

Responsive Management Report



Specializing in Survey Research on Natural Resource and Outdoor Recreation Issues

Winter 2019

Forging the Future of Wyoming's Wildlife



Over the past year, Responsive Management completed one of the largest and most comprehensive human dimensions research studies ever undertaken to develop a new strategic plan for a fish and wildlife agency. *Forging the Future of Wyoming's Wildlife* was a multi-phase project entailing significant new data collection on behalf of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (Game and Fish). The data will guide a strategic plan that will help shape the work of the agency for the next five years.



The project entailed major surveys of Wyoming residents and recreationists, nonresident hunters and anglers, and Game and Fish employees; focus groups and public meetings with residents across Wyoming; and an extensive series of planning meetings with Game and Fish. Responsive Management also maintained an online public input forum to solicit additional feedback from those invested in the work of Game and Fish.

The impetus for the research was a 2016 evaluation of 12 Game and Fish program areas by the Wildlife Management Institute (WMI). The program areas were selected by the Governor's Task Force on Fish and Wildlife Resources, with the objective to assess efficiency and effectiveness within each area. The review concluded with a recommendation for new human dimensions data collection to "identify citizens' expectations" of the agency and to "inform and identify the resources necessary to meet the public's expectations."

Traditionally, wildlife management in the U.S. (and related agency planning) has focused on the biological and ecological aspects of conservation. However, within the past few decades, the wildlife management profession has acknowledged the importance of incorporating the human dimension—that is, the wants and needs of the public. While public attitudes alone should not dictate wildlife policy, *continued on page 2*

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fish and wildlife agencies have realized that the attitudes of citizens are an important part of the wildlife conservation paradigm.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department has long been at the vanguard of the human dimensions movement. Prior to embarking on a new agency-wide strategic plan, Game and Fish leadership were adamant that no stone be left unturned in the interests of generating input from as many Game and Fish constituents as possible. Game and Fish contracted with Responsive Management to design a comprehensive internal-and-external assessment (to include perspectives from both agency employees as well as general population residents) to reliably establish management priorities for the future.

Renny MacKay, Communications Director for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, spoke about the value of the human dimensions data and its continued application to planning efforts down the road. “The social science that was produced in partnership with Responsive Management is invaluable,” said MacKay. “Not only did the Wyoming Game and Fish Department learn more about the people of Wyoming and their wildlife-based opinions and activities, but the entire state now has this resource as it works to expand the outdoor recreation economy. The data are a treasure trove to continue to explore and parse.”

The Process: An Overview of P

Responsive Management’s work for Game and Fish entailed a combination of quantitative and qualitative research techniques; Game and Fish personnel as well as general population residents and recreationists provided substantial input into the study. To help apply the research findings to the eventual agency-wide strategic plan, Responsive Management partnered with Mike Fraidenburg of The Cooperation Company, a Washington State-based firm specializing in strategic and operational planning. Fraidenburg was involved in the project from the beginning but assumed a larger role following Responsive Management’s completion of the data collection.

Responsive Management adopted a methodical approach to the study design so that each successive component would build on the preceding ones. The extensive internal and external project methodology encompassed the following components:

Initial Launch Meeting: In mid-September 2017, staff from Responsive Management convened a two-day project launch meeting with Game and Fish executive staff and division leadership at the Curt Gowdy State Park Visitor Center (see photographs below). The launch meeting allowed for an in-depth discussion of project goals, objectives, and contextual information relating to previous agency planning efforts. The researchers also used a portion of the launch meeting to conduct a “SWOT” analysis, which is a structured, interactive planning method that evaluates an organization’s Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. This analysis allowed for an initial identification of internal and external factors to address in the strategic plan objectives.

Qualitative Project Assessment: The first official component of data collection following the launch meeting and SWOT analysis was a qualitative project assessment of Game and Fish internal employees (all permanent and non-permanent personnel) and stakeholders (Game and Fish Commissioners, members of the Governor’s Fish and Wildlife Task Force, and directors of other Wyoming agencies). The purpose of this assessment was to establish a foundation of data pertaining to the study goals, outcomes, and key agency characteristics relevant to the upcoming strategic plan. The questionnaire was administered to a closed population of respondents by email, and Responsive Management obtained a total of 223 completed responses from employees and stakeholders.

Pre-Survey Focus Groups: Responsive Management next implemented a series of five focus groups in Cheyenne, Rock Springs, Riverton, Gillette, and Cody in November 2017. These groups were conducted to help identify topics for the

A look at the interactive SWOT analysis completed during the project launch meeting in September 2017.



