

# Wyoming Game & Fish Department



## 2020

# Annual Law Enforcement Report

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



## State of Wyoming

Governor Mark Gordon

## Wyoming Game and Fish Commission

President Peter J. Dube, *Buffalo*  
Ralph Brokaw, *Arlington*  
Gay Lynn Byrd, *Glenrock*  
Mark Jolovich, *Torrington*  
Richard Ladwig, *Manville*  
Ashlee Lundvall, *Powell*  
Kenneth Roberts, *Kemmerer*

## Wyoming Game and Fish Department

Director Brian Nesvik  
 Deputy Director John Kennedy  
 Deputy Director Angi Bruce  
  
 Chief Game Warden Rick King  
 Deputy Chief Game Warden Scott Edberg  
 Law Enforcement Supervisor Mike Choma  
 Law Enforcement Coordinator Aaron Kerr

Message from the Chief.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Law Enforcement Organizational Chart .....	5
Statewide Region & Warden District Boundaries ....	6
Regional Law Enforcement Highlights	
Jackson .....	7
Cody .....	11
Sheridan .....	14
Green River .....	19
Laramie .....	22
Lander .....	25
Casper.....	27
Pinedale .....	30
Wildlife Investigations Unit.....	34
Large Carnivore Section.....	37
Watercraft Safety Program .....	39
State Land Enforcement.....	41
Regional Law Enforcement Statistics	
Jackson .....	42
Cody .....	42
Sheridan .....	43
Green River .....	43
Laramie .....	44
Lander .....	44
Casper.....	45
Pinedale .....	45
Wildlife Investigative Unit Law Enforcement	
Statistics .....	46
Administration Law Enforcement Statistics .....	46
Statewide Law Enforcement Statistics .....	47
Top Ten Violations.....	50
Wildlife Forensics Lab .....	52
Game Warden Applicant Testing .....	52
Game Warden Training .....	53
Stop Poaching Program.....	55
Wyoming Wildlife Protectors Association.....	55
Wildlife Violator Compact.....	55
New Legislation Affecting Law Enforcement.....	56
Awards & Recognition .....	57
Retirements .....	57
Promotions .....	57

Cover Photo: North Jackson Game Warden Jon Stephens checks fishing licenses in Soda Fork Meadows.

Visit our web page: <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/law-enforcement>

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF



Wyoming is a special place and our abundant wildlife resources play a central role in the lives of those who live, work, and recreate here. Hunters, anglers, trappers, landowners, wildlife enthusiasts, farmers and ranchers all play a vital part in the stewardship of Wyoming's wildlife. In turn, they entrust the men and women who wear the Wyoming Game Warden Badge to provide firm yet fair enforcement of the laws and regulations enacted to conserve Wyoming's wildlife.

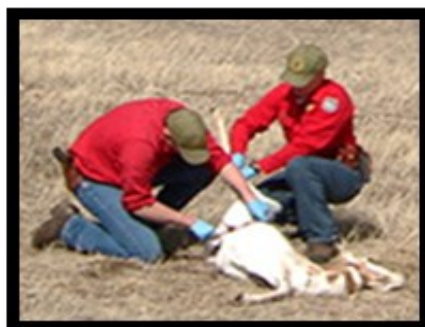
This report is a summary of the law enforcement work conducted in calendar year 2020 by your Wyoming Game Wardens. While much of the world experienced Covid-19 related stay-at-home orders, curfews, and quarantines, the work of protecting Wyoming's wildlife did not stop. Wyoming Game Wardens, with the help of other agency personnel including Office Managers, Biologists, and Lab personnel, logged over 53,000 hours and documented just over 4,100 violations. The scope of enforcement work, ranging from aquatic invasive species to furbearers and large carnivores, is indicative of the challenge Wyoming's game wardens face in their effort to protect Wyoming's rich diversity of wildlife.

I am confident that as you read this report, you will see the dedication, professionalism, and determination Wyoming Game Wardens put forth to ensure we continue to enjoy the unique Wyoming wildlife experience. It takes a special set of skills, interests, and abilities to work as a Wyoming Game Warden. The responsibility of finding the right person to wear the red shirt and protect your wildlife is one we do not take lightly. Take a minute to review the rigorous process we undertake to select the most capable individuals to serve you and conserve your wildlife. I am sure you will agree we do our due diligence. Indeed, Wyoming is a special place made so with the help of thoughtfully and carefully selected men and women who wear the badge of a Wyoming Game Warden.

This report provides you with a summary of the return on a portion of your license investments. I think you will be pleased to know the dollars you contribute for the enforcement of Wyoming's wildlife laws are well spent. Take some time to enjoy the case highlights, then head outside to continue enjoying your Wyoming wildlife experience with the assurance the conservation of your wildlife is in good hands.

Best regards,

Rick King  
Chief Game Warden



## INTRODUCTION

---

The Wyoming Game & Fish Department (Department) is responsible for the conservation and management of over 800 species of wildlife found in the state. Residents and visitors alike value Wyoming's world-class opportunities for hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing. The Department is dedicated to conserving and protecting Wyoming's wildlife to ensure these opportunities for future generations. Enforcement of wildlife laws and apprehension of wildlife violators are critical components of the Department's overall wildlife management efforts.

The Wyoming public has consistently supported the Department's law enforcement officers and programs, giving high marks to game wardens and wildlife investigators for their professionalism and dedication to their work. Department law enforcement officers investigate all types of wildlife crimes and work through the court system to ensure the successful prosecution of violators. Annually,

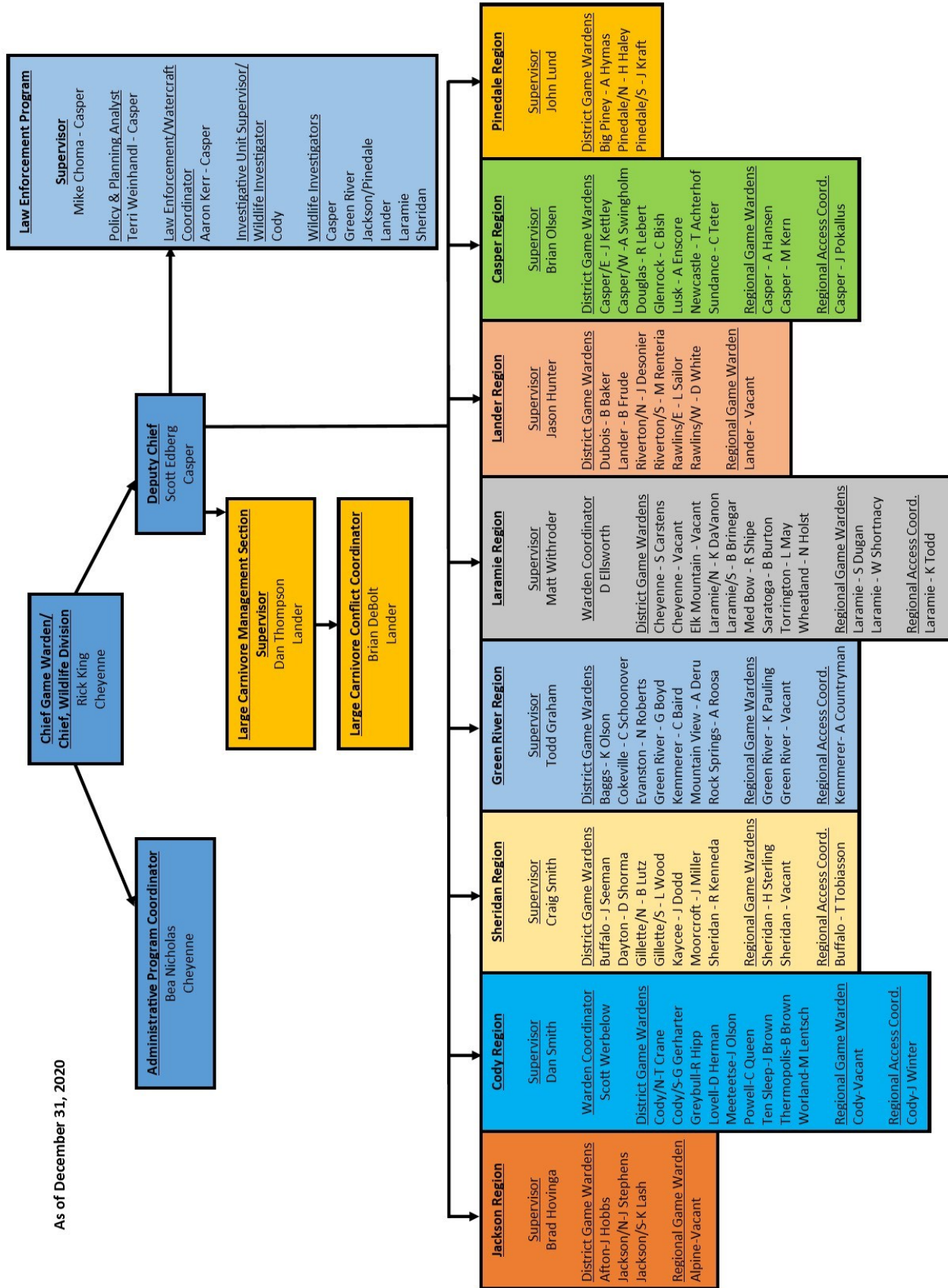
officers dedicate thousands of work hours, hundreds of thousands of vehicle miles (patrol vehicles, all terrain vehicles and snowmobiles), thousands of watercraft hours and hundreds of horseback days patrolling Wyoming's vast landscapes to enforce the state's hunting, fishing, trapping, boating and general wildlife laws. They also spend countless hours interacting with members of the public to gain support for and ensure compliance with wildlife and watercraft safety laws.

The following report details Department law enforcement efforts and highlights for calendar year 2020. It includes an organizational chart of law enforcement personnel, regional summaries, violation statistics, new game warden testing/hiring results, game warden training and new legislation affecting the law enforcement program. It also discusses Wyoming's Stop Poaching Program, Wildlife Investigations Unit efforts and other aspects of wildlife law enforcement in Wyoming.



Sheridan Region Wildlife Supervisor Craig Smith on patrol in the Bighorn Mountains. The elk died of natural causes.

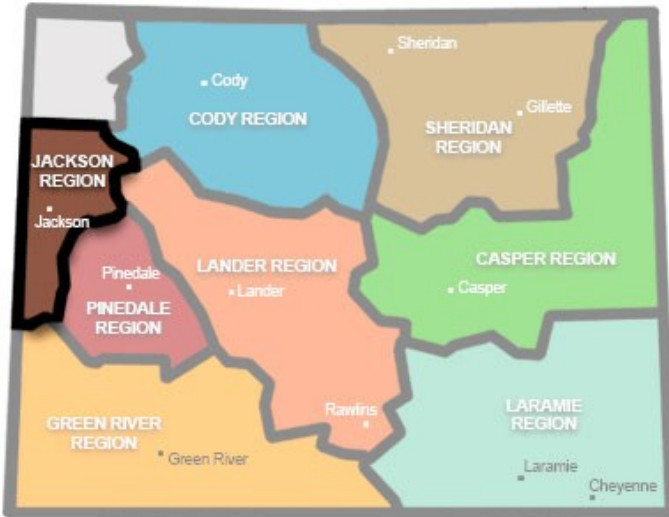
# 2020 LAW ENFORCEMENT ORGANIZATIONAL CHART





## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

### Jackson Region



### Work Unit Overview

The Jackson Region has up to five law enforcement officers, including three district game wardens, one regional game warden stationed in Alpine on occasion and one regional wildlife supervisor. In 2020, the Jackson Region did not have a regional game warden stationed in Alpine. The Jackson Region is located south of Yellowstone National Park and wardens patrol the Jackson Hole Valley, Gros Ventre Range and Star Valley, along with the Hoback and Greys River drainages. The district game wardens cover the North Jackson, South Jackson and Afton game warden districts.

### 2020 Law Enforcement Efforts

Jackson Region law enforcement officers documented 232 violations within the region in 2020. Officers issued 87 citations, 141 warnings and investigated four cases in which a suspect was never developed. Although the Jackson Region is relatively small, the game wardens in the region are extremely busy from a law enforcement perspective. In addition to fall hunting seasons, fishing enforcement, bear baiting and dealing with winter range/antler collection violations, game wardens respond to many calls for service from a diverse public with varying wildlife interests.

Game wardens in the Jackson Region spent a considerable amount of time working horseback in

remote backcountry areas and by boat/kayak on the Greys, Salt and Snake rivers. The high public use in these areas keeps wardens busy in their law enforcement efforts. Each year, game wardens detect several fishing violations in some very remote areas of the Jackson Region.

Game wardens were able to spend a significant amount of time conducting watercraft enforcement on Jackson Lake, Palisades Reservoir and the Snake River. Watercraft enforcement on Palisades Reservoir in past years was typically limited as the water level dropped and the reservoir essentially left Wyoming. However, in recent years, the Bureau of Reclamation has maintained higher water levels in the reservoir later into the summer. Wardens were able to conduct compliance checks throughout the summer and their efforts seem to be having an impact on watercraft violation rates occurring on the reservoir. Palisades Reservoir is currently the Region's most significant watercraft enforcement workload.



Wardens James Hobbs and Kyle Lash check boaters on Palisades Reservoir.

## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

---



Warden Jon Stephens surveys his district from atop an outfitter camp's bear-proof meat platform.

Wardens spent time working trapping enforcement and responding to public concerns when traps were encountered along major recreational trails on the Bridger-Teton National Forest. This year, there was a case where traps were set in close proximity to an extremely busy hiking/dog walking trailhead. The traps were investigated by the local game warden and removed after trapping violations were discovered.

Unfortunately, due to not having enough personnel statewide, the region was not able to have a game warden stationed in Alpine during 2020. The addition of this officer is extremely valuable in workload relief for other regional personnel. Having a game warden stationed in Alpine increases enforcement presence in the Region and allows district game wardens to diversify work tasks. The position also provides a significant benefit to district game wardens in dealing with damage issues and the

public at large on a daily basis. The community of Alpine is growing rapidly and the calls for service there are increasing.

The Grand Teton National Park (GTNP) elk reduction program and the elk/wild bison hunting season on the National Elk Refuge (NER) continue to be a considerable workload for law enforcement personnel in the region. This year elk harvest in GTNP and the NER increased substantially due to the early onset of snow and cold weather in the region. Wild bison harvest was extremely low in 2020 due to mild weather conditions and all wild bison harvested in 2020 were taken on surrounding United States Forest Service (USFS) lands.

Game wardens continued to invest significant effort into the enforcement of the shed antler and horn collection regulation. Game wardens detected several violations of this regulation and local winter range closures. The use of technology has provided game wardens with tools that have vastly improved chances of successfully apprehending antler regulation violators. In 2020, a discrepancy in the opening time for winter range use and antler collection time caused frustration among antler collectors, game wardens and federal land management agencies. Many antler collection violations occurred when people began collecting antlers early, but game wardens chose to issue warnings in many cases due to the confusion caused by the rules discrepancy.

### **Task Forces**

The region conducted its annual Antler Rendezvous task force in Alpine from June 20-28. The antler sale was rescheduled from the standard date in May due to COVID-19 and the NER/Boy Scout antler auction in Jackson was cancelled. This effort is designed to monitor the sale and transfer of antlers, heads, taxidermy mounts and other wildlife parts during the Antler Rendezvous. This is an excellent opportunity to work closely with participating antler dealers/vendors while issuing interstate game tags (IGT) for antlers/horns on skull plates prior to and during the weeklong event. A modest number of minor violations centering on IGT requirements were documented during the rendezvous. No major violations were detected.



## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

---



Warden Kyle Lash patrols the Snake River.

### Notable Cases

**Trapping Violations:** On December 31, Game Warden Kyle Lash received word about suspicious traps in Cache Creek in close proximity to the Hagan Trailhead. This trailhead is used extensively by hikers and dog walkers. Warden Lash responded to the area that evening with a wildlife camera and inspected the traps. That evening, he located two live traps and four leg hold traps. While inspecting the traps, Warden Lash was unable to locate any trapper ID tags, as required by law. He set a camera to watch over the site in an attempt to identify the trapper and see if they were checking their traps on time. It snowed about six inches that night, which covered any tracks in the area. Warden Lash went to the area every day to ensure no one had walked in the direction of the traps and also utilized the camera to monitor the area. After no one had checked the traps for about 90 hours, well over the 72-hour check time required by regulation, Warden Lash removed the illegal traps from the area. Over the next few days, Warden Lash followed up on a variety of leads and was able to come up with a possible suspect. In addition, he discovered a trap ID tag on the small live trap he had seized after the snow and ice melted off it. The number on the ID tag was assigned to the suspect.

On the evening of January 7, Warden Lash made contact with the suspect and they went to the Cache Creek area together to search for additional traps. The suspect explained that he had not checked his traps since around the evening of December 31,

nearly 168 hours ago. Warden Lash asked to verify the trap locations from which he had seized the traps. The suspect took Warden Lash to two traps he had missed, one leg hold and one live trap. The live trap was buried in snow and had a trapper ID tag on it. The suspect admitted he had taken a fox with his traps. The suspect was issued two citations, one for failure to check traps within 72 hours and another for failure to tag traps. He appeared in court and was sentenced to a fine of \$510, loss of trapping privileges for 18 months, and a jail sentence of 10 days.

