



Wyoming prairie habitat.

Introduction and General Description

Wyoming's wildlife is as diverse as its geography. Over 600 wildlife species inhabit forest-covered mountain ranges, short grass prairies, sagebrush steppes, rivers, wetlands and lakes.

Wyoming encompasses approximately 62 million acres of which 48 percent is Federal land, 42 percent is privately owned, 6 percent is State land, and 4 percent is Indian trust land. The highest proportion of public land is located in the rugged western mountains with private land holdings occupying the western river valleys and level terrain.

There are approximately 9,300 farms and ranches in Wyoming which average 3,472 acres in size

WYOMING

and in general, include the most critical wildlife habitats such as big game wintering range, riparian habitats, and wetlands.

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program continues to grow and strengthen in Wyoming. The program is a broad based partnership of private landowners, local communities, conservation districts, sportsmen groups, non-governmental organizations, Federal and State agencies, and others, whose mission is to address landowner and landscape conservation needs.

Wyoming Activities

- < Wetland restoration, creation, and enhancement.
- < Grassland restoration and grazing management.
- < Riparian restoration and management.
- < River and stream restoration.
- < Threatened and endangered species habitat restoration.
- < Outreach and education.

Habitats of Special Concern

Working closely with local ranchers along the front range of the Laramie Mountains, several miles of riparian (streamside) habitat has been restored and protected for the endangered Preble's meadow jumping mouse.

The Partners Program in Wyoming has focused on wetland and upland restoration on the Buford Foundation property near

Centennial, Wyoming. Historically, these wetlands were habitat to Wyoming toads (endangered) and boreal toads (candidate) and were the only locations containing both species. The Partners Program worked with The Nature Conservancy and Natural Resources Conservation Service to restore the wetlands and protect them with a long-term lease.

Porter Lake was dry and Hardigan Lake was partially drained. Working cooperatively with the Buford Foundation, the Partners Program successfully restored both lakes to near former levels. The wetland sites on the properties were improved to potentially reintroduce toads through releases from captive populations.

Threats

When settlement came to the arid West, water and raw materials were critical for progress and



Porter Lake, a 50-acre restored wetland in Albany County.

development. Large irrigation reservoirs and diversions were constructed on rivers and streams, and conveyance ditches were used to deliver water to newly



Wetland restoration along the Snake River.

cultivated fields. Forests were logged to supply construction lumber for growing communities, mineral industry, and rail companies. The once open grasslands and sage steppes were constrained by fences as the large herds of native migratory animals such as bison, elk, and pronghorn antelope were replaced with domestic livestock. The biological system that once evolved due to the dry climate, with fires, and great herds of migratory wildlife was brought under control. These visible and quantitative landscape conversions are long-standing, yet more subtle and possibly damaging

conversions continue to occur today. Native plants, wildlife, and fish are being replaced by uninvited exotic invaders, changing the composition, structure, and function of the ecosystem. Habitat fragmentation by unchecked expanding urbanization and mineral industry activities continues to be a major threat to fish and wildlife.

Conservation Strategies

An important landscape feature of Wyoming is the 2 million acres of wetlands scattered across the State. In arid climates such as Wyoming, these critical areas are home for many resident and migratory wildlife species. In fact, over 75 percent of all wildlife species rely on these wetlands for a part, or all, of their life cycle. In portions of the State, significant wetland complexes or concentrations exist and are targeted as focal areas for



Oxbow restoration in the Lower Missouri River drainage.

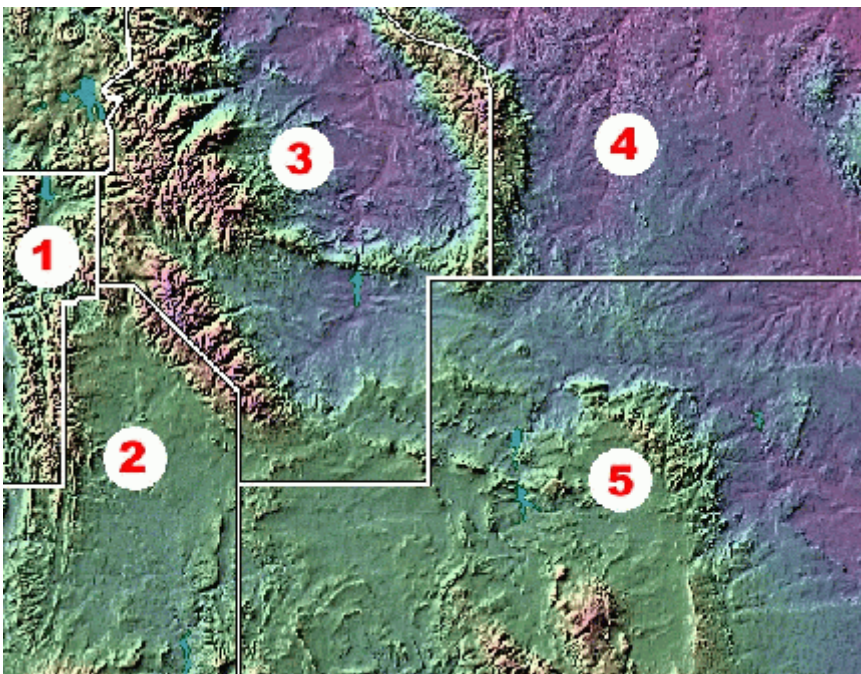
Partners work. These areas are located predominantly in the Laramie Plains, Goshen Hole, Wind River Indian Reservation, Great Basin, and New Fork Pothole Region of the Upper Green River Basin.