Project Methodologies

upcoming surveys and other opinion gathering tools. Each focus group consisted of 9 to 12 residents who engaged in one or more forms of outdoor recreation relevant to Game and Fish, including hunting, fishing, trapping, boating, hiking, and wildlife viewing/photography. Most groups also included at least one landowner of 10 acres or more.

Survey of Wyoming Residents and Outdoor Recreationists:

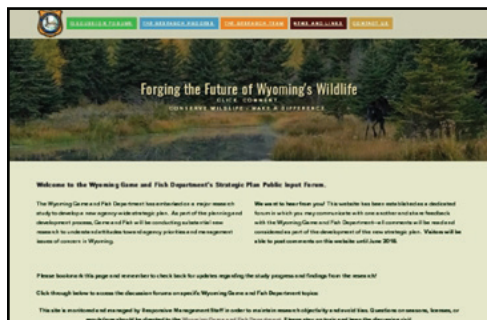
A scientific, probability-based survey was conducted to evaluate the true distribution of residents' and recreationists' awareness, opinions, and attitudes. The survey was conducted by telephone (both landlines and cell phones were called) to ensure maximum representation of the study population and to avoid any of the biases common to internet and mail surveys (self-read surveys systematically exclude those who are not literate enough to complete the questionnaire). The survey included Wyoming general population residents (n=2,558, which included hunters, anglers, trappers, and participants in a range of other activities), nonresident hunters (n=207), and nonresident anglers (n=201).



Survey of Game and Fish Employees: A second survey, consisting of many of the same questions as the general population survey, was conducted entirely with Game and Fish employees. (The results of the earlier SWOT analysis and qualitative assessment were also used in part to develop this survey, which was quantitative and covered more specific areas.) The survey was distributed by email using a database of Game and Fish employees; the resident and employee surveys were administered in January and February 2018.

Post-Survey Focus Groups: Following the surveys, Responsive Management staff headed back to a snowy Wyoming to moderate a second series of focus groups designed to gain additional insights into the quantitative data. The post-survey focus groups were again held with a diverse sample of Wyoming recreationists, including hunters, anglers, trappers, and non-consumptive participants such as hikers and wildlife viewers. The locations for the second series of groups were Laramie, Casper, Sheridan, Worland, and Jackson.

Public Meetings: Responsive Management next facilitated ten regional public meetings with the general public and Game and Fish stakeholders. The meetings provided an open forum for input and dialogue between the agency and its constituents; they also reinforced transparency and encouraged public investment in decision-making. Game and Fish staff attended each meeting in uniform and, toward the end of each meeting, reiterated the major themes they had heard in the public comments. The public meeting locations included Cheyenne, Laramie, Casper, Lander, Gillette, Green River, Sheridan, Pinedale, Cody, and Jackson.



Online Public Input Forum: To allow input from as many stakeholders as possible, Responsive Management designed an online public input forum with separate discussion portals for key Game and Fish topics. The forum website (www.wildlifeforum.org) included a description of the strategic planning process, a list of the public meeting locations, and general discussion questions posed by the researchers (although site visitors were not required to respond to these questions). Commenters could visit the forum as often as they liked throughout the study and also had the opportunity to engage with one another in a typical online discussion format.

The Findings: An Overview

Focus Group Findings



The launch meeting with Game and Fish leadership and the initial qualitative assessment of Game and Fish employees and stakeholders provided critical foundational information to guide the rest of the project. For example, the qualitative assessment identified five major goals at the outset that helped set a course for the study: educate the public and garner their trust; develop a useable and measurable strategic plan; assess and improve employee morale; increase funding for the agency; and manage all wildlife, not just game and sport fish species. The qualitative assessment also looked at employees' desired outcomes of the project, with some of the most important ones including increased engagement with non-consumptive users, elevation of the management of nongame wildlife as an agency priority, and better education of and communication with the public.

