



ACCESS YES PROGRAM

2020 ANNUAL REPORT

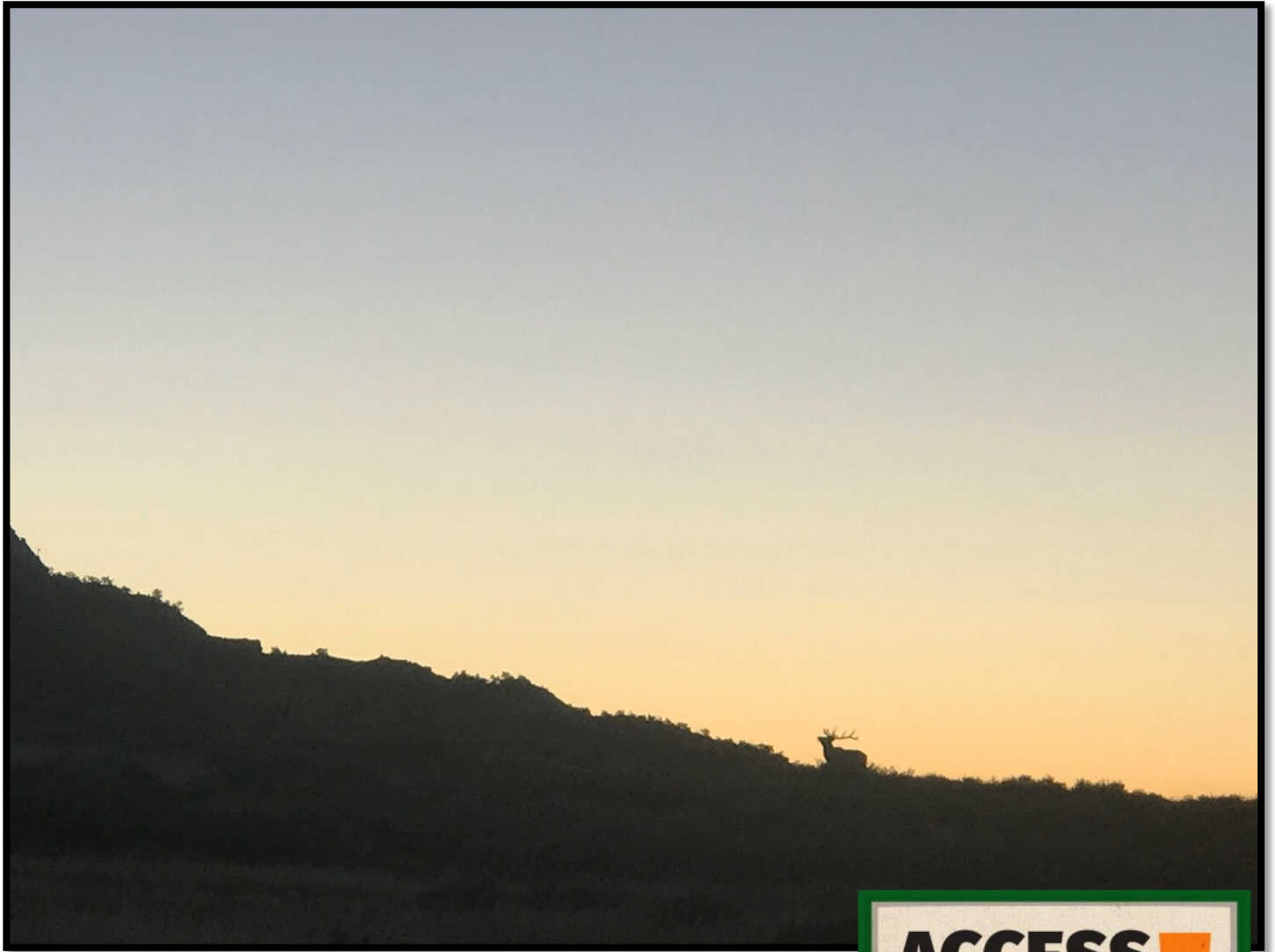


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Information about the Access Yes Program can be obtained from the Department’s website at <http://wgfd.wyo.gov>, Cheyenne Headquarters or any regional office (below). Access information for fishing is updated each December for the following year. Hunting information is updated each July for the fall hunting seasons.

Contact Information	In-State Toll-Free #	Out-of-State Phone #
Cheyenne Headquarters	1-800-842-1934	1-307-777-4600
Casper Regional Office	1-800-233-8544	1-307-473-3400
Cody Regional Office	1-800-654-1178	1-307-527-7125
Green River Regional Office	1-800-843-8096	1-307-875-3223
Jackson Regional Office	1-800-423-4113	1-307-733-2321
Lander Regional Office	1-800-654-7862	1-307-332-2688
Laramie Regional Office	1-800-843-2352	1-307-745-4046
Pinedale Regional Office	1-800-452-9107	1-307-367-4353
Sheridan Regional Office	1-800-331-9834	1-307-672-7418

Introduction

In the past century, hunting and fishing has changed dramatically in the United States. Hunting and fishing activities, once required to feed one's family through the lean winter months, are now viewed more as recreation. This change has occurred for a variety of reasons such as the availability of other food sources, transition from a rural to urban setting and changing wildlife values. Thirty years ago, prospective hunters or anglers simply had to knock on a landowner's door and ask for permission to hunt or fish. Typically, the landowner would grant free access. Today, this happens less frequently due to the monetary value of wildlife, complex land ownership and usage. An increasing number of traditional landowners are selling their properties to individuals who are not purchasing the land for farming or ranching, but for their own hunting pleasure, wildlife sanctuaries or even development. In many instances, landowners view wildlife as competition for livestock forage or crops and welcome hunters onto their land to manage wildlife populations. Conversely, some non-traditional landowners want to see increased wildlife on their land and, therefore, do not allow hunting. The amount of private lands leased by those in the outfitting industry continues to increase. With many traditional landowners now charging trespass fees to generate additional income, fewer people have the opportunity to hunt or fish on private and landlocked public lands.

