

# WYOMING 2014 STATEWIDE HUNTING SEASON FORECAST



## PRONGHORN (antelope)

### JACKSON REGION

In the Jackson Region, northern portions of the Sublette pronghorn herd include Hunt Areas 85 and 86. Although hunter success is good, Hunt Area 85 (Gros Ventre) offers very limited hunting opportunities. There will only be 15 licenses offered for the season. Hunt Area 86 (Hoback) has seen an increase in pronghorn during the past several years. However, hunter access is limited and the majority of the hunting opportunities are located on private lands in the Boundurant area.

### CODY REGION

Overall, pronghorn hunting in the Bighorn Basin is going to be tougher than previous years due to extended drought causing a reduction in pronghorn numbers and seasons designed to reduce numbers to address agricultural damage on private lands. All pronghorn populations in the southern Bighorn Basin which include the Copper Mountain herd (Hunt Areas 76, 114, 115) and the 15-Mile herd (Hunt Areas 77, 83, 110) are below target population objectives. Hunting seasons in these areas are going to be fairly conservative to either maintain or promote population growth. Damage on private lands from pronghorn in cultivated crops have subsided in recent years; therefore, the 2014 hunting season will have fewer doe/fawn licenses in most hunt areas. In addition, Type 1 and 2 license quotas will be reduced in Hunt Areas 77, 110 and 114. Prolonged snow cover and several sub-zero cold snaps last December, January and February had negative effects on these pronghorn herds. Hunters should expect conservative seasons for the next several years to allow these herds to increase. In Hunt Area 80, both buck antelope and doe/fawn licenses have been reduced to allow this herd to grow. Hunt Areas 78, 81, and 82 should have similar seasons to 2013 and hunting should be good. Near Greybull, we suspect hemorrhagic disease also impacted overall numbers of antelope. We are seeing fewer antelope associated with private farm land so doe/fawn hunters may have to hunt a little harder. Hunters with a Type 1, any antelope license should be pleased with the quality of buck antelope this year. Greybull Warden Bill Robertson said, "Buck quality is as good as I have seen it for several years and likely due to good spring forage conditions."

### SHERIDAN REGION

Antelope populations are still at high levels in several herd units, so hunting seasons have been designed to give hunters plenty of opportunity in those areas. The outlook for antelope hunting in most of the Sheridan Region is once again pretty good. However, in those hunt areas north of Gillette and Moorcroft, antelope populations are lower than a few years ago, so license numbers have been set accordingly. In the Sheridan Region, and all other antelope hunt areas in the state, hunters are allowed to purchase a second any antelope license and up to four doe/fawn licenses. However, potential hunters need to be aware that most antelope hunting is found on private land and they should make arrangements for a place to hunt prior to buying licenses. Hunters willing to wait until after the opening day and first weekend of the season may find it easier to get onto private lands. It is possible to find some antelope on the parcels of public lands scattered around northeast Wyoming, but hunters can expect to find other hunters also using those lands. Because of crop damage issues, Hunt Areas 22 and 102 near Buffalo will once again have early rifle doe/fawn seasons beginning September 1 in portions of the hunt areas.

## **GREEN RIVER REGION**

Hunters will notice an improvement in pronghorn hunting in 2014 when compared to 2013, especially concerning horn growth. Mild winter weather and ample moisture have yielded good horn growth this year. Conditions were favorable throughout the Green River Region for both improved animal body condition and fawn production this year, which will improve hunting for this year and following years. As always, hunters will find variable pronghorn hunting opportunities in the Green River Region depending on population status but, in general, the outlook is improving. Many pronghorn populations in the region were significantly affected by the winter of 2010-11 and drought caused lower fawn production/survival during the summers of 2012 and 2013. This year's above average precipitation has arrested this decline and fawns are exceptionally abundant, particularly in higher elevation pronghorn habitats. In general, license numbers and season lengths are similar to 2013 across the region (Hunt Areas 53, 57, 58, 59, 92, 93, 94, 96, 98, 99, 100, and 112). Hunters in Hunt Area 94 are reminded to obtain a permission slip from Western Wyoming Range Limited Partnership before accessing private lands.

It is much wetter this year in many Green River Region antelope hunt areas than the past 10 years. Hunters are reminded to stay on established roads and to be prepared for challenging driving conditions, particularly in clay soil types.

## **LARAMIE REGION**

The Laramie Region received good fall precipitation this past year, and good spring and summer precipitation this year. Habitat is in good condition across the region given this above-average moisture. Based on preliminary pronghorn classification data, fawn ratios have increased from previous years. Pronghorn should be entering the fall in very good body condition and, thus, should have good overwinter survival. Pronghorn hunters should expect to see fewer pronghorn based on our decreased pronghorn population estimates across the region. However, given the higher quality habitat, pronghorn hunters should expect to see better horn growth on bucks and an increase in fawns in the field this year compared to the past few years. Many of the region's pronghorn herd units are below their population objectives as a result of the 2010-11 severe winter, EHD outbreaks, and 2012 drought. Pronghorn licenses were reduced across the Laramie region for the 2014 seasons due to the decrease in pronghorn populations. As a result, hunting should be good for those who were able to obtain a license this year.

Much of the land in southeastern Wyoming is privately-owned, which limits access in some hunt areas. Consequently, hunters should be cautious when purchasing leftover licenses in those areas identified as having limited access. Good buck ratios and horn growth will provide a good hunting experience for hunters who can find a place to hunt. Hunters should refer to Bureau of Land Management (BLM) or U.S Forest Service (USFS) maps to determine which areas contain public land. Access for pronghorn hunting on private land in the region continues to improve, but can still be problematic. Private Lands Public Wildlife (PLPW) Hunter Management Areas and numerous Walk-In Areas provide access for pronghorn hunters on both private and public lands throughout the region.

New in 2014, Hunt Areas 38, 39, 40, and 104 have been combined into Hunt Area 38. Additionally, Hunt Areas 34, 35, and 36 have been combined into Hunt Area 34. Pronghorn hunters are encouraged to review their 2014 pronghorn regulations prior to going afield.

## **LANDER REGION**

Pronghorn populations continue to be down significantly throughout the Lander Region. Most of the region's pronghorn herds were below objective following the 2013 hunting season. To date, pronghorn classifications are showing increased fawn production in 2014. However, yearling buck ratios and overall numbers of pronghorn are down this summer due to extreme drought conditions experienced in 2012 and 2013. Increases in precipitation and forage production this year have contributed to good spring/summer habitat conditions. Buck quality may be better than expected as many quality mature bucks have been observed and hunters should expect good harvest success with a little more effort.

### **CASPER REGION**

Pronghorn hunting in the Casper Region will be good in most hunt areas in 2014, but hunters should expect to work harder than they have much of the past decade to fill their licenses. Due to elevated winter losses during the winter of 2010-11 and 3 consecutive years of record low fawn production, hunters will again see much lower antelope densities compared to those of a few years ago. However, appropriate license reductions were made for the 4<sup>th</sup> consecutive year in an effort to sustain hunter success rates and overall hunting opportunities. Pronghorn numbers remain notably low in Hunt Areas 30 and 31 south of Douglas and Glenrock, in Thunder Basin (Hunt Areas 27 & 29), and in much of the country between Lusk and Newcastle (Hunt Areas 6, 7, & 8). Hunters in southern Niobrara County (Hunt Area 9) should continue to expect good success along Highway 18-20, although local managers report pronghorn densities are not as high as they have been in recent years. In this area, hunter access to private lands via the Department's PLPW access program continues to provide good hunting opportunity. Areas around Casper are more of a mixed bag. Pronghorn numbers south of Casper in Area 32 remain near average levels, while areas west of Casper (Hunt Areas 70-72) have far fewer pronghorn compared to the past few years. Hunt Area 73 northwest of Casper still has good pronghorn numbers and should continue to provide some excellent hunting. Despite poor fawn production and survival the past 3 years, there is a bit of good news this year. Preliminary reports from Casper Region wardens and biologists indicate fawn production is excellent this year, meaning antelope populations may begin to finally recover. What a difference well-timed rain and snow can make! When pregnant doe antelope enter the winter in good shape and experience a wet spring (without severe blizzards), their improved body condition makes a huge difference in birth rates and the health and survival of their fawns. The excellent fall moisture and subsequent fall green-up, followed by the wet spring of 2014, provided such ideal conditions for good fawn production this year.

