research Facility near Laramie. However, the kitten was unable to recover and died at the facility.