### Antler Collection Violation:

This case is an example of a fairly common violation, but notable due to the penalty imposed by the court. In late April, a couple went for a walk in the Gros Ventre drainage on a section of national forest that was closed to human presence to protect wintering wildlife. During their walk, they found a shed elk antler and hid it from view of others, returning after dark that night to retrieve it. Collection of shed antlers in the area was closed in the area until May 1. The suspects were caught leaving the closed area with the elk antler by game wardens Jon Stephens and Kyle Lash. They were cited for collecting shed antlers on public lands during a closure. The court proceedings in this case led to one of the suspects being fined \$435 and having his hunting, fishing and trapping privileges suspended for a year. The case against the second suspect was dismissed.

### Illegally Shooting Across a Public Roadway:

During the late season cow elk hunt, a bullet struck an occupied pickup truck parked along a very busy highway north of Jackson, entering through the passenger door and lodging in the center console. Game Warden Jon Stephens worked with an NER park ranger to locate a suspect, a hunter who had fired two shots at a cow elk. The hunter admitted that one of his shots had missed the elk and was in the direction of the highway, nearly half a mile away. The officers used field ballistic techniques to compare the caliber and rifling marks on the bullet recovered from the damaged truck to the barrel of the hunter's rifle. This evidence helped the officers confirm they had the right suspect, who was cited for shooting across a public road and fined \$250.

## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Warden James Hobbs poses for a photo at the kill site of a black bear that was killed illegally in the Greys River area.

### Closed Season Black Bear:

On the evening of October 26, Game Warden James Hobbs received a text message from an informant who had seen Snapchat photos of two suspected wildlife violations. One photo showed an individual (Suspect #1) with a black bear that he claimed to have shot that day. The informant stated that the picture looked like a location up Poison Hollow or the head of Skull Creek. That location was in Bear Hunt Area 16, which closed on October 7 having reached its mortality limit. Another photo posted at the same time showed a cow elk that had been shot by Suspect #1's friend on the same hunting trip. The elk season in the area was only open to antlered elk at the time, the cow season having closed on October 17. Warden Hobbs had seen a truck belonging to Suspect #1's father parked at the pullout at Poison Hollow earlier that evening as he was headed out of the Greys River. There had been fresh snow on October 25, and both photos that were posted had fresh snow in them.

On the following day, Warden Hobbs, with the help of Dave Hyde, the Department's feed ground manager, rode horseback into the divide between Poison Hollow and Skull Creek. They found one set of horse tracks and followed them to the head of Skull Creek. They searched up a steep draw and found a fresh bear carcass from the day before. Warden Hobbs documented the kill site with a photo matching the photo of the harvested bear. Warden Hobbs continued following the horse tracks to a location that matched the photo of the cow elk with Suspect #2 in it. At that location, he found a cow elk carcass. All evidence of sex was left at the site of the kill, along with several items of trash.

After returning home with the evidence collected at the crime scenes, Warden Hobbs waited for Suspect #1 to register the black bear, which must be done within 72 hours of harvest. Suspect #1 missed the check period, so Warden Hobbs decided to interview him in Alpine. During the interview, Suspect #1 admitted to killing the bear and that he had not been wearing fluorescent orange clothing as required. He said he thought only female bears needed to be

Doubled up yesterday packing out my buddies elk was able to wack a bear.



This social media post led Warden Hobbs to the kill sites of a black bear and elk taken illegally.

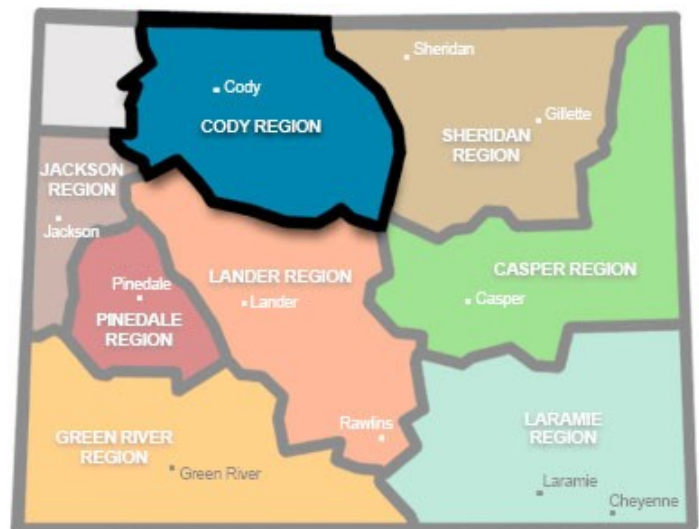
## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Warden James Hobbs at the kill site of a cow elk taken during a closed season.

citations for taking a black bear during a closed season, failing to register a bear within 72 hours of harvest, littering and failing to wear fluorescent orange clothing. Suspect #2 was issued citations for taking the wrong sex of elk, failing to purchase an elk special management stamp and littering. He was issued warnings for failing to wear fluorescent orange clothing and failing to retain evidence of sex on the elk. Between the two suspects, they were fined \$2,350. Suspect #1's hunting privileges were suspended for three years.

### Cody Region



checked in within 72 hours. Lastly, he admitted that he had left some trash at the cow elk kill site. At the time, Suspect #1 was employed as a guide for an outfitter in the Jackson area. He stated that he had looked at the bear regulation book and saw that the bear season stayed open until October 31. However, black bear seasons close when the female mortality limit is reached and hunters are responsible for calling a hotline to check an area's status prior to hunting. Suspect #1 claimed he didn't call the hotline because he was already out of cell phone coverage.

Suspect #1 stated that his friend had shot the cow elk believing it was a spike bull. They took all the meat so they thought it was fine. Warden Hobbs spoke to Suspect #2 and he admitted to shooting the elk, not having an elk special management stamp, littering, not wearing fluorescent orange and failing to leave evidence of sex on the elk. Suspect #1 was issued

### **Work Unit Overview**

The Cody Region has 12 law enforcement officers, including nine district game wardens, one access coordinator, one game warden supervisor and one regional wildlife supervisor. The Cody Region is located in northwest Wyoming and wardens patrol from the Montana state line south to Boysen Reservoir and from Yellowstone National Park east to the west slope of the Bighorn Mountains. The region includes the North Cody, South Cody, Powell, Lovell, Meeteetse, Greybull, Ten Sleep, Thermopolis and Worland game warden districts.

### **2020 Law Enforcement Efforts**

Cody Region law enforcement officers documented 386 violations within the region in 2020. Officers

## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

---



Warden Travis Crane checks elk hunters near Cody.

issued 186 citations, 182 warnings and investigated 18 cases in which a suspect was never identified. During 2020 the most common citations issued in the Cody region were for hunting on private property without permission, failing to properly tag big or trophy game animals and fishing without a license. Wardens spent the majority of their time patrolling their districts and assisting neighboring wardens with locating suspects and conducting several search/arrest warrants. The Cody Region wildlife investigator worked on several high priority cases and assisted region wardens on investigations involving search/arrest warrants.

The Cody Region has a great deal of rugged backcountry with a diverse amount of both trophy game and big game animals. Wardens spent considerable time patrolling these areas with horses and pack animals. Although often rewarding, patrolling backcountry areas can be difficult and dangerous. In addition to the dangers of law

enforcement, there is potential for inclement weather, downed trees across trails, grizzly bear encounters, horse accidents and other hazards. Wardens must be thoroughly prepared and ready to respond to these hazards as they arise.

The Cody Region continues to utilize late season antlerless elk hunting seasons for population management. These late antlerless elk seasons are needed to obtain harvest in areas that are over their population objectives and where hunter access is limited due to large numbers of elk congregating on private properties that allow no public access. Most elk seasons close on December 21, but one hunt area remained open until January 15. In these late season hunts, wardens typically deal with trespassing calls, over-limits of elk and shooting wrong sex of elk violations.

Wardens in the Cody Region have encountered an increase of issues regarding cell phone mapping apps. These apps are becoming more popular and replacing traditional GPS units. However, hunters should be aware that sometimes there are discrepancies between ownership data on these apps and county assessor records, especially for parcels with "unknown" ownership and some state land sections. Some hunters have tried to take advantage of these situations and ended up trespassing on



Two buck mule deer seized as evidence after being killed illegally near Cody.

## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

private lands. Although mapping apps and GPS units are excellent tools, hunters are ultimately responsible for hunting where there is legal access available to them.

### Task Forces

The North Fork of the Shoshone River and Buffalo Bill Reservoir continue to be popular fisheries. A portion of Buffalo Bill Reservoir is closed to fishing April 1-July 14 and the July 15 opening day of the reservoir's west end is popular among anglers. On opening day, several wardens from throughout the Cody Region patrolled the reservoir, with the goal of patrolling the reservoir in plain clothes via boat to document fishermen with over-limits of trout. Other wardens patrolled in uniform from shore checking fishermen as they came off the reservoir in their boats at all boat launching areas on the reservoir. During this task force, no over-limits of fish were detected. Overall compliance was very good and only a few minor violations were detected. Anglers and recreational boaters were generally happy to be contacted by wardens during the opener and many thanked the wardens for their efforts.

Several wardens were assigned to work the July 1 fishing opener on the North Fork of the Shoshone River. This is a very popular fishery and receives a great deal of fishing pressure on the opening day if water conditions are good for fishing. Wardens would check all fishermen for compliance from Gibbs Bridge upstream to the Yellowstone National Park boundary. This year, water conditions were not very favorable for fishing on the opener due to high runoff from snow melt. However, it should be noted that wardens in the Cody Region spent a great deal of time patrolling this stretch of water during the closed season due to the increase of people out fishing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many fishermen were recreating during the spring after being told to either work from home or stay home from work altogether. Cody Region wardens issued a higher number of citations for fishing in closed waters than in previous years.

### Notable Cases

**Trespassers Kill Two Trophy Mule Deer Bucks:** On the morning of November 14, South Cody Game Warden Grant Gerharter received a report from a

concerned landowner that he had observed someone shoot from a public road. The landowner stated that two trucks were present and that they loaded a deer in one of the trucks. The property surrounding the landowner is private so Warden Gerharter suspected a possible trespassing violation as well. Minutes later, Warden Gerharter observed the truck that was described to him as having the deer in it turn onto the Lower South Fork Road. Warden Gerharter caught up to the truck and stopped it. In the back of the truck was a large mule deer buck that was not field dressed. The mule deer season in the area had closed. The truck was occupied by a husband and wife who possessed general deer licenses. The general deer season had closed ten days earlier. Warden Gerharter accompanied the two suspects and discovered that the deer had been killed less than 20 yards from the right of way fence on private property.

The suspects admitted that their son and daughter-in-law were up the river hunting and their daughter-in-law had taken a deer the day before. Warden



Warden Grant Gerharter with a buck mule deer killed by trespassers near Cody.

## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Warden Travis Crane packs out elk antlers seized as part of an over-limit investigation in the Cody backcountry.

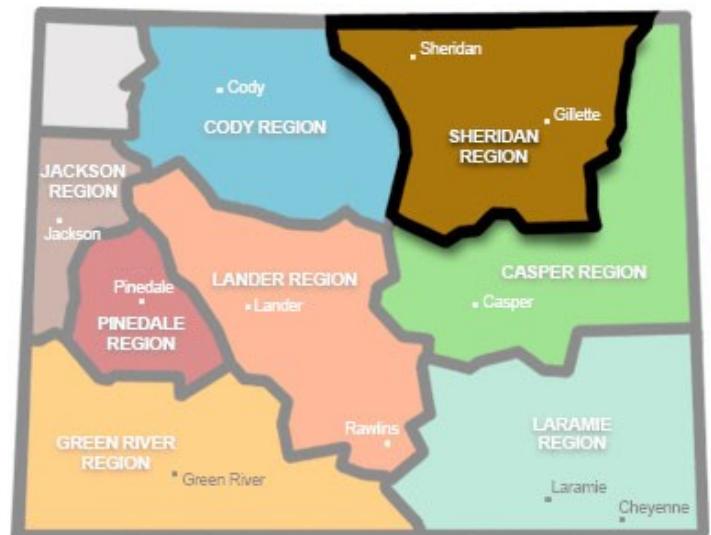
outfitter that one of his clients had shot two bull elk by mistake in a backcountry area of the Sweetwater drainage. They had packed one elk back to camp, where they were able to get a cell signal and call Warden Crane. They made plans pack out the second bull the following morning so the meat could be donated. Unfortunately, when they returned they found a grizzly bear feeding on the second bull so they were unable to retrieve it. Warden Crane met with the outfitter and his client at the trailhead to hear the hunter's side of the story. The hunter said there were three bulls in the group he was hunting and he ended up firing three shots at what he believed was the same elk. He saw it go down and when he got to the bull, he saw the second bull dead about 30 yards away. The hunter took full responsibility for killing both elk and did the right thing by turning himself in for the violation. The hunter was cited for taking an over-limit of elk and fined \$450. This case serves as an excellent example of ethical behavior by the hunter and his outfitter. Had they decided to not report the elk and simply abandoned it in the backcountry, the consequences would likely have been much more severe.

Gerharter seized the mule deer buck as evidence. The couple were able to contact their son and his wife and have them meet the wardens near the scene. When they arrived, the wardens discovered that they were also hunting with general licenses during a closed season. The wardens and all four suspects returned to the motel, where the wardens seized a second large mule deer buck from them. The daughter-in-law informed the wardens that she had harvested her deer on National Forest land, but admitted that they did not field dress the deer there. She stated they dragged the deer out whole and took it to another location to field dress it. All four suspects were charged with taking a deer out of season and the father was also charged with trespassing. They all pled guilty in court and were sentenced to total fines of \$2,280 and \$8,000 in restitution. The father also lost his hunting privileges for two years.

**Doing the Right Thing:** North Cody Game Warden Travis Crane received a report from a local

### Sheridan Region

#### Work Unit Overview



## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

The Sheridan Region has nine law enforcement officers, including seven senior game wardens, one access coordinator and one regional wildlife supervisor. This year, the region also had one game warden who attended the Wyoming Law Enforcement Academy and spent less than one month patrolling Keyhole Reservoir prior to being promoted to a district in another region. The Sheridan Region encompasses the east slope of the Bighorn Mountains, the Powder River Basin, the Rochelle Hills, portions of the Little Missouri River drainage and the western edge of the Black Hills. The region includes game warden districts in Dayton, Sheridan, Buffalo, Kaycee, North Gillette, South Gillette and Moorcroft. The regional access coordinator is stationed in Buffalo, but conducts law enforcement throughout the region as needed.

### 2020 Law Enforcement Efforts

Sheridan Region law enforcement officers documented 549 violations within the region in 2020, an increase of 108 violations from 2019. Officers issued 238 citations, 229 warnings and investigated 82 cases in which a suspect was never developed. Due to the amount of private land in the region, wardens receive regular complaints of trespassing, shooting from a public road and failure to tag violations. During the 2020 calendar year, wardens documented 62 trespass violations, 17 instances of hunters shooting from a public roadway, 20 fail to tag big game animal before leaving the site of kill and 33 violations for wasting a big game animal. The region also employs aggressive hunting seasons for doe/fawn white-tailed deer, which inherently results in the increased take of young male animals or wrong species. In 2020, wardens documented 24 violations for taking the wrong sex or wrong species big game animal. The region did not have a dedicated watercraft/fishing enforcement warden assigned at Keyhole Reservoir this year, and we observed a reduction in the number of watercraft violations documented. The Moorcroft and Gillette game wardens did patrol Keyhole on weekends and holidays, as did the Buffalo game warden at Lake Desmet. Game wardens documented 43 watercraft violations in the region during 2020. Regional efforts indicate 21 violations for failure to provide life jackets or throwable flotation device aboard watercraft, 30 violations for fishing without a license



Wardens Ryan Kenneda and Jon Desonier patrol the Tongue River by kayak.

and three violations for operating an unnumbered watercraft. The enforcement of aquatic invasive species (AIS) regulations is important in the region and statewide, and the Sheridan Region documented 15 total violations. Eleven boats were documented without an AIS decal, three boats launched without an AIS inspection and one violation for failure to stop at an AIS check station was apprehended.

### Task Forces

One task force was conducted in the region again this year to address the problem of illegal take of elk and deer in the vicinity of the Kerns Wildlife Habitat Management Area (WHMA) and is referred to as the State Line Task Force. Two-officer teams were assigned to the area during January and February of 2020. Operations were focused on nighttime and early morning hours. Wardens drove 12,000 miles and worked 700 hours during this task force. They made 65 public contacts and documented 14 violations that were addressed with 2 citations. The other 12 violations were detected but a suspect was never developed. Five poached elk carcasses and one poached deer carcass were discovered during the

## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

---



Warden Justin Dodd participates in firearms training.

task force. The State Line Task Force resulted in few detected violations given the amount of time and effort expended, however, poor communications (radio and cell phone) and the random nature of violations were identified as potential difficulties in conducting the operation. Considerable snow levels and drifting conditions made travel difficult in February. Again this year, suspects from previous documented violations were identified through the efforts of the task force participants. The information gathered and contacts made during this task force are worth the effort in order to identify and deter violations. Wardens deterred one person on the verge of shooting a large buck white-tailed deer, even though they did not apprehend the individual. In addition, task force participants assisted the Sheridan County Sheriff's Office with the discovery of a stolen pickup truck, the apprehension of three people driving a stolen truck, the investigation of a burglary and the apprehension of three other people who stole property from Wal-Mart and Home Depot in Sheridan, as suspects attempted to elude law enforcement in the task force area. Based on public comment, area landowners and the sporting public appreciate the Department's

work to address the significant illegal killing of elk and deer.