While overall buck numbers will be down in most areas, buck quality should be a little better than normal. The excellent moisture received last fall, coupled with improved forage production this spring and summer, resulted in productive pronghorn habitat going into the 2014 hunting season. This translates into improved horn growth and trophy quality. The mild weather during the winter of 2013-14 enabled pronghorn to devote more energy to horn growth as the energetic demands of winter survival were not as high as normal, and animals entered the winter in better body condition compared to recent years. Given the majority of horn growth occurs during winter and early spring months for pronghorn, bucks were able to get a good head start, and received an additional boost throughout the summer.

### **PINEDALE REGION**

In the Pinedale Region, northern portions of the Sublette pronghorn herd include Hunt Areas 87 through 90. Population estimates for this herd are slightly below desired levels. Lower elevation sagebrush communities throughout the region are in very poor condition due to consecutive

years of drought. However, forage production improved during 2014 following periodic rainfall during the growing season. With the more abundant forage and available water, pronghorn remain scattered throughout much of the area and sportsmen can expect to see a good number of bucks dispersed throughout the hunt areas. Observations from this summer's surveys, indicate adult mortality during the winter of 2013-14 was "below normal" on most winter range complexes in the Pinedale Region.

## **DEER**

### **JACKSON REGION**

The Wyoming Range deer population is designated as a special management herd which provides high quality hunting opportunities, mature age-class deer, and high buck-to-doe ratios. Deer numbers increased over the last 4 years because of high over-winter survival. The 2+ year old bucks should be well-represented during fall hunting seasons this year. The early portion of the winter allowed animals to remain dispersed on winter ranges and overall the population experienced low winter mortality. Summer rains were timely and maintained forbs in a high nutritional state and, as a result, hunters may notice bucks with exceptional antler growth – similar to 2013.

The southern portion of the herd unit will offer 14 days of antlered deer hunting in Hunt Areas 134 and 135. Youth license holders will be able to take any deer from October 1-14, while general license deer hunters will be able to take antlered deer from October 1-14. General license, antlered-only deer hunting will run from September 15 through October 7 in the Greys River (Hunt Area 144), Salt River (Hunt Area 145) and along the east slope of the Wyoming Range (Hunt Area 143).

Nonresident quotas for 2014 in Region G will remain at 600 licenses. This strategy should help maintain quality bucks given existing herd ratios and population size.

In addition to mule deer hunting opportunities, a limited quota, doe or fawn white-tailed deer season will again be offered in the Salt River drainage (Hunt Area 145). White-tailed deer numbers along the Salt River have increased and can support a limited doe/fawn hunt. Subsequently, a limited quota, Type 8 license, (60 licenses) will be offered in Hunt Area 145 from November 1 through January 31. This Type 8 license can be purchased in addition to a statewide general deer license.

The Targhee deer herd is a small population on the west side of the Teton Mountains managed to provide recreational hunting opportunities. Population growth is restricted by limited winter range. Proposed hunting seasons in 2014 include a general license season for antlered deer from September 15 through October 7.

### **CODY REGION**

Mule deer numbers are still depressed in the southern portion of the Bighorn Basin and because of this, the 2014 hunting season is predicted to be mostly fair-to-poor hunting. For the past few years, these deer populations have struggled with harsh winters along with yearly outbreaks of hemorrhagic disease. Because these deer populations are below target levels, doe/fawn license quotas have been reduced or eliminated in many areas to help build these populations. Some limited quota areas such as Hunt Areas 37, 119 and 125 should see fair-to-good hunting, while

Hunt Areas 116, 118, and 120 along with most general license areas will likely be tougher hunting. However, as long as hunters put forth the effort, they still should be able to find deer.

For those hunters looking to pursue white-tailed deer, you will likely see fewer deer than in past years. In 2013, hemorrhagic disease caused a significant die-off of white-tailed deer in most areas. Because of this, most hunt areas will have fewer licenses and hunting opportunities in 2014. It will likely take a couple years for these populations to rebound, barring any more disease outbreaks, so hunters should expect reduced deer numbers and tougher hunting for a couple years.

For the northern portion of the Bighorn Mountains, buck numbers have been holding steady with a slightly decreased buck harvest in 2012, and a slight improvement in 2013. The overall population still has not increased to levels seen in the mid 2000's so buck hunting will be fair-to-good, whereas the doe/fawn hunting opportunity will be less in some areas. Near Greybull, field personnel report numbers are down from previous years. There have been some nice older bucks observed but younger buck deer are not as numerous, indicating poor fawn and yearling production/survival in past years. We reduced some doe/fawn licenses due to fewer damage conflicts, but have kept many of those licenses in areas with chronic agricultural damage despite the population being under population objective.

Mule deer hunters may have fewer older buck deer available in the North and South Forks of the Shoshone River this season. Deer populations are below desired levels and buck harvest was relatively high during the 2012 and 2013 hunting seasons. Good production in 2012 translated into more yearling bucks in 2013, which should be noticeable to hunters in 2014. The nonresident quota was reduced and doe-fawn licenses remain at minimal levels in order to reduce harvest and increase deer numbers in these areas.

Opportunities to harvest a mature buck deer in Hunt Areas 105 and 106 will be good in both the later portion of the general season and the November limited quota season in 2014. Recent changes in hunting season structures should also increase the percentage of older age class bucks in Hunt Area 109.

## **SHERIDAN REGION**

Deer hunting in the Sheridan Region is forecast to be about average in much of the region with less than average conditions in the northeast part of the region. Deer hunters in areas around Gillette and Moorcroft can again expect to see less deer than they did a few years ago. White-tailed deer hunters in the Sheridan, Buffalo, and Kaycee areas will notice the negative impacts of the 2013 EHD outbreak with lower numbers of white-tailed deer in some places. Overall, hunters with access to private lands are expected to continue to have high success, while hunters on public lands can expect large numbers of hunters and comparatively lower success. Antler growth and body condition of deer appear to be good in those areas where deer have had access to better forage during this summer. There will likely be some real nice trophy bucks harvested this fall in the Sheridan Region. Hunters are advised that if they have access to private land they should consider buying reduced price doe/fawn deer licenses as several thousand doe/fawn licenses are available throughout the region with many of them restricted to private lands. Several deer hunt areas from Sheridan to Kaycee opened to doe/fawn rifle hunting beginning on September 1 to address crop damage issues. In Hunt Areas 24, 27, 29, 30, 33, or 163, hunters can again purchase an unlimited number of doe/fawn deer licenses until the quota is exhausted. In Hunt Area 24, no quota (unlimited) was set for the Type 8 white-tailed deer doe/fawn licenses.

## **GREEN RIVER REGION**

Hunters will likely experience better hunting for mule deer in 2014. Increased fawn production occurred in many Green River Region deer herds last year and this summer, with the exception of the very dry, low deer density Hunt Areas 131 and 100. Overall survival of deer was very good during the last two winters in all areas resulting in increased deer numbers across the region.

Most Green River Region hunting seasons have been restricted to a 5 to 14-day antlered deer structure with very limited opportunity to hunt does. An antler point restriction is now in place in Hunt Area 131 (4-point restriction), remains in place in Hunt Area 132 (3-point restriction), and has been added to Hunt Areas 133, 134, and 168. The antler point restriction in place for the past two seasons in Hunt Areas 82 and 100 was removed as planned due to achieving buck ratio goals. Season lengths were determined using observed buck-to-doe ratios and overall deer numbers. Areas with better buck and total deer numbers will have longer hunting seasons. Hunters can expect a good variety of buck age classes to choose from, and antler growth appears to be good this year due to habitat conditions. Buck ratios generally remain in the special management ( $\geq 30$  bucks:100 does) category in most mule deer hunt areas in the Green River Region.

Mule deer numbers in the South Rock Springs herd (Hunt Areas 101 and 102) appear similar to last year, and some large bucks were observed this summer. License numbers were reduced for the 2014 season, and those hunters successful in the draw should experience very good hunting this year. The season in Hunt Area 102 will again be open for any deer, and hunters will continue to be restricted to taking antlered deer in Hunt Area 101. Hunters can expect to see good numbers of older-aged bucks in these areas.

Many deer hunt areas in the Green River Region have a few white-tailed deer. In most areas, the season restrictions apply to both species, while a few areas are open for “any” white-tailed deer. White-tails are most common in the Little Snake River Valley portion of Area 82 and 100, along the Green River between (and including) LaBarge Creek and Interstate 80, within and adjacent to Kemmerer city limits along the Ham’s Fork and along the Black’s Fork near Robertson.