The first series of focus groups with Wyoming general population residents was also critical in that these discussions identified issues warranting further exploration in the quantitative surveys. In this stage of the research, focus group findings centered on seven major Game and Fish topics:

Topic	Initial Focus Group Findings
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access was the most discussed issue in each group• Hunting and fishing both affected by public/private land access issues• Road and trail maintenance affects access for non-consumptive activities such as hiking and wildlife viewing/photography
Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Concern over the reintroduction of wolves into Wyoming and the perceived growing presence of grizzly bears• Desire for greater management attention on nongame species• Concern over deadwood in Wyoming's forests and perceived mismanagement of Russian olive and sagebrush
Regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Frustration over perception of overly complex hunting regulations• Frustration over difficulties in drawing big game tags• Frustration with boundaries between public and private land
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Desire for more educational initiatives, especially for youth• Desire for statewide boating ethics/etiquette education
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Desire for increased communication from Game and Fish on regulations, policy decisions, budgets, hunting/fishing regulations, etc.
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Debate over alternative funding mechanisms for Game and Fish (support for new excise taxes and/or fees for non-consumptive users versus reluctance from some hunters and anglers)
Resources and Personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some desire that more Game and Fish resources and personnel be devoted to non-consumptive outdoor recreation and nongame species

Each of these topics was further explored in the quantitative surveys administered to general population residents and Game and Fish employees.

view of Project Results

Survey Results

The general population survey found that participation in outdoor recreational activities in Wyoming is robust: about a third of residents had purchased a hunting license within the previous five years, and nearly half had purchased a fishing license in that time. Additionally, nearly three-quarters of Wyoming residents had hiked, about two-thirds had camped, and about two-thirds had gone wildlife viewing. Given such high participation numbers, it is no surprise that Wyomingites place such a high priority on the management of the state's natural resources.

The general population survey also found that impressions of access for different activities generally aligned with the earlier focus group findings. The best ratings were for access to view wildlife and to hike, while there appeared to be room for improvement regarding access for hunting and fishing (although a majority gave access ratings of *excellent* or *good* to these activities, in both cases the *good* ratings exceeded the *excellent* ratings).

The typical Wyoming resident is both knowledgeable about Game and Fish as well as highly satisfied with the agency: nearly three-quarters of residents said they know a great deal or a moderate amount about the agency, while nine out of ten residents are satisfied with the agency, including six out of ten who are very satisfied. (The perception that there is not enough law enforcement is a leading reason for dissatisfaction, exceeding reasons related to habitat or fish and wildlife management.) **Equally encouraging is the fact that Game and Fish enjoys high ratings of credibility among the general public: nearly all Wyoming residents rated the agency as credible, with more than three-quarters rating it very credible.**

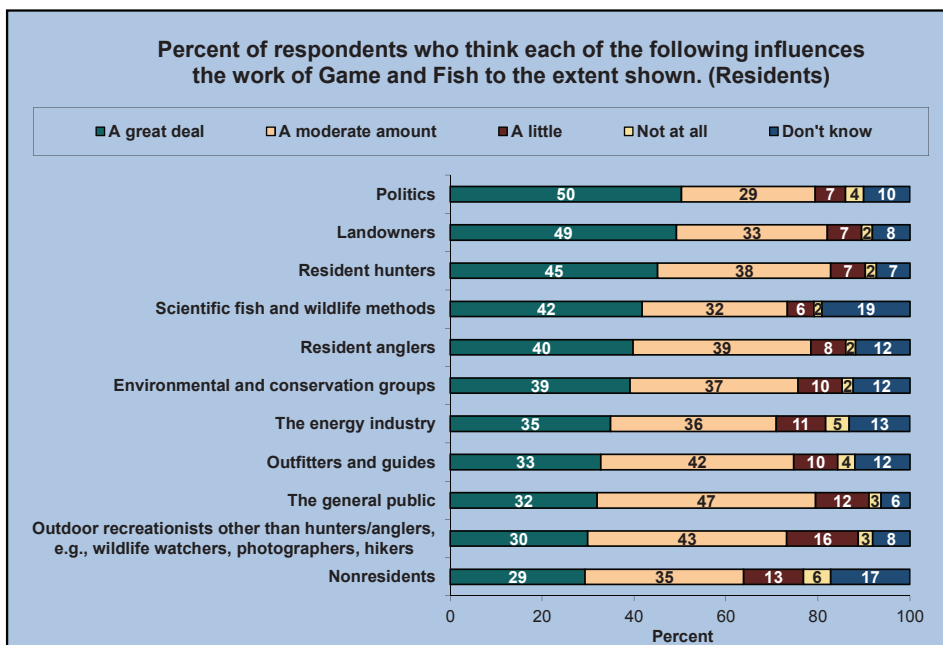
One notable finding from the general population survey concerns potential influences on the agency. In this series of questions, politics was seen by residents as the top influence, with landowners and resident hunters also perceived as having high levels of influence. Toward the middle of the ranking was scientific fish and wildlife methods, while the lowest ranked item was nonresidents (see graph below).

