

Game and Fish Department
Fiscal Year 2008
Report on the 2007 Strategic Plan

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The Wyoming Game and Fish Department operates under the direction of the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission.

Our headquarters office is in Cheyenne. Our regional offices are in Jackson, Pinedale, Cody, Sheridan, Green River, Laramie, Lander and Casper.

Statutory references: The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission is created and empowered in Title 23 of the Wyoming Statutes. The Department is created and placed under the direction and supervision of the Commission in W.S. § 23-1-401. The responsibilities of the Commission and the Department are defined in W.S. § 23-1-103. In these and associated statutes, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department is charged with providing “an adequate and flexible system of the control, propagation, management, protection and regulation of all Wyoming wildlife.”

Clients served: The Department’s clients include, but are not limited to, Wyoming residents, hunters, anglers, and non-consumptive users of wildlife.

Results Statement:

- Wyoming’s wildlife and wildlife habitats are managed to maximize the economic, environmental and social values of importance to current and future generations.
- Wyoming values the unique aspects of its wildlife heritage, providing residents and visitors expanding access to wildlife-associated recreational experiences.
- The Department is a responsible steward of State assets and effectively responds to the needs of residents and guests.

Contribution to Wyoming Quality of Life:

- Conserve Wyoming’s wildlife and wildlife habitat for current and future generations.
- Provide residents and visitors access to wildlife-associated recreational experiences.
- Manage Department assets responsibly and actively involve people in wildlife management decisions.

Total Wyoming Game and Fish Department Expenditures for FY 08:
\$52,894,124

Department Facts:

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department is made up of five major administrative divisions, including 23 programs, listed below with number of staff and 2008 budget:

<u>Division</u>	<u>#FTEs*</u>	<u>2008 Annual Budget</u>
Wildlife Division	150.9	\$18,427,388
Fish Division	99.3	\$ 10,628,900
Services Division	89	\$ 12,624,516
Fiscal Division	49.2	\$ 5,821,818
Office of the Director	17.8	\$ 2,482,958
Other**	<u>56.5</u>	<u>\$ 12,031,870</u>
<u>TOTAL</u>	462.7	\$62,017,450

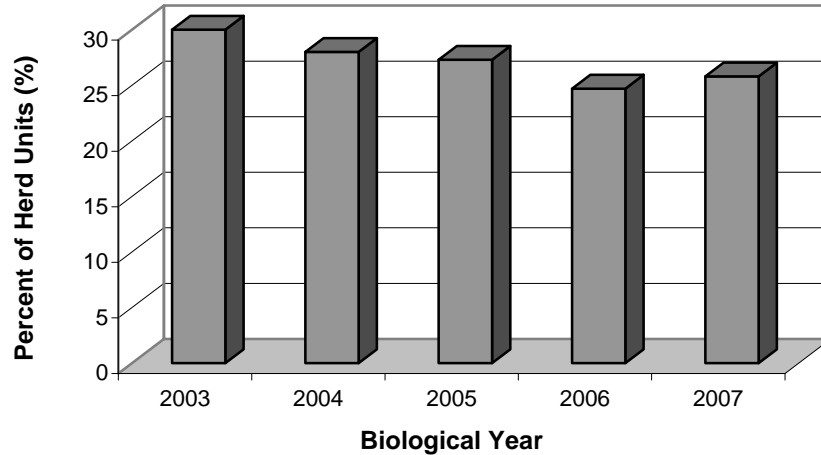
*Includes permanent, contract and temporary positions authorized in FY 08 budget. Any positions added during the budget cycle require Wyoming Game and Fish Commission authorization or must be funded from supplemental grants.

**Includes Wildlife Trust, Access Fund, State Wildlife Grants, Electronic License Project, Reimbursable Grants and General Fund Appropriation.

Primary Functions of the Game and Fish Department:

- **We conserve and advocate for wildlife** by providing wildlife and wildlife habitat management, including scientific data collection, law enforcement, wildlife/human conflict management, research, habitat conservation and wildlife health services.
- **We serve people** by managing wildlife populations, providing access for wildlife-associated recreation and providing information and education about wildlife and wildlife-related issues.
- **We manage the human, fiscal and physical and other resources** necessary to carry out our mission, including people, money, lands, information, buildings and other facilities needed to support wildlife conservation in Wyoming.

Performance Measures #1: Percent of big game herds within 10 percent of population objective (Personnel in this program will work to ensure that at least 30 percent of big game herds are within \pm 10 percent of the population objective).



Story Behind the Last Year of Performance:

While the Department is responsible for managing over 800 species of wildlife in Wyoming, many of our constituents are focused on the management of big and trophy game species. In addition, most of the Department’s annual income is derived from license sales for those species. Management of these species is the responsibility of the regional terrestrial wildlife biologists, regional game wardens and the regional terrestrial wildlife administration. The species included in this performance measure include pronghorn, white-tailed deer, mule deer, elk, moose, bighorn sheep, mountain goat, and bison. Values are based on individual species values taken from annual Big Game Hunting Season Recommendation Summaries (2003-2006) and from the final big game Job Completion Reports (2007).

Hunting seasons and harvest quotas developed by the Department are the primary tools for managing big and trophy game animals. Hunting seasons and harvest quotas are designed to manage herds for population objectives and desired male to female ratios.

