

WYOMING 2018 STATEWIDE FALL HUNTING FORECAST

Revised August
15, 2018



PRONGHORN (antelope)

Jackson

In the Jackson Region, the northern subunit of the Sublette Antelope Herd includes Hunt Area 85. Although hunter success is good, Hunt Area 85 (Gros Ventre) offers very limited hunting opportunities, as there will only be 20 licenses offered for the 2018 season. The mild winter of 2017-18 allowed antelope that remained in Jackson Hole to have relatively good survival, and could translate into higher than normal numbers of antelope during the 2018 season.

DEER

Jackson

The Wyoming Range Deer Herd (Hunt Areas 134, 135, and 143-145) is designated as a special management strategy herd which focuses on providing high quality hunting opportunities, mature age class buck deer, and high buck:doe ratios (30-45:100). By 2016, deer numbers had increased after five years of high over winter survival among all age/sex classes, but the extremely severe winter of 2016-2017 caused unprecedented mortality in all age classes and drastically reduced the population. Post season surveys in December 2017 indicated that fawn recruitment was low with only 54 fawns:100 does, which is not surprising considering the poor shape their mothers were in following the 2016-17 winter. Buck:doe ratios dropped to 29:100 in 2017, a level not seen since 2004. This drop was caused primarily by the lack of yearling bucks in 2017, as almost all of them died as fawns during the 2016-17 winter.

The good news is that a comprehensive aerial survey of all winter ranges in the Wyoming Range Herd Unit in February, 2018 yielded a count of 25,317 deer, and an estimate of approximately 29,000 deer. The mild winter of 2017-18 provided for good body condition and high survival of both adults and fawns, and all indications are that the fawns born in 2018 are robust, healthy, and experiencing high summer survival. This year should really jump-start the recovery of this deer herd, and almost get us back to where we were prior to the severe winter with respect to total numbers of deer. It may take a little longer to recover the age structure of buck deer, however.

The southern portion of the herd unit will offer ten days of antlered deer hunting in both Hunt Area 134 and Hunt Area 135. Both areas have an antler point regulation that will allow hunters to take antlered mule deer with three points or more on either antler or any white-tailed deer. Similar to the 2017 season, general license hunting opportunity for antlered mule deer will run from September 15-October 6 for Hunt Areas 143-145. A three-point or better regulation will be in place for these areas in 2018 as well. In Hunt Area 145, a total of 50 limited quota Type 3 licenses valid for any white-tailed deer will be in place from September 15 to November 15, and unused Type 3 licenses valid for antlerless white-tailed deer will continue from November 16 to January 31.

Due to the severity of the 2016-2017 winter and associated deer losses, the nonresident quota was reduced 200 licenses in Region G for the 2017 season, resulting in a total of 400 nonresident licenses. This will remain unchanged for the 2018 season.

The northern portion of the Sublette Deer Herd includes Hunt Areas 146, 150-152, 155, and 156 in the Jackson Region. Similar to the Wyoming Range, the Sublette Deer Herd is recovering from high deer mortality caused by severe winter conditions in 2016-2017, but it is felt that positive indicators of recovery in the Wyoming Range Herd are also occurring in the Sublette Herd. Seasons in the Jackson area will run from September 15-October 6.

In addition to mule deer hunting opportunities, “any white-tailed deer” seasons will again be offered, as white-tailed deer numbers along many of the major river corridors appear to be stable to increasing. In Hunt Area 150, a total of 15 Limited quota Type 3 licenses valid for any white-tailed deer will be in place from September 15 to November 30.

The Targhee Herd (Hunt Area 149) is a small population on the west side of the Teton Range that is managed to provide recreational hunting opportunities. Population growth of this herd is limited by winter range and habitat loss from residential developments. Most crucial winter ranges are situated in Idaho and options to allow this population to grow are limited. In 2017, hunters reported a 25% success rate. Hunting seasons in 2018 include a general license season for antlered deer from September 15 through October 6 and a Type 8, limited quota license valid for doe or fawn white-tailed deer. A new, Type 3 license (valid for any white-tailed deer) was first offered in 2017, and will be offered again in 2018. Fifteen Type 3 licenses and 50 Type 8 licenses will be available in 2018 and both the Type 3 and the Type 8 seasons will run from September 15 to November 30.