The State is divided into five major river drainages, as generally defined by the boundaries of the Intermountain West Joint Venture:

- < Snake/Salt River
- < Green/Bear River
- < Wind/Bighorn River
- < Lower Missouri River
- < Platte River

Snake/Salt River Drainage

Typical projects in the Snake and Salt River Drainage include restoration of riparian habitats and associated oxbow wetlands. Riparian restoration is accomplished through grazing management along the stream corridors. The timing and intensity of grazing is controlled by fencing the riparian zone to maximize woody and wet meadow plant communities. The incentive for landowners is the offsite water developments provided in the uplands to draw livestock out of the river bottoms and more efficiently utilize the adjacent grass uplands.



Major river drainages in Wyoming are focal areas for Partners work.

Oxbow wetland restorations take



Wetland restoration along the Snake River.

on many forms from simple ditch plugs or earthen dikes to impound water to diverting irrigation return flow water into relic wetlands. The combination of oxbow wetland and riparian restoration not only benefit neotropical migratory birds in the area, but resident big game species such as elk, deer, and moose as well.

Green/Bear River Drainage

Partners projects on the Green and Bear Rivers are designed to maintain and enhance waterfowl and fish habitat and improve irrigation efficiency. Riparian associated oxbow wetland restoration projects along with riparian livestock fencing benefit



Captured irrigation return flow wetland. *Photo by Paul Bultsma, Ducks Unlimited.*

many Federal trust species including the Colorado cutthroat trout and whooping crane. Trumpeter swans benefit from Partners projects in and near the New Fork Pothole Region.

Wind/Bighorn River Drainage

Within this drainage lies the 2 million acre Wind River Indian Reservation, bordered by the Wind River Mountain Range to the south and the Owl Creek Mountain Range to the north. The Partners Program has worked with the Shoshone and Arapaho Tribes on

numerous projects including wetland restoration and creation, riparian livestock fencing, grassland restoration and management, and stream restoration. The Reservation contains localized populations of Yellowstone cutthroat trout, a Species of Concern. Several Partners projects in the spring of 2001, involved installing fish passage structures to eliminate migration barriers.

Lower Missouri River Drainage

Projects in the Lower Missouri River drainage include oxbow wetland restoration in the Sheridan, Ranchester, Ucross, Clearmont, and Buffalo areas.

Riparian livestock and wetland fencing projects improve wildlife habitat and water quality while soil erosion is decreased by managing, maintaining, and improving vegetative cover on the stream banks. Grazing management plans complete the Partners package. For example, one Partners project involves two landowners along the Powder River who have



Fencing project in the Wind River drainage.

incorporated 70,000+ continuous acres into their grazing management plan, protecting over 13 miles of Powder River riparian habitat.

Platte River Drainage

The focal point for this area is Goshen Hole and Laramie Plains wetland complexes. These areas contain some of the highest density of wetlands in the State and are considered major production areas for waterfowl and wetland- dependant wildlife. The combination of oxbow wetlands along the major river corridors and natural wetland depressions in the surrounding countryside provide just the right ingredients. Partner projects include wetland restoration and creation, grassland and riparian fencing, and stream restoration.

Most Partners projects in Wyoming involve a combination of restorations. The cost for riparian fencing is about \$7,000 per mile. Grassland restoration and enhancement costs about \$4.55 per acre. Wetland restoration costs about \$1,200 per acre.

Partners

Wyoming Game and Fish Department
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts
Ducks Unlimited
University of Wyoming Agricultural Cooperative
Extension Service
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Pheasants Forever
Bureau of Land Management
Bureau of Reclamation
City of Buffalo
Union Pacific Railroad
Wyoming Salvage
U.S. Forest Service
Farm Service Agency
National Audubon Society
National Wild Turkey Federation
Rooster Boosters
Wyoming Highway Department
Wyoming Land Trust
Texaco, Inc.



20-acre oxbow restoration near Sheridan in the Lower Missouri River Drainage.

The Nature Conservancy
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources
Bureau of Indian Affairs
Arapaho and Shoshone Tribes
Wyoming Fly Casters Foundation
Boy Scouts of America

Accomplishments

- < 411 acres of wetlands have been restored.
- < 36,000 acres of upland habitat have been restored or enhanced.
- < 16 miles of riparian and in-stream habitat have been restored.

Future Needs

- < Restore 15,000 acres of wetlands.
- < Restore or enhance 5 million acres of upland habitat.
- < Restore 1,000 miles of riparian habitat.
- < Restore 1,000 miles of in-stream habitat.



Cattle have free access to the stream.



Same stream with a riparian grazing system.
Photos by Burt Jellison, Wyoming Game and Fish Department.

CONTACT



Mark Hogan
Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
170 North First Street
Lander, WY 82520
307 332-8719 (Fax) 307 332-9857
wyomingpartners.fws.gov

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