

Game and Fish Department

Mission: Conserving wildlife, serving people.

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.

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 2006 budget:

<u>Division</u>	<u>#FTEs*</u>	<u>2006 Annual Budget</u>
Wildlife Division	151.8	\$15,443,573
Fish Division	98.4	9,294,901
Services Division	87.5	9,870,798
Fiscal Division	48	5,636,840
Office of the Director	17.9	2,059,320
Other**	45.6	8,678,223
TOTAL	449.2	\$50,983,655

**Includes permanent, contract and temporary positions authorized in FY 2006 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.*

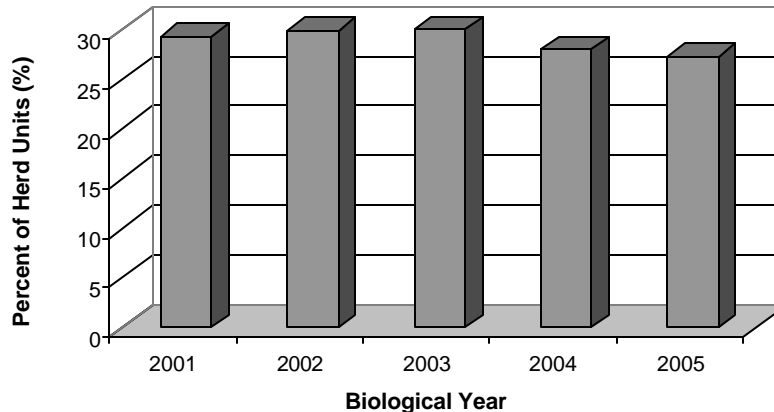
Our headquarters office is in Cheyenne. Our regional offices are in Jackson, Pinedale, Cody, Sheridan, Green River, Laramie, Lander and Casper.

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.

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Performance Measure #1: Percent of big game herds within 10% of 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 antelope, 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.

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.

On one hand, public access to hunt areas, especially in eastern Wyoming, limits the Department's ability to obtain desired harvest levels allowing herds to remain above population objective. On the other hand, loss of habitat to development and other disturbances continues to impact the Department's ability to maintain terrestrial wildlife populations at historic levels.

Since 2001, an average of 29% of big game herds across Wyoming were within 10% of the population objectives. Though the percentage was slightly lower in 2005 (27%), the number between years ranged from 27% to 30%. Of the total 150 big game herds in Wyoming in 2005, 41 herds were at objective (+/- 10%) and 26 herds had incomplete data.

Weather conditions (drought, severe winters) limit productivity of many deer and antelope herds. A number of these populations remain below objective. Elk populations, in general, are near objective after increasing cow harvest in recent few 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 Wildlife and Natural Resources Trust and other sources.

The Department continues to manage for objective in all big game herds. It is not possible in a single year to reach object in those herds above or below objective in a single year. 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

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on range condition. Even if drought conditions improve, it will take several years for range conditions to improve enough to allow herds to move towards objective.

Values reported in the graph above differ slightly from what was reported in the 2005 Strategic Plan that was approved in September 2005. These former values did not include bison, excluded herds from the total that had incomplete data, and used the 5% population objective rule for 2002 and 2001.

What has been Accomplished:

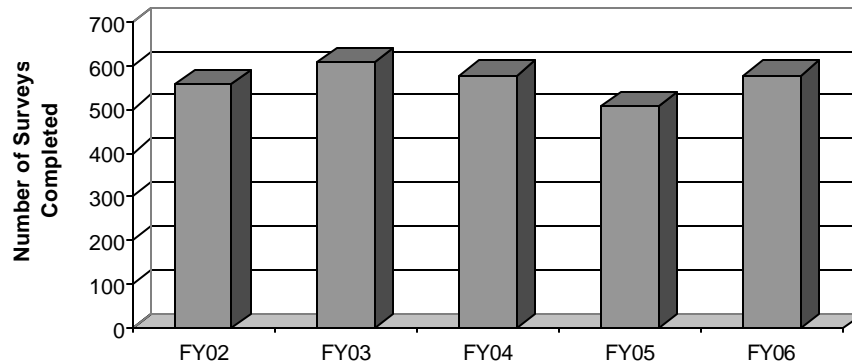
We continued implementation of the Department's Strategic Habitat Plan (SHP), including incorporating nongame priority areas with those previously identified for big game. We were able to obtain \$12.7 million dollars for the Terrestrial Wildlife Management budget in FY2007. We continue to emphasize 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 in FY06 to apply for habitat improvement funds from a variety of sources including many NGOs, federal programs, the Wyoming Governor's Big Game License Coalition, and the new Wildlife and Natural Resources Board.