Survey results continued on page 6



“Working with Responsive Management to survey our employees and the public in a professional and effective manner and compiling those perspectives in a usable product was very rewarding. Responsive Management was prompt and professional in addressing concerns brought forth regarding the survey techniques and the manner data was compiled. Overall, I was very satisfied with our working relationship throughout the project. Job well done.”

– Scott Talbott, Director,
Wyoming Game and Fish
Department



The Findings: An Overview of

A later section of the general population and employee surveys asked about the importance of 27 different program areas in which Game and Fish is involved. In this series, residents' top priority was found to be the protection of fish and wildlife by the enforcement of laws, followed by the protection of Wyoming's waters from invasive species, and the management and maintenance of Wildlife Habitat Management Areas. Game and Fish employees, compared to the public, ranked many areas relating to outdoor recreation higher in priority: acquiring new land and access through private land; recruiting new hunters and anglers; issuing hunting and fishing licenses, permits, stamps, tags, preference points; and maintaining and increasing access to hunting and fishing were all higher in importance in the Game and Fish employee ranking than in the resident ranking. *The comparison of rankings between residents and employees is shown on the following page. Program areas shown in blue indicate areas ranked at least 5 positions higher among employees than among residents, and program areas shown in red indicate areas ranked at least 5 positions higher among residents than among employees.*

A final comparison concerns an area in which Game and Fish employees and Wyoming residents are fairly similar: overwhelming majorities of both groups agree that elected officials should explore options for new funding sources for fish and wildlife conservation in Wyoming (note, however, that agreement is higher among employees).

The later stages of qualitative research, including the second series of focus groups, the public meetings, and the online forum discussions, also proved highly informative. For example, the post-survey focus groups helped clarify the types of outreach and information that residents desire from Game and Fish, including educational opportunities for youth and the general public and more information on aquatic invasive species management, regulatory and policy decision-making rationale, and wolf and bear management. Likewise, comments from constituents throughout the public meetings and in the online forum discussions helped to illuminate perspectives on funding, access, educational needs, large carnivore management, recreational trapping, and many other aspects of the agency's work that were not measured quantitatively.

However, while the results from the public meetings and online forum are valuable in their own right, consideration must be given to the difference between data obtained from scientific techniques such as the probability-based telephone survey and the focus groups (for which participants were randomly selected) and techniques that allow for self-selection such as the meetings and forum discussions (and are therefore non-random and unscientific).

Responsive Management's final report of results for Game and Fish ends with a detailed discussion of the major conclusions and recommendations based on the

research and organized around five major themes: planning future Game and Fish management priorities; exploring alternative funding mechanisms; enhancing current Game and Fish programs; enhancing the Game and Fish work experience; and engaging with residents and improving public outreach.

Following the completion of Responsive Management's human dimensions research, project partner and planning consultant Mike Fraidenburg convened a series of intensive meetings with Game and Fish leadership to begin formalizing content for the new strategic plan. The draft plan, undergirded by a vast new amount of statistical data reflecting the opinions and attitudes of Wyoming residents and Game and Fish employees, is close to being finalized. Game and Fish recently submitted six official goals for conserving wildlife and serving people to its Commission, which subsequently approved them. The agency is now working to make the fulfillment of each goal a reality.



“We are building a first-of-its-kind strategic plan. The social science in this report is both a foundation and a compass for the plan and now for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department,” explained Game and Fish Communications Director Renny MacKay. “I believe the public had more ways to participate in shaping the priorities and goals than in any other planning process I have ever seen. As we implement the goals and move into the future, I also look forward to using this report as a baseline to measure the ways we are meeting the public's expectations and to learn how we can continue to improve.”

This newsletter covers only a fraction of the data collected by Responsive Management for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department strategic plan study. The complete 465-page report of research results—including findings from the launch meeting, qualitative assessment, focus groups, surveys, public meetings, and online forum—is available at www.responsivemanagement.com.

Project Results (continued)

Comparison of Rankings of the Priority of Game and Fish Department Efforts





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Examples of Responsive Management Strategic Planning Experience

- Strategic Direction for the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
- Survey for the Strategic Direction of Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control's Division of Fish and Wildlife
- The Attitudes of the General Public, Stakeholders, and Employees Regarding the Strategic Direction of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources
- Direction for the Decade: The Attitudes of Georgia Residents, Wildlife Resources Division Staff, and Conservation Organizations Regarding the Future of the Georgia Wildlife Resources Division
- Texas Parks and Wildlife for the 21st Century
- House Bill 38 and Future Direction for the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries

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