

Wyoming 2023 Hunt Forecast August, 2023

Wyoming Game and Fish Department

CASPER REGION

Pronghorn

Pronghorn population performance has been variable in the Casper Region in recent years, with herds around Casper remaining at or near population management objectives while herds in northeast Wyoming (from Douglas to Lusk to Sundance) remain far below objective. Over the past five years, pronghorn numbers have generally declined in much of the region due to multiple harsh winters coupled with poor fawn survival and periodic disease outbreaks (Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease and Blue Tongue). In some cases, herds were well above objective and have declined to appropriate levels, while in places like northeast Wyoming, hunting seasons have become extremely conservative to allow herds to grow to desired levels. Then came the winter of 2022-23. As the historically harsh winter progressed, wildlife managers decided to remove Type 6 or 7 (doe/fawn) licenses from almost all of the hunt areas in the region out of an abundance of caution, with one notable exception in Hunt Area 32 south of Casper, where pronghorn have fared well. Thankfully, substantial pronghorn losses were not realized in much of the Casper Region despite severe winter conditions being prevalent in much of the state, partially due to the fact that pronghorn populations were already well below what the landscape could support. Regardless, most pronghorn populations are now under objective with conservative hunting seasons for the foreseeable future. Despite numbers remaining below-desired levels in much of the region, hunters should experience average to high harvest success as buck ratios remain strong and license issuance has been drastically reduced for the fourth consecutive year.

Mule deer

**Correction: This section has been updated to reflect the correct mandatory sampling areas.*

Mule deer populations have decreased or remained stable throughout the region over the past several years, with all populations being well below established objectives. Mule deer adult and fawn survival continues to be poor, which can be attributed to past summer droughts and habitat conditions, disease in some herds and predation. Despite lower-than-desired numbers, buck ratios remain high in most mule deer herds and hunter success should be good for those hunting on private lands and in limited quota areas. Hunters on public land within general license areas should experience low to moderate success, as seasons will remain conservative. In the Black Hills, unprecedented conservative 17-day general seasons will be held in conjunction with the elimination of most doe/fawn licenses in Hunt Areas 1-6, meaning hunters will have only two full weekends to hunt this year. Hunters lucky enough to draw a license in conservatively managed limited quota areas should see high buck ratios with modest trophy potential. In the high-altitude desert (Hunt Areas 10, 34 and 89) many prime-age, mature bucks don't grow large antlers compared to mule deer in other parts of the state. However, these herds are managed for good numbers of older-aged bucks and produce some nice deer every year. Thankfully, 2023 experienced an extraordinarily wet spring and early summer, which should boost forage production and overall habitat quality. In turn, this should lead to good over-summer fawn survival while bolstering the nutritional condition of adult females as they enter the coming winter. This will hopefully result in improved winter survival and fawn production next year, something our mule deer populations could use. Mandatory CWD sample submission is required for hunters who hunt in Hunt Areas 88 and 89. Hunters can get their deer tested for CWD by collecting a sample themselves and sending it to the Wildlife Health Lab or by bringing the head to a game check station or Game and Fish regional office during office hours.

White-tailed deer

White-tailed deer populations experienced substantial die-offs in 2021 in much of the Casper Region due to a severe outbreak of [Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease](#). This outbreak was more widespread and prolonged than usual due to unseasonably warm fall conditions that persisted well into November. White-tail hunters will see far fewer deer in 2023 compared to recent years, especially in the Black Hills where unprecedented conservative 17-day general seasons will be held in conjunction with the elimination of most doe/fawn licenses in Hunt Areas 1-6, meaning hunters will have only two full weekends to hunt this year. Despite being only one year removed from the large-scale EHD die-off, white-tail numbers are starting to rebound in the Casper and Douglas areas. In 2023, doe/fawn license issuance was liberalized in these areas to prevent rapid population growth, which can occur in central Wyoming when weather conditions are favorable and EHD remains at bay. Hunters are reminded the vast majority of white-tailed deer occupy private lands. The notable exception is in the Black Hills, where high numbers occupy the Black Hills National Forest, although numbers are relatively low this year due to the EHD outbreak of 2021.