Hunters and anglers in Wyoming have voiced their concerns and frustrations over declining access to private and landlocked public lands. During the 1990s, the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission (Commission) created a pilot program to explore ways to increase public access onto these lands. The Private Lands Public Wildlife (PLPW) Access Initiative was developed with three sub-programs:

- 1) Hunter Management
- 2) Walk-in Hunting
- 3) Walk-in Fishing

In 1998, the Walk-in Hunting Area (WIHA) Program started with a modest 27,000 private acres. By 2000, all three sub-programs were growing quickly and included more than 657,500 acres for hunting as well as 222 lake acres and 71 stream miles for fishing. Beyond providing public access, the program has also increased cooperation among landowners, hunters, anglers, and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (Department).

By increasing access to privately owned, irrigated fields and riparian lands, which compose the majority of productive wildlife habitat in the state, the Department can be more effective at managing wildlife populations and mitigating agricultural damage.

The success of the PLPW Access Pilot Program led the Commission to make the program permanent in 2001. In 2016, the PLPW program was "rebranded" to the Access Yes Program (Access Yes or Program). The goal was to tie the name and the key funding source of the program together, and make the important connection between the funding source and the access it provided for sportsmen.



Purpose

The goal of the Access Yes Program is to enhance and/or maintain public hunting and fishing access onto Wyoming private and landlocked public lands. This is accomplished by enrolling private landowners into one of the access programs (Hunter Management Area, Walk-in Hunting, and/or Walk-in Fishing). The landowner and Department personnel negotiate the terms of an agreement including: agreement length (one to five years), the species that can be harvested, the geographic location, dates access will be allowed and any other specific rules or stipulations. In return for access, landowners benefit in several ways including:

- A modest monetary payment based on the number of acres or stream length enrolled;
- Increased law enforcement presence;
- Increased wildlife management (population control and damage prevention); and,
- Management of sportsmen, alleviating phone calls and other disruptions to landowners (access maps, hunter instruction on ranch rules, etc.).

Program Successes

The Access Yes Program assists landowners through management of hunters and anglers, providing sportsmen places to hunt and fish, and reducing agricultural damage through hunter harvest. The Department benefits through increased wildlife management opportunities, increased license sales, reduced agricultural damage, and providing quality hunting and fishing access to the public. During 2020, the Access Yes Program experienced many successes, including, but not limited to:

- Providing access to 2,634,025 acres (1,703,651 acres of enrolled private and state lands, and 930,374 acres of public lands) for hunting within the boundaries of the Walk-in Hunting Area (WIHA) and Hunter Management Area (HMA) programs. This included land in every county within Wyoming.
- Providing additional access to 166,635 acres of public lands located outside the boundaries of WIHAs and HMAs, which would not have been accessible without the Access Yes Program.
- Providing fishing access to 4,005 lake acres and 87 stream miles through the Walk-in Fishing Area (WIFA) program.
- Assisted Department IT personnel to develop a new online permission slip database. The internal challenge of setting up permission slips online was becoming more complex. These changes allow the process to be user friendly for sportspersons while reducing difficulties associated with obtaining permission slips for HMAs and the National Elk Refuge (NER).
- Issued 25,978 online permission slips for access to HMAs and the NER.
- Provided free hunting and fishing access on Walk-in Areas to anyone with the proper licenses. Many of the participants are families, contributing to the maintenance and enhancement of hunting and fishing traditions.
- The Access Yes Program provided funding for habitat treatments via helicopter on some enrolled private and state lands spraying a rangeland herbicide aimed at removing Ventenata grass (a newly introduced invasive annual grass).

- Hunters surveyed during the 2019 hunting season for harvest results indicated 23% of antelope hunters (26% nonresident, 19% resident), 18% of deer hunters (17% nonresident, 18% resident), and 13% of elk hunters (12% nonresident, 14% resident) used either a WIHA or HMA to hunt on. This would equate to an estimated 12,842 antelope, 11,075 deer, and 8,235 elk hunters having hunted either a WIHA or HMA.
- Hunters surveyed during the 2019 hunting season who indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied with the opportunity provided through the WIHA or HMA programs were 86% for antelope, 71% for deer, and 71% for elk. This is a 1% decrease for antelope, while satisfaction for deer and elk fell by 5% and 2% respectively from 2018.
- Increased hunting access translates into improved wildlife population management and decreased agricultural damage through harvest.
- Recognized landowners by issuing Access Enrollment Award plaques and signs to 210 landowners who enrolled in the original PLPW Program between 1998 – 2003. These landowners have been recognized as Founding Partners of the Access Yes program and continue to be enrolled.
- Continued the Access Yes Patrol Enhancement (AYPE) plan. Regional Access Coordinators provided patrol assistance and hunter/landowner contacts to other regions during high use periods on Access Yes areas. Additional patrol effort by visiting Access Coordinators during high use periods occurred in the following counties: Goshen, Park, Big Horn, Sheridan, Albany, Johnson and Natrona.
- Increased license sales in hunt areas with difficult public access.
- Conducted a survey of enrolled landowners to gauge satisfaction with the Access Yes Program and help coordinators determine future needs or program direction.



Landowner Survey

During 2020, Access Yes coordinators conducted a survey of landowners enrolled in a Walk-in Area or Hunter Management Area program. Landowners in the Access Yes Program have been surveyed every five years starting in 2005 to determine their satisfaction with the program and to give insight to Access Yes coordinators for future needs or direction for the program. Landowners were surveyed utilizing an online survey or a hand-issued survey. The responses to the surveys were collected and tabulated to provide a composite summary of the results.