### Notable Cases

**Lesson Learned?:** On October 18, the manager of a ranch east of Sheridan observed four individuals who appeared to be hunting without permission on ranch property. He was able to photograph the license plate of their red Toyota pickup and head to a hill several miles away to get a cell signal and report what he had seen. Game Warden Ryan Kenneda met with the ranch manager for details and then went to the area where the trespassers had been seen, but they were gone.

Warden Kenneda found tire tracks in the snow, along with footprints and an impression where someone had laid prone next to the truck. He followed footprints into a ravine and found a bloody drag mark in the snow. The footprints and drag mark initially led to the deer's gut pile and then up a hill toward the road. However, the tracks doubled back down the ravine, where Warden Kenneda came upon a dead buck mule deer that had been covered with snow and brush. The deer had been shot and the bullet had passed through the carcass. Following the drag mark and blood in the snow, Warden Kenneda was able to locate the kill site. There, he was able to dig up the bullet that had passed through the deer and lodged under the snow and dirt.



Warden Dustin Shorma on patrol in the Bighorn Mountains.



## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Juvenile suspects attempted to hide this buck mule deer killed by one of them on private land without permission.

As it was getting dark, Warden Kenneda went to the address associated with the suspect vehicle registration but no one was there. Knowing that poachers often return at night to collect animals they have killed, Warden Kenneda found a spot to hide his truck near the deer and waited for the suspects to show themselves. After a long, cold night with no sign of the poachers, Warden Kenneda was able to make contact with the owner of the house he had been to the night before. The owner told Warden Kenneda that he had not been hunting deer the previous day, but his son and some friends (four youth hunters) had been. Since all four suspects were juveniles, Warden Kenneda made arrangements with their parents to interview them.

The boys explained that they had gone to a ranch where they had permission to hunt white-tailed deer. The season was open for white-tails and they had licenses, but they weren't having any luck so they decided to head east of town. They saw a nice buck mule deer and, believing the mule deer season was still open, the shooter got out of the truck, laid down

next to the road and shot it. The shooter and one of the other youth went to the deer to retrieve it. They knew they were on private land they did not have permission to hunt on, so they moved the deer out of site of the road to field dress it. As they were dragging the deer to the truck, the ranch manager came upon them and got a picture of the truck license plate. When the ranch manager left, the boys got scared and decided to hide the deer and come back for it later. When asked why he didn't come get the carcass the night he shot it, the shooter said, "I knew you would be there waiting for me." He went on to say that he was sick all night about what he had done, and he had told his football coach about it, who advised him to be honest and make things right.

The shooter in this case was issued a citation for shooting from a public road and warnings for taking a deer during a closed season and trespassing. He was fined \$250. All four of the youths will spend next summer working without pay on the ranch where the violation occurred, stretching fences and doing other ranch labor. The shooter told Warden Kenneda that these events have changed his life and he has aspirations of becoming a game warden.

**Spring Elk:** In April, Dayton Game Warden Dustin Shorma discovered a photograph online that showed a recently killed bull elk with small, velvet antlers. Other photographs accompanying the elk



Online photo (left) compared to photo taken by Warden Dustin Shorma during closed season elk investigation.

## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



A Montana game warden assisted Warden Becca Lutz with locating and seizing elk antlers as evidence in a trespassing investigation.

showed familiar terrain and Warden Shorma believed he knew where the elk was killed. Warden Shorma hiked up into the area where he believed the elk might be, and with the help of a few magpies, was able to find the kill site and remains of the elk. Comparing the online photograph with the kill site, it was very obvious to Warden Shorma he had located the same elk. Warden Shorma was able to determine that a suspect from Crow Agency, Montana was responsible for killing the young bull elk. The suspect was interviewed in Wyoming and admitted to that he killed the bull with one shot from his .243 rifle. The suspect was issued a citation for taking an elk during a closed season. The suspect never appeared at his court date and currently has an active bench warrant for failure to appear.

**Trespassing Conviction:** In mid-September, Game Warden Becca Lutz received a tip regarding a large bull elk being harvested on a small section of public land in Elk Hunt Area 129. The odds of harvesting a

trophy bull elk on a single state land section in this area are extremely low and led wardens to investigate further. Warden Lutz remembered contacting the suspect earlier in the season on a state section. Warden Lutz interviewed one of the two suspects and received a false location of the kill site, but some interesting details regarding the kill site and field dressing style eventually led to the discovery of the carcass on private land. Warden Lutz learned that the bull elk antlers, with a Boone and Crockett score of 380 1/8, had been taken to a taxidermist in Montana. Warden Lutz contacted a Montana game warden to locate the elk head at the taxidermist. Forensic evidence matched the carcass Warden Lutz discovered on private property to the head taken to the Montana taxidermist by the suspect. With the help of the Montana warden, the elk antlers were seized and returned to Warden Lutz, who cited both suspects for hunting on private land without permission. They were each fined \$450. The antlers will be used in hunter education classes in Campbell County.

**Poacher from Montana Convicted:** A poaching case involving a Wyola, Montana man was finally adjudicated in March 2020. The case began in December 2016 when Dayton Game Warden Dustin Shorma discovered a kill site along the Pass Creek Road in Sheridan County. Warden Shorma's investigation revealed that the suspect had shot a large buck white-tailed deer from the county roadway and took the whole carcass back to Montana. Evidence gathered during search warrants revealed additional wildlife violations for the suspect as well as two other individuals. The

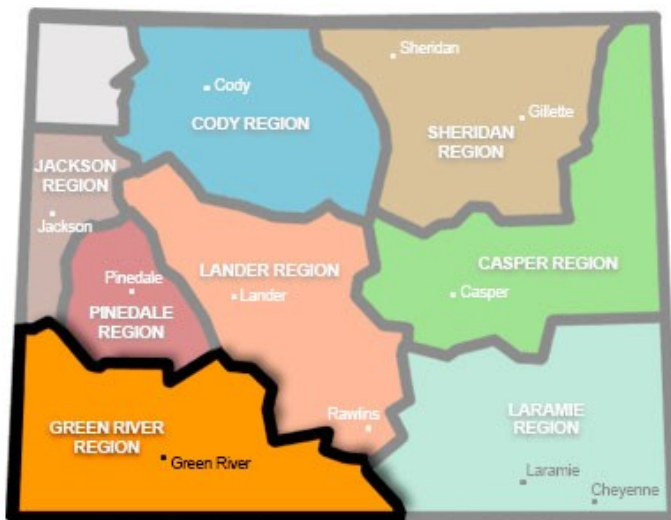


Elk and deer poached in Wyoming by Montana man.

## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

suspect poached a 6x6 bull elk in 2015, operated a spotlight to help another individual poach a bull elk in July 2016, and assisted with the poaching of a large buck white-tailed deer in November 2016. The heads were recovered and the suspect was cited for two counts of taking an antlered big game animal without a license and trespassing. As part of a plea agreement with the Sheridan County Attorney's Office, the suspect pled guilty to two charges, received a \$5,000 fine, was placed on a year of probation and received a suspended jail sentence.

### Green River Region



### Work Unit Overview

The Green River Region has 11 law enforcement officers at full staff, including seven district game wardens, two regional game wardens stationed in Green River, one access coordinator and one regional wildlife supervisor. The Green River Region covers southwest and south central Wyoming and includes the Baggs, Rock Springs, Green River, Mountain View, Evanston, Kemmerer and Cokeville warden districts. In 2020, the region started the year with one regional game warden position. There were two regional game wardens during the summer and fall, with one of those leaving the region in November. These positions focused on watercraft enforcement and safety during the summer.

### 2020 Law Enforcement Efforts

Green River Region law enforcement officers documented 421 violations. This is an increase from 2019 when violations totaled 294 and is similar to the 422 violations documented in 2018. The five-year average number of violations for 2016-20 is 449. Officers issued 145 citations, 250 written warnings and investigated 26 cases in which a suspect was never identified.

Due to a reduction in documented boating violations from 2018 (38) to 2019 (15), not including AIS violations, there was an increased emphasis placed on watercraft enforcement in the Green River Region in 2020. This increased effort focused on Flaming Gorge Reservoir, which is the largest and busiest water body in the region. The Mountain View, Green River, Rock Springs and regional game wardens participated in this effort. Wardens documented 38 boating violations. The most common violations encountered were failing to provide life jackets (13) and failing to provide a throwable flotation device (11). Wardens saw a big increase in the use of paddleboards on regional waters. Many paddleboarders were unaware of the life jacket requirement for these watercraft until informed by wardens.

Another area of focus for the Green River Region has been AIS violations. In particular, there has been a collective effort to prevent people transporting watercraft from failing to stop at AIS check stations. There are four primary AIS check stations in the Green River Region. These are located at the Evanston Port of Entry (POE), Kemmerer, Anvil Draw and Firehole. In 2020, game wardens documented 97 AIS violations, 90 of which were failing to stop at an AIS check station. This is an increase from 60 AIS violations in 2019 and the majority of these were documented at the Evanston POE, the busiest check station in the state. A task force was also used to increase enforcement at the Evanston POE check station.

Violations of the shed antler and horn collection regulation continued to be a focus for wardens in the region. In past years, wardens used a task force and fixed wing airplane to look for antler collection violators. Wardens in the region responded to

## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Warden Chris Baird on patrol in the Wyoming Range.

several reports and worked a considerable amount of time patrolling for violators. One of the biggest complaints this year was the change in the opening time to noon on May 1 for the antler collection season. In 2020, there were three violations documented, down from 11 violations documented in 2019.

### Decoy Operations

Wildlife decoys were utilized three times in the Green River Region in 2020 with one citation being issued. Game wardens deployed a mule deer decoy for three different nights on a winter range area where poaching activity had been documented. During the decoy operations, one violation was observed and a citation issued for shooting from a public roadway.

### Task Forces

Green River Region game wardens and AIS personnel planned and conducted a task force aimed at apprehending watercraft failing to stop at the Evanston POE AIS check station. The task force utilized one out-of-region officer on Memorial Day Weekend and the Pioneer Holiday weekend in July. The task force served to educate members of the public and heighten enforcement of AIS laws. During the two weekends, officers documented 23

violations for boaters failing to stop at the check station for an AIS inspection. The public in the area appreciates the extra effort put in by the Department to protect Wyoming from aquatic invasive species.

### Notable Cases

**The Uncooperative Elk:** Green River Game Warden Gary Boyd received a report on October 8 that a man had shot two elk just west of Farson and left the elk in the field. The reporting party said he witnessed a man shoot a bull and a cow elk in limited quota Elk Hunt Area 100 south of Wyoming State Highway 28. He also said he knew the man that shot the elk and the elk were still in the field. The reporting party took wardens to the scene where the two elk lay. Sweetwater Sheriff's Office Deputy David Henderson was also at the scene to assist. The witness informed the officers of what he had observed and the name of the suspect he recognized driving the truck leaving the scene. Wardens investigated the scene and salvaged the elk for donation.

The next day, wardens contacted the suspect at his residence in Farson. The suspect admitted to shooting both elk. He told the wardens that he shot the bull first and when one cow just stayed there, he asked his friend if he wanted the cow, and then he shot it. The men had general elk licenses and knew they were in limited quota Elk Hunt Area 100. The suspect said they were trying to chase the elk across the highway into the general area but when the elk did not cooperate and move in the right direction, he just decided to shoot both elk. He then saw another



Warden Kim Olson patrols High Savery Reservoir near Baggs.

## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Warden Cody Schoonover with elk antlers seized during a poaching investigation.

truck in the area and was afraid they would turn him in for being in the wrong area so he drove off and left the elk in the field. The suspect also admitted to shooting from the truck. The second suspect confirmed what had happened and admitted he was going to tag the cow with his general license.

The primary suspect in this case was cited for taking a bull elk without a proper license, taking an over limit of elk, and shooting elk from a vehicle. The second suspect was cited for accessory to taking an over-limit of elk and accessory to taking a cow elk without a proper license. The primary suspect pled guilty to taking a bull elk without a proper license and was fined \$5,070 and ordered to pay \$6,000

restitution to the Game and Fish Access Fund. He also had his hunting and fishing privileges suspended for five years and was placed on 12 months unsupervised probation. In addition, he also pled guilty to shooting from a vehicle and was placed on 12 months unsupervised probation concurrent with the first charge. The second suspect pled guilty to accessory after the fact to taking a cow elk without a proper license. He was ordered to pay \$70 court cost and \$6,000 restitution to the Game and Fish Access Fund. He also had his hunting and fishing privileges suspended for five years and was placed on 12 months unsupervised probation. All other charges were dismissed.

**Coyote or Bobcat?:** On December 12, Kemmerer Game Warden Chris Baird received a call from a landowner reporting that a group of men had trespassed on his land to take a bobcat. The landowner had observed a truck stopped on the county road and two people on foot in his pasture. He observed another truck coming up the road when the individuals returned to their vehicle and continued west. The landowner went to the place where he saw the truck stopped and followed tracks in the fresh snow of two individuals leading to a bobcat. The bobcat had been shot but was still alive. The landowner called Warden Baird to report the incident. Warden Baird asked him to put the bobcat down and leave it there.

Warden Baird responded to the area and stopped a truck matching the description the landowner had given. He identified three young men in the vehicle and interviewed them. The men told Warden Baird that not long after they had turned onto this road they spotted what they thought was a coyote north of the road in a pasture. The suspect who shot the bobcat told him that the scope on the rifle was not very good and that he honestly thought he was shooting at a coyote. The suspect also admitted to shooting from the road. The suspect stated that they left the road and crossed the fence to retrieve the bobcat. He said the bobcat was still alive and they had some difficulty dragging it back toward the truck because it was acting aggressive. They realized they might be in trouble for shooting a bobcat, so when they saw another truck coming they decided to abandon the bobcat and leave the area.

## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

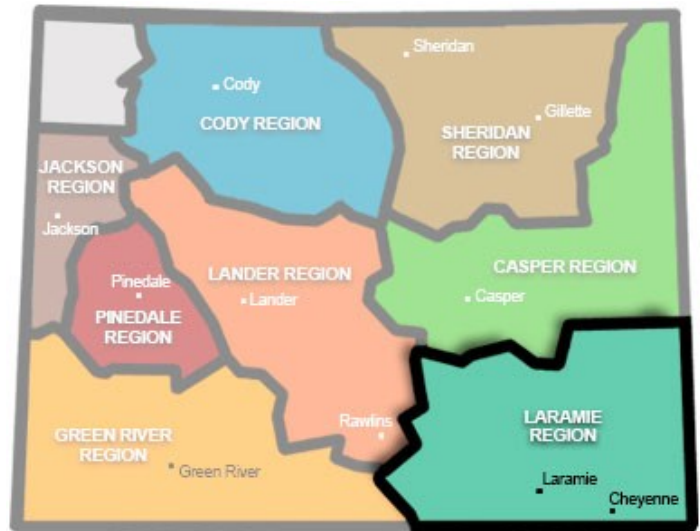


Warden Andy Roosa on winter patrol.

Warden Baird called the landowner to confirm the suspects' story. The landowner told Warden Baird that his brother had returned to where the bobcat had been and saw that it was gone. There were drag marks and blood leading to the surface of the county road. Warden Baird asked the suspects about this and they told him the bobcat was in the back of the truck. They opened the tailgate and bed cover, and showed him the bobcat covered in backpacks and gear. The suspects admitted that after they left the bobcat, they had continued west hunting coyotes, but soon turned around and went back to retrieve the bobcat.

None of the three men had furbearer licenses. All were cooperative and polite throughout the contact and apologized to the landowner for trespassing on his property. The young man that shot the bobcat was issued citations for shooting from the road, hunting on private property without permission and taking a bobcat without a license. The young man driving the vehicle who had helped retrieve the cat was cited as an accessory to the latter two violations. Both men pled guilty and paid over \$2,000 in fines.

### Laramie Region



### **Work Unit Overview**

The Laramie Region has 13 law enforcement officers, including eight district game wardens, two regional game wardens, one access coordinator, one game warden supervisor and one regional wildlife supervisor. The Laramie Region covers southeast Wyoming, including the eastern Sierra Madre Mountains, Snowy Range, Shirley Basin, Laramie Range and eastern plains to the Nebraska state line. The region includes game warden districts in Cheyenne, Torrington, Wheatland, Medicine Bow, North Laramie, South Laramie, Elk Mountain and Saratoga. In addition, the two regional game wardens were assigned to Glendo and Laramie throughout the year.

In 2020, the Laramie Region experienced significant turnover in personnel, specifically in the Cheyenne, North Laramie, and Wheatland game warden districts, the regional access coordinator, the game warden supervisor (new position), and regional game warden positions. The region had one enforcement position (Cheyenne Headquarters game warden) vacant this year due to personnel constraints. Some of these game warden positions were vacant for several months throughout the year.