Public access to some hunt areas, especially in eastern Wyoming, limits the Department’s ability to obtain desired harvest levels, which often allows herds to remain above their population objectives. In other areas, loss of habitat to development and other disturbances continues to impact the Department’s ability to maintain terrestrial wildlife populations at historic levels.

Since 2003, an average of 27 percent of big game herds across Wyoming were within 10 percent of the population objectives. Though the percentage was lower in 2007 (25.8 percent), the number between years ranged from 25 percent to 30 percent. Of the total 151 big game herds in Wyoming in 2007, 39 herds were at objective (\pm 10 percent), 55 (36.4 percent) were above objective, 33 (21.9 percent) were below objective, and 24 herds (15.9 percent) had incomplete data.

Weather conditions (drought, severe winters) limit productivity of many deer and pronghorn herds, and many of these herds remain below objective. Elk populations are, in general, near objective after increasing cow harvest in recent years. The health of some elk herds in western Wyoming is compromised by brucellosis. Landscape-scale habitat improvements are needed in many areas and could be funded under the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust, the Wyoming Governor's Big Game License Coalition, and other sources.

The Department continues to manage for objective in all big game herds. It is not possible to reach objective in a single year in those herds that are above or below objective. Outside factors such as access, weather and disease affect the Department's efforts to reach objective levels. Some herds are intentionally managed below objective because of the effects drought has on habitat conditions. Even if the drought breaks, it will take several years for habitat conditions to improve enough to allow many herds to move towards objective.

Values reported in the graph above differ slightly from what was reported in the 2005 Strategic Plan. These former values did not include bison and excluded herds from the total that had incomplete data.

What has been Accomplished:

We continued to implement the Department's Strategic Habitat Plan (SHP), including incorporating nongame priority areas with those previously identified for big game. We continue to emphasize the need for habitat management and habitat condition monitoring to federal land management agencies and to the public. The Department continues to make land management agencies and landowners aware of our habitat priorities and when funding and resources are available, to undertake joint habitat improvement projects. Implementation of the SHP depends upon the cooperation of land management agencies and private landowners.

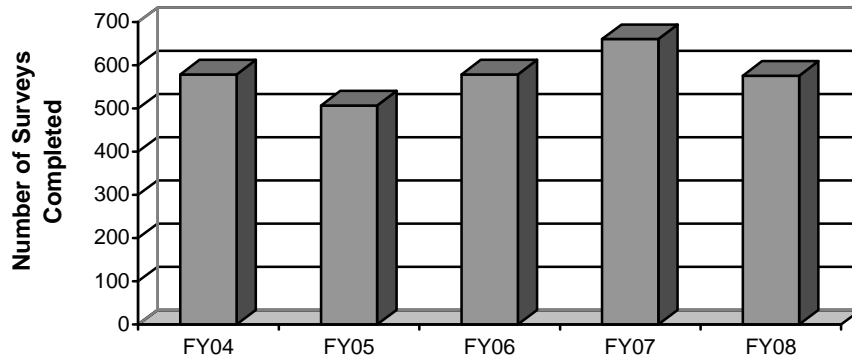
The Department employs habitat biologists in each region and habitat extension biologists in eastern Wyoming that focus on habitat monitoring and improvements on both public and private lands. Much of their effort pertains to big game, and they pool funding from the many sources now available to address priorities in the SHP. Wildlife Division personnel continued to apply for habitat improvement funds from a variety of sources, including many non-governmental organizations (NGOs), federal programs, the Wyoming Governor's Big Game License Coalition, and the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust.

Big game disease surveillance and research continue to be high priorities. These activities as they pertain to brucellosis in northwest Wyoming and chronic wasting disease in much of eastern Wyoming have expanded incrementally each year. Funding for the Department's Veterinary Services program remained at approximately \$1.46 million in FY 08. In FY 08, the Department continued to vaccinate on the state's feedgrounds to reduce the prevalence of brucellosis in elk. The Department continues to implement the five-year test and slaughter pilot project in the Pinedale elk herd, as recommended by the Governor's Brucellosis Coordination team. The Jackson and Absaroka Bison herd Brucellosis Management Action Plans (BMAPs) have been completed.

What we purpose to improve performance in next two years:

We are recommending big game populations, especially deer and pronghorn, be reduced temporarily to levels that can be supported by drought-stressed rangeland habitats. The Department also continues to promote hunter access to private lands in order to obtain adequate harvests. Access is declining and has become a significant impediment to management of big game herds in parts of the state. Access fees and outfitters monopolizing access are additional problems. The Department continues the Private Lands Public Wildlife Access program in an effort to improve access to hunting for the general public.

Performance Measure #2: Number of stream and lake surveys completed



Story Behind the Last Year of Performance:

The quality of Wyoming’s fisheries is a direct reflection of the quality of Wyoming’s lakes, rivers and streams. Stream and lake surveys are conducted to determine the condition of fisheries. Until recently, surveys have been targeted towards evaluating the need to change management approaches, primarily for native and introduced sport fishes. Our survey strategy now includes more intensive surveys that emphasize watershed-level fishery evaluations for our sport fish and native species.