ELK

Jackson

With the Fall Creek Herd at the desired population objective, antlerless hunting opportunities have been scaled back and a limited number of cow/calf licenses will be available. In order to increase antlerless elk numbers throughout the herd, the general any elk season will open September 26 and close on October 9. General license antlered elk, spikes excluded hunting will continue through October 31. This is the fifth year of general license hunting for any elk, with a spikes excluded restriction, which is intended to recruit more yearling bulls into the population. An Area 84,85 Type 7 cow or calf license will continue to be valid through January to address damage to private lands along the Snake River.

In the Afton Herd, Hunt Area 89, the lower Greys River, hunting seasons for antlered elk will again be extended through October 31. The increase in hunting recreation in the lower Greys River is a result of higher numbers of elk counted on the Greys River feedground at Alpine and on native winter ranges in Greys River. In Hunt Area 90, liberal seasons into November and limited quota cow or calf tags are again being proposed to address an increase in elk numbers in the Upper Greys River.

In the Jackson Herd, 10,877 elk were counted during the February 2018 mid-winter survey. While the population is near the objective of 11,000, portions of the herd that migrate from Yellowstone National Park, the Teton Wilderness and the Gros Ventre drainage continue to exhibit low calf recruitment. Elk that summer in southern Grand Teton National Park and near residential and agricultural areas close to Jackson have nearly double the calf recruitment as the long-distance migratory elk from backcountry areas.

Conservative hunting seasons for Hunt Areas 70, 71, 79, and 81-83 are necessary to address low calf recruitment while trying to maintain bull numbers. In the southern portion of the herd unit in Hunt Areas 75, 77, 78 and 80, liberal antlerless elk seasons are needed to address growing elk populations that summer along the Snake River corridor in southern Grand Teton National Park and subdivisions in Hunt Area 78. In Hunt Area 78, Type 1 licenses will be valid off national forest beginning on August 15, and will be valid in the entire hunt area beginning on September 26. There will also be a Hunt Area 78 Type 2, any elk license valid on private lands from August 15 to October 31 to target resident bulls that cause damage in late summer and early fall. Similarly, a general license season for antlerless elk on private land from August 15 to October 31 is being offered in Hunt Area 78 in 2018. Hunting seasons in Hunt Area 78 are structured to harvest elk that are causing chronic damage to agricultural lands, disperse animals, and reduce elk numbers through cow harvest. Hunt Area 75 will have 50 Type 4 licenses and 525 Type 6 licenses available in 2018, and will open October 27. Type 4 license holders will also be able to hunt in the portion of Hunt Area 79 south of U.S. Highway 26-287 from October 27 to 31 this year. The area known as the Snake River Bottom in Hunt Area 75 will be closed again this year. The Department's Hunter Management Access system will again be used to allocate permits for the National Elk Refuge (Hunt Area 77). The youth hunt on the National Elk Refuge has traditionally occurred on opening weekend in mid-October, however few elk are on the Refuge in October. Therefore, this year the youth hunt will again occur from November 22 to 24 during the Thanksgiving school break. Youth hunters holding general or full price limited quota elk licenses can apply for a permit to access the National Elk Refuge during that time.

Due to substantial complaints about hunter crowding during the November general license season in Hunt Area 80, this season will be replaced with a limited quota antlerless season. It will run from October 13 to November 11 in the entire area, and be restricted to that portion of Area 80 south of the Curtis Canyon and Sheep Creek Roads from November 12 to November 30. Hopefully this will maintain the level of antlerless harvest while improving the hunting experience.

The winter of 2017-18 saw an exodus of elk out of the Gros Ventre drainage, leaving only 86 to winter there. Concerns over the status of this segment of the Jackson Elk Herd has prompted Jackson Region personnel to direct specific attention at innovative ways to monitor calf recruitment, migratory behavior, and response to wolf densities in the Gros Ventre. Initial information has shown that elk known to have left the Gros Ventre for the winter have returned there to summer, but the total number of elk and their recruitment rates are yet to be determined. Antlerless elk harvest was essentially eliminated in 2010, but was further reduced for the 2018 season, as Hunt Area 84 Type 2 licenses were reduced to 15. Also, a State Trust Land portion of Hunt Area 75 will close on November 26 to protect migrating cow elk from the Gros Ventre.