Elk

Elk numbers remain at or above objective in all herds in the region. Seasons continue to be liberal in terms of length and license issuance. Modest increases in elk license numbers and liberalized limitations occurred in parts of the region, most notably in Hunt Area 117 where seasons were further liberalized to address a growing elk population and alleviate private land damage. The region continues to provide excellent bull-hunting opportunities, with many areas continuing to boast high harvest success on any-elk licenses and good antler quality. Antlerless elk hunter success continues to be good, although high hunter densities on public lands often result in reduced hunter success in early fall. In areas with interspersed public and private lands, antlerless elk

hunters tend to require more days afield to harvest their elk as large cow/calf groups readily displace off public land. Overall, the 2023 season will continue emphasizing female elk harvest while providing good mature bull hunting in most areas. Those hunters willing to expend the effort should continue to enjoy remarkable numbers of elk and success if the weather cooperates.

CODY REGION

Pronghorn

Pronghorn populations and hunting success continue to be down through much of the Bighorn Basin and licenses have been reduced or maintained for the 2023 season in most of these areas. The northern portion of the Bighorn Basin's pronghorn herds are relatively stable. Early field observations suggest good fawn production throughout much of the region. Hunting should be similar or better for those who drew pronghorn licenses within the region than last year.

Deer

Winter survival appears to be at or above average throughout the region. Based on preliminary field observations, mule deer fawn production appears to be similar or better than last year. The region observed improved fawn production in most deer herds during the 2022 deer classifications. Most mule deer herds within the region are currently below population management objectives. Hunters should expect conditions and success to be similar or slightly improved compared to 2022. Prolonged drought and increasing CWD prevalence have had a negative impact on Bighorn Basin deer herds over the past several years. Managers are hopeful the recent positive trends in precipitation will provide a needed boost to mule deer populations.

Elk

Most herds continue to perform well within the region, with several at or above management objectives. Based on improved precipitation and early field observations suggesting good calf production, elk hunters should expect good hunting within the Cody Region again this year.

Moose

Herds within the region have been performing better over the past several years. The Bighorn Mountain herd has recorded high trend counts for the past four years.

Research conducted within the Absaroka herd (Hunt Area 9) suggests good calf production and survival in 2023. Managers are observing a slight increase in moose numbers in Hunt Area 11, particularly within the Sunlight Basin area. Moose licenses changed slightly this year to balance the new 90:10 resident/nonresident allocation.

Moose hunters should expect good moose hunting conditions and success in 2023.

Wildlife disease management

Hunters are encouraged to assist wildlife managers in collecting disease samples. Elk hunters who receive a [brucellosis](#) sample kit in the mail should carry the sample kit while in the field and collect a blood sample from their harvest. Hunters should be aware that there are mandatory sample submission and focus sampling areas within the region for CWD. Mandatory CWD sample submission is required for hunters who hold a Type 1 license for Hunt Areas 41 and 47. In addition, elk hunters are encouraged to submit a CWD sample for Hunt Areas 55, 56, 58-61 and 66. Hunters can have their deer or elk tested for CWD by collecting a sample themselves and sending it to the Wildlife Health Lab or by bringing the head to a Game and Fish regional office during office hours or game check station.

Weather and habitat conditions

The 2002-23 winter was near the 10-year average to slightly above average across the region. Spring and summer conditions throughout the region have produced above-average precipitation and lower temperatures through July. These types of conditions bode well for wildlife within the region. Wildlife populations should benefit if conditions continue and there is good late-summer/fall precipitation.

GREEN RIVER REGION

Pronghorn

The Green River Region encompasses six pronghorn herds. Pronghorn numbers are down across the region due to harsh winter conditions in 2022-23. However, there is variability in these declines. While slightly suppressed in population numbers, the southern hunt areas of the Sublette herd should still offer quality hunting experiences. A similar outlook should be expected for the Uinta-Cedar Mountain and Carter Lease pronghorn herds. While winter conditions were exceptional, segments of these populations were able to find suitable locations to winter along Interstate 80 and Flaming Gorge Reservoir to buffer against losses. Baggs, Bitter Creek and South Rock Springs pronghorn herds also experienced declines as over-winter survival was suppressed due to winter range snowpack in Wyoming and Colorado. Lower population levels reduced Type 1 (any antelope) license allocations and eliminated all doe/fawn antelope licenses in the region. With the 2023 spring and summer starting mild with good moisture, individuals who made it through winter are experiencing excellent conditions. However, production is expected to be marginal at best, as females coming out of winter in poor body condition will likely have fewer fawns this year.