Composite Responses from Hunter Management Area, Walk-in Fishing Area, Walk-in Hunting Area, and combined Walk-in Fishing and Hunting Area:

- The percentage of landowners responding to the survey who participated for 10 years or more in either the Hunter Management Area or Walk-in Hunting Area Program is 50%, and 50% of respondents in the Walk-in Fishing Area program. 23% of respondents have been a part of the Hunter Management Area and/or Walk-in Hunting Area Program for over 5 years and 10% of the respondents for Walk-in Fishing Area.
- 81% of landowners who responded to the survey have signed a 5-year contract.
- 45.6% of the respondents said they signed a multi-year contract because of the ease of process, 25.6% said because of the payment incentive.
- 43.5% of the respondents said their desires and expectations in establishing a Walk-in Hunting Area or Hunter Management Area was the management of hunters by the Department, 34% said it provide increased hunting opportunities. On Walk-in Fishing Areas, 64.3% of the respondents said their desires and expectations were to increase fishing opportunities.
- 91.7% of the landowners agree the Walk-in Hunting Area or Hunter Management Area on their property met their expectations they had identified. 95.2% of the landowners agree the Walk-in Fishing Area on their property met their expectations they had identified
- 77.3% of the responding landowners felt the number of hunters on their property was about right, and 66.7% felt the number of anglers was about right.
- 32% of respondents said the use of their property by hunters and anglers has increased, 49.7% stayed the same.
- 75.8% of the respondents were satisfied with the behavior of the hunters using their property, and 80.9% were satisfied with the behavior of anglers using their property.
- 97.1% of the responding landowners felt the process to establish an access area on their property was easy.
- 90.5% were satisfied with the Department's efforts to place signs on their property.
- 72.3% were satisfied with the Department's presence on their property during the open season.
- 75.2% of responding landowners felt the relationship with the Department has improved.
- 60.6% of the respondents felt their relationship with the hunters and anglers has neither improved nor worsened, 38% felt their relationship has improved.
- Landowners indicated the following aspects of the Walk-in Area or Hunter Management Area programs worked well: 45% listed signage, 44.5% listed improved access for hunters and anglers, 32.6% listed maps of the areas, and 29.8% listed the Department's presence on their property.
- 85.4% of respondents are satisfied with the landowner incentives.

- 61.3% allowed free access to their property prior to establishing a Walk-in Area or Hunter Management Area. However, only 16.8% indicated they would allow free access if they decided not to participate in the program in the future.
- 79.6% of the landowners felt the programs had made it more convenient to provide access to hunters and anglers.
- Overall, 83.9% of the responding landowners were satisfied with the program.

Hunting and Fishing Access Programs

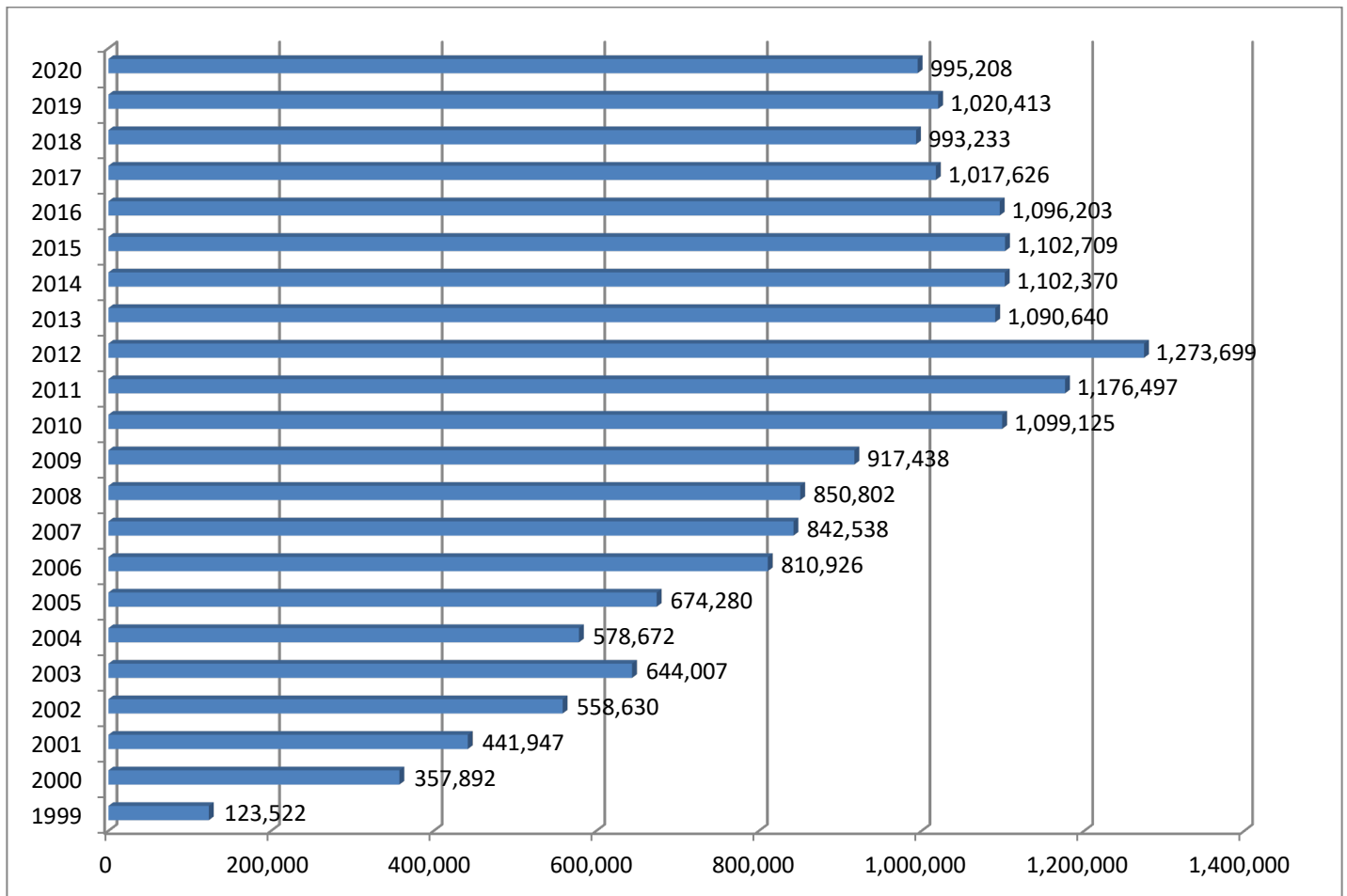
Hunter Management Area – Walk-in Hunting Areas – Walk-in Fishing Areas