In FY 08, a total of 576 streams and lakes were surveyed. This is nearly equivalent to the five-year average of 580 surveys per year. Last year sampling intensity was higher because of our need to identify extent and magnitude of several illegal fish introductions in the Green River and Bear River basins. We continued to survey for native species of concern as identified in the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies (CWCS) for the Big Horn and Green River basins. These surveys evaluated both habitat and population conditions concurrently, leading to completion of fewer but more comprehensive assessments. In the Green River system, FY 08 was the culmination of four years of sampling where we examined over 79,000 fish from 374 sites, spanning more than 1,000 stream miles. Assessments were initiated on the Wind and Bighorn River basins with substantial progress made this year. These base-line surveys continue to be funded primarily through State Wildlife Grants and other third party arrangements. Native species that were surveyed included native trout, sauger, burbot, suckers, and minnows using a watershed-scale or assemblage approach.

Major sport fisheries evaluations continued on lakes and reservoirs such as Pathfinder, Seminoe, Flaming Gorge, Fontenelle, Boysen, Buffalo Bill, Bighorn, Glendo, Keyhole and DeSmet. Intensive population estimates that require multiple electrofishing passes through one sampling

site were conducted most notably on the North Platte, Green, Bear, Snake, Salt, Greys, Hoback, Wind, Bighorn, Shoshone and Tongue rivers for both wild and stocked fishes.

The primary management plans guiding fisheries management survey work are called Basin Management Plans. In FY 07, we changed format and content templates for the basin plans and set a two-year deadline to rewrite all the plans. Substantial progress was made in FY 08 on revising about one-quarter of the 111 Basin Management Plans. As regional personnel become more comfortable with the new format we expect the pace to quicken and complete the planning process on time. The new plans should provide better communication with our public and other agencies. But we will continue to use our surveys as a primary tool to evaluate the management goals for these plans.

What has been accomplished:

Modification of the basin plans began in earnest in FY 08; there was substantial progress towards our self-imposed deadline.

In FY 08, an interdisciplinary team was tasked with rewriting the Strategic Habitat Plan (SHP) priorities. Substantial progress was this year that will allow us to complete this prioritization early in FY 09. As a consequence, we will be able to continue to integrate SHP habitat priorities into the Basin Management Plans. The SHP along with our CWCS priorities serves as the basis for prioritizing and directing our native species surveys. However, energy development demands in the northeast and southwest portions of the state continue to redirect much of our effort towards impact avoidance and mitigation investigations where we have a paucity of base line data in basins having a very high diversity of species of concern.

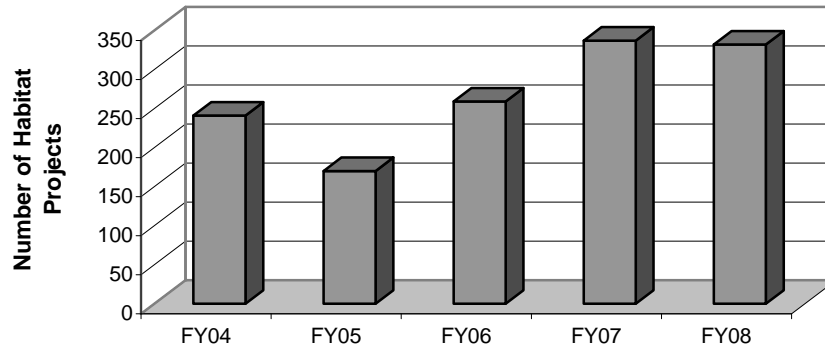
In order to meet data needs that were identified for aquatic species in the CWCS, the Department continually surveys streams and lakes. Surveys are typically to gather base-line inventory or trend monitoring data. The purpose of the CWCS is to gather information sufficient to make better conservation-status assessments and help direct efforts to prevent species of greatest conservation need (SGCN) being listed under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). The State Wildlife Grants program and other federal partners provided the bulk of funding for our native species evaluations. Fortunately, our efforts to secure legislative funding for native and sensitive species were successful in FY 08, which will allow us to significantly increase efforts over current activity levels.

The Department continues to work with the Wyoming Cooperative Research Unit (COOP) to meet continuing research needs. In FY 08, the COOP Unit conducted five projects, three ongoing and two new fisheries-related research projects. Because of COOP Unit staffing reductions and the pending retirement of senior COOP staff, the COOP will lead no new fisheries research after FY 09. As a consequence, we continued to collaborate with Colorado State University in FY 08 to meet our research needs. We continue to look forward to the COOP returning to a full complement of research staff in the future.

What we propose to improve performance in the next two years:

- We look forward to increases in performance with the additional funding available through the general fund and the budget of Governor's ESA Office. Hiring and maintaining staff for the Aquatic Assessment Crew (AAC) will be crucial for providing oversight and direction for the programs and projects made possible by these new funds. When the AAC is at full staff our performance increases substantially in terms of our sampling productivity (numbers of streams and lake surveyed) and allows us the opportunity to better balance our sport fish and native species responsibilities. Anticipated result in the next several years is to increase the number of stream and lake surveys conducted to a level similar to FY 07 (~660) while still working to assess status of multiple species and taxa at watershed levels. Also we will complete fieldwork sufficient to successfully monitor native crayfish by comparing results to the 1985-87 crayfish survey. This is done to fulfill CWCS objectives relative to crustaceans. If the AAC experiences turnover as in the past, we may not realize the predicted gain in productivity (in terms of number of surveys completed).
- Assist Aquatic Habitat Section with the continuing effort to prioritize fish passage and habitat restoration needs for native fish. We need to develop data and the data layers that spatially depict where we should prioritize our work for species of greatest conservation need (SGCN, as identified in Wyoming's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy). Stream survey work for the Bighorn and Wind River basins will be completed in FY 09 in time to be used to reassess the conservation status of fishes native to the Missouri River system for the revised CWCS.
- Streams and lakes are surveyed also to conduct evaluations of sport fish regulations and our fish stocking programs. They also are needed to update and improve our brood stock management plans. Over the next two years we will evaluate success of stocking larger trout to avoid walleye predation and evaluate our recently initiated Colorado River cutthroat trout and Firehole rainbow trout stocking activities.
- SHP revision with the appurtenant habitat priorities is required for FY 10 budget process for habitat project selection. Better guidelines to regional personnel and project proponents will aid in crafting better proposals. As the revision is implemented it is critical to evaluate beneficial effects of our habitat conservation and enhancement activities on aquatic wildlife populations through stream and lake surveys.
- Revision of the CWCS with updated species accounts and habitat priorities is needed to continue to guide future plans for the assessment of native species of concern. We need to meet with conservation partners to reassess conservation status and revise individual species accounts (in the CWCS) based on the new information provided by the stream and lake surveys. The individual species accounts and status assessments are necessary prior to revising the CWCS in preparation for Commission approval July 2009.

Performance Measure #3: Number of habitat projects implemented annually (Personnel in this program will implement at least 150 terrestrial habitat projects and 45 aquatic habitat projects annually).



Story Behind the Last Year of Performance:

The Terrestrial Habitat Section planned 218 habitat projects and accomplished 195 or 89 percent of the projects planned during FY 08. These accomplishments were in spite of the loss of our habitat mitigation biologist to internal restructuring in the Wildlife Division in January 2008 and the loss of a habitat extension biologist, who took a new job in March 2008. A partial list of terrestrial habitat projects includes three landscape area inventory projects using satellite imagery land cover encompassing parts of the Sheridan, Lander and Cody Regions. In addition, the Section is working with and coordinating the Governor’s statewide sage grouse and sagebrush habitat mapping project. Over 250 private landowners were assisted resulting in 203 habitat extension projects developed and/or implemented during the year. This was accomplished even though the Department suspended the habitat grants program in FY 04, by Section personnel working with partners and preparing and soliciting many grants from outside sources, including Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust, Wyoming Governor’s Big Game License Coalition, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Farm Bill Programs, Water for Wildlife Foundation, Bowhunters of Wyoming, Pheasants Forever, Safari Club International, U.S Fish and Wildlife Service Private Lands Program and Landowner Incentive Program (LIP), the Wyoming Governor’s Sage Grouse Fund, private landowners and private donors among others. Terrestrial section personnel developed and administered 21 Department projects and were directly involved with over 50 other grants administered for various projects. Many of the terrestrial habitat projects include development of grazing management plans, working on various internal and external working groups and partnerships, habitat improvement efforts (prescribed fire, herbicide applications, mechanical treatments, fence removal/modifications, seeding, water developments, etc.), wildlife environmental reviews, assisting with large land cover identification and classifications, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Resource Management Plan revisions, U.S. Forest Service (USFS) plan revisions, as well as, assistance on various habitat related research projects. Finally, recognizing the importance of habitat improvements implemented, personnel are collecting data to document and monitor the number of acres and stream miles inventoried with management prescription, such as livestock grazing system, including wildlife habitat management plans developed or enhancements completed

annually. Terrestrial section personnel expect the number of projects completed in the coming year to be similar.

The Aquatic Habitat Section completed or initiated 137 habitat projects in FY 08 (76 percent of the 180 planned projects). This is similar to FY 07 when 126 projects were completed or initiated. The list of aquatic habitat projects includes Department Trust Fund and Wyoming Wildlife Natural Resource Trust projects, watershed inventories, major monitoring efforts, fish passage investigations, warm water stream assessments, shared agency projects, BLM and USFS management planning assistance and other habitat projects implemented or completed. Only those extension and other efforts that resulted in substantial assistance with planning, design or implementing habitat projects were counted. Through the efforts of an at-will contract employee (AWEC) fisheries biologist, data in the section's Wyoming Habitat Assessment Methodology (WHAM) database were thoroughly reviewed and updated and over 50 new inventories were conducted throughout the state. Significant personnel effort went into the collaborative Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative and the Lander BLM Resource Management Plan revision in addition to commenting on wildlife effects associated with energy development. In particular, multiple lease proposals and oil and gas exploration activity in the southwest portion of the state called for extensive effort in evaluating impacts.

The section's fish passage efforts included developing a database for storing and prioritizing passage issues on waterways throughout the state and working with University of Wyoming to link this system with geographic information system (GIS) capabilities. Planning continued on investigating the merits of developing a formal passage program with dedicated funds and personnel to pursue fish passage solutions statewide. Several groups of highly qualified fish passage contractors were interviewed and one was selected to pursue high priority fish passage projects. This contractor began looking at developing passage and screening solutions for a diversion on the South Fork Shoshone River, diversions on the Nowood River, and diversions on the Department's Spence Moriarty Wildlife Habitat Unit. Further fish passage work included several fish passage investigations (e.g. Clear Creek, East Fork Wind River, Bear Creek) and the development of block grants to the Lake DeSmet Conservation District and the Sheridan County Conservation District to rehabilitate and provide fish passage at over six diversion structures. The availability of internal and external funds for fish passage investigations and projects has increased substantially and an AWEC position was available to support our Cody Regional Aquatic Habitat Biologist in fish passage efforts.

Fast paced energy development continues to impact wildlife habitat and place additional workloads on habitat biologists. Federal Farm Bill program changes impact habitat extension biologist's workloads, opportunities and number of projects completed each year. LIP grant funds also placed additional burdens on Terrestrial and Aquatic Habitat Section personnel, especially since only one of the two LIP coordinators (terrestrial) that was planned was ultimately hired due to changes in funding. Grant applications for outside funding to accomplish projects from numerous outside funding sources has also taken a tremendous amount of personnel time.

Despite changes in the Federal Farm Bill Program eligible projects and funding and the loss of one habitat extension biologist, more private landowner habitat extension projects were initiated

this year. As habitat extension biologist complete required training to implement the recently passed new Farm Bill and continue to build trust with private landowners and Conservation District personnel, additional habitat extension projects are expected in the next year. We will continue to better utilize Farm Bill funding to benefit priority habitat areas, watersheds, wildlife and private landowners.

One of the great strengths of the habitat program is development of partnerships and collaborative efforts with private landowners, land management agencies, private industry and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Section personnel spend considerable amounts of time on these partnership activities and continue to write grants and receive funds from a variety of other sources, including state, federal, NGOs, and private donors. We expect this trend to continue in the future.

What has been Accomplished:

The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission adopted the Strategic Habitat Plan (SHP) in December 2001 with implementation effective July 1, 2002. The Habitat Technical Advisory Group began revising the SHP overall goals and objectives in early 2008. At the same time, habitat program section personnel are working with regional personnel on the development of revised priority areas and objectives. A final draft is anticipated in late 2008 and will be presented to the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission for review and approval for implementation in FY 10. The revised SHP includes new priority areas identified in each of the management regions. The priority areas include “crucial” areas essential for conservation of important species and communities and “enhancement” areas, which represent places where work can be conducted to manage or improve wildlife habitat. The crucial areas are being identified on the basis of values such as critical habitats and will communicate to the public where it is important to invest conservation effort and resources. The enhancement areas will indicate where we estimate we can effectively pursue projects to maintain or enhance wildlife habitat over the next five-year period. The revised SHP will recognize how other Department initiatives and plans including the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS) relate to habitat efforts. Implementation of this plan depends on cooperation with land management agencies, NGOs, the public and private landowners. Although major projects are scheduled annually, completion is limited by insufficient number of personnel and time to meet the demands and opportunities. The primary limiting factor in completing on-the-ground efforts is the lack of adequate personnel to address habitat issues, particularly with the vast and intensive energy development activities, as well as increasing administrative duties being assigned to field personnel. There are insufficient numbers of terrestrial and aquatic habitat personnel to address the long-term habitat needs of Wyoming’s wildlife.

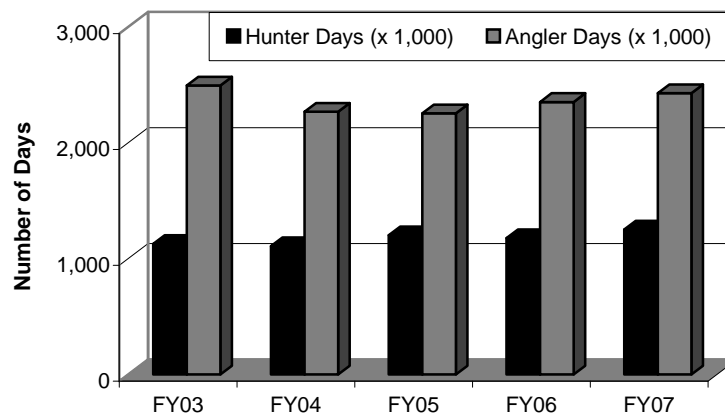
Personnel continue to develop large-scale proposals and applications for funding from the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust, Governors’ Sage Grouse Fund and Wyoming Governor’s Big Game License Coalition, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service State Wildlife Grants and Landowner Incentive Programs, and the Wyoming Conservation Landscape Initiative. In addition, the Department continues to seek expansion of the Habitat Extension Biologist partnership with NRCS to facilitate implementation of Farm Bill programs that benefit wildlife on private lands. Aquatic Habitat extension personnel, as identified in the SHP, have not been

funded and established yet. Having these additional extension personnel would increase the number of projects implemented in the Aquatic Section.

What we propose to improve performance in the next two years:

With renewed focus on priority wildlife habitats under the revised SHP, section personnel will work with land management agencies, private landowners and funding partners to conserve and manage wildlife habitats that are crucial for maintaining populations of terrestrial and aquatic wildlife for the present and future. The Department continues to implement habitat related conservation actions from the CWCS, with special focus on those that deal with aspen, wetland, riparian, stream, and mountain shrub, grassland or sagebrush habitats. Finally, with Federal LIP funding, Department personnel are initiating agreements with landowners to maintain and/or improve habitats for species of greatest conservation need associated with grassland, sagebrush and prairie stream systems. The Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative program in western Wyoming will address many of the identified SHP priority habitat area needs too and will continue to be a major focus. Efforts to enhance internal coordination and communication and efficient delivery of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department habitat management and enhancement program is an on-going major focus. Last, but not least, we will continue to focus on maintaining and developing additional partnerships and expand collaborative habitat management projects.

Performance Measure #4: Number of days in the field by hunters and anglers (Personnel with this program will work to provide at least 1.1 million hunter days and 2.3 million angler days per year).



Story Behind the Last Year of Performance:

The number of days hunters spend in the field annually remains low. This is due primarily to low deer and pronghorn fawn production and recruitment caused by drought-related habitat conditions. The result has been reduced license quotas, especially for nonresidents, and shorter hunting seasons. Declining access for hunting has also affected hunter days. Angler days have declined over late 1990's and through 2001 primarily because of poor water conditions in Wyoming's lakes and rivers, a result of persistent drought. Angler days stabilized somewhat and were higher than 2005 and 2004 but still 4 percent less than angling days documented in the

2001 nationwide survey of angling participation by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The modest increase of over 100,000 days from 2005 was somewhat heartening given the persistent drought conditions that continue to plague waters and our fisheries statewide. Several extraordinary water years will be needed to resuscitate many important major sport-fishing lakes in the southeast quarter of the state. Collectively these waters are now only supporting a fraction of the million angler days they have provided in the past.

Over the past three years angler days and hunter days have also been affected to some degree by license fee increases that were implemented on January 1, 2004. Short-term reductions in hunter and angler numbers, and associated days of recreation generated, frequently accompany fee increases, but seldom last more than two to three years. In addition, increases in gasoline and diesel prices, now at or around \$4 per gallon, may continue to negatively affect angler and hunter recreation days.

Since FY 03, Wyoming residents and nonresidents have expended an average of 1,174,240 and 2,361,501 hunter and angler days respectively. In FY 07, 1,253,614 hunter recreation days were provided, excluding furbearers hunting and trapping efforts, and 2,429,757 angler recreation days were provided. Values in FY 04, FY 05, FY 06, and FY 07, in the graph above, reflect Lifetime License holders included in the estimate of angler recreation days.

What has been Accomplished:

Long-term declines in access for hunting and fishing are being addressed through the Department's Private Lands Public Wildlife (PLPW) Access program. We will continue to encourage participation in this program among users and private landowners. Acres enrolled in Walk-In Areas increased approximately 28.3 percent to 698,220 acres, and privately owned acres enrolled in Hunter Management Areas increased 1.34 percent to 850,802 acres in calendar year 2007. The program now has 153 lake acres and 98 stream miles enrolled. The PLPW program is an important strategy for increasing hunting and fishing access in Wyoming. Funding for the PLPW program is provided in the existing Department budget. We continued to secure additional permanent access easements adjacent to and within several towns and cities this year, providing for more future access by the license holding public.

The Department continues to provide access and related facilities for hunters, anglers and other wildlife users on wildlife habitat management areas and public access areas. In FY 07, we concentrated on extending and modifying existing boating access developments to ensure continued access to reservoirs affected by low water elevations. These areas were developed with boat ramps, parking areas, and outhouses. In addition, additional funding was secured in FY 07 for six comfort stations (\$180,000), two handicap accessible fishing piers, and one handicap accessible duck blind (these projects equal \$30,000).

The Department continues to manage wildlife populations as needed through elk feedgrounds, fish hatcheries and bird farms. Veterinary Services' efforts to address terrestrial wildlife diseases were approved, as were funds to prevent whirling disease in two fish culture facilities. These improvements to fish culture facilities are expected to lead to advancement in disease prevention techniques and allow for greater flexibility in the stocking trout both in numbers and size in order to meet angler needs.

What we propose to improve performance in next two years:

Drought is affecting both fishing and hunting opportunities. It has caused low water levels, intolerable water temperatures, poor motorboat access to lakes and reservoirs, poor forage conditions and low population recruitment in many of our aquatic and terrestrial species. The drought may continue to depress the number of hunting and fishing recreation days as long as these conditions persist. Changes in private land ownership, which is affecting public access, the primary and secondary effects of mineral development and changes in societal interests are also compounding the problem. The Department will continue to encourage hunting and fishing recruitment, seek ways to maintain and increase access, improve habitat and advertise the opportunities Wyoming offers. However, environmental conditions will have the greatest influence over recreation opportunities in the next two years.

Performance Measure #5: Percentage of species of greatest conservation need (SGCN) with adequate inventory data, by group (Personnel in this program will work to complete inventories on at least 50 percent of the mammals and birds, 85 percent of the fish, 67 percent of the amphibians and 57 percent of the reptiles on the list of SGCN).

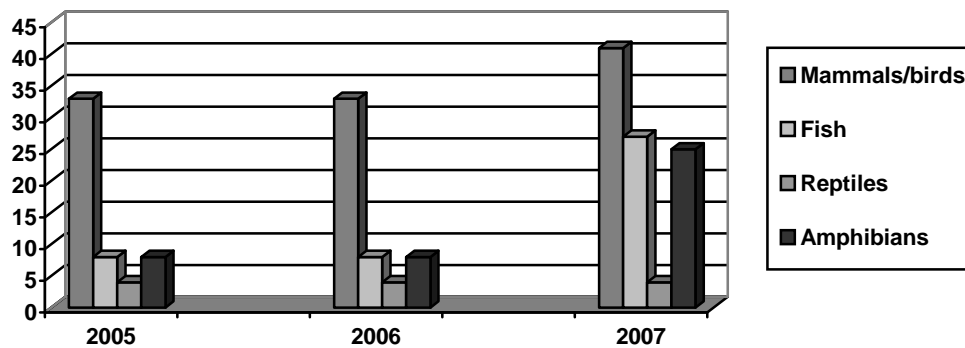


Figure 1. Percentage of SGCN inventories completed, by groups of species.

Story Behind the Last Year of Performance:

The *Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy for Wyoming* (WGFD, 2005) identifies 279 “species of greatest conservation need” (SGCN) in Wyoming. In general, these are species whose populations are greatly restricted or declining, whose habitats may be imperiled, or whose status in Wyoming cannot be documented sufficiently to demonstrate their security. Of the 279 SGCN identified, 54 are mammals, 60 are birds, 26 are reptiles, 12 are amphibians, 40 are fishes, 19 are crustaceans, and 68 are mollusks. A total of 235 species are included as SGCN all or in part due to the absence of important data to document their status in Wyoming.

At the time the *Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy* (CWCS) was developed in 2005, the most important priority identified was to complete sufficient inventories on those SGCN whose status could not be adequately documented in Wyoming. As of July 2008, 11 of 54 (20 percent) of the mammals, 36 of 60 (60 percent) birds, 1 of 26 (4 percent) reptiles and 3 of 12 (25 percent) amphibians, 11 of 40 (27 percent) fishes and none of the 19 crustaceans or 68 mollusks had sufficient inventory data to document their security in Wyoming.

The most significant factor limiting our ability to complete these inventories is funding. Federal funding under the State Wildlife Grants program provides only about \$600,000 annually to support the conservation of SGCN. A significant amount of this funding is used for grizzly bear and various subspecies of cutthroat trout. We succeeded in the spring of 2008 in augmenting this funding with funding from both the legislature and the Governor's office for FY 09. That funding will be used to supplement the routine annual surveys we have been conducting with surveys of species for which we have little information on status and distribution. This new funding will also be used for research, such as determining the effects of energy development on birds of sagebrush habitats and increasing our understanding of pygmy rabbit habitats and survey methods.

What has been Accomplished:

Due to the low levels of funding to date, progress on inventory, monitoring and conservation actions in the CWCS has been limited. Efforts have been made to develop and implement grizzly bear conflict management strategies, including a bear-proof community project and remote sensing for female grizzly bears. Terrestrial inventories for birds and mammals continue. Native fish assessments are ongoing in the Green River and Wind/Bighorn River drainages, with particular efforts directed at species that may be candidates for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Additional funding from state sources will allow us to increase inventories of 235 species for which information is lacking. This information will allow us to assess the status of those species and classify them appropriately. In some cases they will be determined to be secure. For those whose populations and/or habitat are imperiled we will implement conservation actions and conduct additional studies. This proactive approach will be Wyoming's most effective strategy in reducing the chance that a species will be listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act.

What we purpose to improve performance in next two years:

We will continue the annual and periodic SGCN surveys we have been conducting. Recent additional funding from the Wyoming Legislature and Governor's office will allow us to increase inventories of the 235 SGCN for which information is lacking, and conduct research on the life history of SGCN, SGCN survey techniques, and the effects of energy development and other impacts on a number of SGCN. This additional funding will allow us to move more quickly toward removing those species whose status can be confirmed as secure, and begin implementing conservation actions for those whose populations and/or habitat may be imperiled. This proactive approach will be Wyoming's most effective strategy in reducing the chance for a listing.

The Department will revise the CWCS by fall of 2010. The revision will include reviewing and modifying the strategies to learn more about SGCN and how to conserve them. It will also involve reviewing and revising the status of SGCN.

Performance Measure #6 - Number of breeding pairs in Wyoming (Personnel in this program will work to maintain the number of breeding pairs at a level that meets the requirements of Wyoming statutes and complies with the Wyoming Gray Wolf Management Plan).

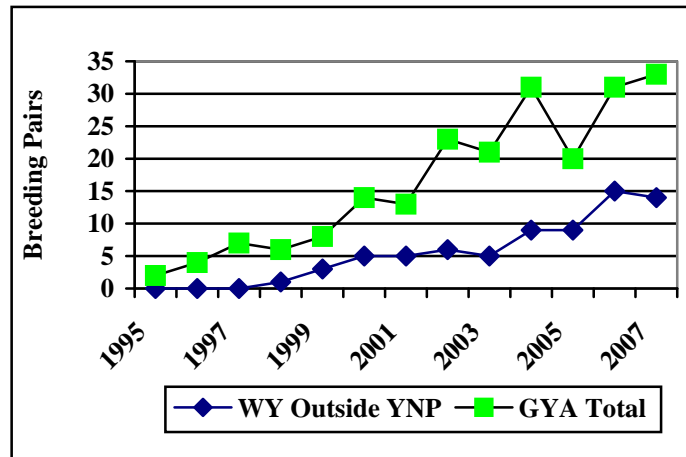


Fig. 1. Number of breeding pairs of wolves in the GYA recovery area and in Wyoming outside YNP since 1995. (“Breeding pair” is defined by W.S. 23-1-304(c) as an adult male and an adult female gray wolf raising at least two (2) pups of the year until December 31).