Mule deer

Severe winter conditions have been unfavorable for mule deer populations throughout the region. Through GPS collaring efforts, wildlife managers observed above-average mortality on winter ranges in the Wyoming Range and Uinta mule deer herds. Similar survival rates can be expected in the Baggs herd due to similar winter conditions. These winter losses prompted conservative general deer season structures and shortened season length for hunt areas 82, 132-135 and 168. General hunt areas 100 and 131 have low-density deer numbers and will continue to have conservative seasons in 2023. Hunters should expect tough hunting conditions in these general areas. The South Rock Springs deer herd (Hunt Areas 101 and 102) experienced an above-average winter. However, it did not see the extremes like other parts of the region. In past observations, this deer herd typically responds favorably to above-average winters with increased fawn ratios and survival, likely due to improved range conditions in this otherwise arid area. Fawn production is expected to be down in other parts of the region, as most females coming out of winter will be in poor body condition and likely experience suppressed fawning rates. With most of the region's deer herds under objective even before winter, finding older-aged bucks will likely be challenging, particularly in the low deer-density desert habitats.

Elk

Before the 2023 winter, most herds were at or above population objectives. Even with some known winter losses, elk hunting should remain good in the region, including the special management herds in Hunt Areas 100 and 30-32. Quality animals are being observed and hunters are expected to harvest some nice bulls, including areas under recreational management. General season structures were liberalized with added opportunity for antlerless elk due to increased conflicts across much of the region from the exceptional winter. Overall, cow hunting opportunities remain liberal throughout

much of the region where the increased harvest is warranted, particularly in hunt areas 102-107 to keep or move populations towards objectives. Managers expect an average or above-average elk harvest this fall, depending on weather conditions and hunter effort.

Weather and habitat conditions:

The Green River Region experienced one of the worst winters in recent memory. Heavy snowpack, below-average winter temperatures, and the overall duration of these conditions contributed to substantial impacts on wintering big game. Many parts of the region contain important winter range areas, and mule deer and pronghorn herds were negatively impacted. While below-average ungulate survival was seen across the region, there were areas with lower snow loads that facilitated the ability for individuals to winter successfully. These areas included basins in the Rock Springs and Green River areas and areas surrounding Flaming Gorge Reservoir. Despite the harsh winter, the over winter moisture, along with consistent spring rains helped much of the region crawl out of drought conditions. Current range conditions have improved compared to previous years thanks to substantial grass and forb production.

JACKSON REGION

Pronghorn

The Jackson Region harbors a small migratory segment of the Sublette antelope herd in Hunt Area 85. Antelope wintering in the Pinedale region experienced extreme winter mortality as a result of the unprecedented winter severity as well as an outbreak of *Mycoplasma bovis* this year. In early May, approximately 75 percent of radio-collared adult doe pronghorn from an on-going study had died. This prompted an emergency rule to reduce antelope licenses in the affected hunt areas, which included closing Hunt

Area 85 for the 2023 hunting season. Regional managers will assess recovery of the Jackson segment of the Sublette herd and may recommend to the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission to re-authorize hunting seasons in future years as appropriate.

Mule deer

Portions of the Sublette and Wyoming Range herds are managed in the region, including Hunt Areas 150-152, 155-156 and 144-146. Both herds experienced substantial winter mortality due to winter severity this year. As a result, the Commission approved several changes to the 2023 season. Hunters will see shorter season lengths, three point antler restrictions, reduced non-resident quotas and the elimination of the doe/fawn opportunity for youth hunters. The impacts of this winter were significant and Game and Fish managers continue to monitor these herds closely. Hunters should expect to see significantly fewer deer on the landscape this fall. However, we expect to document increased survival, body condition, fawn production and herd recovery in upcoming years, similar to what we have documented following previous severe winters. While the 2023 season will have fewer deer on the landscape, restrictive season structures, and fewer non-resident hunters, Game and Fish is confident that harvest will not restrict the growth potential of these herds in this or future years. Hunters can get their deer tested for CWD by collecting a sample themselves and sending it to the Wildlife Health Lab or by bringing the head to a game check station or Game and Fish regional office during office hours.