## **LARAMIE REGION**

Hunters should expect to see similar deer hunting throughout the Laramie Region compared to last year. Mule deer herds across the region experienced good over-winter survival rates. Additionally, increased precipitation this past spring and summer has improved habitat and will contribute to good body condition, increased fawn ratios, and increased antler growth in bucks. The increased fat reserves from the better habitat conditions should improve mule deer survival over the coming winter.

White-tailed deer hunting in southeast Wyoming should be good, especially for hunters with access to private land. White-tailed deer populations seem to persist and remain healthy over time, with sporadic reductions occurring due to EHD.

Hunters are encouraged to review the 2014 deer hunting regulations because there have been changes in hunt areas, season dates, and limitations in the Laramie Region. Hunt Areas 15, 16, 55, 57 have been combined into Hunt Area 15. The Sheep Mountain (Hunt Areas 61, 74, 75, 76, 77) mule deer hunting season will run from Oct. 1 – Oct. 7, and remains a general season hunt

with a 3-point or better restriction. This year's Lake Owen burn has already begun to recover and new green vegetation was visible as early as two weeks following containment. The 2012 Arapaho wildfire in the Laramie Mountains has continued to recover and should increase quality habitat for both deer and elk and provide for better hunting conditions.

Hunters pursuing deer in the Snowy Range or Sierra Madre Mountains should be aware of the ongoing pine beetle epidemic that has resulted in the deaths of millions of lodgepole and ponderosa pines. Avoid dead trees when choosing a camp site. It is also a good idea to have access to a chainsaw.

### **LANDER REGION**

Similar to pronghorn, mule deer populations have continued to decline over the last couple of years due to poor fawn productivity and drought conditions. Of the 6 herds within the Lander Region, all are estimated to be below objective following 2013 hunting seasons. Overall fawn ratios throughout the region were down in 2012 and 2013, as compared to previous years. Buck-to-doe ratios remained relatively stable in most areas. As a result, hunters will experience shorter seasons, a reduced opportunity to harvest an antlerless deer, and antler point restrictions. The number of licenses for any white-tailed deer seasons in the Lander, Riverton, and Jeffrey City areas have been reduced due to impacts of EHD during the fall of 2013. These license reductions, combined with lower numbers of white-tailed deer, will likely reduce hunter harvest opportunity in the affected areas this fall.

### **CASPER REGION**

White-tailed Deer: Public lands within the Black Hills National Forest continue to provide reasonable hunting opportunity. However, following harsh conditions during the winter of 2010-11, subsequent mediocre fawn production, along with losses to EHD, white-tailed deer numbers are still much lower than those of the past decade. As such, hunters can again expect to see reduced densities of white-tailed deer in the Black Hills this fall. Fortunately, fawn production and winter survival improved somewhat in 2013-2014, so hunters should expect to see slightly more deer in 2014 than in the past two years. Nonresident Region A licenses have remained depressed since 2010, and declining resident hunter participation should again result in lower hunter numbers on National Forest lands compared to much of the 2000's. Hunt Areas 1, 2, and 3 will close on November 21<sup>st</sup> this year in an effort to continue reducing buck harvest, while Hunt Areas 4, 5, and 6 will close on their traditional date of November 20<sup>th</sup>.

Outside of the Black Hills, white-tailed deer are mainly found on private lands along creeks and rivers. Hunters should expect only fair-to-tough hunting opportunities in these areas. Casper Regional wardens and biologists have noted a fairly significant drop in white-tail numbers here the past two falls due to EHD die-offs. However, fawn numbers appear to be good this summer and hopefully white-tail numbers will begin to rebound. As always in the Casper Region outside the Black Hills, hunters should plan to secure permission to access private land prior to purchasing a white-tailed deer license and going afield.

Mule Deer: Following several years of poor fawn productivity, the number of mature bucks available to hunters has declined across much of the region, especially on public lands where hunting pressure is heavy. For the most part, already conservative seasons are unchanged for this fall. In 2014, the Department will implement a 3-point or better season in Hunt Area 66 for the second consecutive year. This restriction will reduce harvest of yearling bucks and will likely result in decreased hunter numbers. Ultimately, this season should help to enhance

yearling buck survival and improve mature buck availability in future years. Although buck numbers are currently at low levels, Hunt Area 66 continues to be popular among hunters because it provides a fair general license hunting experience. In addition, the 3-point or better season in Hunt Area 10 (Rochelle Hills) will continue again this year. Hunters in the Black Hills and Cheyenne River areas will likely experience another year of tough mule deer hunting on both public and private lands. There are good quality bucks available, but their numbers are low. Doe/fawn licenses have long been eliminated throughout much of the region, and the few remaining private-land licenses quickly sell out. To reduce hunting pressure in general areas, nonresident quotas were again cut substantially throughout much of the Casper Region. Deer hunting in limited quota Hunt Areas 34 and 89 west of Casper should continue to be good this year. Although these herds have declined to the same extent as herds hunted with general licenses, recent license quota reductions should again provide high hunter success for those lucky enough to draw the license. Hunters should expect to see some nice trophy bucks in these limited quota managed areas, although overall buck numbers have continued to decline. In the long run, across the region and Wyoming, increased fawn production and survival is what is most needed for mule deer herds to recover.

### **PINEDALE REGION**

The Sublette and Wyoming Range deer herds are 2 large populations with special management strategies designed to provide high quality hunting opportunities, older age-class deer, and high buck-to-doe ratios. Hunting conditions should be good this fall. Hunting seasons in all regional hunt areas have been designed to increase overall deer numbers and reduce buck harvest below the 5-year average. To accomplish these goals, a standardized closing date (October 7<sup>th</sup>) for all general license hunting seasons in the Sublette herd unit was implemented in attempts to spread out hunting pressure. In addition, nonresident quotas for Region H will remain at 800 licenses.

In addition to mule deer hunting opportunities, an any white-tailed deer season will be offered again this year. White-tailed deer numbers appear to be stable or increasing along many of the major river corridors. Subsequently, a limited quota, Type 3 license (50 licenses) will be offered in Hunt Areas 138-140, 142, and 143 from October 1 to November 30. This Type 3 license can be purchased in addition to a statewide general deer license.

## **ELK**

### **JACKSON REGION**

General license seasons will run from September 26 to October 31 in the Fall Creek elk herd. In the early- to mid-2000's, this elk herd experienced several years of sustained population growth. Recent hunting seasons have been successful in reducing elk numbers toward desired levels. The 2014 season will focus the general portion of the season on any elk with the exception that yearling males, or spike bulls, will be excluded from the harvest. This change in season structure implemented in 2013 should result in more bulls being added to the posthunt population. The number of reduced price cow or calf licenses has been significantly reduced for the 2014 hunting season. A limited number of cow or calf licenses will still be offered in an effort to focus harvest pressure on antlerless elk that spend the summer near residential and agricultural lands along the Snake River.

In the Afton herd, a change was implemented in 2008 in the lower Greys River which shortened the season in Hunt Area 89 in order to reduce harvest on bull elk. This strategy will continue in

2014 with general license hunting valid from October 15 to October 24. In Hunt Area 90, liberal seasons into November and increased limited quota cow or calf tags will again provide hunting opportunity while attempting to trim the segment of the herd that inhabits the Upper Greys River. Hunters should find trophy class bulls in Greys River hunt areas.

Conservative hunting seasons are proposed for Hunt Areas 70-71, 79, and 81-83 to address low recruitment while trying to maintain bull numbers. In the southern portion of the herd unit in Hunt Areas 75, 77, 78, and 80, cow seasons are proposed to address elk populations that summer along the Snake River corridor in southern Grand Teton National Park and in Hunt Area 78. Hunter opportunities in Hunt Area 78 were modified slightly in 2014 by increasing the number of archery or muzzle-loading firearm licenses (Type 7 licenses) available and reducing the Type 6 licenses. The changes were made to address homeowner concerns regarding rifle seasons in the residential areas. In Grand Teton National Park, the River Bottom portion of Hunt Area 75 will remain closed this year and Hunt Area 75 Type 4 hunters will again be allowed to hunt in Hunt Area 79 and a portion of Area 81 in an effort to reduce hunter densities in the southern portion of the Park. Hunters will continue to have opportunities to hunt on the National Elk Refuge (Refuge) with reduced price cow or calf licenses. The Department's Hunter Management Access system will be used to allocate access permits for the Refuge. To apply for a National Elk Refuge permission slip, hunters should access the WGFD website at <http://wgfd.wyo.gov/plpwhmprogram/frmHunterManagementDetail.aspx>. Hunting seasons in the Moran Junction area are proposed to reduce hunting pressure on Teton Wilderness and Yellowstone elk with Hunt Areas 70, 71, and 79 closing on November 3. To address low calf-to-cow ratios and low recruitment in the Gros Ventre area (Hunt Areas 81-83), the shortened season length and antlered-only spikes-excluded limitation will be maintained in 2014.