Hunter Management Areas

Hunter Management Areas are access areas where each hunter must first obtain a permission slip from the Department prior to hunting. These areas are generally larger than WIHAs, and usually have some level of vehicle access. Permission slips are issued through the Department’s website, and this method has proven to be a fair and popular way to distribute hunter access. For HMAs with limited access and high demand, random draws are used to assure a fair distribution of permission slips. Website distribution of permission slips is popular with nonresident hunters as they can obtain permission for HMAs prior to coming to the state to hunt. Regional office personnel and game wardens/biologists provide extra assistance to hunters needing help obtaining a permission slip. Hunter Management Areas can provide unlimited, limited first-come first-served, or limited random draw hunter access permission slips. The type of HMA depends upon several factors such as desired harvest levels, hunter participation, wildlife population numbers, landowner preference, and agricultural damage. For 2020, there were 58 HMAs with 137 participating landowners encompassing 995,208 enrolled acres for hunting primarily big game species, but also included small game and upland game birds (Figure 1). This is a decrease of 25,205 acres from 2019 due to the loss of two HMAs: Piedmont and Gooseberry. The Carter Mountain HMA was split into two: Carter Mountain and the new Bear Creek HMA.



Figure 1. Hunter Management Area Acres by Year

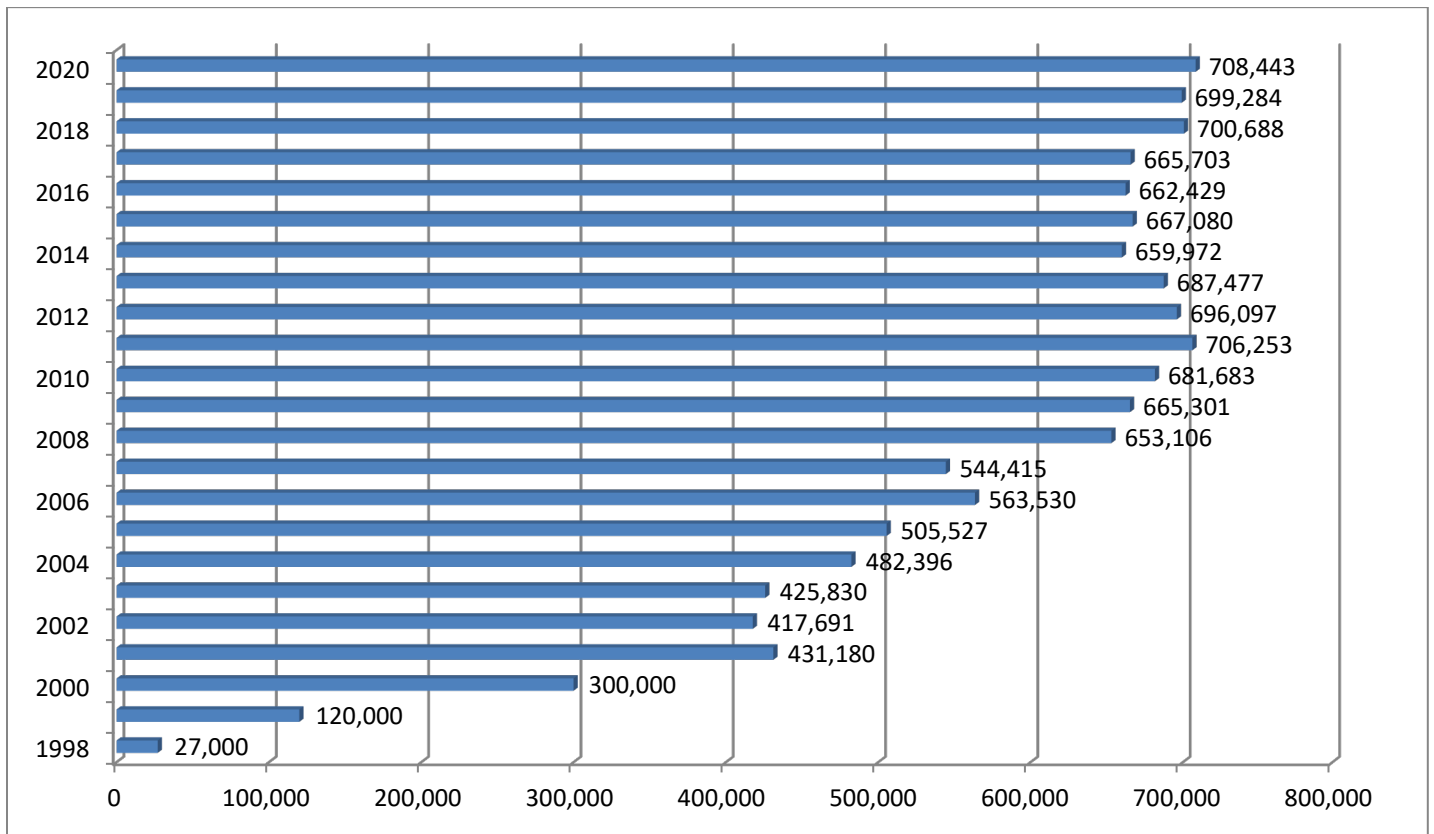


Walk-in Hunting Areas

Walk-in Hunting Areas are parcels of land open to anyone who has a valid hunting license for the species allowed to be hunted on the WIHA; no permission slip is required. These access areas are usually smaller than HMAs and, as the name implies, typically require hunters to walk in to hunt. Walk-in Hunting Areas are similar to HMAs in that landowners determine which species can be hunted and when access will be granted. For 2020, the Access Yes Program enrolled 708,443 private and state acres involving 464 landowners in WIHAs (Figure 2). This is an increase of 9,159 acres from 2019 due to the addition of some properties, and changes in enrolled boundaries. Walk-in Hunting Areas provide incredible opportunities throughout the entire state for a wide variety of game species, making it possible for hunters to enjoy free hunting access close to their home.