### **2020 Law Enforcement Efforts**

Laramie Region law enforcement officers documented 804 violations, issuing 212 citations,

## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

---

570 warnings and investing 22 violations in which a suspect was never developed or charged. The region's game wardens have a diverse enforcement workload demonstrated by the array of violations documented. Laramie Region officers recorded 120 watercraft and 148 AIS violations. Fishing opportunities abound in the region, as evident in the 110 total sport fish related violations documented. Of the sport fish violations documented, 55% (61) were fishing without license violations. Big game populations in the region are generally stable to increasing and wardens remained busy during the lengthy big game seasons. In 2020, 63 violations were associated with pronghorn, 56 violations were associated with elk, 67 violations were associated with mule deer, and 14 violations were associated with white-tailed deer. These four big game species accounted for 26%, sport-fishing violations accounted for 14%, AIS violations accounted for 19%, and watercraft violations accounted for 15% of the region's total violations. In addition to these violations, Laramie Region game wardens and wildlife investigators continue to investigate several open cases involving big game animals and multiple suspects. Charges are pending in several of these cases.

### Task Forces

The Laramie Region conducted two task force projects during the year. Officers from outside the region assisted with fishing enforcement in the Snowy Range Mountains. The Snowy Range contains dozens of high mountain lakes and receives significant fishing pressure during the short summer season. In addition, two mountain reservoirs, Lake Owen and Rob Roy Reservoir, are popular summer fishing destinations. The Snowy Range Task Force focused on these lakes and reservoirs for three weekends in July, beginning targeted enforcement Friday-Sunday. During each time period, one officer patrolled from a pickup and on foot, working primarily in plain clothes. The task force officers documented 26 violations, including 19 for fishing without licenses, two for false statement to procure a fishing licenses, two for failure to provide life jackets aboard watercraft, one for waste of game fish, one for failure to purchase a conservation stamp and one for failure to purchase an AIS program decal.

The Laramie Region is home to several high profile mule deer herds. Effective management requires an effective enforcement program. Again this year, the Laramie Region requested assistance from outside region officers to assist in patrolling mule deer winter ranges in the South Laramie and Saratoga game warden districts. Patrols focused enforcement efforts in November when mule deer are most susceptible to illegal harvest. These officers concentrated their patrol efforts on winter ranges near the Wyoming/Colorado border. Task force officers documented two violations, one for failure to tag a big game animal and one for taking a deer during a closed season. The region considers the task force a valuable deterrent and worth the investment in time and personnel to protect wintering wildlife.

### Notable Cases

**Elk Over-limit:** On September 10, Wheatland Game Warden Nate Holst received a call about two cow elk carcasses thought to be wasted. Warden Holst investigated both elk, noting there were no waste violations, but noticed the proximity to the road where the elk were laying. Warden Holst began investigating tire tracks and other evidence, when another vehicle stopped to talk with Warden Holst and Game Warden Supervisor Ellsworth. During the conversation, Warden Holst noticed the



Warden Luke May leads Laramie Region wardens in firearms training.

## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Warden Sarah Dugan with a successful elk hunter in the Snowy Range.

vehicle tires were the same as the tire impressions he was investigating. The driver of the vehicle admitted he and his wife both harvested these elk the day before, advising they had each shot an elk.

Two days later, Warden Holst and Game Warden Supervisor Ellsworth interviewed the husband about his elk hunt. The suspect eventually confessed to shooting both cow elk, as his wife was not present with him at the time. In addition, the suspect shot both elk from the roadway, and then utilized his wife's elk license to cover the additional elk. The public land where this occurred was closed to hunting at the time. The suspect was issued a citation for taking an over limit of big game and warnings for shooting from a roadway, transfer of license, and hunting big game during a closed season. The suspect was fined \$450 and the additional elk was seized so the meat could be donated.

**Stateline Mule Deer:** On November 18, Laramie Game Warden Sarah Dugan was patrolling the Colorado/Wyoming state line south of Laramie. During this timeframe, Wyoming mule deer seasons were closed, but Colorado deer seasons were open. Warden Dugan noticed a truck with a mule deer buck in the bed traveling north into Wyoming. In

talking with the hunters, they advised they had been hunting in Colorado, had just harvested the buck mule deer and were heading home through Wyoming. Warden Dugan asked the hunters to verify the kill site to ensure it was in Colorado. The hunters took Warden Dugan to the site of the kill, which was confirmed to be in Wyoming. The suspect was issued a citation for hunting during a closed season and the deer was seized and donated. The suspect pled guilty and was fined \$850 for the violation.

**Kentucky Deer in Wyoming:** On November 20, Laramie Game Warden Sarah Dugan received a call from Wyoming Highway Patrol asking for her assistance with a traffic stop on I-80 east of Laramie. Warden Dugan responded and met the state trooper, who had stopped a vehicle from Utah for traffic violations and discovered two men transporting 8-10 deer in three coolers. The Utah men made several inconsistent statements to the officers about the number of deer in the vehicle and who had killed them. The men indicated they had been hunting in Kentucky with four of their friends from Utah, who had flown home. Warden Dugan and a wildlife investigator escorted the two Utah men to the regional office and began to piece together the deer parts. The meat added up to 10 deer, except for two missing hind quarters and a missing tenderloin. The



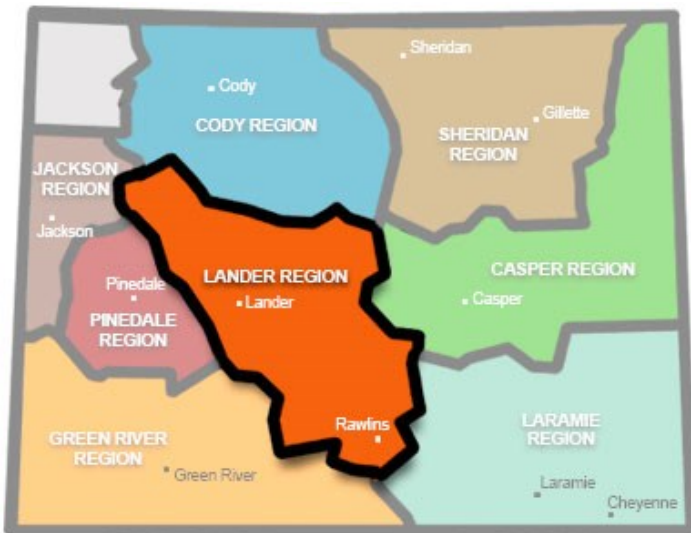
A traffic stop made by a Wyoming state trooper led to the discovery of several violations related to deer killed in Kentucky.



## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Utah men claimed that all of the deer were legally harvested in Kentucky, but they were not able to produce any Kentucky licenses. The wardens contacted a Kentucky conservation officer and were able to confirm that all six individuals from Utah possessed the appropriate licenses for the deer. Kentucky has similar tagging requirements as Wyoming and all of the deer carcasses should have been tagged individually with a license. The driver was charged with one count of transporting untagged game meat in Wyoming and was fined \$150.

### Lander Region



### Work Unit Overview

The Lander Region has seven law enforcement officers, including six district game wardens and one regional wildlife supervisor. District game wardens are stationed in Dubois, North Riverton, South Riverton, Lander, West Rawlins and East Rawlins. The Lander Region is located in central Wyoming and wardens patrol from the Red Desert north to the Owl Creek Mountains and from the Gas Hills west to the Wind River Range and southern Absaroka Mountains.

### 2020 Law Enforcement Efforts

Lander Region law enforcement officers documented 348 violations within the region in 2020. Officers issued 99 citations, 179 warnings



Wardens traverse the rugged road into Shoshone Lake during a “plain clothes” task force to address violations of a fishing closure.

and investigated 70 cases in which a suspect was never developed or charged. The Lander Region focused efforts on issues ranging from illegal antler collection in Dubois to deer shot and left near Riverton and Crowheart. The region also focused on watercraft and fishing enforcement on Boysen and Seminoe reservoirs as well as several other smaller bodies of water and high mountain lakes. Progress was made in these areas using task force operations and coordinating with the region’s wildlife investigator.

### Task Forces

The Lander Region conducted one task force using out-of-region officers this year to focus on backcountry fishing violations near Lander. Over the past several years, there have been reports of individuals fishing during a closure on Shoshone Lake (September 1-June 14). In the second year of this task force, plain-clothes officers using ATVs patrolled Shoshone Lake watching for fishing activity during the closure. Three individuals were contacted with a citation and a warning issued.

## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Wardens participate in an annual parade in Rawlins.

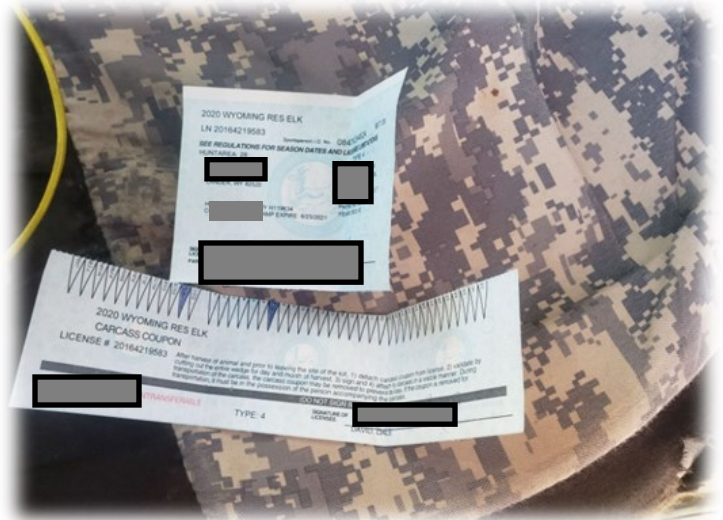
Department personnel placed three closure information signs in 2019; one at the parking/loading area, one near the forest boundary along the Shoshone Lake Road, and one at the Shoshone Creek inlet. It is believed these signs continued to help alleviate some of the violations that had been reported in previous years.

### Notable Cases

**The Shoshone Lake Bandit:** On September 5, game wardens working a task force to enforce the fishing closure on Shoshone Lake received a report from a member of the public that who had seen two youths carrying fishing poles around the lake. Later that afternoon, the wardens contacted a man and two children along the Shoshone Lake Road carrying fishing poles and other gear. The wardens questioned the man, a Wyoming resident, and he admitted to fishing in the closed area. The man acknowledged that he read the signs on the way to Shoshone Lake indicating the area was closed to fishing, but he and his kids decided to fish anyway. They did not have any fish in possession and claimed that they had not caught anything that day. In addition to fishing in a closed area, the man did not have a valid fishing license. He was cited for fishing without a license and issued a warning for fishing in a closed area. He was fine \$250.

**Elk Over-limit:** On November 10, Lander Game Warden Brady Frude received a tip that a local

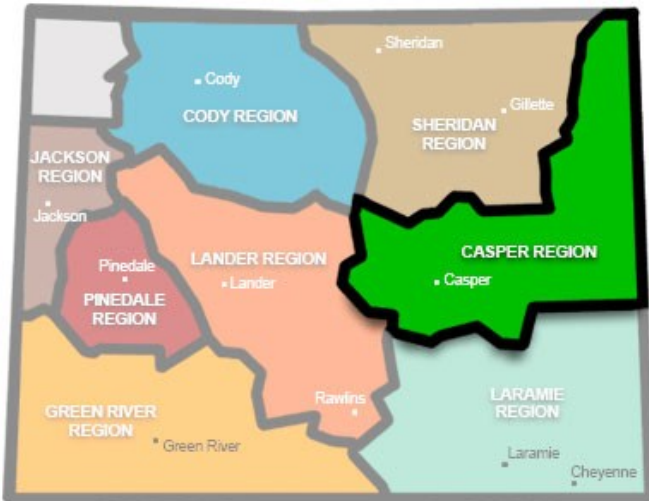
Lander man was elk hunting after already filling his license the weekend prior. Warden Frude responded to the area and contacted the suspect who, when asked, produced a cow/calf elk license which had the carcass coupon detached, dated and signed and the landowner coupon removed. The suspect told Warden Frude that he had shot at a cow elk a few days prior and had validated the coupon because he thought he had been successful. Furthermore, he stated he gave the landowner coupon to the landowner whose property he had been hunting prior to discovering he was “unsuccessful.” Warden Frude contacted the landowner and confirmed his suspicions that the suspect had indeed harvested an elk the weekend prior and learned the landowner had witnessed him pack out half of it. Warden Frude was able to locate a meat processor in Riverton who had taken the suspect’s elk in as well. When confronted with these facts the suspect admitted he had shot at and wounded a cow elk the week prior, but had failed to recover it until the following day. He claimed coyotes had scavenged a portion of the cow elk and by the time he took it to the processor it had soured. He figured the coyotes had “taken” that elk so he decided to fill his tag again. The suspect was issued a citation for attempting to take an over-limit of elk, to which he pled guilty in Fremont County Circuit Court and was fined \$220.



Example of a common tagging violation. The harvest date has been colored in with a pen rather than cut out as required.

## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

### Casper Region



Game wardens are briefed in preparation for serving a search warrant during a poaching investigation.

### **Work Unit Overview**

The Casper Region consists of 11 law enforcement officers, including seven district game wardens, two regional game wardens stationed in Casper, one access coordinator and one regional wildlife supervisor. The Casper Region is located in east-central Wyoming and game wardens patrol from the Rattlesnake Hills and southern Big Horn Mountains east to the Nebraska state line, along with a portion of the Thunder Basin National Grasslands and the Black Hills. District game wardens are stationed in Glenrock, Douglas, Lusk, Newcastle, Sundance and two in Casper.

### **2020 Law Enforcement Efforts**

In 2020, Casper Region law enforcement officers documented 1,074 violations. Officers issued 418 citations, 606 written warnings and investigated 49 cases in which a suspect was never identified. The Casper Region continues to place emphasis on watercraft safety, fishing violations and boating under the influence (BUI) enforcement on Alcova, Pathfinder and Glendo reservoirs and on the North Platte River. Enforcement efforts on these bodies of water have the goal of increasing safe boating and reducing the potential for boating-related injuries and deaths. Casper Region game wardens contacted hundreds of families and over a thousand people recreating on the water during the summer boating season. Game wardens documented 339 violations

in the region through their watercraft enforcement efforts. Of these, 208 were watercraft violations, 91 were AIS violations and 40 were fishing violations. Six arrests for BUI were made by game wardens during the boating season. Several other operators were put through preliminary BUI testing and were subsequently found to be within legal limits to operate their watercraft. Although game wardens detected alcohol on 17% of contacts made during summer boating season, most boats utilized a sober operator. Because of the potential for a deadly boating accident, BUI enforcement remains a high priority for Casper Region wardens.

During the summer boating season, game wardens responded to one reported watercraft accident and assisted the Natrona County Sheriff's Office with seven search and rescue operations. One of the search and rescues was on Goldeneye Reservoir where game wardens responded to a call of a drowning man and stranded boat. Game wardens responded along with the Natrona County Sheriff's Office, Casper Fire-Rescue, Casper EMS and Bureau of Land Management rangers. While attempting to load his boat on a windy day, an adult male lost control of the dock-line and the boat containing his wife and infant child began to drift out into the open lake. There were no life jackets on board the boat. The woman was unable to start the

## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Warden Austin Swingholm patrols Alcova Reservoir.

boat so the man stripped off his clothes and tried to swim out after the boat without a life jacket. He began to struggle but was able to make it to shore on his own at the same time responding units arrived. While the man was being evaluated by EMS, game wardens launched a boat to rescue the woman and child who were stranded on the boat. The woman and child were rescued uninjured, but due to adverse weather, the boat could not be recovered that day.

Game wardens provided informal on-site watercraft safety awareness during contacts with the public. Game wardens also participated in the cooperative children's life jacket awareness program offered between the Department and Sloanes General Store, which provided children 12 and under a free ice cream cone every time they were "caught" wearing their life jacket. Additionally, the Respect Our River organization donated life jacket loaner stands to be placed along the North Platte River and at Alcova Reservoir and Pathfinder Reservoir. The Department, along with other agencies, donated numerous life jackets to each stand. These stands showed to be useful by the amount of life jackets seen borrowed each weekend.

### Decoy Operations

A white-tailed deer decoy was deployed during the fall in Crook County. Game wardens placed a decoy because of the increased number of complaints from

homeowners concerning hunting in closed areas and shooting from the road. More than 30 vehicles passed the decoy during the operation, and although several stopped, no one committed violations by shooting from the public road in the closed area.

### Task Forces

The Casper Region conducted its annual Alcova July 4 task force, which included six Casper Region game wardens and one additional warden from the Cody Region. These seven wardens worked Alcova and Pathfinder Reservoirs as well as the North Platte River over the July 2-5 holiday weekend. The task force recorded approximately 450 public contacts and 53 violations, including two arrests for BUI. Game wardens on the task force also assisted local law enforcement officers on several occasions, including a serious medical emergency at Pathfinder Reservoir.

The Casper Region also conducted a July 4 law enforcement task force at Glendo Reservoir. This task force documented numerous violations again this year. Seven game wardens recorded 29 violations and over 100 boat contacts. Severe weather, which included heavy rain and winds,



Wardens Rod Lebert and Matt Lentsch talk to boaters at Glendo Reservoir.

## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Warden Mitchell Kern with ducks and geese killed during a closed season.

occurred each afternoon. The total number of BUI arrests on Glendo since the first task force operation in 1996 has decreased dramatically. The increased law enforcement presence during the July 4 holiday has resulted in fewer boats with alcohol on board and more boats having designated operators.