The Jackson Region also includes the Targhee mule deer herd (Hunt Area 149) and Hunt Area 148 of the Dubois mule deer herd, both of which contain low deer densities and see limited hunter numbers and harvest.

White-tailed deer

Small populations may be found near riparian habitats throughout the region, and all hunt areas in the region offer the opportunity for hunters to harvest white-tailed deer

during the general season. There are limited quota Type 3 (any white-tailed deer) and Type 8 (doe/fawn white-tailed) deer licenses available to provide additional late season opportunities. Hunters holding a Type 3 or Type 8 white-tailed deer license for the combined hunt areas of 148, 150, 151, 152, 155 and 156 may obtain permission slips to hunt on the National Elk Refuge. Hunt periods on the Refuge are approximately 6-8 days long and run from Sept. 1 - 14 (archery only) and Sept. 15 - Nov. 22 (firearms and archery). Visit the [National Elk Refuge webpage](#) for more information or contact the Jackson Game and Fish Regional Office for assistance. Hunters are encouraged to have their deer tested for CWD by bringing the head to a Game and Fish regional office or hunter check station. Mandatory sampling is required for white-tailed deer harvested on the National Elk Refuge.

Elk

The region manages four herds (Jackson, Fall Creek, Afton and Targhee) that currently contain at least 17,000 elk and are within management objectives. These areas provide a wide range of hunting opportunities and vary from early-season rifle hunts for branch-antlered bulls in the Teton Wilderness to late antlerless elk seasons on private lands to address elk damage to stored crops and co-mingling with livestock. Despite the severe winter, overall elk mortality was relatively low because the majority of elk in these herds are supplementally fed on feedgrounds. Some feedgrounds had higher calf mortality this winter than normal, but hunters should still expect to see typical elk numbers in most hunt areas. Hunt Area 75 (Grand Teton National Park) licenses were reduced in quota and season length in an effort to shift management towards population maintenance as opposed to population reduction based on survey data and herd unit objectives. Hunters can get their elk tested for CWD by collecting a sample themselves and sending it to the Wildlife Health Lab or by bringing the head to a Game and Fish regional office during office hours or game check station. Mandatory sampling is

required for all elk harvested in Hunt Areas 75 (Grand Teton National Park) and 77 (National Elk Refuge).

Moose

All or parts of the Jackson, Sublette and Targhee herds are found in the region, and all are managed under a special management strategy to provide recreational opportunities while maintaining a harvest of older age-class bulls. While moose numbers remain below desired levels, hunters lucky enough to draw a license should experience high success and have a good chance of harvesting a bull. Moose fared well last winter in the cold and deep snow conditions. Higher moose mortality has recently been observed during warmer winters. Moose hunters are encouraged to submit the two front incisors (lower teeth) from their harvested moose for aging, which is helpful for managers to evaluate herd status. Successful hunters are also encouraged to bring their moose head to the Jackson Game and Fish regional office for sampling to help with ongoing disease surveillance such as CWD, carotid artery worms, etc.

Weather and habitat conditions

Mule deer and pronghorn that summer in the Jackson region and winter in the Pinedale region will take multiple years of favorable weather conditions to recover from the 2022-23 winter. The 2023 spring moisture will aid in providing a prolonged growing season, however if the hot/dry weather of late August persists, early fall conditions could result. The Jackson Region represents a small portion of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and is a weather-driven system. Game and Fish managers continue to work with partners to increase habitat resilience and permeability for animal movement to increase the ability of wildlife to buffer the impacts of extreme weather events and to manage wildlife populations towards management objectives.

LANDER REGION

Pronghorn

Hunters can expect fewer animals this fall following severe winter conditions throughout much of the region – particularly in the Rawlins/I-80 areas. Throughout the region, we expect buck quality to be lower than in past years due to winter severity, loss of older age classes and fewer animals. As a result, license numbers were reduced in 2023. Hunters who draw a license and are willing to put in effort should expect good harvest success.