Story Behind the Last Year of Performance:

Wolves were first introduced from Canada into Yellowstone National Park (YNP) in January of 1995 and again in 1996. YNP is part of the Greater Yellowstone Wolf Recovery Area, one of three recovery areas in the U.S. Northern Rocky Mountains. The other two recovery areas are Central Idaho and Northwest Montana. In its 1987 Wolf Recovery Plan and again in the 1994 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on introducing wolves into Yellowstone National Park and Central Idaho, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) defined criteria for a recovered wolf population in the Northern Rocky Mountains (NRM). Those criteria included 10 breeding pairs and approximately 100 wolves in each recovery area, equating more or less to 30 breeding pairs and 300 wolves equitably distributed. The recovery criteria had to be met for three consecutive years before wolves could be removed from the federal list of endangered and threatened wildlife. In addition to USFWS recovery goals, all three states in the NRM agreed to manage wolves at least 15 breeding pairs and 150 or more wolves. Wyoming also committed to managing seven or more packs outside National Parks in Wyoming.

The recovery criteria were first achieved in 2000, and by 2002 had been exceeded for three consecutive years in the NRM. On July 13, 2005 Wyoming filed a petition requesting the USFWS to establish a Northern Rocky Mountain (NRM) Distinct Population Segment (DPS) of gray wolves, and to remove wolves in the NRM DPS from the federal list of endangered and threatened wildlife.

On March 28, 2008, wolves in the NRM were delisted and management was transferred from federal authority to state authority. A coalition of 12 groups filed suit in federal court to halt the delisting. On July 18, 2008, the U.S. Federal District Court in Missoula, Montana issued a

preliminary injunction that immediately reinstated Endangered Species Act protections for gray wolves in the NRM DPS pending a final court decision.

Montana and Idaho have formal agreements with the USFWS that allow them to manage wolves in their respective states. Wyoming and the USFWS are deciding if they will sign a similar memorandum of agreement (MOA).

What Has Been Accomplished:

Official annual wolf population estimates are calculated each year based on monitoring efforts ending on December 31. The number of wolves in Wyoming (WY) is derived from the entire State of WY including Yellowstone National Park (YNP). We combine three census techniques to estimate the total number of wolves in WY: 1) direct observations of wolves; 2) winter track counts of wolves traveling in snow; and 3) confirmed reports of wolf sightings from other agencies. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) defines a pack of wolves as two or more wolves traveling together in a defined home range. A breeding pair is defined as two or more adults producing two or more pups that survive through December 31 of that year. We count the number of wolves in packs containing radio-collared wolves using visual observations from the ground and aerial telemetry flights. We track wolves in winter and count the different sets of wolf tracks in snow. In areas where repeated wolf sightings are confirmed, we incorporate those observations into our estimates.

In 2007, the total wolf population in WY increased approximately 15 percent from 311 wolves in 2006 to 359 wolves in 2007. The number of wolves in YNP increased 26 percent from 136 wolves in 2006 to 171 in 2007. YNP had 10 breeding pairs in 2007. Wolf numbers in WY outside YNP increased seven percent from 175 wolves in 2006 to 188 wolves in 2007. Fifteen packs in WY outside YNP produced pups in 2007.

In addition to annual population estimates, preliminary mid-summer population estimates are determined in August to describe possible population trends for the coming year. As of August 13, 2008, there are approximately 334 wolves and 25 breeding pairs in WY. YNP has 155 wolves and 11 packs producing pups. In WY, outside YNP, there are a total of 179 wolves and 14 packs producing pups.

From January 1, 2008 through August 13, 2008, there have been 41 confirmed livestock depredations by wolves (26 cattle/14 sheep). In the Trophy Game Area, wolves killed 24 cattle and two sheep. Wolves killed three cattle and 12 sheep in the Predator Area.

From January 1, 2008 through August 13, 2008, 56 wolf mortalities have been documented, 17 in the Predator Area and 39 in the Trophy Game Area. Causes of mortality include: agency control for livestock depredations, 31 (55 percent of total mortality); hunter take in predator area, 9 (16 percent); under investigation, 7 (12 percent); natural, 3 (6 percent); vehicle hits, 2 (4 percent); landowner control for livestock problems, 2 (4 percent); capture related, 1 (2 percent); and unknown, 1 (2 percent).

What we propose to improve performance in the next two years:

In spring 2008, the Wyoming Game & Fish Department (WGFD) initiated a wolf management program. Legislative funding was used to hire a wolf coordinator and 3 wolf management specialists. The wolf program will address four key issues concerning wolf management; 1) Monitoring, 2) Management/Control, 3) Information and Education, and 4) Research.

Monitoring: Depending on the decision to enter into an MOA with the USFWS, WGFD may maintain an aggressive wolf-monitoring program in the Trophy Game Area using radio telemetry. Standard very high frequency (VHF) radio collars may be deployed in known packs. Global positioning system (GPS) technology may also be used where appropriate. Population will be monitored to estimate population growth, mortality and survival, home range, reproductive success, and dispersal of young wolves.

Management/Control: WGFD will investigate all potential livestock depredations caused by wolves in the Trophy Game Area. Depending on the decision to enter into an MOA with the USFWS, WGFD may respond quickly and efficiently to lethally remove offending wolves and minimize additional loss of livestock. USDA Wildlife Services may assist WGFD with wolf control.

Information and Education: WGFD will develop factual information to help the general public and other management agencies better understand wolves as a Trophy Game species, and understand how the WGFD program will address specific management objectives.

Research: Depending on the decision to enter into a MOA with the USFWS, the WGFD may actively engage in wolf research and support new and ongoing research that is pertinent to Wyoming Game and Fish management objectives.

Wyoming Game & Fish Organization Chart

