



January & February 2017 activities assisting the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Tribes of the Wind River Reservation, WY

USFWS Lander Fish & Wildlife Conservation Office

To meet our trust responsibilities of assisting the Tribes with sensible fish and wildlife conservation, we performed the following activities:

Conducted annual count of wintering bald and golden eagles on Wind River. Surveyed along 170 miles of roadways and observed 9 adult and 7 immature bald eagles (16 total), and 4 adult golden eagles. This is the 5th year of surveying. We observed fewer bald eagles than average (preceding 4-year average of 26). This may be related to colder temperatures resulting in less open water which may have caused eagles to migrate further south.

In cooperation with the Tribal Fish & Game and Wyoming Game & Fish, re-installed remote trail cameras and bait sites for detection of 2 rare species, the wolverine and lynx, along Trail Ridge in the Owl Creek Mountains. Due to deep powdery snow conditions and inclement weather, attempts to re-visit 3 monitoring sites have been unsuccessful. This project was begun in March 2015, and is a part of a larger regional effort to assess wolverine occurrence in Wyoming, Montana, Idaho and Washington. Lure and hair-collectors for DNA analysis were deployed for lynx at the same sites for wolverine, a new addition to this third-year of effort.



Art Lawson installing wolverine bait on Trail Ridge.

Conducted annual winter count of trumpeter swans along Bull Lake Creek and Dinwoody Creek. Observed 19 adults and 2 juveniles along Bull Lake Creek and 23 adults and 6 juveniles along Dinwoody Creek (total of 42 adults and 8 juveniles). This is the second highest count since surveys began in 2005. Most of these swans are winter migrants from other parts of Wyoming and/or Idaho, Montana and Canada.

Conducted aerial survey of bighorn sheep from the North Fork Popo Agie Canyon to Bull Lake Canyon. Tribal Fish and Game Warden Art Lawson also was an observer. Counted the most bighorn sheep in the area since the early 1990s. 44 ewes, 12 lambs and 27 rams were observed (83 total, 27 lambs per 100 ewes and 61 rams per 100 ewes). Helicopter flight was generously paid for by the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation.



Partial image of nearly 1,000 wintering elk, many more in background.

Conducted a 4-day aerial survey of elk and bighorn sheep in the Wind River and Owl Creek mountains to assess Reservation-wide population trend. The number of elk counted is very similar to previous years': 3,174 from North Fork Popo Agie to Red

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Rocks along the Wind River Mountain front; 4,422 from East Fork to Wind River Canyon in the Owl Creek Mountains (Total of 7,596). Since aerial surveys do not completely cover an area, a significant number of elk are not observed. Accounting for these untallied elk gives a wintering elk population estimate of 9,500 to 11,300 on Wind River.

Collaborated with Matt Kauffman from Univ Wyoming and Tribal Fish & Game for acquiring funding from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Wyoming Governors License Coalition for proposed elk migration study on Wind River.

Presented draft MOU to the Eastern Shoshone Business Council between ESBC and US Fish and Wildlife Service for assistance with bison restoration efforts on Wind River.

Documented additional swift fox. This unique and rare species, first documented on Wind River in March 2016, appears to be expanding its population by recolonizing the Reservation. Tribal Fish & Game documented at least 2 fox north of the Big Wind River. We located a swift fox that died by vehicle collision near Ft. Washakie. Will be mounted for display and donated to the Tribes.

Participated in public meeting with ~40 local livestock operators and concerned citizens to discuss recent occurrence of a wolf pack near Lander. Depredations of livestock by wolves have occurred within the last year. Meeting was very productive with much open and honest dialogue.

Collected Chronic Wasting Disease sample from deer near Washakie Reservoir displaying wasting symptoms. Lab test was negative for CWD.

Collated historic bighorn sheep horn measurements from 1988 to 2016 for future analysis to determine if there has been any change in horn characteristics over time.

Continued summarizing many decades of historic fish stocking records into an electronic format in order to more completely document what stocking occurred when and where. Many old records were paper. Electronic format will allow for easier analysis of trends.

Participated in meeting with Tribal Water Engineer, Tribal Water Management Board, Bureau of Reclamation, Arapaho Business Council and Shoshone Business Council. Gave presentation on the negative effects of water draw-down to the fishery in Bull Lake Reservoir. This past fall, Bull Lake Reservoir was drawn down for irrigation purposes from a maximum pool of 152,000 acre-feet to a winter pool of 26,000 acre-feet. This was the lowest level in many years, eliminating any spawning and juvenile rearing habitat and likely causing a significant to complete loss of ≤ 4 year-old burbot.

Gave 2 presentations to 90 Willow Creek Elementary students on wolves and wolf ecology. Well received by students.

Preparing for arrival of Scott Becker, new Fish and Wildlife Service Wolf Coordinator for Wyoming. Scott will be located in this Lander Office.

Provided environmental review of 2 projects involving waterline and septic replacement at 2 existing homesites. No significant fish and wildlife concerns with either project.



A house-cat sized swift fox documented north of the Big Wind River.

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Acknowledgements: *The Fish & Wildlife Conservation Office located in Lander, Wyoming, has assisted the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Tribes with fisheries conservation since 1941 and wildlife conservation since 1975. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to assist the Tribes with conserving and enhancing their 2.2 million acres of beautiful lands, and the abundant fish and wildlife that reside there. Our special thanks go to the Tribal Fish and Game Department: Ben Snyder, Western Thayer, Art Lawson, and Sherilyn Heba without whose cooperation we could not accomplish our mission.*



March 2017 upcoming activities:

Attend the Yellowstone Ecosystem Subcommittee meeting related to grizzly bear conservation in the Yellowstone area, March 29th 1-5 pm & 30th 8a-12 pm at the Snow King Resort, Jackson, WY.

Attend the regional Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout annual coordination meeting with biologists from multiple agencies.

In cooperation with University of Wyoming, Tribal Fish & Game and Wyoming Game & Fish, re-capture bighorn sheep ewes in the Sacagawea Ridge and Red Creek area, Bull Lake Canyon, and the Washakie Reservoir area to radio-collar additional sheep for this ongoing effort. Will also assess pregnancy, disease and body condition. Scheduled for March 11th and 12th.

Begin checking sage-grouse attendance at ~50 leks (breeding grounds) located on Wind River. The counts of males displaying on leks is a good indication of the trend in population. This is done annually between mid-March and early May.

Complete annual summary report of wolf conservation on Wind River. Portions of the report are incorporated into larger annual summary report for the Northern Rocky Mountains.

Survey areas for wolf activity to target locations for capturing and radio-collaring wolves in spring.

Conduct 2-day aerial survey of pronghorn antelope north of the Big Wind River to assess the population trend in the northern ½ of the Reservation.

Revisit wolverine/lynx camera sites on Bold Mountain, Mount Shoshone and Trail Ridge to check cameras, remove storage cards to review pictures, and resupply with fresh bait and lure.

April 2017 upcoming activities:

Attend the bi-annual Wyoming Fish Passage coordination meeting.

Continue checking sage-grouse attendance at ~50 leks (breeding grounds) located on Wind River.

Set range cages on the north rim above Washakie Reservoir and on the south and north rims of Bull Lake. These cages are clipped in the fall to assess the amount of grasses and forbs produced and available for wildlife.

Revisit wolverine/lynx camera sites on Bold Mountain, Mount Shoshone and Trail Ridge to pull sites.