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the wyoming game & fish department

CASPER REGION newsletter

Access Yes

Preparation for 2017 Hunting Seasons

The Access Yes Access Program was created in 1998 to enhance and maintain public hunting and fishing access on private and landlocked public and State lands in Wyoming. Hunting access is provided by enrolling lands in one of three subprograms: the Walk-In Area Program (WIA); Hunter Management Area Program (HMA); and Hunter/Landowner Assistance Program.

Lands enrolled in the Access Yes Access Program can vary from year to year. The current year landowner enrollment information is not published until late summer. Although the ma-



majority of properties are enrolled for multiple years, be aware that a property enrolled in your area of interest the previous year could potentially drop out of the program at any time.



Walk-In Hunting Access (WIA) Program

Private lands, and in some instances, state lands, enrolled as a WIA are open to hunting for the species and time periods specified in the WGFD's online Walk-In Area Atlas. A permission slip is not required to access these lands for hunting or fishing purposes; however, the species, time periods, travel restrictions and other rules applicable to each specific WIA will vary.

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Hunter/Landowner Assistance Program

Some landowners who are not enrolled in a WIA or HMA seek hunters via this program. The Hunter Assistance Program enables landowners to post their contact information online so hunters can contact them directly for permission to hunt.

Walk-In Fishing Access Program

The WGFD has negotiated Walk-In Fishing Area (WIFA) access on numerous tracts throughout the state. Public access to WIFAs is limited to fishing only during the time period and only for the specific species agreed upon by the landowner and the WGFD.



On the Ground

Dove Banding, Juniper Removal

Migratory Game Bird Biologist Nate Huck began dove banding at the Casper Regional Office along with help from other Casper Region employees. With two established bait sites, a total of 58 doves were banded in the month of July. This is off pace when compared to 2016, when 146 doves were banded in the month of July. In general, dove abundance appears to be down at the Casper Office. Nate trapped a dove originally banded in 2015, and it didn't have

toes. The dove likely lost the tips of most of his toes to frostbite. The lack of toes obviously hasn't affected his survival!



Willow Steen received approval from the State Land Board and grazing leasees to remove junipers and cedars from three miles of publicly accessible state land on Trail Creek. These trees invade sagebrush grasslands and riparian areas due to the loss of historic fire regimes which would restrict them to rocky areas with a low herbaceous cover where a fire couldn't be carried. Junipers and cedars are aggressive competitors



and displace native woody trees and shrubs with high wildlife habitat values such as cottonwoods, willows, golden currants and buffaloberry, as well as shade out important herbaceous species.

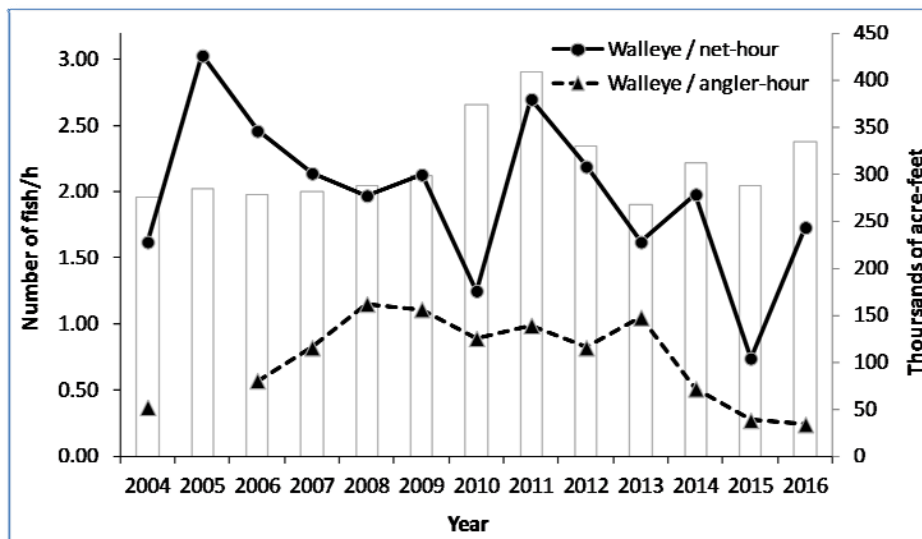
While conducting the habitat work, a Plateau Fence lizard was spotted, which is a species of greater concern currently being studied by Game and Fish in the southeast Wyoming lizard project. The lizard is typically known to occur in rocky outcroppings or canyon walls and therefore the riparian habitat that it was found in may offer nongame the ability to learn more about the habitat preferences and requirements of this lizard.