## **CODY REGION**

Both the South Bighorn (Hunt Areas 47-49) and Gooseberry elk herds (Hunt Areas 62-64) still have plenty of elk, with numerous cow/calf licenses available in all hunt areas. Access in some portions of these hunt areas can be difficult. Hunter Management Areas are available in Hunt Areas 47, 62, 63 and 64, which provide additional hunting access on private lands. Overall, there is ample opportunity for elk hunting in the southern Bighorn Basin, along with some very good bull quality in most areas and hunters are encouraged to take advantage of these great elk hunting opportunities. Hunters are reminded that Game and Fish personnel will again be collecting blood and tissue samples from harvested elk this hunting season to monitor and test brucellosis seroprevalence around the Basin.

The elk populations on the northern part of the Bighorns remains healthy and this fall there will be good opportunity again to harvest an elk. Good forage conditions on the summer range will hopefully hold elk on public lands later this year than in previous years so hunters will have a good chance to find an elk on the mountain. Bull hunting should be good for those hunters who drew a Type 1 license, and success usually depends on weather and snow conditions. An early heavy snow may trigger their movement to private land, especially in Hunt Area 41. More licenses and longer seasons for cows (extended into December) should help cow elk hunters in 2014. While elk distribution in Hunt Area 41 over the past few years may have discouraged many hunters, longer seasons should give hunters a better chance of harvesting an antlerless elk.

Elk hunting near Cody has been excellent in most areas. In some areas, elk numbers exceed management objectives and antlerless elk hunting opportunities have been increased. In other areas, decreased calf survival has reduced herd productivity and required reductions in both

antlered and antlerless harvest. Changes adopted in 2013 for Hunt Areas 55, 56, 59, and 60 will remain in place for 2014. This includes the conversion of Hunt Area 55 to limited quota hunting, a shorter two-week general license season for non-wilderness areas in Hunt Areas 56 and 59, and a rifle opening date of September 20 for Hunt Area 60. There will still be expanded opportunities to hunt antlerless elk in Hunt Area 61 on limited quota licenses and Hunt Area 66 on a general license. The opportunity to hunt bull elk on a general license in Hunt Area 66 will be limited to the month of September in 2014.

Hunt areas northwest of Cody have changed dramatically in an effort to better manage migratory and non-migratory elk population segments. Non-migratory elk that roam the area from the Shoshone Canyon to the Montana state line along Rattlesnake Mountain, Pat O'Hara Peak, Bald Ridge, and the Beartooth face are all part of the same group of elk and were placed in the same hunt area (Hunt Area 54). This change involved adding the eastern portions of Hunt Areas 50 and 121 into Hunt Area 54 and eliminating Hunt Area 65, resulting in a much larger Hunt Area 54. A similar change was implemented with the migratory elk of Sunlight and Crandall, as the western portion of Hunt Area 50 and nearly all of Hunt Area 52 were combined to create a much larger Hunt Area 51. And finally, the western portion of Hunt Area 121 was added to the Dead Indian and Elk Creek drainages to form the "new" Hunt Area 53. Please review the 2014 elk hunt area map closely or call the Cody Regional Office for a more detailed explanation.

### **SHERIDAN REGION**

The Sheridan Region contains some of Wyoming's well-known elk hunt areas. Those hunters who were successful in drawing one of the highly sought after limited quota any elk licenses for a hunt area in the Bighorn Mountains, the Rochelle Hills, or the Fortification will have the opportunity for a great hunt with the possibility of bringing home a real trophy. The limited quota any elk hunting season in Hunt Area 113 will be open this fall after being closed since 2012. Because potential hunters know there are some large bulls in this hunt area, it was one of the hardest licenses to draw in the state. For those hunters who did not draw a license, there are still some leftover antlerless elk licenses available and residents can purchase a general license to hunt in Hunt Areas 36 and 37. Success for general license hunters and limited quota antlerless elk license hunters tends to be much lower than those who have a limited quota any elk license, but they can still enjoy time together hunting with family and friends. In a portion of Hunt Area 37, cow/calf hunting is scheduled to open September 1 and will run through September 30. This season is designed to allow rifle hunters the opportunity to harvest an elk before they leave a small portion of public land or harvest elk off the national forest. Antlerless elk (Type 4 license) hunting in Hunt Area 38 will again begin on October 1 which should significantly increase hunter success.

A second year of enhanced brucellosis surveillance will be conducted in the Bighorn Mountain elk hunt areas. Elk hunters are encouraged to collect blood samples from harvested elk in the blood tubes provided as part of the brucellosis surveillance project. WGFD personnel in the field will have spare blood tubes available and accept samples from successful hunters.

### **GREEN RIVER REGION**

Elk numbers remain high and continue to increase across the region, with most populations remaining above objective, with exception of the two special management herds, South Rock Springs and Steamboat. Regional personnel expect another above average hunting season for elk hunters with ample licenses and long seasons.

The Steamboat or “Desert” elk herd (Hunt Area 100) is estimated to be slightly below objective and licenses were reduced for 2013 and 2014. As per current special management direction, bull ratios remain high for this population. The average age of harvested bulls fell slightly over the last 3 years due to increased bull harvest; however, older aged bulls remain in the herd. Antlered and antlerless hunting opportunity was reduced somewhat to move the population toward objective. This area continues to be extremely popular with hunters, probably due to the abundance of mature bulls and limited time it requires to harvest an animal.

The West Green River herd (Hunt Areas 102-105) remains above objective, especially in the western portion of Hunt Areas 103 and 104. As a result, the number of antlerless elk licenses was increased in this portion of the herd unit to reduce this segment, while antlerless opportunity was reduced in the more popular Hunt Area 102. We will continue to maintain a shorter “any elk” general season to continue managing for higher bull-to-cow ratios and older-aged males.

The Department significantly increased harvest in the South Rock Springs herd (Hunt Areas 30-32) in recent years due to growing numbers of elk. This interstate population is difficult to manage since elk move freely between Wyoming, Colorado, and Utah to escape hunting pressure and utilize existing seasonal habitats. The Department slightly reduced opportunity in this area for 2014, but hunting will be very good for those who draw licenses. Bull ratios are high and many older-aged trophy class animals were harvested in 2012 and 2013.

Hunting was liberalized across much of the Sierra Madre elk herd last year to address a population that has been significantly above objective for many years. Issues surrounding hunter density, access, road density, and perennially low bull ratios continue to impact the Department’s efforts to manage this population. Increased harvest of antlerless elk in Hunt Areas 13, 15, 21, and 108 will be achieved through a combination of general any elk, general antlerless, and reduced price cow-calf licenses.

Seasons in the Petition herd (Hunt Area 124) will be similar to last year, with greater bull hunting opportunity. We will continue to put the majority of harvest in this area on the female segment of the herd to limit population growth. This area is becoming a popular area with “trophy” bull hunters.

Elk hunting in the Uinta herd unit (Hunt Areas 106 and 107) continues to be affected by weather conditions moreso than other elk populations in southern Wyoming. Elk in this herd move between Wyoming and Utah, creating challenges for sportsmen in Wyoming. Additionally, access is a concern in this herd, particularly in Hunt Area 106 where private lands are often leased to outfitters. The population is managed to minimize damage to stored grass hay, but weather conditions dictate the number of elk wintering in Wyoming more than hunting seasons.

## **LARMIE REGION**

A majority of the elk herds in the Laramie Region are above their population objectives and should provide hunters with excellent hunting opportunities. Elk populations across the region have high bull ratios (greater than 29 bulls:100 cows) and productive calf ratios (greater than 30 calves:100 cows), demonstrating healthy elk populations with plenty of bulls available for harvest. Hunters should read regulations for their hunt area, as some seasons have changed from the 2013 season. Hunt Areas 5 and 6 have been combined into Hunt Area 6. In some hunt areas, hunters may be able to purchase up to 3 elk licenses.