Wildlife 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. A third major focus is West Nile Virus, especially in northeast Wyoming sage-grouse. Funding for the Department's Veterinary Services program remained at approximately \$2 million in FY07. In FY06, the Department continued to vaccinate on the state's feedgrounds to reduce the prevalence of brucellosis in elk, initiated a test and slaughter program on the Muddy Creek feedground, has completed development of three Brucellosis Management Action Plans (BMAPs) for elk herd units in the Jackson Region, and is developing BMAPs in three other herd units.

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 Land Public Wildlife 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 is now focused on fewer, but more intensive surveys that emphasize watershed-level fishery evaluations.

In FY06, a total of 579 streams and lakes were surveyed. This is slightly higher than the five-year average of 558 surveys per year. Some of the increase in number of surveys completed is related to an emphasis on native species of concern that have increasingly become a priority as identified in the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies and funded by State Wildlife Grants. With these funds, contract biologists were hired and able to concentrate on performing more surveys than in the past. Native species that are were surveyed native trout, suckers, minnows, mollusks and herptefauuna wildlife, using a watershed-scale or assemblage approach. Beside increasing in number, the number of surveys conducted are more intensive – resulting in an improved understanding of biological productive capacity of aquatic systems and sustainability of populations for recreation, scientific and educational purposes. Also, the increase in number of surveys conducted is partially reflective of the newly reorganized Aquatic Assessment Crew fully staffed and operational.

Besides a small increase over the average, it should be noted that the types of surveys on streams have become more extensive and larger in scale - often encompassing watersheds instead of stream reaches, as conducted previously. The primary management plans guiding fisheries management survey work are called Basin Management Plans. In FY06, we consolidated our basins along standard hydrologic units reducing the number to 111 from 170. Goals and objectives are now being written for these newly configured Basin Management Plans. The new units should provide better communication with our public and other agencies. We will continue to use our surveys as a primary tool to evaluate the management goals for these plans.

What has been Accomplished:

Basin Management Plans need to be modified over the next three years so they better reflect the Department's responsibility to manage all aquatic wildlife, not just sport fisheries. We expect this next year to have several plans per region completed. After this initial year the pace should accelerate to meet our 2009 deadline.

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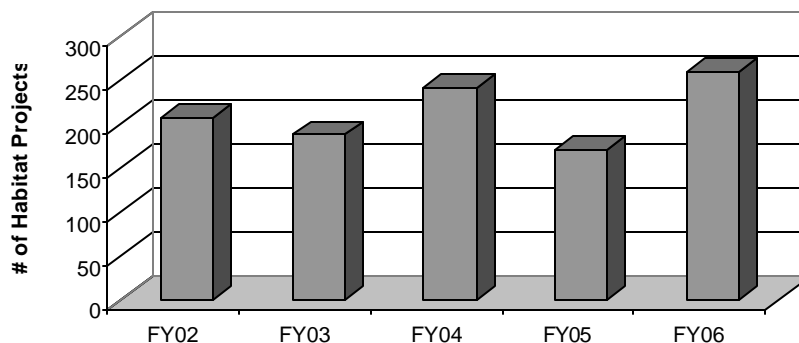
We began to integrate the Strategic Habitat Plan priorities into the Basin Management Plans. Habitat and fish management people reassigned priorities so there is one set of regional priorities. We need to better integrate the goals of our Basin Management Plans with these watershed priorities.

In order to meet data needs that were identified for aquatic species in the CWCS, the Department is in the continual process of surveying streams and lakes. The purpose of this plan is to manage species of greatest conservation need in Wyoming and reduce the need to list species under the federal Endangered Species Act. Funding provided in existing State Wildlife Grants program. Additional funding to be proposed as part of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's alternative funding proposal.

The Department continues to work with the Wyoming Cooperative Research Unit (COOP Unit) to meet continuing research needs. In FY06, the COOP Unit conducted six fisheries-related research projects. Because Coop staffing has been reduced by 33% we need to look outside the Coop for other credible researchers that can further assist us in meeting our research needs.