In the Water

Glendo Reservoir Update

The walleye population at Glendo Reservoir began a rebound in 2016 that should continue if favorable conditions support ample reproduction over the next couple years. Water levels have been very good during recent years. Glendo was at 163% of average storage during sampling in August 2016. Overall abundance, indexed by standardized August gill netting, jumped to 1.73 fish/net-hour in 2016 from 0.74 fish/net-hour in 2015, but was still below the previous ten-year average of 1.99 fish/net-hour.



Walleye catch rates increased in gill nets, but not for anglers in 2016.

Walleye population structure at Glendo Reservoir showed signs of improvement in 2016, with the proportion of fish measuring at least 15 inches (proportional stock density or PSD) returning to a more balanced value of 61 in 2016, from an unhealthy high of 90 in 2015. A PSD of 61 in 2016 was closer to a value reflecting a population of walleye with a balance of young, small fish and large, mature fish. The percentage of walleye measuring from 10 to 15 inches has stabilized around 35-39% over the last two years, an increase from 15% in 2014. Numbers of age-three to age five fish (15 to 18 inches) dominated the population structure in 2016 and will drive the fishery over the next two years.

Most importantly, a resurgence of age-one walleye occurred in 2016, and these fish will help the fishery rebuild. This contrasted with 2014 and several previous years when small, young fish were uncommon. The return of age-one and age-two Walleye, however slight, was a good sign for the future at Glendo. Large walleye will likely take a slight dip in abundance in the near future as the weak numbers of mature, big fish die. The largest walleye sampled in 2016 measured 28.4 inches and weighed 8.76 pounds!



Walleye body condition was good at Glendo in 2016. Gizzard Shad were reestablished by importing mature adults from Nebraska over the last two years. Abundant shad fry and fingerlings spawned at Glendo fuel the growth and spawning potential of Walleye, as well as all the other game fish in the reservoir. Biologists plan to import a few more shad with help from Nebraska Game and Parks in 2016 to ensure that enough mature adults are present to produce a good spawn. At our northern latitude and elevation, Gizzard Shad do not always overwinter and most likely mature at age-three. This means that 2018 is the earliest that shad hatched in Glendo from recent stockings are expected to mature and begin producing forage. Although a few adult shad transplanted from Nebraska may have overwintered, only small, immature, age-one shad were found in early 2017. Stocking additional mature shad in 2017 is a cheap insurance policy on rebuilding the Glendo fishery.