Deer

Throughout most of the region, mule deer populations declined in 2022-23 due to harsh winter conditions. With several years of reduced fawn recruitment resulting in the loss of at least three age classes, mule deer numbers remain below management objectives. Antler-point restrictions continue but changed from a 3-point to 4-point or more in hunt areas near Lander and Rawlins. Elsewhere, hunters will have opportunities for similar harvest success — mostly with young bucks. Continued any white-tailed deer seasons are in place in the Dubois, Lander, Riverton and Jeffrey City areas. Hunters should expect tougher mule deer hunting and likely lower success compared to last year. Mandatory CWD sample submission is required for hunters who hunt in Hunt Areas 157 and 171. Hunters can get their deer tested for CWD by collecting a sample themselves and sending it to the Wildlife Health Lab or by bringing the head to a game check station or Game and Fish regional office during office hours.

Elk

Elk populations are doing well across the region and were relatively unaffected by winter conditions. Last year's calf production remained on par with previous years and should result in continued, robust numbers. Observed bull numbers remained strong during mid-winter surveys. If favorable weather conditions are realized during the fall, hunters should experience excellent harvest opportunities.

Moose

Moose are at or below desired levels and the hunting season framework includes continued conservative quotas. For the past three years, more moose were counted in Hunt Areas 2 and 30 and it appears this population is stable. Winter counts in the Dubois country continue to yield fewer moose and remain at historically low levels. Hunters fortunate enough to draw a license can expect good harvest success in the region.

Weather and habitat conditions

Most of the region has enjoyed increased spring and early summer moisture with good vegetation production. Animals that pulled through the severe winter of 2022-23 should be in great shape and flourishing with improved habitat conditions. The portion of the region in the Red Desert has seen improved precipitation as well and, unlike the previous few years, is in good condition with regard to available forage and open water availability.

LARAMIE REGION

Pronghorn

Pronghorn herds throughout the Laramie Region did not succumb to the harsh winter conditions to the same extent as those in south-central and western Wyoming. However, Hunt Areas 50, 51 and 52 experienced higher winter mortalities compared with herds to the east, and as a result Type 1 (any antelope) and Type 6 (doe or fawn) licenses were reduced. Grassland herds in the north and east, including Hunt Areas 11, 34, 38 and 103, have declined over the past six years, along with notable decreases in fawn production. Decent buck numbers remain in these herds, but older animals will be harder to find. Hunters should expect fewer pronghorn in the Laramie Valley and Shirley Basin compared to previous years with reduced hunting opportunities. However, populations in Hunt Areas 47 and 48 are experiencing an increase. Winter snowpack

combined with above-average spring and summer precipitation should provide the necessary dietary needs for lactating does. Managers expect to see an increase in fawn survival which translates to increased opportunities in the future.

Mule deer

Winter conditions most likely negatively affected mule deer throughout the Platte Valley and license numbers were slightly decreased to compensate for winter mortality. Wildlife biologists and game wardens will collect CWD samples throughout Hunt Areas 16, 78-81 to better understand disease prevalence. The population within the Sheep Mountain herd has been on a steady decline for the past several years. However, the regeneration of important grass and shrub species within the Mullen Fire burn scar should have long-term, positive effects for fawn rearing and survival. Hunters should be prepared for downed timber on the U.S. Forest Service road system. Increased snowpack and above-average spring and summer precipitation will likely result in better forb and shrub conditions that are vital for lactating does, so an increase in fawn survival across the region is expected to be documented when herd composition surveys are completed this winter. Hunters should expect an increase in buck numbers in two or three years. High prevalence of CWD within the Goshen Rim (Hunt Area 15) and Laramie Mountains Herd (Hunt Areas 59, 60 and 64), coupled with poor fawn production for the past five years, has resulted in declining populations and fewer older age bucks on the landscape. Hunters should expect to spend more time in the field if they are looking for a mature buck to harvest; however, an adequate number of younger class bucks are still available for harvest.