It is anticipated that the 2018 hunt season will focus hunting pressure on southern segments of the Jackson elk population that exhibit high calf recruitment and contribute to high numbers on the National Elk Refuge. In addition, lower calf production observed in long-distance migratory

segments over the past several years will continue to influence recruitment and contribute to the conservative hunting seasons proposed for the backcountry segments of this population.

The Targhee Herd (Hunt Area 73) is a small population on the west side of the Teton Range that is managed to provide recreational hunting opportunities. Most crucial winter ranges are situated in Idaho and options to allow this population to grow are limited. In 2017, hunters reported a 43% success rate. Hunting seasons in 2018 include a general license season for antlered elk, spikes excluded from September 20 through October 25. A Type 6 license is also in place for 2018, which will be valid for cow or calf elk on private land only from August 15-January 31 to address chronic damage along the state line. There will be 25 Type 6 licenses available.

MOOSE

Jackson

In the Sublette Moose Herd, management direction in the past has focused on maintaining or building moose numbers in Hunt Areas 10, 20, 21, and 23. Mature bulls that are four years of age or older are consistently being harvested in these areas. The opportunity to harvest a trophy class Shiras moose has increased in recent years in Hunt Areas 10, and 20, and throughout these hunt areas the average antler spread continues to approach 40 inches. In order to maximize success, hunters should plan on hunting when temperatures are the coolest and moose are likely to be feeding at first light and early evening. Due to a desire to balance hunting opportunity and to maintain or improve quality, license numbers were reduced slightly in Hunt Areas 10 (10 to 8) and Hunt Area 21 (5 to 2). For the same reasons, license numbers for antlered moose in Hunt Area 23 were reduced slightly in 2017 (from 20 to 15), and will remain so in 2018.

The Targhee Herd is designated for special management and conservative hunting seasons will be maintained in 2018 in the combined Hunt Areas 16 and 37. Tough hunting conditions existed in 2018, and hunter success dropped to 60% while hunter effort increased to 12.4 days. The age of these bulls, however, was above average for this herd unit. Low moose densities remain a concern in this herd unit, and hunting seasons in 2018 will only offer five antlered moose licenses for the combined Hunt Areas 16 and 37.

The Jackson Herd also continues to be a concern. A total of 253 moose were classified this year, which is average for this herd in recent years. Calf ratios dropped slightly in 2018, but were still good at 37 calves:100 cows. Although overall moose numbers remain very low, the sustained increase in the calf ratio in recent years is a promising sign that this herd may be increasing, or at least holding steady. License quotas in the Jackson Herd have decreased from a high of 495 in 1991 to 10 beginning in 2013. In 2011, Hunt Areas 7, 14, 15, and 32 were closed because of low calf:cow ratios and declining population trends. Hunt Areas 17 and 28 were combined in 2012 and will again offer five antlered moose licenses in 2018. In the upper Gros Ventre drainage, Hunt Area 18 will remain at five licenses for antlered moose and open on October 1. Conservative seasons are again proposed to address low herd numbers. This herd will continue to be closely monitored in future years to evaluate population numbers and determine if and when additional licenses can be offered.

BIGHORN SHEEP

Jackson

The Targhee sheep herd is small, and until recently, estimated at approximately 125 sheep. Recent surveys in 2014, 2015, and 2016 yielded observations of less than 60 sheep, and raised concern over the current status of this herd. An increased count of 76 sheep was obtained in 2017. From 2006 to 2011, one ram was harvested each year, no rams were harvested in 2012, and one ram was harvested each year from 2013 to 2017. Average age of harvested sheep is 6.5 years old for the last five years, and hunter success is limited by the difficult terrain, low sheep numbers, and movements into Grand Teton National Park. This herd appears to be limited by poor quality, high elevation winter habitat. Sheep hunting opportunities for the Targhee Herd will again be offered in 2018, but with only one resident license. Significant efforts are currently being directed at understanding the current status and trend of this population.