Elk have learned to avoid areas with high hunting pressure, but plenty of good elk hunting should be available away from well-traveled roads and trails. A few Public Land, Private Wildlife Hunter Management Areas provide access opportunities in the region but, as with other species, access to private lands is limited in many areas. Hunters should plan ahead for places to hunt.

## **LANDER REGION**

Like much of Wyoming, elk populations are doing exceptionally well across the Lander Region. Observed bull-to-cow ratios remain high over most of central Wyoming, while calf survival in 2013 was similar to previous years.

New in Dubois for 2014, Hunt Areas 67 and 68 now have regulations excluding spike bull elk from the harvest. The new spikes excluded regulation was implemented based on input received at public meetings. The season is designed to reduce harvest on younger bulls.

Favorable weather conditions during this fall's hunting seasons should result in excellent harvest rates and hunter success in all hunt areas. With elk herds above objective in almost all locations, license levels and season dates have been designed to reduce populations toward management targets.

## **CASPER REGION**

High elk numbers continue to provide outstanding hunting opportunities throughout the Casper Region. Nearly all elk hunt areas in the Casper Region have opening dates and season lengths nearly identical to those of the past few years. Elk hunters should continue to enjoy remarkable numbers of elk and good hunting success, especially if the weather cooperates. Elk hunters in the southern Bighorns (Hunt Area 120) should again expect to see improved bull quality and availability, with good access to antlerless elk as well. Hunters in the Rattlesnake Hills (Hunt Area 23) should again expect moderate hunting quality as a high percentage of those elk continue to seek refuge on private lands with restricted access. This area can be "hit or miss," as hunting can be exceptional when elk return to public lands, as they periodically do throughout the hunting season. Elk hunters in the Laramie Range (Hunt Areas 7 and 19) should continue to enjoy outstanding hunt quality, especially for bull elk, as bull numbers and trophy quality remain strong. Casper Region managers noted a substantial increase in the number of large trophy quality bulls in Hunt Area 7 following last year's hunting season, which should bode well for the 2014 season. Access for cow elk hunting on private lands continues to be relatively good in Hunt Area 7, especially later in the season. Hunters are also reminded to take full advantage of the Department's Walk-In-Areas and Hunter Management Areas, which provide tremendous opportunities throughout the region, but especially for antlerless elk in Hunt Area 7.

Those hunters with general licenses should not plan to hunt in Converse, Niobrara or Weston counties unless they have secured access to private lands known to contain elk. General license areas within these counties are not managed for a sustainable elk population as most of these lands do not provide quality elk habitat. Thus, elk occur only in isolated areas and almost exclusively on private lands in Hunt Areas 126 and 129.

In the Black Hills, elk hunters should expect to see improved hunting opportunity in limited quota Hunt Area 1. Last year, snow greatly reduced hunter access, while over-winter survival of elk was good in this predominately public land area. On the surrounding private lands, which make up Hunt Area 117, elk numbers and bull quality appear to be similar to the past couple of

years, as this herd is holding fairly steady. North of I-90, Hunt Area 116 converted from limited quota to a general license area last year. This change was made to better facilitate elk harvest on private lands, where elk numbers remain above desired levels. Since elk almost exclusively occupy private land in Hunt Area 116, there is very little opportunity to harvest an elk on public lands. Therefore, general license hunters are encouraged to secure private land access before going afield.

## **PINEDALE REGION**

There are 4 elk herds managed within the Pinedale Region. Liberal seasons have been in place for several years and are designed to move populations toward post hunting season objective levels while maintaining at least 20 bulls per 100 cows in post-hunt populations.

The Piney elk herd has exceeded the established population objective over the last several years. In an effort to reduce this herd, seasons in Hunt Areas 92 and 94 will open October 15<sup>th</sup> for general license any elk hunting and extend to November 23<sup>rd</sup> for antlerless elk. Limited quota cow or calf licenses will again be offered in Hunt Areas 92 and 94 and will open on October 1 and run to November 24<sup>th</sup> to address surplus numbers of elk along the east slope of the Wyoming Range.

Elk numbers in the Pinedale herd remain near the upper limits of the post season trend objective despite increased hunter success and improved overall harvest in 2013. This fall's hunting seasons will again allow any elk to be taken by general license holders for both Hunt Areas 97 and 98 from October 1<sup>st</sup> to October 15<sup>th</sup> and then switch to antlerless elk from October 16<sup>th</sup> to November 20<sup>th</sup>. Reduced price limited quota Type 6 license season lengths were extended for both hunt areas in 2014, running from September 20<sup>th</sup> to November 20<sup>th</sup>.

The 2014 hunting season in the Hoback herd is similar to 2013 for both Hunt Areas 86 and 87. The herd is being managed to provide recreational opportunities while addressing low elk numbers in Area 87 north of Highway 189/191.

For the Upper Green River herd, sportsmen can anticipate good hunting conditions during the 2014 hunting season. This herd remains near the upper limits of the post season trend objective of 2,500 animals and similar to the 2013 hunting season, reduced price limited quota Type 6 licenses will be available for Hunt Areas 95 and 96. This herd is managed using a combination of general and limited quota licenses to stabilize elk numbers in the population.

## **MOOSE**

### **JACKSON REGION**

The Targhee moose herd has been designated for special management and conservative hunting seasons will be maintained in 2014 in the combined Hunt Areas 16 and 37. Poor hunter success in recent years and low calf-to-cow ratios are a concern in this herd unit. Hunting seasons in 2014 will offer 5 licenses for the combined Hunt Areas 16 and 37. The Jackson herd calf:cow ratios have improved during 2014 but, unfortunately, several years of low ratios have precluded any significant population growth and resulted in the elimination of antlerless tags for all hunt areas. Hunt Areas 7, 14, 15 and 32 will again be closed due to low calf:cow ratios and declining population trends. Five antlered moose licenses will again be offered in 2014 for the combined Hunt Areas 17 and 28. In the upper Gros Ventre drainage, Hunt Area 18 will remain at 5

antlered moose licenses. Conservative seasons are again proposed to address the low population densities and limited recruitment the moose herd experienced in recent years. In the Jackson portion of the Sublette moose herd, management is focusing on stabilizing moose numbers in Hunt Areas 10, 20, 21, and 23. Mature bulls are consistently being harvested and the opportunity to harvest a trophy class Shiras moose has increased in recent years, especially in Areas 10 and 21. Throughout all of these hunt areas, the average antler spread continues to approach 40 inches.

In an effort to standardize opening dates of the hunting season in the Jackson area, moose seasons will open five days later on September 15. Because of the anticipated warm weather projected for this fall, hunters should plan on hunting when temperatures are the coolest and moose are likely to be feeding – at first light and early evening.

### **CODY REGION**

Moose numbers in Hunt Areas 9 and 11 in the Absaroka Mountains are still at low densities. Despite low permit levels, hunters have had good luck harvesting mature bulls with several nice (+45”) bulls being reported. Although opportunity is limited, we anticipate hunters for the 2014 season will again have good success.

### **SHERIDAN REGION**

The Bighorn Mountains continue to have a thriving moose population. Limited quota moose licenses for any moose in Hunt Areas 1, 34, and 42 are some of the most highly sought after licenses in Wyoming. It is expected that there will be some large mature bulls harvested again this fall as some “trophies” have been observed during the summer of 2014. Although bull moose can be observed during the summer along roads and highways soon after the hunting season begins, many bulls head for deep cover making for a challenging hunt.

### **GREEN RIVER REGION**

Moose populations in the Uinta and Lincoln herd units remain down and this fall’s season will remain conservative. Disease (parasite) concerns have been documented and significant losses appear to have occurred, although recent losses are much lower than previous observed losses, and increased moose numbers have been documented. Antlerless moose licenses have been eliminated in the Uinta and Lincoln moose herds. However, bull hunters will find ample opportunity to harvest large, older-aged bulls, particularly in Hunt Area 26.

New for 2014, Hunt Area 33 will be open for the first time in 10 years to address moose numbers and habitat issues on Seedska-dee National Wildlife Refuge. This area will be open for any moose harvest (except cow moose with calf at side) and is included with adjacent Hunt Areas 36 and 40 (which are open for antlered moose, only).