Figure 2. Walk-in Hunting Area Acres by Year

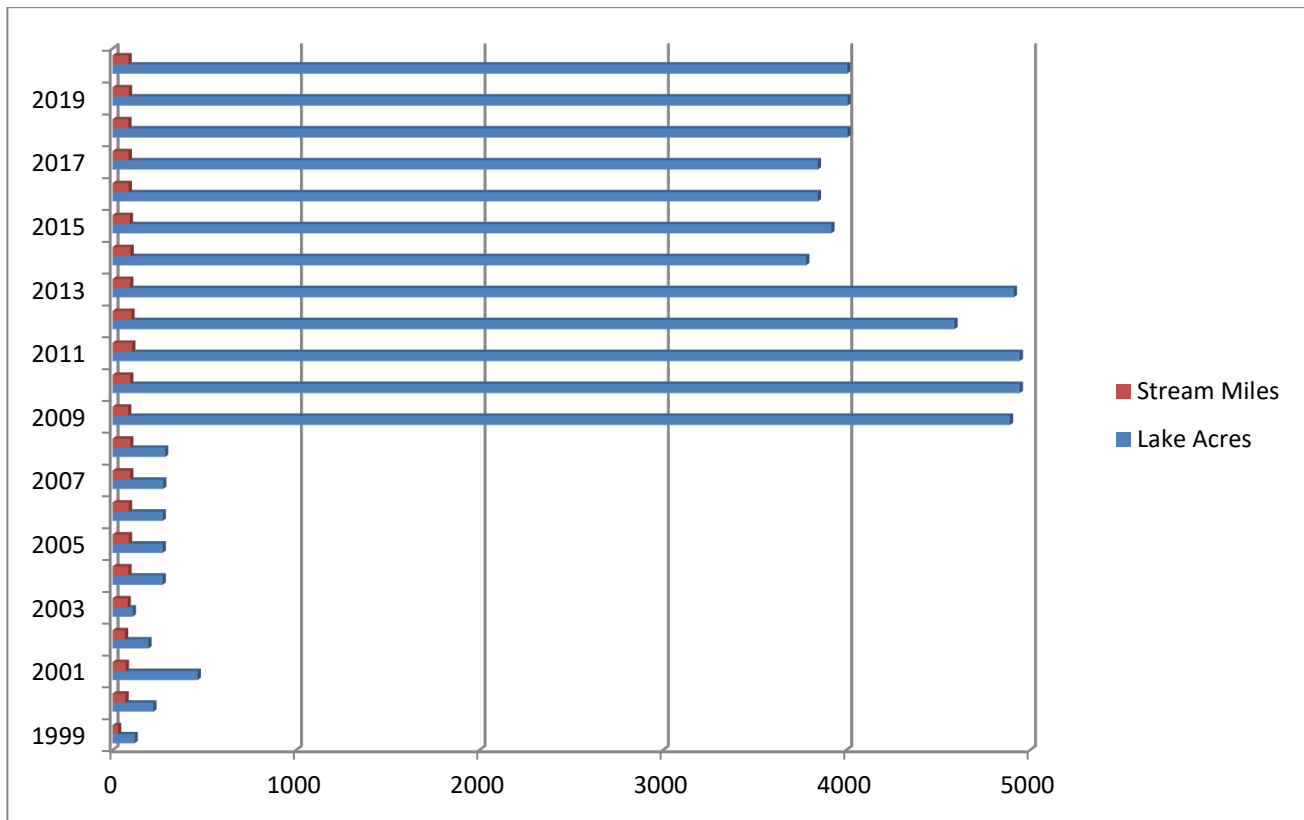


Walk-in Fishing Areas



Walk-in Fishing Areas are similar to WIHAs in that anyone with a valid fishing license may enter the property to fish. Unless otherwise specified within Department publications, WIFAs are open year-round. Walk-in Fishing Areas in Wyoming are not as prevalent as hunting areas simply because fewer water sources exist compared to hunting areas. Nevertheless, WIFAs provide valuable fishing access, particularly during the summer months. For 2020, a total of 4,005 lake acres and 87 stream miles were available for anglers, thanks to the 70 landowners enrolled in the WIFA program (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Walk-in Fishing Lake Acres and Stream Miles by Year



