

STATE REPORT FOR WYOMING

From the Research Project Entitled

WILDLIFE VALUES IN THE WEST



A Project of the
Human Dimensions Committee of the
Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

Produced by the Human Dimensions in Natural Resources Unit
Colorado State University

In cooperation with Wyoming Game and Fish Department



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Colorado
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University

Knowledge to Go Places



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report documents results of a study that assessed the Wyoming public's values and attitudes toward wildlife. Findings are part of the larger research program *Wildlife Values in the West*.

Data were collected using a mail-back survey administered to residents in Wyoming. Eight hundred and twenty-eight completed surveys were returned, and the response rate for the mail-back survey was 31%. A telephone nonresponse survey was completed, and tests for differences between mail survey respondents and nonrespondents were conducted. Based on these tests, data were weighted to correct for age and wildlife-related recreation participation.

Key findings include:

- *There are diverse types of people, based on wildlife value orientations, in Wyoming.*

The four wildlife value orientation types include Utilitarian, Mutualist, Pluralist, and Distanced. Utilitarians believe that wildlife should be used by humans and strongly support hunting. Mutualists consider wildlife to be like part of an extended family and express an emotional attachment to wildlife. Pluralists hold both utilitarian and mutualism wildlife value orientations, and the situation or context determines which of these orientations plays a role in their thinking. Distanced individuals have less interest in wildlife compared to others in the public. The distribution of these wildlife value orientation types in Wyoming is: Utilitarian (44%), Pluralist (31%), Mutualist (18%), and Distanced (7%).

- *The public differed on its perception of the current funding and programming approach of Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) and its preferred approach.*

The public was divided almost evenly in choosing the perceived current approach among four choices. In contrast, two-thirds of the public desired the approach which benefited all members of the public and was funded by both hunting and fishing licenses *and* taxes. Overall, more than half the respondents thought the current approach did not match their desired approach.

- *The public was generally accepting of new taxes to fund fish and wildlife management activities and programs.*

Over half of the public felt the creation of new taxes was acceptable for all of the suggested programs, except one which involved "paying landowners to not develop their land." The programs which the most respondents found acceptable were those for "expanding information and education activities," "buying private land to protect fish and wildlife habitat," and "buying water rights to protect fish and wildlife habitat."

- *The majority of the public did not believe their opinions, interests, and input were heard and adequately considered in fish and wildlife management decisions.*

Less than half of all respondents expressed agreement that fish and wildlife decision-makers in Wyoming were taking their opinions, interests, and input into account. However, more than half agreed that their state agency "makes a good effort to obtain input from the public" and almost half expressed trust in the agency to "make decisions without their input."

- *The public expressed greater trust in WGFD than in the state or federal governments.*

Over 70% of the public indicated that they trust WGFD to do what is right for fish and wildlife management in the state. In contrast, 63% indicated that they trust the state government and 44% indicated they trust the federal government to do what is right for the state and the country respectively.

- *The public generally believed that the WGFD performed well in managing fish and wildlife and agreed with the WGFD being involved in the suggested activities.*

A majority of the public felt the WGFD represented their views and made acceptable decisions about fish and wildlife management, as well as effectively managed fish and wildlife. They further agreed that the WGFD provided them with accurate and adequate amounts of timely information. Most respondents also agreed that the agency should be a strong advocate for fish and wildlife, even if that means opposing development, and that they should encourage more young people to hunt and fish. Finally, the public believed that Wyoming's fish and wildlife and their habitats were healthy.

- *Over 80% of the public participated in some form of fish and wildlife decision-making in the last year.*

More than half of the public participated in fish and wildlife decision-making using one to three methods of public involvement and a fifth participated using four or more methods. Around 40% participated in an active manner which required interaction with the agency, while 35% participated using only passive methods.

- *In bear-human conflict situations, the public was most accepting of conducting controlled hunts using trained agency staff among a series of population-level control techniques.*

A majority of the public (more than 85%) found "doing nothing" to be unacceptable in situations when bears are a nuisance and when bears are a safety threat. More than half of the public supported "providing more recreational opportunities to hunt bears" in these situations. "Conducting controlled hunts using trained agency staff" was acceptable to 70% of the public in a nuisance situation and more than 80% in a safety threat situation.

- *In deer-human conflict situations, the public was accepting of increasing recreational hunting opportunities, conducting controlled hunts by trained agency staff, and distributing short-term contraception.*

In nuisance and disease situations, the majority of the public (more than 70%) did not accept "doing nothing" or "distributing pellets with permanent contraceptives" but more than half did accept "providing more recreational hunting opportunities," "conducting controlled hunts using trained agency staff," and "distributing pellets with short-term contraceptives." The public was more accepting of "conducting controlled hunts" and "distributing pellets with contraceptives" in a disease situation as compared to a nuisance situation.

- *Given limited funds to allocate to conservation, the public favors native, game, and declining species.*

In public preference for conservation funding, species status (i.e., whether a species is common, declining, or extirpated) was more important than species use (i.e., whether a species is considered a game species or not) or species origin (i.e., whether a species is native or not). Native species tended to be prioritized over nonnative species, and game species tended to be prioritized over nongame species. Declining species were more likely to be prioritized over common species as were extirpated species.

- *The public generally felt ORV users were responsible, but agreed ORV use can cause damage to habitat and conflicts with other users.*

Just over half the public believed ORV users stay on authorized trails, but around 80% also agreed that ORV use can cause damage to fish and wildlife habitat and conflicts with other recreationists. Slightly less than half the public agreed that most complaints about ORVs are from people who want to restrict others' use of public land.

- *The public agreed that ORV regulations should be enforced by the WGFD and were accepting of limitations on ORV use.*

Only a third of the public agreed that rules related to ORV use are sufficiently enforced and 70% or more agreed that the "WGFD should help enforce regulations on both state and federal land." Over 75% of the public agreed that "ORV use should be limited on public land when it harms fish and wildlife habitat" and "when it causes conflicts with other recreationists."

- *Hunters and anglers differed little from those who did not hunt or fish in the past 12 months on attitudes toward key issues measured in the survey.*

Differences between those who hunted or fished as compared to those who did not were only noted on the following issues: their interest in providing input to fish and wildlife decisions; whether the WGFD should encourage more young people to hunt and fish; and participation in decision-making activities, both in the number of methods used and the activeness of the methods.

- *Comparison of responses by wildlife value orientation types allowed for greater understanding of public attitudes toward key issues measured in the survey.*

Wildlife value orientation types proved useful in more thoroughly understanding the attitudes of the public, especially regarding the acceptability of new taxes for fish and wildlife programs and activities; public involvement in fish and wildlife management; whether the WGFD should encourage young people to hunt and fish; participation in fish and wildlife decision-making; and management of bears involving lethal means. Typically, Mutualists and Utilitarians differed the most on these issues, with Pluralists and Distanced individuals sometimes expressing similar views to each other.