### **LARAMIE REGION**

Hunting should be excellent for those hunters with a Hunt Area 38/41 moose license. Snowy Range moose licenses were decreased by 5 for Type 1’s, and 10 for Type 4’s. The reduction in licenses was done in an effort to maintain a healthy moose population and a quality moose hunting experience. This hunt area is one of the premier moose areas in the nation. Moose are found scattered throughout the Medicine Bow National Forest and adjacent lands. Ample opportunity exists to harvest a trophy bull for hunters willing to venture away from roads. Good calf production in this herd often makes it difficult for antlerless moose hunters to locate a cow without a calf at her side. Hunters are encouraged to avoid highway corridors and popular tourist areas when pursuing their moose.

## **LANDER REGION**

Both of the Lander Region's moose herds are below desired population objective levels and continue to struggle, though recently in the Lander herd unit, moose numbers seem to be slightly increasing. Although moose calf survival remained near average in 2013, overall herd performance and population size continue to be of concern. Seasons for 2014 will be identical to those held in 2013. Moose hunters in the Lander herd unit enjoyed harvesting some exceptional quality bull moose in 2013, as a result of conservative hunting seasons. A similar harvest is expected in 2014. Hunt Area 30 license holders will continue to be allowed to hunt in Hunt Area 2 from November 1 through the 20<sup>th</sup>. Quotas remain the same in the Lander Region.

## **PINEDALE REGION**

The Pinedale Region manages the majority of the Sublette moose herd unit which is designed to provide recreational opportunities and maintain high bull:cow ratios. The Sublette herd remains below the mid-winter trend count objective, but has seen slow, steady growth since 2005. Since 2003, a total of 390 permits were eliminated. This reduction in harvest has been successful in reversing a downward trend in this population. The 2014 seasons are targeted at maintaining quality bull ratios and an average harvest age of 4 years old. Trophy class bulls continue to be harvested in this portion of the herd unit with the average antler spread approaching 40 inches. During the early portion of the season, many bulls may be found in the cooler, heavily timbered slopes except at first light and dusk when temperatures are the coolest and moose are likely to be feeding.

## **BIGHORN SHEEP**

### **JACKSON REGION**

Sheep hunting opportunities for the Targhee herd will again be offered in 2014 with one resident and one nonresident license available. With the exception of 2012 when no sheep were harvested, one ram was harvested each year from 2006 to 2013. For the Jackson Sheep Herd, the 2014 hunting licenses will be maintained at 8 licenses in Hunt Area 7. Licenses were reduced in 2013 after managers detected pneumonia-related mortalities across all age classes during 2012 and early-2013. Despite the detection of pneumonia in this population, the average age of harvested rams was 7.8 years old in 2013. While it is still unclear what impacts the current disease outbreak may have on this herd, sheep population trends indicate ram numbers were high during late-spring 2014 and hunters should experience a good hunt this fall.

### **CODY REGION**

Overall, sheep hunting in the Absaroka Mountains should be good for those lucky enough to draw a license. In 2013, hunter success in Hunt Areas 1-5 was at least 90% with average ages of harvested rams between 7-8 years old. Licenses were reduced in Hunt Areas 3, 4, and 5 as a result of documented winter losses. Fewer ram tags will also help maintain the overall number of older age class rams in the population. Higher than normal winter losses were suspected during 2010-2011 in Area 5. Several classification/trend flights have been conducted in Area 5 since 2011 and approximately 30-40% fewer sheep were observed compared to the previous 10-year average. The 2014 hunting season should be good, but hunters in some areas will have to put in more effort compared to previous years, especially if looking for an older age-class ram. For 2014, the number of Type 6 ewe/lamb licenses in Hunt Area 5 were reduced.

Hunt Area 12 bighorn sheep herd in Devil's Canyon continues to grow and do well, with several older age class rams observed during summer and winter flights this past year. Hunters lucky enough to draw the coveted two licenses for this small herd will have a great opportunity to harvest a mature ram.

### **LARAMIE REGION**

Timely precipitation benefitted bighorn sheep in the Laramie Region. Bighorn sheep hunting in the Laramie Peak area was very good last fall and should be again this year. Ram ratios in Hunt Area 19 are very good and lamb production has increased during the last 3 years. The future looks bright for this herd and hunters can expect a good opportunity to find a trophy ram this fall. Bighorn sheep Hunt Areas 18 and 21 are open for the 2014 season, with 2 resident licenses available.

### **LANDER REGION**

Lamb production declined slightly in the Whiskey Mountain bighorn sheep population in 2013 but is still considered to be doing well when compared to the 20-year average. Disease issues continue to be a concern with this population of sheep. Lamb productivity has been depressed in the herd unit for nearly 20 years and while it has certainly impacted population growth, there are still plenty of rams for harvest. Hunter success in 2014 should not be impacted.

Hunt Area 22 (Dubois Badlands) will once again be open for hunting any ram in 2014. Four licenses will be valid to hunt in Hunt Area 22 from September 1-30. After September 30, these licenses will also be valid in Hunt Area 5.

### **PINEDALE REGION**

There is one sheep herd (Darby Mountain) plus a portion of the Whiskey Mountain Herd managed by the Pinedale Region.

The 2014 bighorn sheep hunting season for Hunt Area 24 is closed due to the lack of mature rams, low lamb numbers, and poor recruitment of sheep from juvenile to older-age classes. In 1998, this hunt area was also closed to hunting when total sheep numbers and availability of mature rams declined below acceptable levels.

There are no proposed changes for the Whiskey Mountain Hunt Areas 8 and 23 and licenses will remain at 12.

## **MOUNTAIN GOATS**

### **JACKSON REGION**

The Palisades goat herd (Hunt Area 2) is an extension of Idaho's Palisades mountain goat population that has expanded into Wyoming. This interstate goat population continues to migrate across state lines during annual movements to summer and winter ranges. For 2014, 8 licenses will again be available and the season will run from September 1 to October 31.

An August 2012 aerial survey located over 100 goats on Wyoming summer ranges. Trophy class billies continue to be taken in this herd. During the 2010 hunting season, several record book goats were taken and there were several trophy class billies noted during 2012 survey efforts.

Hunters should expect to find goats in steep, rocky terrain with trips of up to 5 miles away from roads.

## **CODY REGION**

Mountain goats in Hunt Area 1 are currently doing well and hunter success is generally 90-100 percent and drawing a license is the hardest part of hunting mountain goats in Wyoming. The creation of Hunt Area 3 increased opportunity for hunters in hard to access backcountry with low densities of goats and the past three years hunters have had relatively good success there. The 2014 season should again see high success rates in the Beartooth goat herd.

## **BISON**

### **JACKSON REGION**

Beginning in 2014, hunters will no longer be contacted based on a wild bison priority list. Instead, a random drawing was conducted and 90 any wild bison and 225 any female or calf wild bison licenses were issued for this fall. The 2014 hunting season was extended six days longer and will close on January 18. Winter trend counts indicate harvest levels have stabilized the bison population, but additional harvest is needed to reduce the population toward the agency's post hunt population objective of 500 animals.

In addition to being allowed to hunt on the national forest, license holders will be allowed to access the National Elk Refuge by obtaining a permission slip for the Refuge through the WGFD website at <http://wgfd.wyo.gov/plpwhmprogram/frmHunterManagementDetail.aspx>.

The application process to obtain a National Elk Refuge bison permission slip will be very similar to the process the Department used for hunters who applied for an elk permission slip on the National Elk Refuge.

Additional bison hunting information will be available on the National Elk Refuge website at [http://www.fws.gov/refuge/national\\_elk\\_refuge/](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/national_elk_refuge/)

## **UPLAND GAME BIRDS - SMALL GAME**

### **SAGE GROUSE – STATEWIDE**

As with most other game birds, sage-grouse hunting success in 2014 will depend on June's nest success and chick survival. Like rabbits, sage grouse experience population cycles. In most of Wyoming, both cottontails and sage grouse are at or near the low points in their respective cycles. Climatic conditions also impact sage grouse populations. In general, moist conditions lead to good plant and insect production which results in higher nest success and chick survival. Last year's increased moisture, when compared to 2012's record setting drought, brought improved conditions for sage grouse. And while chick production did not reach levels needed to grow the population, the steep declines observed in recent years were reduced. Last year's fall and winter precipitation also bodes well for 2014 grouse numbers and grouse production should improve and the 2014 fall population will be higher than 2013's.