Elk

Populations remain above objective, with ample harvest opportunities throughout the region. Hunters are encouraged to hunt south of Wyoming Highway 130 within the

Snowy Range herd to take advantage of elk utilizing the Mullen Fire burn scar where vegetation improvements occurred. Several changes were made to the Snowy Range and Shirley Mountain herd hunt areas, so hunters should become familiar with the new dates and limitations before going to the field. Given hunting pressure on public land, hunters should be prepared to pursue elk in areas far from well-traveled roads and trails. Look for additional access opportunities on properties enrolled in the Game and Fish Access Yes program and secure a permission slip if needed.

Moose

Excellent hunting opportunities are expected in the Snowy Range herd. Harvest success across Type 1 (any moose, except cow moose with calf at side) and Type 4 (antlerless moose, except cow moose with calf at side) licenses continues to be exceptional, and the herd maintains high bull ratios and good calf production. Vegetation regrowth from the Mullen Fire is expected to improve moose habitat.

Weather and habitat conditions

Winter conditions were harsher compared to previous years. However, based on collar data from pronghorn, mule deer and bighorn sheep, winter survival was better in the Laramie Region than in the western portion of the state. Above average snowpack coupled with significant spring and summer precipitation, has resulted in tremendous plant production, which the region has been hoping for, given the drought conditions we have experienced for the past decade. These conditions have replenished stock dams, recharged watersheds throughout the region and wildlife are expected to be in better condition going forward.

PINEDALE REGION

Pronghorn

The region encompasses the northern portion of the Sublette herd, one of the largest in the nation, and includes Hunt Areas 87-91 and 101. The 2022-23 winter was exceptionally harsh, which combined with an outbreak of the novel, pneumonia-causing bacteria *Mycoplasma bovis*, resulted in substantially elevated winter mortality for pronghorn in the Pinedale Region. Nearly 2,000 licenses were cut for the 2023 hunting seasons, including all doe/fawn tags and around 80 percent of buck tags, to maximize the opportunity for the herd to rebound in future years. Hunters lucky enough to draw a buck pronghorn license in these hunt areas should expect to see fewer pronghorn this fall.

Mule deer

Portions of the Sublette and Wyoming Range herds are managed in the region, including Hunt Areas 130, 138-143, 146, 153 and 154. Both herds include relatively large populations with special management strategies designed to provide high-quality hunting opportunities and at least 30 bucks per 100 does, and large-antlered, older-aged deer are harvested annually from both herds. Above-average snow depths and colder-than-normal temperatures during the 2022-23 winter resulted in above-average winter mortality in the Wyoming Range, and near-average mortality in the Sublette herd. Hunters in the Wyoming Range herd should expect fewer deer than normal this fall, and those hunting the Sublette herd will likely see fewer bucks than in recent years. Mule deer enthusiasts should remember that periodic elevated winter mortality is common in these mule deer herds, resulting in wide fluctuations in population abundance trends. While the populations are currently in the trough of the trend, these herds have demonstrated the ability to rebound relatively rapidly given several consecutive winters of below-to-average severity.

White-tailed deer

Small populations may be found near riparian habitats, and all deer hunt areas in the region offer the opportunity for harvest during the general season. Additionally, 50 limited quota Type 3 licenses provide the opportunity to harvest any white-tailed deer from Oct. 1 - Nov. 30 in Hunt Areas 138-143.

Elk

Nearly 10,000 elk in three herd units are managed in the region. Liberal seasons provide hunters with ample opportunities, especially for antlerless elk, with all general seasons providing an opportunity to harvest a cow or calf elk until Nov. 20. Bull numbers remain strong, with ratios ranging from 31 bulls per 100 cows in the Pinedale herd to 37 bulls per 100 cows in the Upper Green River and Piney herds. The herds also remain productive, with an average of 35 calves per 100 cows region-wide, indicating stable to growing populations. Bull harvest in 2022 was around average with many nice bulls taken, and cow elk harvest was slow early in the season but picked up into November as snow pushed herds into lower-elevation, more easily accessible areas. Elk hunting in the region during 2023 should offer excellent opportunities.