Only age-one gizzard shad were found in early 2017



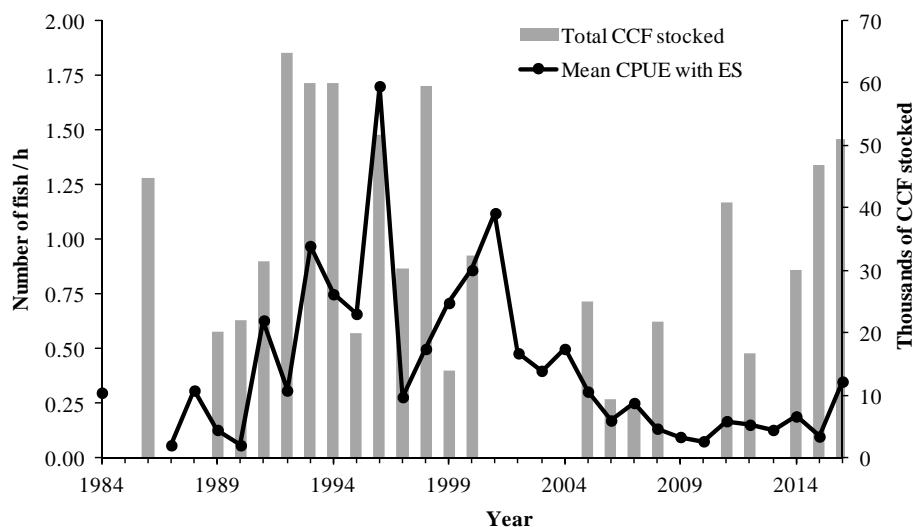
A Glendo walleye in 2016

Walleye were first stocked at Glendo Reservoir in 1972 and were completely self-sustaining for the following 40 years. However, an unexpected set of circumstances in 2016 allowed Wyoming Game and Fish to stock over nine million surplus walleye fry from Garrison National Fish Hatchery in North Dakota. Wyoming Game and Fish trades trout with other states extensively to acquire warm-water species, such as walleye, channel catfish, bluegill and others. The North Dakota Game and Fish Department had met all of its Walleye stocking needs, leaving a massive surplus on the table and Wyoming benefitted. Hedging against another potentially poor spawning or recruitment year at Glendo for walleye, Wyoming Game and Fish jumped to claim the fish. It's impossible to tell yet how well the fry survived after stocking. It's also hard to speculate how much the fry will benefit the fishery but biologists will evaluate their contribution as they mature into the population.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife personnel harvest recently hatched walleye fry from a raceway at the Garrison National Fish Hatchery in North Dakota (left) and Wyoming Game and Fish Department personnel stock nine million fry at Glendo Reservoir by boat in 2016 (right).

The channel catfish fishery at Glendo Reservoir and the North Platte River upstream relies upon stocking from out-of-state sources to make up for very poor natural reproduction. The availability of channel catfish from out of state has improved greatly in recent years, and a total of 128,000 fingerlings to catchable-sized fish have been stocked since 2014. These fish will support many years of fishing for this long-lived species. Gill net catch rates in Glendo Reservoir increased dramatically in 2016 (0.35 fish/net-hour) from a low level in 2015 (0.07 fish/net-hour) where catch rates had stagnated for over a decade.



A channel catfish from the River above Glendo

The annual gill net catch rate for channel catfish (line) at Glendo Reservoir has improved since the number of fish stocked (bars) has been more consistent in recent years, but is still far below rates observed two decades ago.

Large, long-lived catfish were rare in Glendo Reservoir in 2016. No catfish older than age seven were sampled in 2016, indicating that numbers of larger fish had dwindled substantially. These fish were stocked from 2005 through 2008 and would have been ages 8 to 11 in 2016. Thankfully, some of the fish stocked since 2014 are growing into the population (8 to 14 inches in 2016) and are now available for anglers to catch. We should see this fishery take off in the next few years.

The panfish fishery at Glendo improved in 2016 as the abundance and size structure of yellow perch continued a cyclic upswing that occurs every four to five years. This happens somewhat in response to declines in Walleye abundance with a slight timelag. Yellow perch abundance increased for the third year in a row in 2016 (0.82 fish/net-hour), rebounding from the lowest point observed in over a decade during 2013 (0.06 fish/net-hour). A high number of 5-inch fish from 2015 advanced to approximately seven inches during 2016 and was replaced by strong reproduction. Water levels appeared high enough at Glendo during the last four years to maintain good spawning and rearing habitat conditions. Walleye abundance was low during that time period as well. In addition, abundant gizzard shad forage returned in 2015, which shifted predation away from Yellow Perch. Black crappie continued to be rare in 2016, but a very strong and unexpected number of age-one (average length of 6.2 in) white crappie (0.53 fish/net-hour) were observed and promise to produce a crappie fishery within a few years if they survive well.



Of Interest

Fences

While conducting habitat surveys, Casper Wildlife Biologist Heather O'Brien has also been documenting fences that create barriers to pronghorn antelope movements. Current research has shown woven-wire and five-stranded fences can be a major hindrance to pronghorn as they try to move seasonally or even daily. The Game and Fish's Pronghorn Working Group is working to modify or remove these fence types in pastures where they are no longer necessary.