While regulated hunting has not been demonstrated to be a threat to population sustainability, sage grouse are currently a species of intense management concern so hunting seasons are set

very conservatively with a short season and small bag limits. Additionally, sage grouse hunting is self-regulatory in that hunters tend to hunt less and harvest fewer birds when populations are depressed.

### **JACKSON REGION**

Expect good hunting for ruffed and blue grouse in the Salt River, Wyoming, Teton, Gros Ventre, and Snake River Mountains. The mild spring seems to have resulted in good production for both species. In the past 3 years, cold, wet spring conditions resulted in poor initial nesting success, but a strong renesting effort by ruffed grouse produced some large broods. Good berry crops in many areas should attract grouse broods.

Sage-grouse hunting season is closed in the Snake River drainage in the Jackson Region and that portion of the Pinedale Region in Hoback Basin.

There is a healthy population of snowshoe hares within the region; however, several areas of the Bridger-Teton National Forest are closed to winter access beginning either December 1 or December 15. Hunters should check with the Bridger-Teton National Forest for details of their winter travel plan.

### **CODY REGION**

Upland game bird hunting for the southern portions of the Bighorn Basin consists of pheasants, chukars and grey partridge. Hunters should not expect much for upland bird hunting in 2014. Biologist Bart Kroger said, “2013 was likely one of the worst seasons for partridge and chukar hunting in the southern Bighorn Basin and 2014 will likely be about the same.” Very few partridge and chukars have been seen this summer with no broods being reported. Pheasant hunters may see a few more birds than previous years. Several pheasant broods have been seen this summer and it appears pheasants had a fair hatch and chick survival this spring and summer. Bird hunters are reminded that hunting has little to no affect on upland bird populations, and that weather and habitat play a much more significant role than hunting.

Turkey hunter success was at about 50% this past spring with most hunters at least locating some gobblers. The spring of 2015 will be the first general license spring turkey hunt for the Bighorn Basin, excluding the Yellowtail WHMA which will remain a limited quota area. Because of this general season, hunters should expect to see a few more hunters in the field this spring but hunter numbers will likely drop off after a year or two. We are seeing an expanding population of turkeys into new country, so if hunters do a little scouting and asking for landowner permission, they should be able to find a spot with some turkeys and less hunter pressure.

### **SHERIDAN REGION**

Game bird hunters in the Sheridan Region during 2014 will likely have similar results as in 2013. There was some residual cover for nesting habitat in the spring of 2014. Field personnel report observing some hens with small broods. Spring “lek” (breeding ground) surveys of sage-grouse showed that sage-grouse numbers were still below long-term averages. Wild turkey numbers vary throughout the region. In the Buffalo and Sheridan areas, turkey numbers remain abundant. Pheasants from the Wyoming Game and Fish Department bird farm will again be released on several Sheridan Region Walk-In Areas. Hunters are reminded that most game bird hunting occurs on private land except for blue grouse hunting on the Bighorn Mountains and pheasant hunting on the WGFD Walk-In Areas.

## **GREEN RIVER REGION**

Sage-grouse hunting in Green River Region should be fair, and better than the low year of 2013, although observed brood size continues to vary widely locally with precipitation. As is typical, wetter, higher habitats are producing larger broods this year. Additionally, the number of males attending leks was generally up this year in much of southwest Wyoming, which should result in slightly better hunting this year when compared to 2013. Grouse numbers showed the highest increases in the eastern and western portions of the region (Carbon and Lincoln/Uinta counties, respectively), and very slight increases and some decreases in the lower, drier habitats of Sweetwater County.

Mountain grouse (ruffed grouse and blue grouse) will vary by locality, although some pockets of good hunting should occur. Observed broods this year are large and robust. Both blue grouse and ruffed grouse hunting should be good in the Wyoming Range, and blue grouse hunting will likely be good in the Sierra Madre Mountains. Hunters are reminded they may harvest a limit of three ruffed grouse and three blue (dusky) grouse this year – a change from the previous combined “mountain grouse” bag limit. Since many local names for these two species of grouse exist (e.g. pine grouse, willow grouse, etc.), hunters are cautioned regarding proper identification of the two species in order to avoid an overlimit violation.

Grouse hunters are also reminded the season remains closed for sharp-tailed grouse west of the Continental Divide, which includes all sharp-tailed grouse in the Sierra Madre Mountains and foothills.

Cottontail rabbit numbers are at peak cycle this year in Southwest Wyoming, with numbers greatly increased from the past several years. 2014 will be an exceptional year to take young hunters out and let them enjoy this bounty. Snowshoe hares, a species that receives very little harvest pressure in the Green River Region, are numerous in some of the higher elevations of the southern Wyoming Range, Uinta, and Sierra Madre Mountains, providing additional winter hunting opportunity.

## **LARAMIE REGION**

Spring moisture and heavy rains throughout July have helped improve nesting and brood-rearing cover for all upland game within the Laramie Region. Brood observations for most upland game birds were difficult this year due to the above average height and density of vegetation. Good pheasant production (~15,000 birds raised) at the Downar Bird Farm will provide hunters the opportunity to hunt pheasants on designated walk-in areas throughout Goshen, Laramie and Platte Counties, and the Springer and Glendo special permit hunts. Blue grouse hunting should be better than last year for the Snowy Range and Sierra Madre Mountains as field observations suggest a productive year for blue grouse. Sage grouse lek counts were up this spring, indicating a few more birds than last year. Increased nesting and brood rearing habitat should help sage grouse as well. Sharp-tailed grouse lek attendance was also up this spring. Sharp-tailed grouse hunters should have an easier time finding and harvesting birds this year. Turkeys should be plentiful for fall and spring hunters based on high quality habitat and average poult production. Cottontail rabbits and snowshoe hares remain abundant throughout the Laramie Region.

## **LANDER REGION**

Seasons for other upland game birds will be similar to previous years, except for the change in bag limits for blue and ruffed grouse and the need to retain a fully-feathered wing on all upland

game birds. Overall, grouse (sage-, blue, and ruffed) numbers remained stable during 2014. But, with severe drought conditions during summer 2012 and 2013, it appears sage-grouse brood production was down as expected.

The 8:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. shooting hours at Sand Mesa and Ocean Lake Wildlife Habitat Management Areas, and the 1-day youth hunt at Sand Mesa, proved to be very popular with pheasant hunters last year and will be continued in 2014. This year's youth hunt will occur on Saturday, November 15. Bird farm pheasants will again be released at the Sand Mesa and Ocean Lake Habitat Units through November.

Cottontails appear to be increasing slightly around the Lander Region in 2014 and may provide for better cottontail rabbit hunting opportunity this fall and winter. Snowshoe hares and red squirrels appear to be stable this year within the Lander Region. For those interested in pursuing these animals, hunting conditions should be fair-to-good in 2014.

### **CASPER REGION**

Based on lek counts, sage grouse numbers may have stabilized as male lek attendance improved slightly in 2014. Following 7 straight years of very poor chick production/survival, the number of chicks per hen rebounded in 2013 as weather and grass production was favorable for better nest success and chick survival. At this point, it appears chick production and survival may be even better in 2014 as biologists have observed large broods this summer. As sage-grouse numbers have declined dramatically over the past 7-8 years, the Department has maintained very conservative seasons. Thus, grouse numbers continue to remain high enough to ensure hunters have not had much trouble filling their daily bag limits, especially south and west of Casper. Hunters should see some improvement in 2014, with a higher number of young-of-the-year chicks available for harvest. Extremely conservative season limitations will remain in effect in northeast Wyoming with a 3-day season and a daily bag/possession limit of 2/4 birds, respectively. Many other portions of the Casper Region with marginal sage-grouse populations remain closed to hunting.

Following a period of decline, blue grouse numbers in the Casper Region appear to be rebounding with anecdotal reports indicating chick production and survival has been relatively good over the past 3 years. As a result, blue grouse densities should be relatively good this year. The majority of blue grouse hunting in the Casper Region can be found in the Laramie Range. While blue grouse numbers should be relatively good in this area, hunters are reminded the Laramie Range typically does not have as high of densities as some of Wyoming's other major mountain ranges such as the Bighorns or Sierra Madres.

Chukar and Hungarian partridge numbers in the Casper Region continue to remain at extremely low densities. Although some sizeable broods of Huns have been observed around Casper this year, hunters should still not expect to see huntable numbers in most of the region. Even in good years, hunters in the Casper Region should not expect to see chukar and Hungarian partridge densities similar to the Bighorn Basin and areas around Buffalo and Sheridan where better partridge habitats can be found.