### Notable Cases

**Four Elk Shot with a Rifle During Archery Season:** In early September during the special archery season Casper Game Wardens Mitchell Kern and John Pokallus were dispatched to a Stop Poaching call where two archery hunters observed someone shoot an over-limit of cow elk with a rifle during a special archery season. The archery hunters were on the south side of a draw stalking the elk roughly 60 yards from the herd when they heard the suspect start shooting. The archers observed the shooter fire his rifle at the herd of elk 12 times in three different locations in the draw. When the shooting stopped, the suspect went to a downed cow elk and began to field dress it. From their vantage point, the archers could see three more elk down, so they went to the shooter and told him about them.

A short time after they received the call, the wardens were advised by a dispatcher that the suspect had also called the Stop Poaching Hotline. He was

distraught and told the dispatcher that he had really messed up. The dispatcher advised the suspect to care for the elk and wait for the wardens to arrive. When interviewed at the scene, the suspect had two licenses valid for antlerless elk in the hunt area. He told the wardens that he had misread the special archery season dates in the regulation book and thought that the September dates were open for hunting with a firearm. The suspect knew he had shot two elk, but did not know he had shot the other two until the archery hunters pointed them out to him.

The suspect was cited for taking an over-limit of elk, hunting elk during a closed season, hunting with a firearm during a special archery season and failing to make a reasonable effort to retrieve big game. The elk were all processed and donated to several needy families in the Casper area. Wyoming's First Lady, Jennie Gordon, is the founder of the Wyoming Hunger Initiative and partnered with Dan's Meats in Casper to help pay for the processing through the Food from the Field program. The suspect paid fines over \$2,000, paid \$6,000 in restitution, and lost his hunting privileges for two years. This case was made because of hunters taking time out of their own hunt to report these violations.

### Hunter Shoots Trophy Deer, Then Buys License:

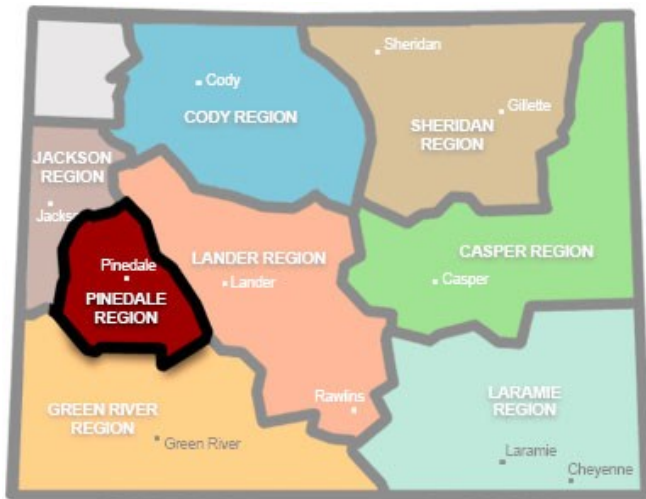
Lusk Game Warden Andy Ensore received a call from a concerned citizen informing him that a woman had killed a trophy 5x5 buck white-tailed deer on a general license in an area that had been closed to general deer hunting for almost a month. After meeting with the suspect, Warden Ensore found out she shot the buck deer outside of Lingle and then drove to Lusk to drop it off at the meat processor. Warden Ensore advised her that the deer season was still open in the Lingle area for white-tailed deer but she would have needed a limited quota type 3 license to legally kill the deer. Further investigations by wardens determined that the deer was killed on private land near Lingle but the suspect had not purchased her general deer license until after she killed the deer.

Wardens conducted multiple interviews with the suspect and other witnesses to determine the timeline of how the suspect could have purchased a

## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

deer license in Lingle, killed and loaded the deer, and driven to the Lusk meat processor within one hour. She said she was in a hurry and that she honestly did nothing wrong. The investigation determined that the suspect shot the deer and later purchased the license on her way to take the deer to the Lusk meat processor. The suspect was charged with intentionally taking an antlered deer without a license. She was fined \$5,000, paid \$4,000 in restitution and had her hunting privileges suspended for three years.

### Pinedale Region



### Work Unit Overview

The Pinedale Region has four law enforcement officers, including three district game wardens and a regional wildlife supervisor. The region is in western Wyoming and covers Sublette County from the west slope of the Wind River Range to the east slope of the Wyoming Range. The Pinedale Region includes the North Pinedale, South Pinedale and Big Piney warden districts. The regional wildlife supervisor and the Green River access coordinator also assist with enforcement efforts in the region.

### 2020 Law Enforcement Efforts

Pinedale Region law enforcement officers documented 173 violations in 2020. Officers issued 75 citations, 90 warnings and investigated eight cases in which suspects were not identified. The



Warden Adam Hymas patrols the Green River.

region is home to a very diverse wildlife and aquatic resource with high desert habitat as well as three major mountain ranges and several cold-water lakes, streams and river systems. Law enforcement efforts vary depending on the season. Typical enforcement duties include desert and front country small and big game enforcement, watercraft, fishing and backcountry patrols.

Late fall and winter enforcement efforts included mule deer winter range patrols, monitoring trapping activity, and patrolling the antler hunting season closure and WHMA closures. Antler hunting complaints continue to increase as more people become interested in the activity. Wardens receive many reports of illegal antler hunting activity every year, however many of the reports are vague and only report suspicious activity. Apprehending violators can be difficult and wardens continue to explore new ways to effectively and efficiently detect and apprehend violators. A team approach involving the region's entire enforcement staff as well as the assistance of other local agencies has proven effective and as a result compliance was good in 2020, although some violations were documented.

In addition to antler hunting enforcement, wardens focused attention to black bear bait compliance checks in the spring. Summer efforts were focused on fishing and watercraft enforcement on lakes and

## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Law Enforcement Coordinator Aaron Kerr checks an antelope hunter during the fall hunting season.

rivers, including backcountry fishing enforcement. Several typical fishing violations were detected, both on Pinedale area lakes and rivers, as well as in remote backcountry areas. Angler use continues to increase on the Green and New Fork rivers, resulting in the need for increased law enforcement efforts. The use of drift boats and kayaks to patrol local rivers has resulted in increased effectiveness and efficiency in fishing enforcement. While the region has several large lakes, recreational watercraft activity is minimal compared to other areas in Wyoming. Cold water temperatures discourage water skiing and personal watercraft activity, so documented watercraft violations remain low compared to other regions. Enforcement of AIS regulations remains a priority in the region and four violations were documented in 2020.

Reduced deer population numbers from the 2016-2017 and 2019-2020 winters combined with mild conditions throughout the fall made hunting difficult again in 2020. The mild fall conditions also delayed deer and elk movements toward winter ranges, reducing late season vulnerability to harvest, which resulted in a below average number of violations

detected. Several cases resulted from hunters turning themselves in after accidentally harvesting the wrong sex or over-limits of big game animals. This trend in self-reporting is encouraging. Compliance with Elk Special Management Permits improved significantly in 2019, with only six violations documented, however an increase in violations was again noted in 2020, and 25 violations were documented.

COVID-19 health orders throughout the country resulted in a significant increase in recreational activity in the region, especially in the Bridger Wilderness Area. While unprecedented numbers of people from around the country visited the Pinedale area throughout the entire summer and into fall, there did not seem to be a significant increase in violations related to the increased human activity.

### Task Forces

An annual mule deer winter range enforcement task force has been ongoing in the region for over 20 years and continued in 2020. The number of documented violations and suspects apprehended tends to fluctuate from year to year. Few violations have been documented over the last several years, indicating its success in deterring many potential violators. The task force involves personnel from around the state, who each spend four to five days in the region throughout November and into mid-December. This task force remains very important to the public and continues to have significant public support. One mule deer was illegally taken in December south of Pinedale. Its head was removed and the carcass was stashed inside a culvert. No suspects have been identified as of early January. With only one case, this is encouraging and can be attributed to years of consistent enforcement coverage and engagement with the public. Due to its success, as well as public concern for mule deer in western Wyoming, this task force will continue well into the future.

### Notable Cases

**Bondurant Deer Case:** Excellent attention to detail by a concerned informant, and teamwork with other agencies were critical in the successful outcome of a case involving an illegal deer. On September 19 North Pinedale Game Warden Bubba Haley received

## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

---



Wardens investigated this “gut shot” elk that an archery hunter was unable to find after shooting it.

a report of a possible deer hunting violation in Tosi Creek east of Hodges Peak in Deer Hunt Area 141. The informant stated he heard a gunshot around 7:30 that morning, but couldn't locate the shooters. Knowing deer season was closed there, he contacted Warden Haley. The informant had observed an adult male and juvenile male in full camouflage in that area the day before, and had seen horses at the head of Dell Creek two days earlier. The informant provided Warden Haley a description of the suspects, as well as the horses, including unique brands on two of them. Warden Haley contacted a local brand inspector who determined it was an Idaho brand belonging to an individual from the Montpelier, Idaho area.

A search of the Department license database showed the same person had received a nonresident Region H deer license. Warden Haley located a truck and horse trailer registered to the suspect at a trailhead near Bondurant. The following day, Haley contacted the suspect and his young son as they returned to the trailhead. The man admitted to shooting the buck in Tosi Creek in Deer Hunt Area 141, which was closed at the time. He did not have a resident guide while hunting in the wilderness and had not been wearing orange while hunting. He was cited for hunting in the wrong area and hunting in a wilderness area without a guide. He was also issued

a warning or not wearing hunter orange while hunting. He was fined \$400 for the violations.

**Scab Creek Antler Hunting:** On April 15, a resident of Boulder was apprehended during patrol efforts for multiple antler collection violations. The suspect had hiked several miles through private property without permission and had collected a dozen elk antlers on and around the Scab Creek elk feed ground during the seasonal human presence closure. The suspect was apprehended while exiting the area under the cover of darkness. The suspect was convicted of violating the antler collection regulation and the Sublette County Circuit Court Judge imposed an \$805 fine (the monetary market value of the illegally collected antlers) and suspended the suspect's hunting privileges and the ability to collect antlers for a period of two years. The suspect was also charged by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for violating the seasonal human presence closure on the Scab Creek elk feed ground located on BLM lands.

**Antelope Over-limit and Waste:** A case involving two California suspects committing multiple big game violations while hunting antelope in the Boulder area was recently finalized. The case began when a landowner reported a shot and left buck antelope and doe antelope on their property in August during a special early doe/fawn private land only hunting season. Investigation and interviews by Game Warden Jordan Kraft identified an elderly man accompanied by a youth, both with licenses for the special season, as the suspects responsible for the crime. The youth suspect had mistakenly killed a buck antelope while firing several times into a group of running antelope while attempting to harvest a doe. The youth suspect quickly exited the area and crime scene after learning of his mistake. Unbeknownst to the youth suspect, he had also killed a doe antelope in the volley of shots but never followed up due to fear of the consequences associated with the dead buck. The youth suspect asked for counsel from the elderly suspect on how to handle the situation and the elderly suspect advised that it was best to just leave the buck antelope where it laid and to not tell anyone. The two suspects continued to hunt for the next few days and eventually filled all of their doe/fawn licenses, but



## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

illegally allowed each other to take antelope on licenses not issued to them. The youth suspect was charged with taking the wrong gender of big game, waste of big game and taking an over-limit of big game. The elderly suspect was charged as an accessory to taking an over-limit of big game, accessory to waste of big game and failing to properly tag big game. The youth suspect was fined \$55 and placed on probation and had all hunting privileges suspended for two years. The elderly suspect who counseled in covering up the violations was fined \$915 and ordered to pay restitution of \$3,000 to the State of Wyoming for the value of the antelope. The elderly suspect also had all hunting privileges suspended for a period of three years.



Wardens and biologists participate in horse training in Meeteetse.

## WILDLIFE INVESTIGATIONS UNIT

### Work Unit Overview

The Wildlife Investigations Unit (WIU) is comprised of six wildlife investigators stationed at the Casper, Green River, Lander, Laramie, Jackson and Sheridan regional offices and one supervisor/investigator stationed at the Cody regional office.

The WIU is responsible for investigating large scale, complex, lengthy, overt and covert cases. The WIU places its highest priority on cases with commercial involvement, multiple suspects, multiple violations and wildlife violations taking place across several jurisdictions. Investigators also assist game wardens with larger enforcement cases, task forces and other special projects. The WIU maintains several intelligence databases. WIU members operate with unmarked vehicles and typically out of uniform. The WIU is equipped with digital media forensics, modern evidence collection and equipment for surveillance, tracking and covert operations. The WIU also works closely with other states' wildlife investigators and with several federal agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

### 2020 Law Enforcement Efforts

The WIU initiated at least 21 major investigations in 2020 and assisted game wardens throughout Wyoming and officers from other jurisdictions across the country with over 100 other cases. It is important to note that the WIU is at full staff again for the first time since 2009. Retirements and the subsequent replacement of investigators as well as filling the long-vacant Jackson/Pinedale position has given the WIU the capacity to increase its overall law enforcement efforts in 2020.

The WIU continues to explore new technologies related to tracking suspect activity, covert operations and forensics. The WIU analyzes all cell phones, computers and other electronic devices seized from wildlife violators in Wyoming. Approximately 42 cell phones, 73 SD cards/flash drives, nine computers, and several cameras seized by game wardens and investigators as evidence were forensically examined by WIU personnel. The WIU also coordinated forensic extractions of additional cell phones for other Wyoming law enforcement agencies in several cooperatively worked cases. The WIU wrote and executed cell phone, Google

geofence and social media preservation letters and search warrants as well as search warrants for premises and property in 2020.

### Notable Cases

**Repeat Offender:** The suspect in this case was convicted in Wyoming for various wildlife crimes in March 2012, losing all his hunting and fishing privileges for six years, ending in March 2019. In August 2016, the suspect was convicted on a felony charge of witness intimidation, receiving a deferred sentence and being placed on five years of supervised probation. In 2017, the suspect was cited again in Wyoming by his local game warden for purchasing an elk license while under suspension. As a result, the suspect's probation was revoked, he lost his deferred status and was sentenced to four to five years in the Wyoming State Penitentiary. However, the sentence was suspended again and he was placed on five years of supervised probation.

In November 2018, the suspect's parole officer acquired new information from a confidential informant (CI) about the suspect hunting and fishing while under suspension before and after his fall 2017 conviction. The case was turned over to Wyoming wildlife officers to again investigate the suspect for hunting and fishing while under suspension. The investigation led to search



Evidence photo recovered during the investigation of a repeat offender who continued to hunt while under suspension.

## WILDLIFE INVESTIGATIONS UNIT

---



Warden discovers a hidden rifle while serving a search warrant at a suspect's residence.

warrants being served on the suspect's residence in March 2019. During the execution of the search warrant, firearms and illegal steroids were discovered in his residence. Being a convicted felon, the suspect was not allowed to possess firearms. The Crook County Attorney's Office again filed a petition to revoke the suspect's probation related to the items found during the wildlife warrant. The suspect's probation was revoked a second time and he was ordered to complete the program at the Volunteers of America Adult Community Correction Facility in Gillette and was then placed back on probation.

Based on the evidence collected during the wildlife investigation, the suspect was charged with five counts of hunting or fishing while under

suspension. Eventually a trial date was set for March 2020 and witnesses began to be contacted for trial prep. The CI in this case was very intimidated by the suspect and had gone into hiding in another state, making contact difficult even for investigators. However, after wildlife officers and prosecutors spoke with the CI, advising them of several safety procedures that were being put in place to protect them, the CI was willing to testify. Thus, the CI was listed on the trial witness list for the suspect and his attorney to view as part of required criminal discovery procedure.

In January 2020, the suspect's probation agent was contacted by Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) agents and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) agents who had intercepted an illegal silencer, falsely labeled as an oil filter, that was shipped from China to the suspect at his address. The ATF and DHS agents, along with the probation officer, questioned the suspect about the package and seized his cell phone. A search of his cell phone revealed that the suspect ordered the illegal silencer only days after the witness list for the wildlife case, including the CI's name, was disclosed.

A third petition to revoke suspect's felony probation was filed related to the purchase and false labeling of the silencer. His probation was again revoked and he was sentenced to serve out his underlying sentence on the witness intimidation charge of four to five years in the Wyoming State Penitentiary. Additionally, as part of the plea agreement with the State of Wyoming, the suspect pled guilty to the five counts of hunting or fishing while under suspension.

On January 31, the suspect was sentenced to the maximum of one year in jail on each of the five counts of hunting or fishing while under suspension, to run concurrent and to be served in the Wyoming State Penitentiary in Rawlins. The suspect was also fined a total of \$775 and lost all hunting, fishing and trapping privileges for 30 years. Lastly, the judge ordered the suspect's suspension to include all predator hunting and stated he was not allowed to be in the field with any hunting, fishing or trapping equipment for the duration of his 30 year suspension.

## WILDLIFE INVESTIGATIONS UNIT



Illegal bighorn sheep which led to a chronic violator's first of several license suspensions.

**Year after Year....after Year:** A wildlife investigator's work with the Lander USFWS special agent was pivotal in holding a repeat wildlife violator from Dubois accountable for his crimes. The investigator was a lead officer investigating wildlife violations committed by the suspect dating back to November 2006, involving the illegal killing of an adult bighorn sheep ram and other violations, and in September 2015, involving the illegal killing of a grizzly bear and other violations. A U.S. District Court Judge sentenced the suspect in July 2018 for the illegal take of the grizzly bear. The suspect was assessed \$7,000 in restitution and had his hunting privileges suspended worldwide for five years. He was also placed on five years of unsupervised federal probation. The court stipulated he was not to commit any violations, particularly wildlife violations, while on probation.