Moose

The Sublette herd is managed under a special management strategy to provide recreational opportunities while maintaining an average harvest age of 4 years for bulls to maintain trophy quality. This herd has a winter trend count objective of 1,500 and the population has been stable to slightly increasing over the last decade. A total of 125 bull and five antlerless licenses were offered in the Pinedale Region for the 2023 hunting season. Hunters are advised not to be discouraged when scouting or hunting for moose during the early season when warm temperatures can drive moose into forested habitats where they are generally less visible. Moose hunters who hunt during the later portion of the season typically encounter more moose. Hunter success for moose hunt

areas in the region averaged 92 percent over the past five years and should be high during the 2023 season.

Weather and habitat conditions

High soil moisture, resulting from above-average snowpack, along with higher than normal precipitation during the growing season has resulted in increased herbaceous plant production and leader growth on shrub species throughout the Pinedale Region. Increased foraging opportunities on summer and transitional habitats are anticipated to impact the body condition of wildlife entering winter positively and hunters can anticipate that some animals will be more broadly dispersed due to the availability of water this season.

SHERIDAN REGION

Pronghorn

Pronghorn numbers have declined in recent years for various reasons, including harvest, drought, disease and weather conditions. The largest declines have been in the Gillette area. However, populations have stabilized across most of the region. Quotas have been adjusted to reflect decreased populations. Spring and early summer conditions this year have provided much-needed moisture to the region and should help populations start to rebound. Opportunities to harvest a pronghorn will be similar to 2022. While numbers might be down, hunters should find average-quality bucks this year.

Mule deer

Mule deer populations throughout the region have been impacted by severe drought and disease-related mortalities since 2019 and weather conditions during this past winter. Harvest strategies are designed to provide buck hunting opportunities with limited antlerless deer harvest. Increased precipitation in 2023 has reduced the drought

intensity, and the doe-to-fawn ratios should positively respond to the increased moisture and improved forage. Hunting opportunities are expected to be similar to 2022. CWD prevalence estimates in the region's herd units range from 12-18 percent. Deer Hunt Areas 1-6 are part of the 2023 [CWD monitoring focus areas](#). Hunters can get their deer tested for CWD by collecting a sample themselves and sending it to the Wildlife Health Lab or by bringing the head to a game check station or Game and Fish regional office during office hours.

White-tailed deer

All white-tailed deer hunt areas offer both October and November hunting seasons for any white-tailed deer, and many doe/fawn seasons extend into December, allowing ample opportunity for harvest. Most white-tailed deer are found on private land, with limited public land hunting opportunities. Hunters are encouraged to secure private land access before purchasing a white-tailed deer license. Some doe/fawn licenses are restricted to private land, so check the regulations. The Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease and bluetongue virus outbreaks in 2021 and 2022 affected white-tailed deer populations, resulting in reduced deer numbers. Depending on the location, hunters can expect to find similar or decreased deer numbers compared to 2022. Hunters might find fewer mature bucks this year due to the EHD and bluetongue virus outbreaks, which tend to affect adult males more than other age or gender cohorts. CWD prevalence is greater than 20 percent in some areas. Deer Hunt Areas 1-6 are part of the 2023 [CWD monitoring focus areas](#).

Elk

Now is a great time to be an elk hunter with ample opportunity to harvest an animal, especially if you are willing to hunt antlerless elk. There are some changes in the 2023 seasons as compared to previous years in the region, so be sure to refer to the current [hunting regulations](#). Changes in season limitations, opening dates and license types

were designed to help achieve desired harvest levels. Limited quota, any-elk licenses continue to be difficult to draw but those lucky to draw a license have a reasonable chance at harvesting a mature bull. Several areas had leftover antlerless and cow/calf licenses available, but these tend to be private land areas with limited access to hunt. Hunters are encouraged to secure private land access before purchasing a leftover license.

Moose

The Bighorn Moose herd continued to perform well. Winter conditions did not appear to affect moose in the Bighorns negatively. Moose license quotas changed slightly this year to balance the new 90:10 resident/nonresident allocation. Age structure suggests good cohorts of mature (i.e. 4+ years old) bulls in this population. Moose hunters should expect good moose hunting conditions and success in 2023.

Weather and habitat conditions

The 2022-23 winter was a more normal winter, different from the relatively mild winters experienced the last several years. There was above average spring and early summer moisture, resulting in green forage well into the summer months. This flush of quality forage should benefit wildlife this year. The prediction for continued moisture through August should allow wildlife to enter winter in good body condition.