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Performance Measure #3: Number of habitat projects implemented annually



Story Behind the Last Year of Performance:

The Terrestrial Habitat Section accomplished 211 habitat projects in FY06 (83% of planned projects), which was more than the five-year average (n=159). The list of terrestrial habitat projects includes nine landscape/watershed/large area inventory projects. Satellite imagery land cover and shrub/steppe change detection was used on large landscape areas encompassing most of the Sheridan, Pinedale/Jackson, Green River, and Lander Regions, initiated in the Cody and completed in the Casper Region. In addition, over 80 landowner habitat extension projects were developed and/or implemented during FY06. Due to budget constraints, the Department suspended the habitat grants program beginning in FY04 resulting in no new grant projects being developed which required a great many grant applications being prepared and solicited from outside sources, including Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resources Trust, Wyoming Governor's Big Game License Coalition, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, NRCS Farm Bill Programs, Water for Wildlife, Bowhunters of Wyoming, Pheasants Forever, Safari Club International, and private donors among others. Terrestrial section personnel developed and administered 11 Department trust fund projects were funded and were directly involved with 54 other grants administered for various projects. The remaining 57 terrestrial habitat projects include grazing management plans, working groups, habitat improvement efforts (prescribed fire, herbicide, fence removal/modifications, seeding), wildlife environmental reviews, assisting with large land cover identification and classifications, and Bureau of Land Management Resource Management Plan Revisions. Finally, recognizing the importance of habitat improvements implemented, personnel have collected data to measure the number of acres, stream miles, inventoried with management prescription (such as livestock grazing system) and wildlife habitat management plans treated annually. Terrestrial section personnel expect the number of projects completed in the coming year to be similar or slightly higher next year.

The Aquatic Habitat Section accomplished 48 habitat projects in FY06 (72% of planned projects), which was slightly less than the five-year average (n=54). The list of aquatic habitat projects includes trust fund projects, watershed inventories & other habitat projects implemented or completed. Does not include extension or other efforts which are major time commitments but not realistic to track. The section's fish passage efforts are increasing and should result in several projects completed in this and upcoming years. We have significantly increased both internal and external funds, and have hired a 12-month AWEC position to support our Cody Regional Aquatic Habitat Biologist in leading this effort. Work output should increase with our private lands efforts with the hiring of an aquatic Land Incentive Program (LIP) coordinator (Fall 2006). With

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additional monies received for FY07, we now have approximately \$500,000 in LIP project funds to support this effort.

Fast paced energy development continues to impact wildlife habitat and place additional workloads on habitat biologists and federal Farm Bill program changes impact habitat extension biologists workloads, opportunities and number of projects completed. Federal Landowner Incentive Program grant funds also placed additional burdens on Section personnel. Preparation of grant applications for outside funding to achieve project from numerous sources has also taken a tremendous amount of time.

Changes in the Farm Bill and funding sources slightly reduced private landowner habitat extension projects. New habitat extension personnel required training and the opportunity to build trust with private landowners before projects can be implemented. Additional habitat extension projects are expected in the next year as the new habitat extension biologists gain the knowledge of programs and build trust with landowners. We need to better utilize farm bill funding to benefit our priority watershed

As Department funds have declined, so has the number of Department Trust Fund dollars available. Section personnel 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 next year.

What has been Accomplished:

The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission adopted the Strategic Habitat Plan (SHP) in December 2001. Full implementation was effective July 1, 2002. Section personnel updated, revised, and continue to implement the SHP. Important habitats for big game, sage grouse, and other species have been identified. The CWCS and Basin Management Plans are being incorporated into the SHP. Implementation of this plan depends on cooperation with land management agencies and private landowners. Although major projects are scheduled annually, completion of these projects is impacted by insufficient number of personnel and time to meet the demand. Increasing numbers of projects between 2001 and 2003 were noted as the SHP began full implementation. 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 increasing “administrative” duties being assigned to field personnel. We continue to have inadequate personnel to address the long-term needs of Wyoming’s aquatic wildlife and watershed health. Without a doubt, Wyoming will permanently lose significant areas of habitat and associated wildlife populations in the coming decades.

Personnel continue to develop proposals for funding from Wildlife and Natural Resources Board. In addition, the Department continues to expand the Habitat Extension Biologist partnership with NRCS to facilitate implementation of Farm Bill programs that benefit wildlife on private lands.

The Terrestrial and Aquatic Habitat Sections are working cooperatively to develop a statewide watershed habitat monitoring effort to measure the success of habitat improvement efforts. Aquatic Habitat Section, in conjunction with the Fisheries Management Program, continues to revamp our basic planning instrument, Basin Management Plans. These plans are now goal and objective driven, with goals and objectives for each priority watershed identified and incorporated into our work schedule.