Wild turkeys in the Black Hills sustained substantial losses during the 2010-2011 winter, and then suffered from subsequent poor poult production and survival the next 3 years. In addition, wild turkeys were severely impacted by last October's winter storm "Atlas" in some areas. As a result, mature wild turkey numbers in the Black Hills will remain low this fall and during the

upcoming spring of 2015. But, there is a bright spot on the horizon. Local managers conduct intensive brood count surveys in the Black Hills during August each year, and information to date suggests excellent poult production in most areas around the hills this summer. So, while wild turkey hunting opportunities remain fair in the Black Hills, overall wild turkey numbers are considerably lower than they were during much of the preceding decade.

Wild turkeys continue to thrive in much of the Casper Region outside of the Black Hills. As a result, fall wild turkey hunting on a general license should be favorable throughout the remainder of the Casper Region as access to hunt them on private lands remains good. In general, poult production has been poor to moderate outside of the Black Hills in recent years, resulting in relatively stable wild turkey numbers throughout most of the region. However, poult production and survival appears to be good thus far in 2014 in the Casper and Glenrock areas, which may significantly bolstered local wild turkey numbers.

### **PINEDALE REGION**

The 2014 upland game bird seasons for this region are similar to last year. Sage-grouse seasons will run in late-September to shift the hunt later in the fall and reduce vulnerability of hens with broods.

Blue and ruffed grouse seasons are the same as in past years. Ruffed and blue grouse production has been variable throughout the region. The mild 2014 spring seems to have resulted in good production for both species.

# **MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS**

## **CENTRAL FLYWAY OVERVIEW**

Spring and early summer precipitation improved in 2014, and most of Wyoming is no longer in a hydrologic drought. Wet, cold weather during May and June may have impacted nesting success and production to some extent. Spring moisture conditions were very good in Alberta and Saskatchewan, and duck breeding populations were well above the long-term average. This fall, hunting success will depend on the chronology of bird migration and weather patterns occurring by the end of the various hunting seasons. The increase in surface water will increase the state's ability to attract and hold migrating birds and hunting is expected to be much improved this fall.

## **PACIFIC FLYWAY OVERVIEW**

In 2014, breeding habitat improved from the poor conditions observed during 2013. As a result, brood production is expected to increase. Hunting success for migratory game birds, particularly locally-raised birds, is expected to be good. Early season hunting should be productive where birds concentrate near available water and irrigated farmlands. The liberal hunting season framework will be in effect in both the Central and Pacific flyway portions of Wyoming based on the continental status of duck populations. Fall and early winter weather patterns often determine hunting success for Wyoming hunters, either pushing birds south into Wyoming or allowing birds to linger farther north in eastern Montana. The Wyoming portion of the Pacific Flyway is not a major migration corridor and hunting opportunity is primarily dependent on local production and movement of birds out of southwest Montana and Yellowstone National Park.

## **DUCKS**

In May of 2014, 49.2 million ducks were counted in the traditional breeding survey area of Canada and the north-central United States. This was an 8% increase from last year and 43% higher than the long-term average. Many of the ducks hunted in the Central Flyway portion of Wyoming are raised in Alberta where the number of ponds counted in May increased 8% compared to last year's count. The number of ponds in Montana and the Western Dakotas increased 152%. The breeding duck estimate increased 26% in southern Alberta and 129% in Montana and the Western Dakotas. The outlook for the duck migration into Wyoming looks excellent based on a projected fall-flight index of 13.4 million mallards. Improved wetland conditions in eastern Wyoming will likely attract and hold more ducks. As always, hunting success in Wyoming will be highly influenced by surface water conditions, availability of waste grain, and weather patterns along the migration corridor.

## **DARK GEESE**

The Canada geese that are harvested in Wyoming are from three populations. Canada geese from the Rocky Mountain Population (RMP) occupy Wyoming west of the Continental Divide and are also found in the Big Horn Basin, Wind River Basin and western Carbon and Natrona counties. Although there is some mixing among populations, large Canada geese east of the RMP are mostly from the Hi-line Population (HLP) and smaller Central Flyway Arctic-nesting Canada Goose Population (CFANP). The spring population index for RMP geese decreased 26%, however the fall flight is expected to be average. In 2014, spring population surveys of HLP geese estimated the population at 288,200 geese, 15% lower than the prior year estimate. The 2014 fall flight of HLP geese is will likely be above-average. Production of CFANP geese in 2014 is expected to be average resulting in a fall flight simliar to that of 2013. Hunting success for both upland and migratory game birds increases in years with good brood production.

Hunting success in Wyoming will be heavily influenced by surface water conditions, availability of waste grain, and weather patterns along the migration corridor.

### **LIGHT GEESE**

Most of the light geese that migrate through Wyoming are from the Western Central Flyway Population (WCFP). Historically, this population was predominately lesser snow geese, but Ross' geese now represent nearly a third of the population. During the 2014 winter ground surveys, 264,800 geese were counted, reflecting a 17% increase from the number counted in 2013. Production of WCFP snow geese 2014 is expected to be above average in 2014. Snow and Ross' geese typically bypass Wyoming during the fall migration, with only small groups sporadically encountered. The majority of the hunting takes place during the spring Conservation Order, when up to 100,000 light geese stage in southeast Wyoming. Hunting success will increase with a higher proportion of inexperienced juvenile birds in the fall flight. Hunting success will also be heavily influenced by surface water conditions, availability of waste grain, and weather patterns along the migration corridor.

### **SNIPE**

Based on data from the North American breeding bird survey, snipe populations decreased slightly in Wyoming during 1966-2011, but increased slightly throughout the United States and Canada over the same period. Improved habitat conditions should provide better snipe hunting opportunities in shallow wetland and riparian areas this year.

### **RAILS**

Based on the most recent data from the North American breeding bird survey, Virginia rail populations decreased slightly in Wyoming during 1966-2011, but increased in the United States and Canada. Over the same period, sora rails increased in Wyoming, the United States, and Canada. Soras are the most abundant and widely distributed of North American rails. The increase in surface water should provide better rail hunting opportunities.

### **MOURNING DOVES**

Based on the Call-Count Survey, the number of mourning doves heard in Wyoming declined during 1966-2013 and also in recent years (e.g., the 2004-2013 period). However, changing land use practices along the traditional call count routes are believed largely responsible for the decrease in doves heard. Beginning in 2014, call-counts are being replaced with an operational banding program to more accurately monitor the dove population. Hunting success in 2014 is expected to be comparable to that of previous years. The increase in surface water and seed production could improve hunting opportunities in some areas. Locally-raised doves usually migrate out of the state with the first significant cold snap, which can happen anytime from late August through mid-September.

### **SANDHILL CRANES**

Cranes that migrate through eastern Wyoming (Crane Hunt Area 7) are primarily from the Mid-Continent Population (MCP), which has been relatively stable since the early 1980s and exceeds the established objective range of 349,000–472,000. The spring 2013 index, in the Central Platte River Valley of Nebraska, was the largest ever recorded, likely due to deep snow and ice in the Dakotas, which kept large numbers of cranes from moving further north. The majority of this population overflies Wyoming during both the fall and spring migration periods. Locating sandhill cranes on the ground is the key to hunting success.

Cranes that stage in central and western Wyoming (Hunt Areas 1-6) are from the Rocky Mountain Population (RMP). The fall 2013 pre-migration count was 20,360 cranes and the most recent 3-year average was 17,757, which is within the established objective of 17,000 – 21,000. It is too early to gauge sandhill crane production in western Wyoming. The cool, wet spring may have reduced juvenile crane survival, which is always relatively low for this species. Cranes will begin concentrating on fall staging areas in mid to late August. The RMP crane population has declined in recent years due to poor production. The 2013 count increased significantly from that of the prior year; however, the 3-year average decreased. As a result, the harvest allocation has been reduced for all participating states, including Wyoming. In 2014, 22 fewer permits will be available to Wyoming hunters. We anticipate about 70 cranes will be harvested compared to 74 in 2013.

Cranes in Hunt Areas 4 and 6 roost and feed in the same general locations every year. Roost locations in Hunt Area 6 are located north of Worland, the Otto area, Powell to Ralston, and Ralston Reservoir. Roost locations in Hunt Area 4 are Hidden Valley, Riverview Valley, and the south side of Ocean Lake. For best success, scout the birds prior to the season and obtain permission to access the fields they are using.