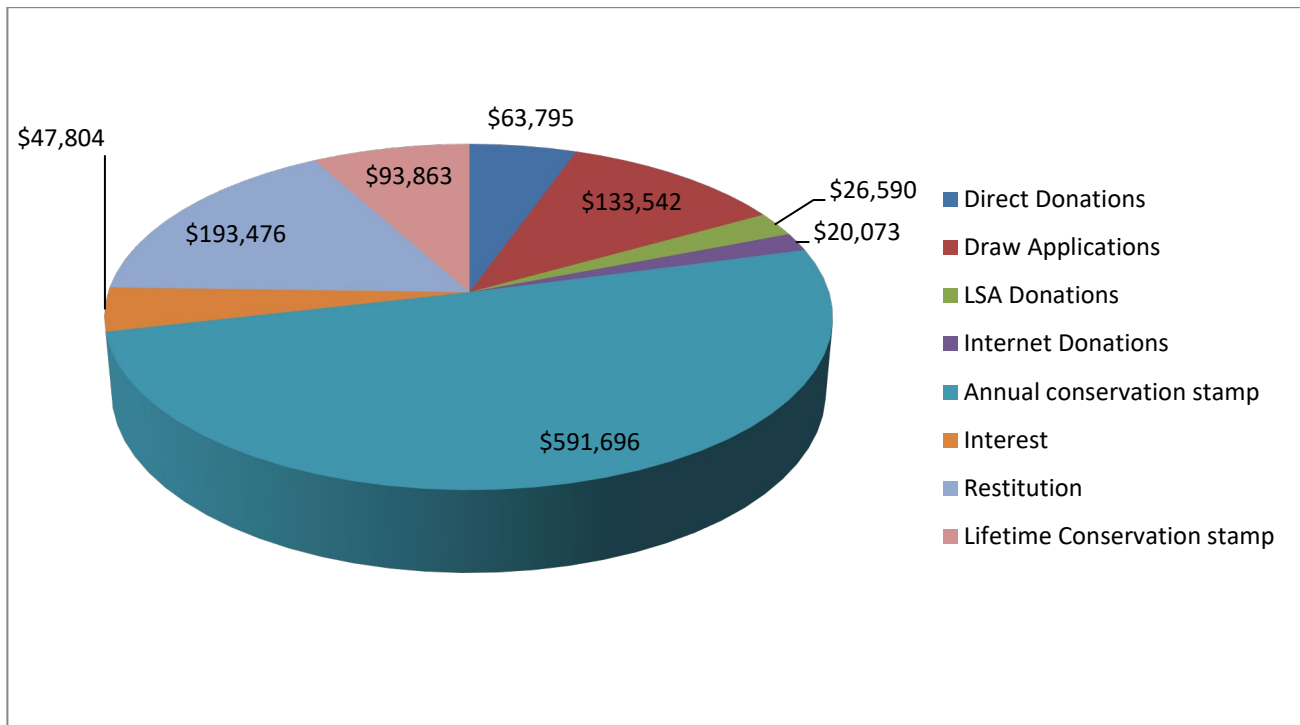
Program Funding

The Access Yes Program is funded by Department and Access Yes Program funds. Department funds, primarily from license sales, fund the daily operations including personnel. Revenue for the Access Yes Program account is generated from the sale of lifetime and annual conservation stamps, donations from organizations, individual hunters and anglers, state wildlife restitution amounts from court-imposed sentencing of wildlife violators, and interest, totaling \$1,170,839 in 2020 (Figure 4). Except for a few exemptions, every hunter and angler must purchase an annual conservation stamp, unless a lifetime conservation stamp has been previously purchased. A portion of the sale of these stamps is deposited into the Access Yes account (\$3.00 per annual stamp and half of each lifetime stamp). These two sources generate the majority of the funds each year, and in Fiscal Year 2020, they generated \$685,559.

Easement payments made to landowners are funded through the Access Yes Program. Authorized by state statute, funds collected through the Access Yes Program may only be utilized for acquiring easements with landowners. In 2020, the Access Yes Program paid \$1,012,603 to landowners for hunting and fishing access. Every dollar spent provided approximately 2.8 acres of access.



Figure 4. Access Yes Funds Received Totaling \$1,170,839 in Fiscal Year 2020



Donations to Access Yes provide another valuable source of funding. During Fiscal Year 2020, direct donations from conservation groups and organizations totaled \$63,476 indicating the importance these groups place on access. These organizations include Wyoming Sportsman’s Group, Muley Fanatic Foundation, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Pheasants Forever, The Wyldlife Fund, National Wild Turkey Federation, Quail Forever, Cheyenne Field Archers, Wyoming Ducks Unlimited, Goshen County Rooster Boosters, Fremont Beverages, and Back Country Hunters & Anglers.

Individual hunters at Department regional offices made additional donations totaling \$319. Direct donations increased from Fiscal Year 2019 by \$48,618. These direct donations vary year-to-year based on changes in large donations from individual conservation groups.

Hunters and anglers can also make donations to Access Yes when applying for or purchasing licenses; either in person at a license selling agent, or through the Department website. Sportspeople contributed a total of \$180,205 in Fiscal Year 2020, a 10% increase from 2019 donations. Overall, during Fiscal Year 2020, the Access Yes Program received \$1,170,839, an increase of \$194,959 (17%) from 2019 (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Access Yes Funds Received Each Fiscal Year

ACCESS- SUMMARY OF FUNDS RECEIVED									
Fiscal Year	Total Access fund Receipts	Direct Donations F06 6246 4R20	LSA collections F06 6245 4R20	License Draw Donations F06 6245 4R20	Internet Sale donations F06 6245 4R20	State Restitution F06 3301 4R20	Lifetime C-stamp F06 2633 4R20	Annual c-stamp** F06 2607 4R20	Interest* F06 4601 4R20
FY2020	1,170,839	63,795	26,590	133,542	20,073	193,476	93,863	591,696	47,804
FY2019	975,880	15,177	22,075	127,345	12,496	84,909	85,052	565,300	63,526
FY 2018	1,036,675	32,996	22,982	115,941	15,031	50,059	98,700	654,112	46,854
FY 2017	913,366	28,630	25,023	112,586	19,504	64,379	76,983	545,267	40,994
FY 2016	897,877	35,025	20,396	103,786	15,174	67,311	77,705	541,337	37,143
FY 2015	895,524	19,909	19,990	101,951	15,163	79,701	72,110	542,534	44,166
FY 2014	960,314	76,570	25,705	92,402	15,280	109,955	71,207	534,508	34,687
FY 2013	908,837	37,827	23,347	88,058	14,426	58,135	82,308	530,694	74,042
FY 2012	924,801	16,675	22,232	97,032	12,244	82,578	53,789	589,691	50,560
FY 2011	897,862	13,744	18,100	85,332	10,305	96,226	52,887	513,977	107,291
FY 2010	909,072	31,215	20,697	85,962	11,541	122,591	51,051	528,037	57,978
FY 2009	882,935	32,032	27,545	90,255		87,859	57,098	539,559	48,587
FY 2008	879,512	45,261	27,350	104,025		104,962	95,674	444,805	57,435
FY 2007	761,297	20,078	25,952	97,362		74,916	63,662	442,699	36,628
FY 2006	710,736	7,466	26,213	92,281		71,340	48,385	432,820	32,231
FY 2005	645,468	4,862	24,894	89,118		50,295	36,965	409,151	30,183
FY 2004	654,354	7,697	25,922	91,481		62,721	12,975	429,776	23,782
FY 2003	607,282	11,648	26,250	105,393				443,172	20,819
FY 2002	632,814	12,690	31,831	106,000				460,009	22,284
FY 2001	312,003	6,862	35,296	97,361				161,601	10,883
	\$ 16,577,448	\$ 520,158	\$ 498,390	\$ 2,017,213	\$ 161,237	\$ 1,461,413	\$ 1,130,414	\$ 9,900,745	\$ 887,877

* Interest includes prior period adjustments for gains on investment income.

** This amount represents the funds deposited for annual conservation stamp sales in each respective fiscal year. The revenue is recognized when received not when the sale actually occurs. Payments for license sales occur the month following the sale which results in a timing issue related to the actual sales within the fiscal year compared to the revenue recognized. FY12 figures have been modified to reflect revenue recognized rather than sales data reported last period.

Approximately 57% of the donations were from nonresidents and 43% from residents.

Communications & Outreach

In 2020, the Department’s statewide communications and outreach efforts on the Access Yes Program continued to highlight landowners, donations, and the program benefits to hunters and anglers. The Department created press releases and wrote feature articles throughout the year that reached 91,500 readers.

Wyoming Wildlife magazine included two articles on the Access Yes Program during 2020. In May, a news article promoted the availability of 2.6 million acres to hunters through the program in 2019. An October feature titled, “Celebrating Wyoming’s stewards of the land for 25 years” focused on landowners who provide access. The article reached 30,000 magazine readers.

With spotlights in Department e-mail newsletters, articles about the Access Yes Program were directly targeted to 1.3 million resident and nonresident sportspersons in the Monthly Hunting Update, one of the most trusted sources for Wyoming hunting information.

On social media, the Access Yes Program was the topic of 13 posts reaching 75,809 people and driving 833 visits from Facebook to the website. In total, the Access Yes webpages received 982,369 page views over the year, accounting for nearly 6.1% of all website views to the Game and Fish website.

VPA-HIP Grant

In 2020, the Department was awarded a three-year Voluntary Public Access & Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) grant from the National Resource Conservation Service. The VPA-HIP grant benefited the Access Yes Program by providing funding for hiring additional contract personnel, leasing of vehicles, signing supplies, commercial printing, and easement payments. Furthermore, the VPA-HIP grant provided funding for habitat improvements. The Department employed five contract personnel for approximately a five-month period (mid-June through mid-November) with the VPA-HIP grant providing funding for three and half months of the contract personnel time. Funds from VPA-HIP grant were also used for commercial printing of vinyl signs, used to highlight information and special rules on Access Yes enrolled properties. The funding for habitat improvement projects was utilized by the Department to conduct habitat treatments on more than 5,000 acres of private lands enrolled in the Access Yes Program. With two more years of VPA-HIP grant funding available, more habitat improvement projects will be administered in the future.

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The National Elk Refuge

The Access Yes Program has been administering permission slips for elk hunting on the National Elk Refuge (NER) since 2008 and added wild bison hunting access opportunity in 2014. The permission slip application process is on the Department's Access Yes HMA web page. Hunters from across the country are able to apply and print out their permission slips regardless of their location.



The application period starts in July and continues through the end of the elk and wild bison hunting season. There are initial draws for permission slips in September, with additional weekly alternate permission slip drawings during the hunting season in October for elk hunters and November - December for wild bison hunters. The application process is more complex than other HMAs throughout the state due to weekly drawings, but it allows hunters maximum opportunity to increase their chances of a successful hunt.

In 2020, wild bison permission slips were issued on a first-come, first-serve basis in January from the Jackson Regional Office and the NER office due to the uncertainty of the hunting closure of the NER. The NER allows hunting for wild bison through January or until the feeding of elk on the refuge begins, whichever comes first.

During the 2020 NER hunt, there were 255 permission slips issued for wild bison and 1,507 permission slips issued for elk. This is an increase of 35% from 2019 for wild bison, and an increase of 3% for elk permission slips. Harvest success for elk on the NER increased from 2019, but wild bison harvest continues to be low. At the end of 2020, approximately 350 elk and 4 wild bison had been harvested.

Additional Access Yes Programs and Services

The Access Yes Program continues to modify its programs to benefit landowners, hunters, anglers, and the Department. For example, one ongoing service is the Hunter/Landowner Assistance Program matching landowners who desire additional harvest with hunters looking for a place to hunt. This program was developed as an avenue to assist landowners who wanted increased harvest of big game animals on their private property without having to enroll in one of the existing access programs. The program operates by posting landowner contact information on the Department's website allowing hunters to contact landowners directly to secure their own access. Landowners do not receive any compensation from the Department, and all details pertaining to access to their property are arranged between the landowner and the hunter. Once a landowner obtains the desired harvest, their information can be removed from the website if requested. Landowners are added and removed throughout the hunting seasons.



For 2020, there were 72 landowners allowing access for antelope hunting, 64 allowing access for deer hunting, 20 allowing access for elk hunting, three allowing access for turkey hunting, and three allowing access for sandhill crane hunting. Participation in the program was higher for antelope, deer, and elk in 2020 than in 2019. This program has been very successful in assisting landowners while increasing hunting access. Some landowners choose not to have their information on the website during subsequent years because the number of game animals has returned to acceptable levels or they have returning hunters who provide the needed level of harvest.

Recognition of landowners who provide access is an important aspect of maintaining sportsperson/landowner relationships. The Access Yes coordinators participate as facilitators in the Access Recognition Program. This program, a joint program of the Wyoming Board of Agriculture (Board) and the Commission, recognizes landowners who provide access to or through their property to hunters and anglers. The state is divided into four quadrants, and the regional access coordinators facilitate the selection by working with the four quadrant committees to select a quadrant winner each year. The quadrant committees are comprised of Board and Commission members. Each of the four winners is recognized at the annual Wyoming Stock Growers Association winter meeting. The recipients each receive a recognition plaque and a check for \$2,000. Funding for the program is provided by Commissioner donated licenses. The four recipients of the 2020 Access Recognition Program award were: The Hellyer Family – Burnt Ranch of Lander, Miles Land and Livestock of Casper, Heward 7E Ranch of Medicine Bow, and all landowners of the Chimney Butte Hunter Management Area: Eastfork Livestock, Jensen Family, Richie Ranches, Jones Family, Hittle Family, Opler Family, and the Baker Family. Each of these families from the Chimney Butte HMA were awarded a plaque and a check for \$300.

Elk herds that exceed Commission population objectives are a major concern for landowners and the Department, and managing these populations towards objective is a high priority. The Department's main method to decrease an elk population is hunting, but hunting access on private lands remains limited in many areas of the state. To address over objective elk populations and private landowner access concerns, the Department initiated a new program in 2010 called the Hunter Management and Access Program (HMAP). The HMAP is designed to increase antlerless elk harvest at specific locations by coordinating with landowners to

allow controlled and monitored hunting access. The Department employs a Hunt Management Coordinator (HMC) to facilitate hunting by directing, monitoring, and assisting small groups of hunters as they hunt elk.

During the 2020 hunting season, an HMAP continued in the Black Hills area in Elk Hunt Area 117 and Deer Hunt Area 11. The HMC was charged with locating and monitoring elk herds, and communicating and coordinating with landowners in order to assist hunters in successfully harvesting elk. The HMC collected CWD samples and extracted teeth for aging from harvested animals. For elk hunting, the HMC concentrated on property north of Newcastle and south of Sundance and elk were harvested from August through January. The goal was to reduce elk populations on private lands experiencing damage on cultivated crops throughout the year. During the elk season, 120 HMAP hunters harvested 52 antlerless elk. For white-tailed deer hunting, the HMC had one property 30 miles south of Newcastle that allowed hunting in October and November. Sixty hunters ended up harvesting 41 white-tailed deer (bucks and does) on this property.

Aside from the elk and deer harvested, other benefits of the HMAP were realized including: 1) Hunters were very appreciative of this hunting opportunity and exhibited good hunting ethics; 2) The HMAP provided great opportunity for new hunters (youth and adults) to harvest their first elk; 3) Hunters did not contact the landowners for permission to hunt which allowed landowners to complete ranch work without worrying about hunting issues and problems; 4) Increased interaction between Department personnel and landowners improved relationships; 5) Increased hunting access due to positive landowner relations; and 6) A notable decrease in cultivated crop damage. A final report for the 2020 HMAP will be available in late March 2021.

Challenges Facing the Access Yes Program

As land ownerships continues to change and the Access Yes Program continues to expand, one big challenge it continues to face is limited personnel. Maintaining or increasing access areas while maintaining positive landowner relationships is difficult with limited personnel dedicated toward this effort. In 2018, the Department added an additional game warden in the Cheyenne area whose duties included assisting with the Access Yes Program/Laramie Region Access Yes coordinator but with personnel needed elsewhere, the position became vacant after several months, leaving it currently unfilled. As this new position has many responsibilities and demands, it resulted in minimal assistance to the Access Yes Program. Having another dedicated Access Yes Coordinator would be ideal. Additionally, with long hunting seasons and season dates overlapping between and across species, providing Department presence on the enrolled Access Yes properties is very difficult due to limited personnel.

In 2018, the Access Yes coordinators began the Access Yes Patrol Enhancement effort. This was done to increase Access Yes coordinator presence in various areas of the state during high use periods, as hunting season workloads for Access Yes coordinators vary across the state throughout the year. Seasonal contract technicians were employed during the summer and fall of 2020 to provide much needed assistance to regional access coordinators with sign maintenance and landowner/hunter/angler contacts. With expanding workloads, regional access coordinators have difficulties in adequately maintaining signs and having a presence on enrolled properties. To maintain healthy department/landowner relationships, signing and patrolling assistance from other regional personnel (game wardens/biologists) is necessary. Through our successes, and through more involvement from regional personnel, we hope to overcome this challenge.

In 2020, the Access Yes Program increased the number of upper level payment tiers providing increased payments to landowners who enrolled 5,000 acres or more in the program. This relieved some of the inequality of larger enrolled properties receiving a similar payment as smaller enrolled properties. In order to continue to benefit landowners, maintain and seek out new access opportunities, the Access Yes Program will need to continue to look for additional ways to benefit landowners who enroll in the Access Yes Program.

Each year, the Access Yes Program receives donations ranging from conservation groups and organizations to individual sportspersons. These donations vary from year to year, which in turn make it very difficult to know how much funding the program will receive. Since total payments to landowners increased in 2020 due to additional tiers in the payment structure, the flexibility to increase overall access acreage in the program and finding ways to benefit landowners who enroll in the program will continue to be an issue facing the program.



Wyoming, like so many other western states, has experienced some transition from traditional landowners to those who purchase property for their own hunting pleasure or non-consumptive uses. This typically correlates to a decrease in the amount of access hunters and anglers enjoy. Many traditional landowners charge a trespass fee or lease the hunting rights to their property as a means to supplement their income. The result is fewer people hunting and fishing private lands, which impacts wildlife management, agricultural damage, hunter success, and license sales. Additionally, increased and

expanding development (i.e. energy and subdivisions, etc.) has affected hunter access and in turn created some wildlife management issues. This is a concern for the Department and something our access programs aim to mitigate by continuing to look for ways to partner with landowners for access.