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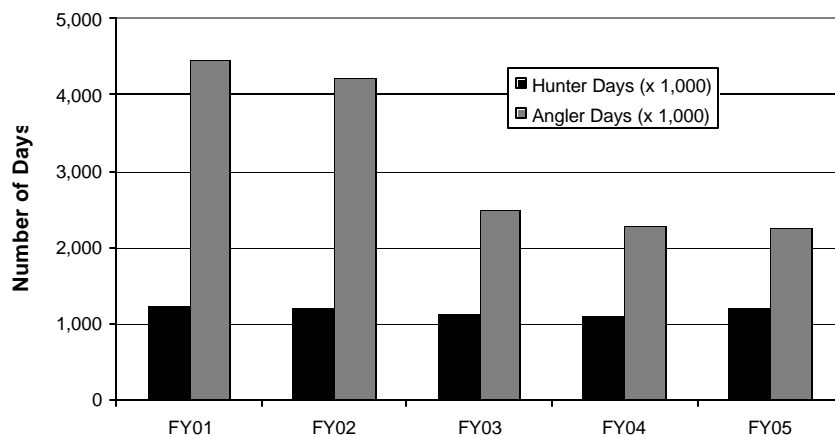
The Terrestrial and Aquatic Habitat Sections need to ensure that field personnel in both sections continue to coordinate habitat improvement efforts, thus maximizing benefits on a watershed scale.

In FY06, a total of 20 habitat projects were implemented through the local Sage Grouse Working Groups. These include 13 on-the-ground habitat manipulations, five research projects, and two information and education (winter range closure signs) related habitat projects. Some of the monies utilized are based on cooperative agreements with other entities. Local Sage Grouse Working Groups are in the process of designing and evaluating proposed habitat projects within the conservation plans for 07-08 biennium.

The Department continues to implement habitat-related conservation actions from the CWCS, with special focus on those that deal with aspen, wetland, or sagebrush habitats. In FY06, the Voorhee's wetland enhancement project along the Green River was implemented and now provides excellent spring/fall habitat for Trumpeter Swans. This habitat improvement project was the result of eliminating carp, water manipulation, installing water control devices and vegetation planting. Also, water levels for three ponds in the Department's South Park Unit were manipulated and filled to improve habitat for several birds that are listed as species of greatest conservation need (SGCN) in the CWCS. Finally, with Federal Landowner Incentive Program funding, Department personnel initiated agreements with four landowners to maintain objective levels of black-tailed prairie dogs which provides habitat for two other SGNC mammals and three SGCN birds.

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Performance Measure #4: Number of days in the field by hunters and anglers



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, primarily because of poor water conditions in Wyoming's lakes and rivers, which have also been caused by drought. Angler days stabilized somewhat from the declines seen previously though that is partially due to the inclusion of anglers holding Lifetime licenses in the recreation days tally. None-the-less, water conditions for many of Wyoming's lakes and rivers continued to suffer from the prolonged drought to an extent that some very popular reservoirs are dry or nearly so and no longer support fish populations or angler numbers seen previously.

Angler days and hunter days have been further affected in the past two years 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 2-3 years. In addition, increases in gasoline and diesel prices may be impacting the angler and hunter recreation days.

Since FY01, the average number of hunter and angler days provided to Wyoming residents and nonresidents are 1,173,163 and 3,143,519 respectively. In FY05, 1,202,382 hunter recreation days were provided and 2,256,200 angler recreation days were provided. Values in FY04 and FY05, in the graph above, reflect the inclusion of Lifetime License holders 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) program. We will continue to encourage participation in the PLPW program among users and private landowners. Acres enrolled in Walk-In Areas increased in the past year by approximately 12% to 563,530 acres, and privately owned acres enrolled in Hunter Management Areas increased 20% to 810,926 acres. The program now has 273 lake acres and 101 stream miles enrolled. The PLPW program is an important means of providing access to hunters and anglers in Wyoming. Funding for the PLPW program is provided in the existing Department budget. Additionally, permanent access

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easements were secured 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 FY06, two new public access areas were created in central Wyoming. These areas were developed with boat ramps, parking areas, and outhouses. In addition, additional funding was secured for six outhouses (\$180,000), two handicap accessible fishing piers, and one handicap accessible duck blind (last two = \$30,000). We anticipate construction of these new features to be completed in July 2007.

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.

NO SUPPLEMENTAL REQUEST TO BE SUBMITTED.