

Annual Report
2002
Wyoming Game & Fish Department
E. Tom Thorne, Acting Director

Director's Summary

Costs

In summary, the prolonged drought in Wyoming continues to take a devastating toll on fish and wildlife populations. There's a corresponding loss in recreational opportunities, declining license revenues for our agency, and a significant reduction to the state's economy.

Some of these costs are calculable. Others are not. Our best assessment includes the loss of upwards of 100,000 deer and antelope annually to the drought in each of the past four to five years. There's a corresponding reduction of approximately 40,000-50,000 licenses each year for those two species, resulting in the loss of \$4-\$6 million in license revenue and 250,000-300,000 lost recreation days per year. Lost expenditures by hunters in the state for such things as fuel, equipment, food, lodging, entertainment, and outfitting and guiding services means losses to Wyoming businesses of \$65-\$70 million annually.

On the aquatic side in 2001, fishing license revenue declined by more than \$700,000. Losses for 2002 won't be known until the end of the current calendar year, but will most assuredly be greater than 2001. These figures do not include costs to water-based recreation or expenditures from anglers. These are expected to decrease by an additional \$16-\$20 million this year alone. Nor do they include out-of-pocket expenses to the Department for program modification or actions taken to cope with drought conditions.

Finally, these figures do not take into account the long-term degradation of critical habitat, some of which may take decades to recover, perhaps precluding some wild populations from ever rebounding to pre-drought levels. Simply put, things are in tough shape in many (but not all) areas of Wyoming and will only get worse if the drought persists next year.