In November 2018, the suspect and another Dubois man, killed a mule deer doe and attempted to kill a cow elk, without licenses for either animal, from a vehicle and from a road. Both men pled guilty to killing the wildlife illegally in Fremont County Circuit Court. The suspect was sentenced on March 4, 2020 to \$6,365 in fines, restitution and court costs, three years probation, 18 years license suspension, one year of jail and forfeiture of a Remington 700 Ultra Mag rifle.

Because of the suspect's latest state crimes, he was now in violation of his federal probation from the grizzly bear case. The wildlife investigator assisted

the assistant U.S. Attorney and USFWS special agent in providing the U.S. District Court Judge with background information on the suspect's lengthy and serious criminal history, particularly in regards to wildlife crimes.

A U.S. District Judge found the suspect had violated his probation by committing additional wildlife crimes and sentenced him to five months jail concurrent with his last state jail sentence and one month jail consecutive to his last state jail sentence. Although the suspect was sentenced to one year in jail from the state violations, he had filed an appeal of the state sentence and was out of jail while his appeal progressed in the state court system. As a result, the suspect was required to serve all 6 months of his federal jail sentence and was due to be released in late January 2021.

**Rusty Wranglers:** In July 2020, University of Wyoming researchers conducting a routine crayfish distribution survey located rusty crayfish in the Laramie River drainage near Wheatland. Rusty crayfish, a non-native invasive species, were not known to be present within Wyoming since two small introduced populations were extirpated in 2009. Further sampling efforts in the area revealed rusty crayfish populations at eleven different sites.

The WIU was asked to help in determining the source of the rusty crayfish. The investigation determined that the rusty crayfish had been illegally introduced to the area in the early 2000s, eventually growing to well-established and widespread rusty crayfish populations unlikely to be effectively removed from the ecosystem. No one will be prosecuted as a result of the investigation, as the individuals responsible for the introduction are since deceased.



Rusty crayfish found in the Laramie River drainage.

## Large Carnivore Section

### Work Unit Overview

The Large Carnivore Section (LCS) is responsible for the management and conflict resolution of mountain lions, black bears, grizzly bears and wolves (where classified as trophy game animals) in Wyoming. The high profile nature and inherent controversy associated with large carnivores requires a working knowledge of the species and their interactions with humans and other wildlife. The LCS law enforcement officer, stationed in Lander, serves as the LCS Conflict Coordinator. The LCS conflict coordinator is also responsible for reviewing all trophy game damage claims in the Pinedale, Lander, Cody, and Jackson regions. The LCS conflict coordinator focuses on managing conflicts between humans and carnivores and law enforcement situations with these animals. In addition, the LCS coordinator serves as the lead of the Department's Predator Attack Team (PAT) and

conductive electrical weapons (CEW) trainer. The LCS coordinator works cooperatively with regional wardens and investigators, federal agency law enforcement officers, and LCS personnel on all human attacks by carnivores. The LCS coordinator provides an advisory and investigative role in statewide trophy game law enforcement activities.

### 2020 Law Enforcement Efforts

LCS and regional law enforcement personnel were active in investigating nine reports of aggressive grizzly bear encounters, some of which resulted in bear mortalities or injuries. The LCS enforcement officer served as the lead assistance person to USFWS agents and game wardens in multiple ongoing grizzly bear enforcement cases. In addition to grizzly bear investigations, LCS personnel assisted with multiple wolf, mountain lion and black bear investigations. The LCS also provided



Wardens perform a necropsy on a grizzly bear involved in a human attack.

## LARGE CARNIVORE SECTION



A grizzly bear was captured alive a month after being shot by a homeowner near Dubois. LCS biologists removed a shotgun pellet from the bear.

localized assistance to game wardens with a variety of cases involving watercraft safety, big game, fishing and other wildlife related incidents. Although most cases are referred to local game wardens, the LCS conflict coordinator cited several individuals for misdemeanor wildlife violations.

The PAT responded to two grizzly bear-caused human injuries this year in Wyoming. These conflicts, when they occur, require an immediate response by trained, equipped law enforcement personnel. The Department will continue to prioritize reducing conflicts between grizzly bears and humans and maintain an immediate and efficient

response in all wildlife/human attack situations. The LCS coordinator provided certification training of all users for CEWs (also referred to as Tasers). Use of CEWs by Department personnel is strictly limited to wildlife, but provides another successful tool to increase safety to wildlife, Department personnel and the general public. CEW deployments were conducted on three black bears, two mule deer and one moose in 2020.

### Notable Cases

One interesting case for the LCS conflict coordinator involved the reported self defense shooting of a grizzly bear. The bear was getting into unsecured trash at a residence in the middle of the night. The homeowner went outside and, during the encounter, shot the bear, wounding it. The homeowner claimed the bear was charging him and shot in self defense. The bear was wearing a radio collar at the time and was captured several weeks after the shooting as part of annual grizzly bear population monitoring. The USFWS and the Fremont County Attorney's office both declined to prosecute the homeowner for take of the grizzly bear because it survived.

Two additional notable cases involved the teamwork of the LCS to prosecute individuals for trophy game violations. These two unrelated cases were discovered by LCS biologists in 2020 during review of mountain lion harvest records and were reported to the LCS conflict coordinator for investigation. Subsequent review of Facebook posts, license agent security footage, field investigations and suspect interviews resulted in the successful prosecution of two separate individuals for taking mountain lions without licenses.

## WATERCRAFT SAFETY PROGRAM



The Department is the state agency primarily responsible for watercraft safety education and enforcement. In a typical year, Wyoming game wardens spend much of their time patrolling water bodies, from major reservoirs to small ponds and streams, enforcing fishing and boating safety laws and regulations and promoting safe boating activities. Wardens throughout Wyoming reported increased participation by the public in watercraft-related activities, much of which was due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people, including high numbers of first-time boaters, took to the water as a way to get away from home and safely recreate. This posed some challenges for game wardens in their education and enforcement efforts, but also gave them opportunities to interact with many people who had never met a game warden before.

Game wardens worked approximately 6,500 hours on watercraft safety enforcement and educational efforts. Eight regional game wardens (two in the Casper Region, two in the Green River Region, two in the Laramie Region and two in the Sheridan Region) were assigned full time to watercraft safety duties from Memorial Day through Labor Day. This number is down from the normal 11 positions due to several unfilled vacancies from retirements and promotions in Department law enforcement ranks this year. Most district game wardens also worked watercraft safety enforcement along with their other duties. Wardens contacted thousands of Wyoming boaters during the spring and summer months, emphasizing the importance of carrying the proper safety equipment on board and operating watercraft in a safe and sober manner.

To accomplish the Department's boating safety mission, game wardens work in partnership with county sheriff's offices, municipal police departments, local fire departments and volunteer search and rescue organizations. The Department also partners with the United States Coast Guard (USCG) and other boating safety organizations throughout the country to work toward consistent regulations and education messaging among the

states. According to USCG statistics, on average, drowning accounts for nearly 70% of all boating related fatalities nationwide in a given year. In approximately 85% of these cases, the victims were not wearing life jackets. Many of these deaths could have been prevented with life jacket wear. For this reason, game wardens emphasize the importance of carrying and wearing properly fitting life jackets aboard watercraft when contacting the boating public.

Casper area game wardens assisted a local volunteer organization, "Respect Our River," with maintaining several life jacket loaner stations along the North Platte River and at Alcova and Pathfinder reservoirs. Wardens observed many people taking advantage of this program, especially in the area of the Casper Whitewater Park on the North Platte River, which



Warden Austin Swingholm arrests a BUI suspect at Alcova Reservoir.

## WATERCRAFT SAFETY PROGRAM

---



Boat patrol at Pathfinder Reservoir.

has been the scene of several drowning fatalities in the past few years.

Watercraft accidents that occur in the state are investigated by game wardens. To develop the skills necessary for these investigations, the Department sends game wardens to advanced training in watercraft accident investigation techniques. Five wardens were scheduled to attend this training in 2020, but were unable to because of COVID-19 travel restrictions. They will attend the next available training session, hopefully in 2021. This training aids wardens in conducting thorough, professional investigations to determine the causes of watercraft accidents ranging from those involving minor property damage to incidents involving serious injuries or death. In 2020, game wardens investigated four reportable watercraft accidents involving four watercraft, 17 individuals, and approximately \$32,500 in property damage. Sadly, one of these incidents resulted in a fatality. A man drowned in April on the North Platte River near Encampment after the drift boat he was in ran aground and capsized, throwing the victim and his two companions overboard. In another incident, a woman wakeboarding on Grayrocks Reservoir suffered a broken leg. In addition to these incidents, game wardens assisted with several search and rescue efforts and medical emergencies on waterways throughout the state. Given the increased participation in watercraft activities during the summer boating season, game wardens were

pleasantly surprised at the lower-than-average number of watercraft accidents.

Alcohol and drug use has been a contributing factor in many of the most serious watercraft accidents in Wyoming over the past several years. Game wardens keep a watchful eye for boat operators under the influence of alcohol or drugs, with the goal of intervening before an accident occurs. During 2020, seven boat operators were arrested for BUI, all related to alcohol use. Alcova Reservoir near Casper accounted for six of these arrests, while one occurred on Glendo Reservoir. The Department again participated in Operation Dry Water, a nationwide effort to educate the public about the dangers of BUI and encourage boaters to designate a sober operator.

The Department continues to improve the training of game wardens related to boating safety, including specialized boating law enforcement and water survival techniques. The initial training that all new game wardens receive includes general boat operations, review of Wyoming boating laws and regulations, boat-to-boat arrest tactics, BUI detection and enforcement, an officer survival pool session and training on the effects of cold water immersion. Wardens also routinely participate in scenario-based training to evaluate their skills and decision-making abilities in a variety of situations they may encounter on the water. The COVID-19 pandemic limited some of the normal in-person training that wardens were able to do, but some practical training was done in small groups adhering to safety protocols recommended by the Center for Disease Control.

The Department remained involved in national and regional associations dedicated to safe boating. Law Enforcement Coordinator Aaron Kerr continued to chair the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators Enforcement and Training Committee. This committee is dedicated to developing and providing training resources to marine law enforcement officers nationwide. Kerr also served as executive board president of the Western States Boating Administrators Association, which is dedicated to collaboration among western states in the interests of recreational boating safety enforcement and education.



## STATE LAND ENFORCEMENT

In addition to wildlife and watercraft law enforcement, the Department assists the Wyoming Office of State Lands and Investments by enforcing certain statutes applying to Wyoming State Trust Land (state land). Department game wardens have the authority to enforce prohibitions of off-road travel, overnight camping, open fires and littering on state land. Most state land enforcement was incidental to hunting and fishing patrol duties. On many state land parcels throughout Wyoming, off-road travel is an ongoing issue and has caused considerable resource damage to some areas. Much of this off-road use occurs in the early spring or fall

when soils are wet or when roads are blocked by snow and people attempt to drive around the drifts. Illegal overnight camping on state lands occurs throughout the year and can contribute to resource damage and littering. Open fires, typically associated with overnight camping, were of particular concern this year due to very dry conditions in most of Wyoming. Many of the state land violations discovered by game wardens were handled with verbal or written warnings to educate the violators, although several more serious violations causing resource damage were addressed with citations.

### STATEWIDE SUMMARY OF STATE LAND ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS

Violation	Written Warnings	Citations	Total
Off-Road Travel	20	15	35
Camping	13	7	20
Open Fires	3	5	8
Littering on State Land	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL 2020</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>TOTAL 2019</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>TOTAL 2018</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>78</b>



Off-road violation on state land.

## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS

The Department utilizes an electronic case management system (CMS) to document wildlife violations and create individual law enforcement case reports. The CMS allows for the compilation of wildlife violation data and associated law enforcement action. Personnel work hours are tracked through a Daily Activity Report database. Both of these Department databases were utilized to compile the statistics included in this report.

Some law enforcement positions were vacant for part of the year due to retirements and personnel moves. The number of law enforcement positions listed for each region or work unit represents the total number of positions that documented law enforcement activity while assigned to a region or work unit.

### Jackson Region – 4 Enforcement Personnel

(3 District Game Wardens, 1 Regional Wildlife Supervisor)

<u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>HOURS</u>	<u>WATERCRAFT HOURS</u>	<u>MILES</u>
WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT	2,275	0	27,482
WATERCRAFT ENFORCEMENT	215	40	2,284
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,490</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>29,776</b>

<u>PROGRAM ENFORCEMENT</u>	<u>WARNINGS</u>	<u>CITATIONS</u>	<u>UNKNOWN SUSPECT</u>	<u>LAW ENF. ACTIONS</u>
TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE	68	54	4	126
SPORT FISH	50	29	0	79
NON-WILDLIFE	13	4	0	17
AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES	10	0	0	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>232</b>

### Cody Region – 12 Enforcement Personnel

(9 District Game Wardens, 1 Regional Access Coordinator, 1 Game Warden Supervisor, 1 Regional Wildlife Supervisor)

<u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>HOURS</u>	<u>WATERCRAFT HOURS</u>	<u>MILES</u>
WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT	6,632	8	92,018
WATERCRAFT ENFORCEMENT	1,914	29	5,494
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8,546</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>97,512</b>

<u>PROGRAM ENFORCEMENT</u>	<u>WARNINGS</u>	<u>CITATIONS</u>	<u>UNKNOWN SUSPECT</u>	<u>LAW ENF. ACTIONS</u>
TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE	132	141	18	291
SPORT FISH	31	28	0	59
NON-WILDLIFE	11	17	0	28
AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES	8	0	0	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>386</b>

# REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS

## Sheridan Region – 10 Enforcement Personnel

(7 District Game Wardens, 1 Regional Game Warden, 1 Regional Access Coordinator, 1 Regional Wildlife Supervisor)

<u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>HOURS</u>	<u>WATERCRAFT HOURS</u>	<u>MILES</u>
WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT	6,105	0	82,665
WATERCRAFT ENFORCEMENT	644	212	7,021
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6,749</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>89,686</b>

<u>PROGRAM ENFORCEMENT</u>	<u>WARNINGS</u>	<u>CITATIONS</u>	<u>UNKNOWN SUSPECT</u>	<u>LAW ENF. ACTIONS</u>
TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE	177	189	81	447
SPORT FISH	14	29	1	44
NON-WILDLIFE	26	17	0	43
AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES	12	3	0	15
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>549</b>

## Green River – 10 Enforcement Personnel

(7 District Game Wardens, 1 Regional Game Warden\*, 1 Regional Access Coordinator, 1 Regional Wildlife Supervisor)

<u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>HOURS</u>	<u>WATERCRAFT HOURS</u>	<u>MILES</u>
WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT	4,993	46	78,797
WATERCRAFT ENFORCEMENT	630	161	6,756
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,623</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>85,553</b>

<u>PROGRAM ENFORCEMENT</u>	<u>WARNINGS</u>	<u>CITATIONS</u>	<u>UNKNOWN SUSPECT</u>	<u>LAW ENF. ACTIONS</u>
TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE	126	77	23	226
SPORT FISH	23	34	3	60
NON-WILDLIFE	24	14	0	38
AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES	77	20	0	97
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>421</b>

\*A second regional game warden transferred from Green River to Laramie in November.



## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS

### Laramie Region – 12 Enforcement Personnel

(8 District Game Wardens, 1 Regional Game Warden, 1 Regional Access Coordinator, 1 Game Warden Supervisor, 1 Regional Wildlife Supervisor)

<u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>HOURS</u>	<u>WATERCRAFT HOURS</u>	<u>MILES</u>
WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT	5,500	15	92,656
WATERCRAFT ENFORCEMENT	1,083	260	13,328
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6,583</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>105,984</b>

<u>PROGRAM ENFORCEMENT</u>	<u>WARNINGS</u>	<u>CITATIONS</u>	<u>UNKNOWN SUSPECT</u>	<u>LAW ENF. ACTIONS</u>
TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE	285	121	20	426
SPORT FISH	60	48	2	110
NON-WILDLIFE	83	37	0	120
AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES	142	6	0	148
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>570</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>804</b>

### Lander Region – 8 Enforcement Personnel

(6 District Game Wardens, 1 Large Carnivore Conflict Coordinator, 1 Regional Wildlife Supervisor)

<u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>HOURS</u>	<u>WATERCRAFT HOURS</u>	<u>MILES</u>
WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT	2,946	8	45,731
WATERCRAFT ENFORCEMENT	473	90	5,301
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,419</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>51,032</b>

<u>PROGRAM ENFORCEMENT</u>	<u>WARNINGS</u>	<u>CITATIONS</u>	<u>UNKNOWN SUSPECT</u>	<u>LAW ENF. ACTIONS</u>
TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE	91	45	67	203
SPORT FISH	24	19	2	45
NON-WILDLIFE	45	33	1	79
AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES	19	2	0	21
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>348</b>



## REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS

### Casper Region – 11 Enforcement Personnel

(7 District Game Wardens, 2 Regional Game Wardens, 1 Regional Access Coordinator, 1 Regional Wildlife Supervisor)

<u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>HOURS</u>	<u>WATERCRAFT HOURS</u>	<u>MILES</u>
WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT	4,945	15	76,639
WATERCRAFT ENFORCEMENT	1,186	329	12,722
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6,131</b>	<b>344</b>	<b>89,361</b>

<u>PROGRAM ENFORCEMENT</u>	<u>WARNINGS</u>	<u>CITATIONS</u>	<u>UNKNOWN SUSPECT</u>	<u>LAW ENF. ACTIONS</u>
TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE	367	239	48	654
SPORT FISH	51	69	1	121
NON-WILDLIFE	108	100	0	208
AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES	80	11	0	91
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>606</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>1,074</b>

### Pinedale Region – 4 Enforcement Personnel

(3 District Game Wardens, 1 Regional Wildlife Supervisor)

<u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>HOURS</u>	<u>WATERCRAFT HOURS</u>	<u>MILES</u>
WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT	1,743	21	22,611
WATERCRAFT ENFORCEMENT	127	58	1,701
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,870</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>24,312</b>

<u>PROGRAM ENFORCEMENT</u>	<u>WARNINGS</u>	<u>CITATIONS</u>	<u>UNKNOWN SUSPECT</u>	<u>LAW ENF. ACTIONS</u>
TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE	68	56	8	132
SPORT FISH	8	10	0	18
NON-WILDLIFE	13	6	0	19
AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES	1	3	0	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>173</b>



# WIU AND ADMINISTRATION LAW ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS

## Wildlife Investigations Unit - 7 Investigators

(6 Wildlife Investigators, 1 Wildlife Investigations Unit Supervisor)

<u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>HOURS</u>	<u>MILES</u>
WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT	10,140	54,167

<u>PROGRAM ENFORCEMENT</u>	<u>WARNINGS</u>	<u>CITATIONS</u>	<u>LAW ENF. ACTIONS</u>
TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE	1	11	12
SPORT FISH	0	2	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>

Note: Many of the investigations undertaken by the WIU in 2020 are ongoing or in the process of having charges filed through the appropriate prosecuting attorney's office.

## Law Enforcement Administration – 4 Enforcement Personnel

(1 Chief Game Warden, 1 Deputy Chief Game Warden, 1 Law Enforcement Supervisor, 1 Law Enforcement Coordinator)

<u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>HOURS</u>	<u>MILES</u>
WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT	1,114	8,447
WATERCRAFT ENFORCEMENT	241	910
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,355</b>	<b>9,357</b>

<u>PROGRAM ENFORCEMENT</u>	<u>WARNINGS</u>	<u>CITATIONS</u>	<u>LAW ENF. ACTIONS</u>
TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE	56	7	63
SPORT FISH	9	1	10
NON-WILDLIFE	9	1	10
AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES	20	2	22
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>105</b>



# STATEWIDE LAW ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS

## 82 Law Enforcement Personnel

ACTIVITY		HOURS	WATERCRAFT HOURS	MILES
WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT		46,393	113	581,213
WATERCRAFT ENFORCEMENT		6,513	1,179	55,517
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>52,906</b>	<b>1,292</b>	<b>636,730</b>
	<b>2019</b>	<b>52,042</b>	<b>1,346</b>	<b>709,330</b>
	<b>2018</b>	<b>55,294</b>	<b>1,525</b>	<b>735,782</b>

PROGRAM ENFORCEMENT		WARNINGS	CITATIONS	UNKNOWN SUSPECT	LAW ENF. ACTIONS
TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE		1,371	940	269	2,580
SPORT FISH		270	269	9	548
NON-WILDLIFE		332	229	1	562
AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES		369	47	0	416
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2,342</b>	<b>1,485</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>4,106</b>
	<b>2019</b>	<b>1,700</b>	<b>1,365</b>	<b>256</b>	<b>3,321</b>
	<b>2018</b>	<b>2,213</b>	<b>1,787</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>4,228</b>



Warden Jon Stephens on a late fall horseback patrol near Jackson.

# STATEWIDE LAW ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS

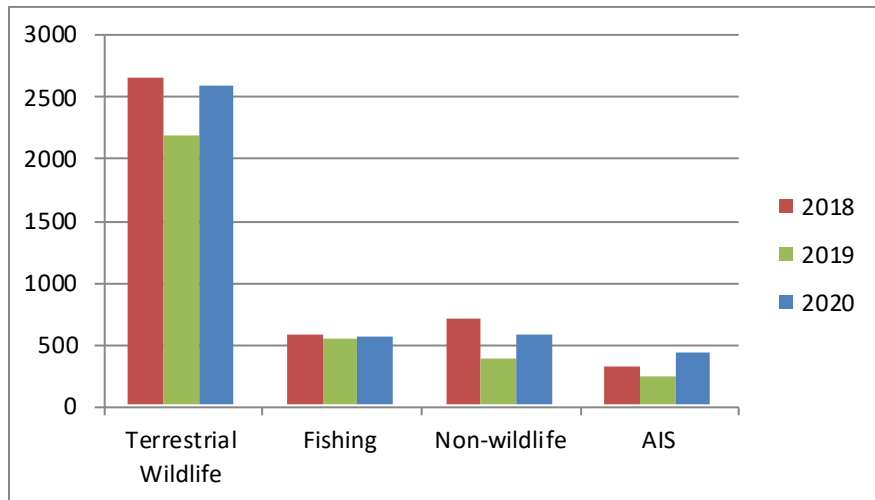
## Three Year Comparison of Violations

The number of violations detected on an annual basis depends on a variety of factors, including overall public use, shifting patrol efforts, law enforcement position vacancies and the amount of time spent by game wardens on non-law enforcement duties. Chart 1 compares the number of documented wildlife violations from 2018-2020 and Chart 2 illustrates violations by year for each category: terrestrial wildlife, fishing, non-wildlife and AIS. Documented violations increased by approximately 800 over 2019, particularly non-wildlife (watercraft) and AIS violations. The Department was closer to full staff during the summer boating season, so more personnel were available to focus on these efforts. Greater focus was placed on these activities due to increased public participation in boating activities. In addition, AIS infestations in neighboring states continue to be a concern for Wyoming, so the Department stepped up enforcement efforts to aid in the prevention of AIS introductions.

Chart 1. Violations by Year, 2018-2020



Chart 2. Violations by Category, 2018-2020



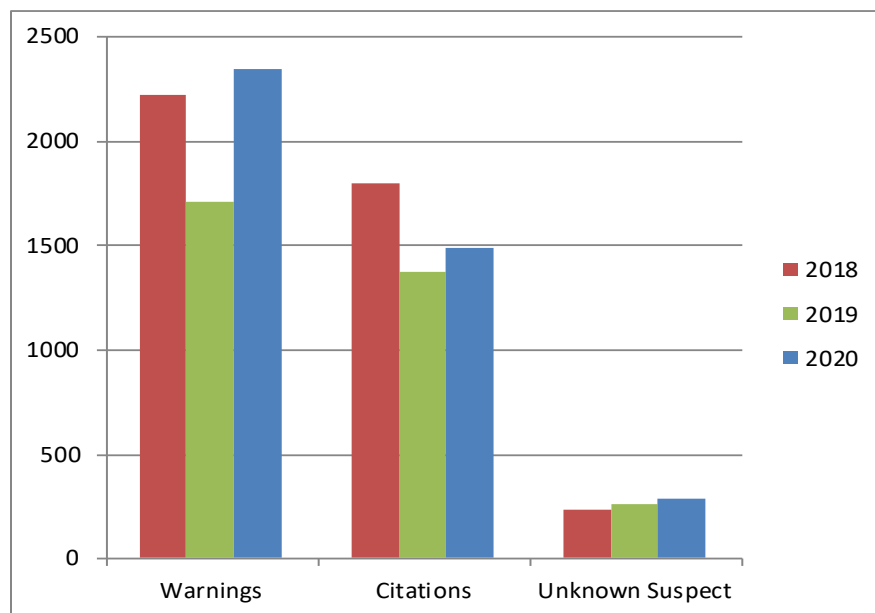


# STATEWIDE LAW ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS

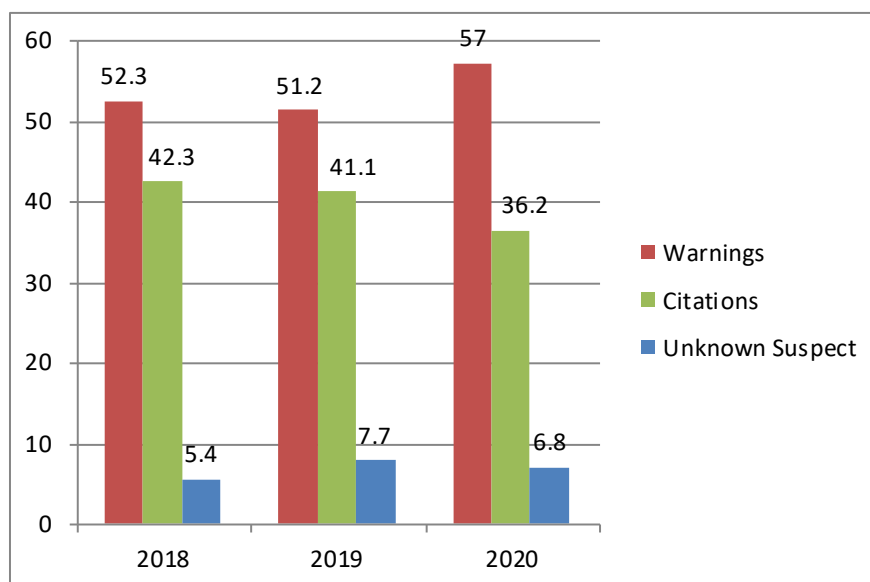
## Breakdown of Law Enforcement Actions

In a typical year, Department law enforcement officers issue more warnings than citations, often taking the opportunity to educate people who may have inadvertently committed violations. A warning documents that a violation occurred but doesn't result in fines or loss of hunting privileges. Chart 3 illustrates the number of warnings, citations and unknown suspect violations (violation documented, but suspect yet to be identified so no citation or warning issued) by year for 2018-2020. Chart 4 shows the percentage of law enforcement actions by year for 2018-2020. The increase in the overall percentage of warnings can be partially attributed to the increase of first-time recreational boaters and efforts by game wardens to educate them about watercraft safety and AIS laws and regulations.

**Chart 3. Law Enforcement Actions by Year, 2018-2020**



**Chart 4. Percentage of Law Enforcement Actions by Year, 2018-2020**



## TOP TEN VIOLATIONS

In 2020, the top ten violations documented by Department law enforcement officers accounted for approximately 46% of all violations encountered. With few exceptions, the most common violations have not changed over the past several years and much of the Department's enforcement effort is geared toward these violations.

Fishing without a license is consistently the most common violation in the state and was again this year. This is due to recreational anglers being the largest user group that game wardens contact in the field during the year. Many of these violations are committed by individuals who simply forgot to purchase a license, while others fish without licenses intentionally and take their chances on getting caught. Even with the ease of obtaining fishing licenses online with a smart phone, fishing without a license accounted for approximately 8% of all violations detected.

Responding to hunting, fishing and trapping trespassing complaints has long been a major part of the job for many game wardens, especially those with districts in the eastern half of Wyoming, which is predominantly private land. 2020 was the third year where the collection of shed antlers on private land without permission was also a specific violation of the state's trespassing statute, and several illegal antler hunters were cited for trespassing. Several of the trespassing violations wardens respond to are

unintentional by a suspect, but in many instances the violators knew they were trespassing.

Department administered lands include properties owned by the Wyoming Game & Fish Commission (Commission) and private lands enrolled in the Access Yes Program. Various regulations apply to these properties and are enforced by Department law enforcement officers. Several of the Commission owned lands are closed to human presence during the winter months to protect wintering wildlife. Over the past few years, several individuals have been cited for entering these properties during closures, mostly to gather shed antlers. Other common violations on Department administered lands include off road travel, open fires in restricted areas, lighting fireworks, failing to obey regulatory signs and violations of "ranch rules" on Access Yes areas.

Preventing AIS such as zebra and quagga mussels in Wyoming waters continues to be a high priority for the Department. Violations of the AIS regulations remained high in 2020. The Department increased enforcement efforts at AIS check stations this year and stopped over 200 boaters who failed to stop as required. Failing to purchase an AIS decal for a watercraft also remained prevalent. Many AIS violations are by non-motorized watercraft users, who are not required to register their watercraft. Motorized watercraft owners tend to be more

TOP TEN VIOLATIONS DOCUMENTED IN 2020	
1. Fishing without a license	325
2. Hunt, fish, trap, collect shed antlers on private land without permission (trespassing)	284
3. Violation of rules governing use of Department-administered lands	229
4. Fail to stop at AIS check station	226
5. Fail to provide life jackets aboard watercraft	179
6. Fail to purchase conservation stamp	142
7. Fail to purchase AIS decal	135
8. Fail to tag big or trophy game animal	135
9. Waste or abandon big game	127
10. Fail to provide proof of hunter safety	123

## TOP TEN VIOLATIONS

familiar with the boating and AIS regulations because they receive a watercraft regulation brochure when they register their watercraft. The Department continues to expand awareness of the AIS program and the importance of preventing species like zebra mussels and invasive vegetation from becoming established in Wyoming waters.

The most common boating safety violations are inadequate life jackets or throwable flotation devices aboard watercraft. Game wardens patrolling the water emphasize the enforcement of these regulations due to the life-saving potential of proper life jacket wear. Many of these violations occur early in the boating season. Often, boaters clean out their boats and put life jackets and other safety equipment in storage over the winter. This equipment doesn't always make it back into the boat before the first outing of the year.

Hunters and anglers, with some exceptions, are required to purchase a conservation stamp for \$12.50 in addition to their license. Conservation stamps are valid for one year. The revenue generated from these sales is used to fund various Department projects, including the Access Yes program and wildlife habitat improvement projects. Increased messaging efforts by the Department have improved overall compliance with conservation stamp requirements over the past few years.

Failing to tag big game animals, trophy game animals and wild turkeys continues to be a common violation. Licenses for these species contain carcass coupons, commonly referred to as tags. When one of these animals is harvested, the hunter is required to properly fill out the tag prior to leaving the site of the kill. Proper tagging entails detaching the carcass coupon from the license, signing the coupon and cutting out the month and day of harvest to show when the animal was killed. Game wardens often encounter hunters in transit from the kill site who have failed to take one or more of the steps to properly tag their animals. In these situations, it is difficult to know whether the tagging violation was simply an oversight or if the person was trying to get their animal home without tagging it so they could go hunting again using the same license. The Department has added diagrams into the regulation brochures for these species to remind hunters of

proper tagging procedures at the kill site.

Most of the waste of big game violations are situations where hunters fail to retrieve all of the edible portions from their animal. "Edible portions" of meat is defined in regulation and it is the responsibility of hunters to care for and retrieve all of the edible portions from the field. The Department has added a diagram to the big game hunting regulation brochure to educate hunters on what meat must be retrieved from a harvested big game animal and taken out of the field.

Hunters born on or after January 1, 1966 are required to pass a hunter safety course prior to taking wildlife with a firearm. These courses have contributed to greatly reducing hunting accidents throughout the United States. In Wyoming, hunters must carry proof of hunter safety completion when they are hunting. In most cases, when game wardens check hunters without a hunter safety card, the hunters have lost their card or forgot it at home. However, game wardens occasionally check hunters who have never taken a hunter safety course. To encourage participation in hunting, Wyoming offers a hunter mentor program, where new hunters may hunt with an experienced mentor prior to taking hunter safety.



Warden Becca Lutz north of Gillette.

## WILDLIFE FORENSICS LAB

The forensic section of the Department's Wildlife Forensic and Fish Health Laboratory provides law enforcement forensic services (analytical and technical) to aid Wyoming wildlife law enforcement personnel, Wyoming biologists and wildlife managers in an additional twelve states.

Wyoming's forensic lab personnel employ a variety of techniques to test evidence items collected during investigations of wildlife crimes. Species determination, sex identification and DNA analyses are performed on blood, hair, saliva, tissue and bones. Analyses also include DNA matching of submitted samples and determining the minimum number of animals represented in submitted samples. A detailed report of each test is compiled and provided to the requesting officer. Lab personnel are often called upon to testify in court during trials of defendants charged with wildlife violations.

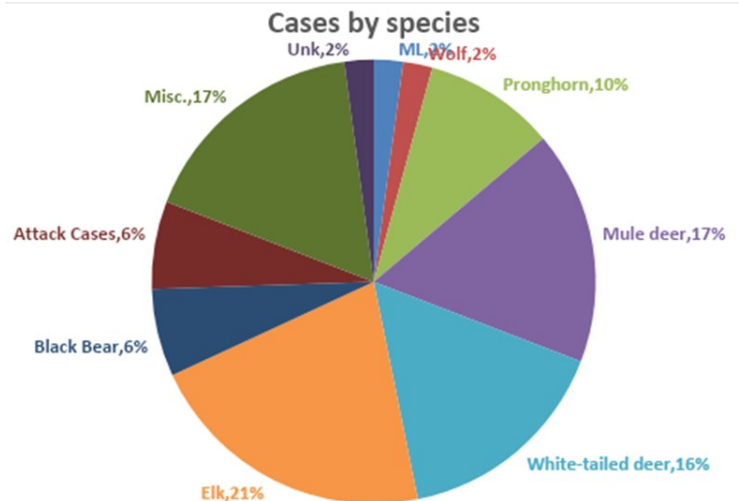
Forensic lab personnel are heavily involved in writing standards for the field of wildlife forensics. The federal government created a Forensic Science Supervisory Board with five Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC) that are further broken into subcommittees, with wildlife forensics as one of the subcommittees. This subcommittee is tasked with writing standards for the wildlife forensic community that will be published by the American Academy of Forensic Science Standards Board (AAFS-ASB) and eventually placed on the National Institute of Standards and Technology registry. Kim Frazier, Department Laboratory Director, is the chair of the wildlife forensic subcommittee and Tasha Bauman, Department Forensic Program Manager, serves on the subcommittee and acts as the Google Suites liaison. These are all appointments made by the federal government. As of December 2020, the wildlife forensic subcommittee had eight standards published through the AAFS-ASB.

Kim Frazier, Tasha Bauman, and Lauren Schumacher are all certified wildlife forensic scientists by the Society for Wildlife Forensic Sciences (SWFS) and all three participate in a yearly proficiency test administered by the USFWS Forensic Laboratory. The lab also participates in a

blind proficiency test submitted by Wyoming Game and Fish Department game wardens.

Forensic personnel are also involved with the SWFS, with Tasha Bauman serving as the President of the SWFS and Kim Frazier serving as the Director of Certification.

Over the last twelve months, the lab has conducted five virtual/PowerPoint voice over wildlife officer training workshops, conducted a virtual experiment during Expo week, attended several virtual conferences and received 77 cases from fourteen different states; Wyoming (24), Colorado (16), Montana (9), New Mexico (9), Iowa (4), Utah (3), North Dakota (3), Minnesota (2), South Dakota (2), Arizona (1), Nebraska (1), Illinois (1), Kansas (1) and Oregon (1 proficiency test). The cases involve fourteen different species (see chart "cases by species").



\*Misc. includes bobcat, cattle/bison, mountain goat, bighorn sheep, porcupine, barbary sheep, coyote, pig, chicken, moose and gemsbok.

\*Attack cases include grizzly bear, black bear and mountain lion

## GAME WARDEN APPLICANT TESTING

All game wardens are selected by competitive examination, per Wyoming statute. The first step to becoming a Wyoming game warden has traditionally been to earn a bachelor's degree in wildlife management, biology, zoology or a closely related field. Applicants with other degrees, such as

criminal justice, are now being considered, as long as they also have a minimum amount of college credits in wildlife fields or several years of wildlife experience. This change in the minimum qualifications allows the Department to consider applications from game wardens in other states who are looking to move to Wyoming. Many states do not require their game wardens to have a wildlife management degree as a prerequisite for hiring, and Wyoming could benefit from recruiting and hiring experienced game wardens from other states. Applicants must pass an online written exam consisting of general wildlife management knowledge, wildlife identification, legal terminology and questions about Wyoming wildlife statutes and regulations. Candidates who successfully pass the online written exam must complete a life history questionnaire, after which they may be invited for a preliminary online interview using Google Hangouts. This determines which candidates will complete an in-person interview, personality profile testing, psychological testing and polygraph examination. Candidates offered a game warden job undergo a thorough background investigation and must successfully graduate the Wyoming Law Enforcement Academy (WLEA) 14-week, 595-hour Peace Officer Basic (POB) course prior to working as a Department law enforcement officer.

Individuals who successfully complete this hiring process can take great pride in the fact they have achieved the high standards required to become a Wyoming game warden.

In 2020:

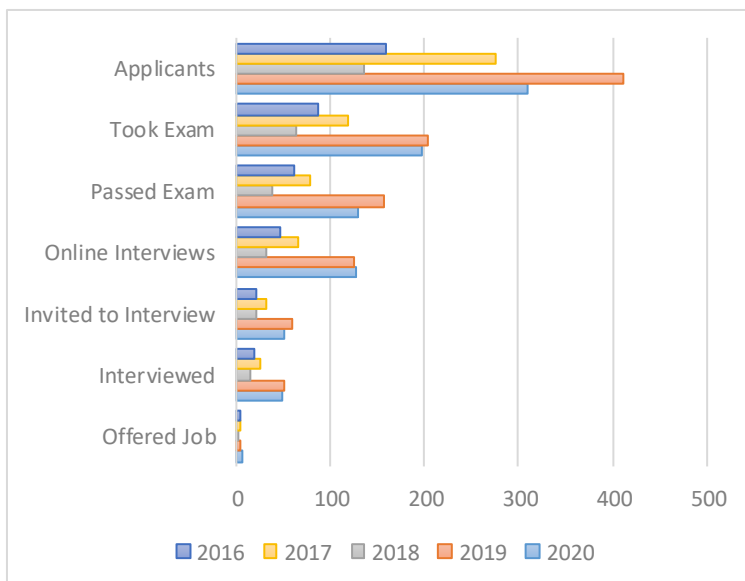
- Testing was offered online only
- 309 people applied
- 198 took exam
- 130 passed exam - 66% pass rate
- 128 online interviews conducted
- 51 invited for in-person interview
- 48 interviewed
- Six offered job after first round of hiring and one more after the second round.

Seven game wardens and a wildlife investigator were hired during 2020. Two of the wardens were experienced game wardens from other states, Jake Miller from North Dakota and Spencer Carstens from South Dakota. In addition, the wildlife investigator had several years of experience as a game warden in Tennessee. Sarah Dugan, Adam Hansen, Mitchell Kern and Kelli Pauling were hired in April and completed WLEA training in July. Heather Sterling was hired in September and will complete her WLEA training in April 2021.

### GAME WARDEN TRAINING

This year presented many challenges for the Department’s law enforcement training program. The COVID-19 pandemic restricted the amount of hands-on training that Department law enforcement officers were able to do. All officers must qualify with their duty handguns, rifles and shotguns twice a year. Officers are also required to demonstrate proficiency with non-deadly force weapons and core skills used for self defense and controlling suspects, such as handcuffing and takedown techniques. Officers completed their qualifications as required, but had to forego some of the additional training they do in a typical year. In order to meet state requirements to maintain their peace officer certifications, wardens throughout the state turned to online law enforcement training and legal updates.

The WLEA was also forced to adapt to the pandemic and moved much of the content of the POB course online. After completing the online sessions, wardens received some POB content in person at the



The above chart shows a comparison of game warden applicants, exam takers, interviewees, and hires for calendar years 2016-2020. On average, less than 5% of applicants are offered game warden positions at the end of the hiring process.



Warden Troy Tobiasson participates in firearms training.

WLEA in Douglas. This was done adhering to strict COVID-19 testing and safety protocols. After graduating the WLEA, new wardens attended training conducted by Department training officers and law enforcement staff to prepare them for the upcoming boating season. Much of this training was provided using video conference technology instead of in person. Training topics included watercraft accident investigation techniques, watercraft patrol, BUI detection, fishing enforcement and watercraft/fishing statutes and regulations. They received practical training in officer water survival, cold-water immersion, boat handling and patrol scenarios. The wardens attended a second training session to prepare for the fall hunting seasons. Training topics included review of Game and Fish statutes and regulations, patrol techniques, interstate game tag guidelines and issuance, game check stations, the Access Yes Program, general wildlife law enforcement, collection of evidence, crime scene investigation and various other game warden duties. In addition to these intensive training sessions, new game wardens spent a considerable amount of time in their respective regions receiving on-the-job training from other Department employees.

On a national level, Deputy Chief Game Warden Scott Edberg continues to be very engaged as a steering committee member and executive adviser in the National Association of Conservation Law Enforcement Chiefs (NACLEC) Leadership Academy. The academy's mission is to build a stream of leadership in the conservation law

enforcement community with the capacity to solve complex and continually evolving challenges in the efforts to protect fish, wildlife and natural resources, now and in the future. In 2020, Cody Region Wildlife Supervisor Dan Smith attended the NACLEC Virtual Introduction to Conservation Leadership course, which included 21 hours of synchronous work competed as a group, plus an additional six hours of asynchronous work.

Laramie Region Wildlife Supervisor Matt Withroder, Game Warden Supervisor David Ellsworth, Dubois Game Warden Brian Baker and South Riverton Game Warden Mitch Renteria attended the Rocky Mountain Command College in Casper. This week-long program was hosted by the FBI Law Enforcement Executive Development Association and covered a wide range of topics relevant to law enforcement leadership, including dealing with critical incidents, working with the media and uses of new technology in various types of investigations.

Many game wardens and wildlife biologists are responsible for managing wildlife in backcountry areas accessible only on foot or horseback. It is important that these personnel and their horses are well trained and prepared for any situations they may face in the backcountry. In June, several game



Wardens ride horses between barrels with smoke bombs, one of the many obstacles encountered during horse training.

wardens and wildlife biologists from throughout the state attended a week of horse training in Meeteetse. Training topics included basic horse safety, basic and advanced horsemanship, horse and rider desensitization, packing and knot tying, backcountry horse use, horse care and first aid. The trainers spent a lot of time building the “herd mentality” of the horses using a wide range of obstacles and situations to build the confidence of the horses and riders. The final day of the training included a timed obstacle course completed by two-person teams and their horses. The course incorporated many of the training sessions from earlier in the week and included saddling and packing a pack horse using proper hitches and knots.

### **STOP POACHING PROGRAM**

The Stop Poaching Program began in 1980 as a means to provide an opportunity for the public to help protect their wildlife resource by reporting suspected poaching activity. This program is an excellent and necessary enforcement tool for helping to identify wildlife violators throughout the state. All information on the reporting party is kept strictly confidential.

In 2020, 314 tips were received from members of the public via the Stop Poaching Hotline, a text tip line and the Department website. Game wardens followed up on all of these tips, and in many cases, no violation could be determined. However, in numerous instances, wardens were able to identify

wildlife violations and possible suspects. Investigations led to 23 citations and 13 warnings being issued to violators. Defendants charged as a result of tips made to the Stop Poaching Program paid \$4,750 in fines and restitution to date, with three cases still under investigation or pending court disposition.

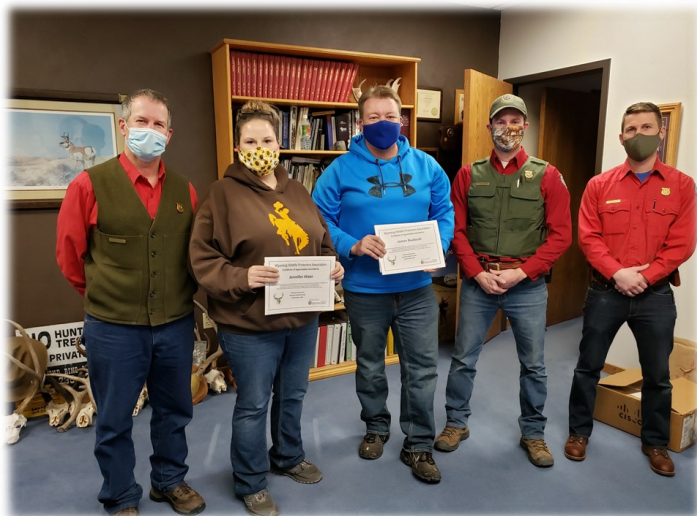
### **WYOMING WILDLIFE PROTECTORS ASSOCIATION**

To encourage reporting of wildlife violations by the public, the Department has partnered with the Wyoming Wildlife Protectors Association (WWPA). The WWPA began in 1983 and is a registered non-profit organization. The sole purpose of the WWPA is to manage a reward account and provide monetary rewards to citizens who report suspected poaching activity. The WWPA is funded by restitution payments as ordered by the courts at sentencing of wildlife violators and from private donations.

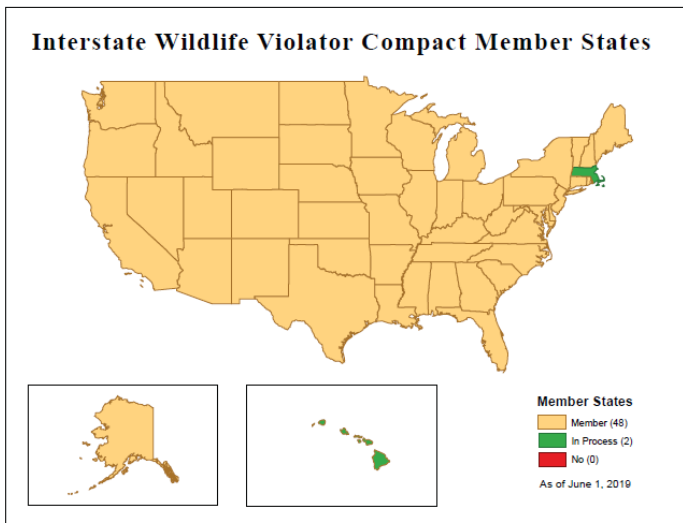
Many of the successful investigations and prosecutions of wildlife violators in Wyoming would not have been possible without the information provided by concerned citizens. Often, informants are turning in a friend or family member, which can be difficult and shows their genuine concern for Wyoming’s wildlife resource. Department enforcement officers may submit a reward recommendation request based on a reward payment schedule listed in the WWPA Constitution. In 2020, a total of \$1,700 in rewards was paid to individuals who provided information leading to the conviction of wildlife violators.

### **WILDLIFE VIOLATOR COMPACT**

Wyoming has been a member state of the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact (Compact) since 1996. The Compact is a reciprocal agreement between member states to honor suspensions of hunting, fishing and trapping privileges for convicted wildlife violators. Individuals who are suspended in one member state may also have their privileges suspended in the other member states. The Compact acts as an additional deterrent to violating wildlife laws and strengthens the consequences of illegal hunting, fishing or trapping activities. The Compact is also an effective tool for ensuring that violators meet their court obligations, as those who fail to do so also have their privileges suspended until their



Hunters recognized by the Wyoming Wildlife Protectors Association for their contributions to protecting wildlife.



case is resolved. The law enforcement coordinator routinely fields calls from individuals asking what they need to do to have their license privileges reinstated.

There are now 48 member states and two more, Massachusetts and Hawaii, are finalizing the process of joining. Nationwide, there were 5,225 new license suspensions entered in the Compact, including 37 from Wyoming. Several cases initiated in 2020 are awaiting court proceedings and may lead to further license suspensions once completed. With nearly the entire United States having joined the Compact, the loss of privileges in one state effectively amounts to a nationwide suspension.

## NEW LEGISLATION AFFECTING LAW ENFORCEMENT

### Bills enacted during the 2020 Legislature:

#### HB0092 Pioneer Archery License

Signed into Law by the Governor 3/17/2020

Summary: This bill modifies W.S. 23-1-705 and directs the Department to issue a resident archery license without charge to a resident who is at least 75 years of age and has continuously resided in Wyoming for at least 50 years immediately preceding application for the license.

#### SF0126 Game and Fish Law Enforcement Definition Amendments

Signed into Law by the Governor 3/17/2020

Summary: This bill amends W.S. 6-1-104 and W.S. 7-2-101, which include Department law enforcement personnel in the definitions of peace officers. Previously, these statutes defined game wardens as peace officers when enforcing statutes under Title 23 (game and fish laws), Title 41, Chapter 13 (watercraft safety), Commission rules and regulations, felonies committed in their presence, warrants for arrests of suspects or providing assistance to another law enforcement agency. The enforcement authority of game wardens is still limited to these provisions, but the amended bill specifies that game wardens are peace officers *when performing their official duties*. Game wardens perform many official job functions that are not specifically related to law enforcement, such as dealing with wildlife conflicts and collecting biological data for wildlife management. In 2019, a game warden was assaulted while performing non-law enforcement official duties and the perpetrator could not be charged with assaulting a peace officer, even though his motive for the assault was related to a previous law enforcement action by the warden. This bill clarifies that whenever they are at work, game wardens are peace officers with limited authority as to what laws they can enforce.



Warden Dustin Shorma investigates a shot and left deer.



---

## AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Two Wyoming game wardens were recognized in 2020 for their outstanding service to the state by the Department and other organizations.

2020 Shikar-Safari Club Wildlife Officer of the Year - Kyle Lash, South Jackson Game Warden

2019 Wyoming Game Wardens Association Officer of the Year - Brian DeBolt, Large Carnivore Conflict Coordinator

## RETIREMENTS

Congratulations to five game wardens who retired in 2020 with a combined 163 years of service to the State of Wyoming and its wildlife. Their experience and dedication will be missed!

John Demaree - Laramie Wildlife Investigator - 42 years of service

John Davis - Moorcroft Game Warden - 31 years of service

Neil Hymas - Cokeville Game Warden - 41 years of service

Jessica Beecham - North Riverton Game Warden - 10 years of service

Tom Desomber - Ten Sleep Game Warden - 39 years of service



Neil Hymas



John Demaree



John Davis



Tom Desomber

## PROMOTIONS

Game Warden to Senior Game Warden

Jake Miller - Moorcroft

Spencer Carstens - Cheyenne

Andy Enscoe - Lusk

Jon Desonier - North Riverton



Jessica Beecham



**Wyoming's wildlife belongs to you. Help protect it!  
Report all wildlife violations.**

Call the Stop Poaching Hotline  
or text to TIP411  
(text keyword WGFD and message)

Rewards are provided  
by the Wyoming Wildlife  
Protectors Association



Conserving Wildlife  
Serving People



**STOP  
POACHING**

Help us Stand Watch **1-877-WGFD-TIP**