In the Jackson Sheep Herd, managers began detecting pneumonia in the sheep population in early summer 2012. Some winter ranges in the Jackson and Gros Ventre areas may have experienced a 30% decline in the overall number of sheep during that outbreak. Lamb:ewe ratios also declined from 50 lambs:100 ewes to 21:100. However, the population has rebounded quickly in recent years. The 2017-18 mid-winter trend count indicated the population is doing well, with a lamb:ewe ratio of 29:100 and a total of 398 sheep classified. Ram:ewe ratios remain adequate at 37:100. Forty-eight rams were observed with $> \frac{3}{4}$ curl horns during the 2016-17 survey, but hunters had a hard time finding them in 2017, and success dropped to 67%. The 2018 hunting season will offer 12 licenses in Hunt Area 7.

MOUNTAIN GOATS

Jackson

Hunt Area 2 encompasses the Palisades Goat Herd which is an extension of Idaho's Palisades mountain goat population that has expanded into Wyoming. A hunting season was initiated in 1999 with 4 permits. In 2015, permits increased from 8 licenses to 12 licenses, valid for any mountain goat with the season running from September 1 to October 31. The hunt area was expanded in 2014 to include lands north of Wyoming Highway 22 and west of Grand Teton National Park. The same season structure will be maintained for the 2018 hunting season. The expanded area was created to address mountain goat expansion into the area.

A winter survey in 2017 showed very low kid survival, so licenses were reduced from 12 to 8 for the 2017 season, where it will remain for the 2018 season. Reproductive rates over the last several years indicated the population was very productive and remained above the population objective. Future surveys should help understand the impact of the 2016-17 winter, and when licenses can be increased again. During the last several years, record book goats have been taken in this herd unit. Hunters should expect to find goats in steep, rocky terrain with long trips of more than 10 miles from any roads.

BISON

Jackson

The Jackson Bison Herd was within 20% of the population objective of 500 after the 2016 hunting season. This was the result of over 10 years of hunting seasons designed to reduce herd numbers from over 1,000 bison to approximately 500. Hunter success was extremely high in 2016 at 98%, and the February 2017 classification survey found 546 bison in the herd unit. Significant changes were made to the 2017 hunting season to shift from the goal of reducing the herd to a goal of stabilizing the herd. Mild conditions during the 2017 hunting season delayed bison movements onto the National Elk Refuge, and resulted in less than expected harvest of both bulls and cows. Hunter success on Type 1 licenses was only 76%, and Type 4 license hunter success was 40%. Therefore, licenses will be increased for the 2018 season in order to keep the population closer to 500 animals.

Hunters can expect the regular season to run from August 15, 2018 to January 1, 2019. Like last year, the season will continue from January 2 to January 31 with National Elk Refuge (NER) permits available on a daily basis through the WGFD Jackson Regional Office through the end of the month or until supplemental feeding on the NER is deemed necessary. This will allow for additional hunting opportunities should forage and weather conditions delay the onset of supplemental feeding of elk and bison on the Refuge. A total of 117 Type 1 licenses and 75 Type 4 licenses will be issued in 2018. This is an increase of 47 Type 1 licenses and an increase of 25 Type 4 licenses compared to 2017. There were 567 bison counted during the 2017-2018 mid-winter survey. The post-season calf:cow ratio dropped to 50, which did help slow the growth of the herd, while the bull:cow ratio remained high at 131 bulls:100 cows. However, most of the bulls in the population are in younger age classes, therefore bull licenses will remain relatively conservative in 2018 to maintain bull quality in the herd and adjust the bull:cow ratio closer to the desired 100 bulls:100 cows.

If bison migrate prior to the end of the season, hunter experience on the NER should be exceptional due to fewer hunters and reduced crowding. Cow/calf hunters should be aware that almost all of the harvest on the Type 4 license occurs on the NER, and the majority of the harvest occurs during late December and January. Hunters wishing to hunt on the NER will have an opportunity to apply for a Refuge permit on the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's web page beginning in July. Additional information on NER permits will be available to successful applicants by contacting the Jackson Regional Office.

UPLAND GAME BIRDS - SMALL GAME

Jackson

Mild winter conditions likely had a positive impact on over-winter survival of upland game birds, and good spring/summer conditions benefitted nesting birds. Similar to most years, sportsmen will likely find localized populations of grouse that have reproduced well during the year.

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.

TURKEY

MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS