



# The WILD, the WONDERFUL, and the HUNGRY

## Living with wildlife in Wyoming

Rural land in Wyoming comes with many wonderful qualities such as wide open spaces, wildlife, and room to do many things. While wildlife can be one of the enjoyable aspects of living on a rural property, they can also become a problem. Learning to live with wildlife is an important part of being a good steward of the land, and once one has figured out how to live with them, wildlife can be very enjoyable. It helps to develop some perspective by keeping in mind that wildlife were usually on your property before you were.

First, decide if wildlife are something you want to encourage on the property or not. Wildlife are usually drawn to an area by at least one of three things: food, water, or shelter. These three components of wildlife habitat are key in either encouraging or discouraging the use of the property by wildlife.

Second, figure out the different types of wildlife that live in the area and then determine which ones are wanted, which are to be tolerated, and which can't be tolerated in

certain parts of your property. When planning any improvements to your property, think ahead about how the change will attract or discourage wildlife. If you are trying to encourage wildlife, both the negative and positive impacts of any change on your property need to be thoroughly evaluated. Once an animal has called the property home, trying to keep the animal from using the area can be difficult.

### Basic wildlife considerations on a rural property

#### Sources of food for wildlife

- Pet food attracts many forms of wildlife so, if possible, keep it inside your home or garage, or feed amounts that will be consumed all at once. If food has to be stored outside, ensure that it's in a secure container. Depending on the wildlife in the area, it may need to be kept in a bear-proof container or in just a mouse-proof container.
- Garbage needs to be kept picked up and kept in a secure container.

- Bird feeders may attract some beautiful birds but can also attract unwanted animals – such as raccoons, skunks, and bears. Feeding birds only in the winter when bears are not at large may be the best strategy for areas where bears roam.



### Sources of water for wildlife

- Birdbaths can be great for birds but can also provide a water source for unwanted animals.
- Old tires on your property can accumulate water, which will not only attract wildlife but provide an area for mosquitoes to lay eggs.
- Small swimming pools should be dumped out after use for similar reasons while large pools should be covered.

### Sources of cover

- Firewood piles create excellent shelter for many animals such as mice, rabbits, skunks, and raccoons. Keeping the pile a distance from the house will help reduce the number of mice entering the house and will reduce the potential wildfire hazard to your home. Storing firewood in a secure shed or under a secure cover will help keep out skunks.

- Scrap piles of wood, auto parts, and tires can create cover.
- Sheds built off the ground are attractive areas for skunks, rabbits, snakes, and many other critters. If access is limited when the building is originally built, it is easier to keep wildlife out. If an animal has already made a home under a shed, it can be more difficult to discourage it from using the shed even if its access hole has been boarded up.

These are all things to consider whether encouraging or discouraging wildlife. Thoughtful planning and the thorough consideration of all the intended and possible unintended impacts on wildlife from changes to the property are very important. Think before you act, or you may create a problem for yourself that didn't exist before.

### Gardens and wildlife

Many wildlife species love vegetable gardens because they provide an excellent source of food. Gardeners often don't take kindly to wildlife in their vegetable gardens. Fences around the garden are the best way to ensure vegetable-consuming wildlife are kept out. When planning a garden, take into consideration the wildlife in the area.

Ground squirrels, pocket gophers, and other rodents can be kept out with a fence that is two feet tall, but it will need to be buried at least a foot into the ground, possibly more, due to their ability to tunnel. The fence will need to be constructed with a woven wire mesh material that has openings no larger than a quarter inch in size. This will help keep most rodents from digging under the fence. If there are rabbits in the area, it would still be advisable to bury the fence a foot and build it three feet tall or that amount above the highest level the snow drifts rise to if you need to protect anything during winter. Antelope can usually be kept out with a four-foot-high fence. There are two options for deer, elk, and moose. The first is a fence at least seven feet tall. Another option that has been reported to work is an electric fence with a hot wire at about 36 to 46 inches off the ground. If animals jump an electric fence, attach small pieces of aluminum foil to the hot wire with a little peanut butter while the fence is off. The aluminum foil is just a way of attaching the peanut butter to the electric fence. After the fence is back on they will lick the peanut butter causing them to be shocked; usually this will cure them from jumping the fence. A combination of these may be necessary to keep the garden protected.



## Landscaping

Trees, shrubs, lawns, and flowers all make a property more appealing both for the property owner and wildlife. Vegetable gardens are usually confined to one location, which makes it easier to fence, but landscaping is often more spread out and not as economical to fence. However, it is cheaper to build a fence around a tree than to replace it several times. A substantial amount of money can be invested in landscaping so proper planning will help protect your investment.

First, the selection of plants can help reduce wildlife problems. Deer, elk, antelope, and moose will consider some species of trees, shrubs, and flowers a delicious buffet. Some species of trees are more appealing for animals to rub their horns or antlers on than others. Following is a list of trees and shrubs that will survive in Wyoming but wildlife usually won't eat – unless they're really hungry.

- **Trees:** boxelder maple, Engelmann spruce, pines (pinyon, limber, ponderosa, lodgepole), larch, honeysuckle, and hawthorn.
- **Shrubs:** dryad (yellow and white), common juniper, cinquefoil (potentilla), raspberry, creeping mahonia, silverberry, buffaloberry, and white spirea.

Try planting a few of a chosen plant species to see how they do in your area before you invest in many. You can find more plant suggestions at [barnyardsandbackyards.com](http://barnyardsandbackyards.com).

Second, fencing, while expensive, if placed around each and every tree is an effective way to keep wildlife out (see garden section above). Some repellents can be effective if used correctly. Spray repellents are applied directly to the plant and will help keep animals from browsing or grazing on them. The drawbacks are they have



## Wyoming Wildlife law

Many species of wildlife are protected in some way by Wyoming or federal laws. After identifying your animal of concern, contact the Wyoming Game and Fish Department for more information on its protection status.

to be reapplied often, it doesn't work for rodents that eat roots, and it will not deter wildlife from rubbing their antlers/horns on the plants. Systemic repellents (for example, tablets that are often "planted" with the tree) contain bitter ingredients that are pulled into the plant through the root system. Benefits of the systemic repellents include protection of the entire plant including the roots, and one application will often last a couple of years. Drawbacks of systemic repellents include taking several months for the repellent to spread throughout the plant, the fruit of the

plant cannot be eaten, and it will not deter wildlife from rubbing their antlers/horns on the plants. Follow directions and use proper protection when utilizing repellents.

## Raptors (birds of prey)

Eagles, hawks, and owls can be beneficial in removing rodents from around a property, but they will sometimes use a cat or small dog as a food source. Tall trees will attract these birds of prey. If mice, squirrels, or other rodents are causing problems, 10-to 20-foot-tall posts can be placed in these areas for raptors to perch on and help control the problem. Just remember to keep Fluffy safe.

## Rabbits

Cover is usually what attracts rabbits the most. Brush piles and outbuildings (especially those elevated off the ground) around the property will help draw them into a property. If they are causing problems, figure out where they are hiding, and try to eliminate the protection the area provides.

## Skunks

Most often skunks become a problem if there is a food source (garbage, pet food, etc.) or a place to call home (under a shed). Elimination of access to these amenities may reduce the problem.

## Badgers

Big holes are probably the biggest nuisance a badger will cause although sometimes they will go after dogs and cats. They are primarily nocturnal so the holes are often the only sign that there is one on the property. Their primary food source is small mammals like squirrels and prairie dogs. If a den is located in an inconvenient place on the property, sometimes repeatedly filling the hole with large rocks will encourage them to relocate.



### **Tree squirrels**

These creatures can get into many different places, which can create a variety of problems. Making sure all holes on buildings are covered can eliminate many problems. Wire mesh can be used to cover entry points. Live trapping is the most effective method of control depending on surrounding populations. If there are others in the area, they may move in when the original problem squirrel is removed. Before trapping, make sure you have a way of destroying the animal or an area to release it where it won't cause problems for other landowners.

### **Ground squirrels**

Problems with ground squirrels are usually seen in flower beds and lawns. Ground squirrels are often

mistakenly called gophers. Gophers are rarely seen above ground whereas ground squirrels can be seen above ground throughout the summer. Ground squirrels may have stripes on their back, spots, or just a plain tan color. Poisons\* and traps can be used to eliminate these pests, but others from adjacent properties will often move in to fill the vacated area.

### **Prairie dogs**

Similar but larger than ground squirrels, prairie dogs create large mounds. Wyoming has two species of prairie dog: the black-tailed and white-tailed. Poisons and kill traps are effective on these animals, but others may move in. Prairie dogs like to be able to see a long way from their holes to watch for predators. So, shrubs, tall grass, or other obstacles to block their view can help deter the use of a property.

### **Pocket gophers**

Mounds of fresh dirt without holes are a good indication pocket gophers are in the area. These critters are rarely seen but can cause a significant amount of damage. Lawns, gardens, flower beds, and trees are all susceptible to damage. Usually dirt mounds will be noticed in the area, then plants start to die due to the root systems being chewed on. Tree damage will often be noticed when the tree is sitting at a funny angle. When the tree is pulled on, it comes right out of the ground because the roots have been chewed off. Systemic repellents (see info above) can be effective for trees and shrubs. Poisons\* are an effective control method. Killer traps can effectively be used if someone is willing to spend the time.

### **Beavers**

These animals are an important link in many riparian ecosystems but can also become a big nuisance. A beaver's ability to take down large deciduous trees in a couple of days can be devastating to a landscape. Chicken wire mesh wrapped around trees from the base up to four feet will deter the beaver. Kill trapping can be used for control although trapping can be difficult and usually requires an experienced trapper. Most areas have trappers that, for a fee, will do the work. If a beaver has become a nuisance, contact the local WGFD office for assistance as state laws govern the trapping of beavers.



\*Always read the labels when using any poison.

Poisons can be a very effective method of control for pests when used properly and according to manufacturer's instructions. When using any poison, take into consideration other wildlife and use caution to avoid any pets or children (yours or neighbors) who may use the area. Some poisons require a search of the area daily to pick up and dispose of any dead animals. This is to reduce the chance of secondary poisoning. For example, a domestic cat or wild bobcat eating a mouse killed by poison may get poisoned from eating the mouse.

## Raccoons

These masked bandits can become a big nuisance with their ability to get into many places and closed containers. Eliminating places for them to hide and food sources are the best prevention. Trapping raccoons is an easy and effective method of control. Live traps baited with cat food work well, but it may take a few times of catching the cat before a raccoon is captured. Before live trapping is done, make sure a good location miles from other homes is selected for the release. Contact your local WGFD office for information and locations on releasing animals. That way it will not become a nuisance for others.

## Mountain lions

If you see a mountain lion in your area contact your local WGFD office. Usually a lion will just be moving through to another area. Lions will go after pets and livestock. Do not try to confront the animal.

## Deer, antelope, elk, moose

These large mammals can be a great thrill to see in the yard but can quickly become a nuisance. Usually just the appearance of people will scare them off, but sometimes they can become aggressive so always be aware. Moose are probably the most likely to charge, but the others will go after small dogs. Loud noises like shouting will often scare them away. If any of them get aggressive and threatening, call the local office of the WGFD. Fencing is the most effective way to keep them out of particular areas.

## Wildlife-friendly fences

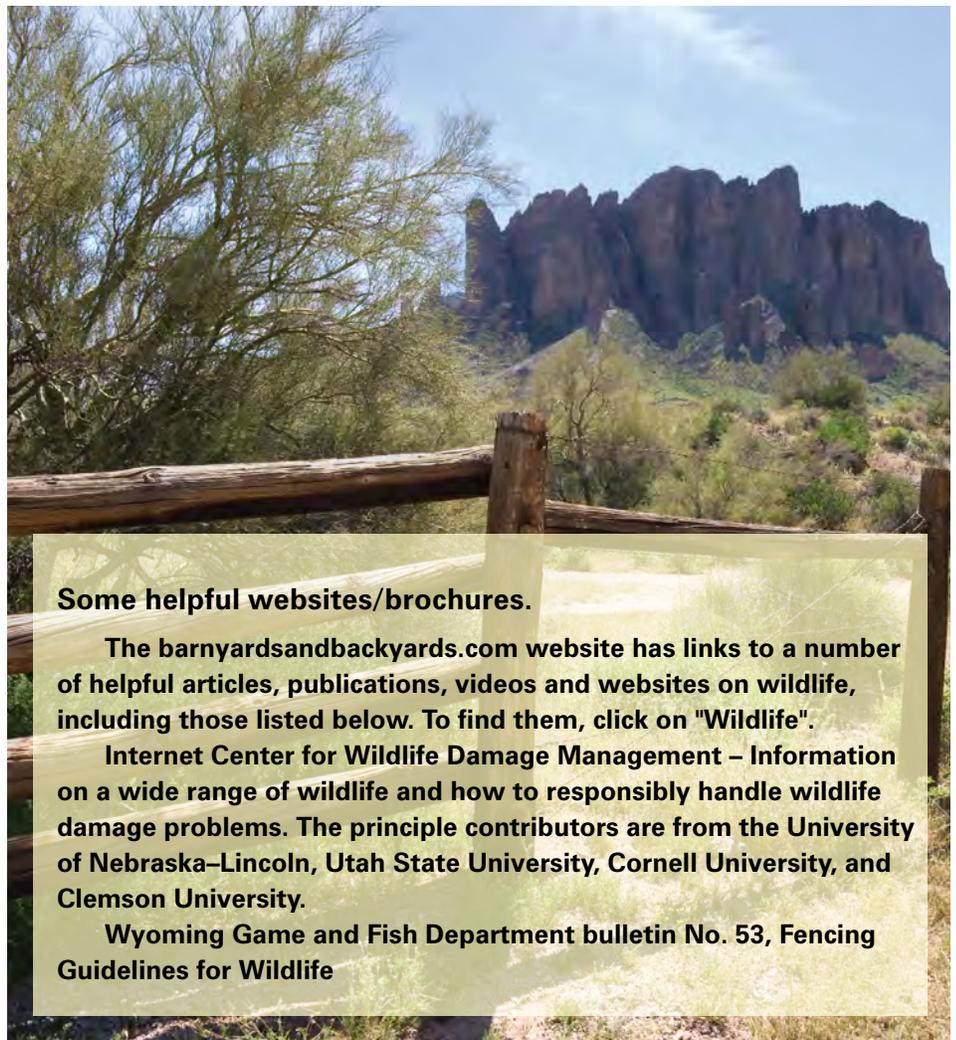
It is important to consider wildlife when you are building livestock fences. Wildlife-friendly fence construction will reduce the chance that animals will get tangled and keep your fence from being destroyed by

wildlife. Deer, elk, and moose usually jump over a fence while antelope typically go under the wire. So take into consideration what type of wildlife use the area and construct a fence that is easier for them to navigate. For areas with primarily deer and antelope, a four-strand wire fence with the top wire at 42 inches, the next wire 12 inches below that, and the bottom wire smooth at 16 inches above ground level is ideal. In areas with moose and elk, replace the top wire with a wood rail. For more information and detailed fence constructing, see the WGFD habitat extension bulletin No. 53 Fencing Guidelines for Wildlife [http://wgfd.wyo.gov/web2011/Departments/Wildlife/pdfs/BULLETIN\\_NO530001795.pdf](http://wgfd.wyo.gov/web2011/Departments/Wildlife/pdfs/BULLETIN_NO530001795.pdf)

## Trapping

Live trapping is an effective way to get rid of unwanted wildlife and keep pets from getting injured. If a domestic cat is caught, it can be released. Before live trapping is done, make sure a good location miles from other homes is selected for the release. Contact your local game and fish office for information and locations on releasing animals. This way it will not become a nuisance for others.

Handle all wildlife carefully because they can bite. Also, fleas are common on wildlife so when handling the trap with the animal make sure to have a long-sleeve shirt, pants, and gloves on. Insect repellent would also be beneficial. If



### Some helpful websites/brochures.

**The barnyardsandbackyards.com website has links to a number of helpful articles, publications, videos and websites on wildlife, including those listed below. To find them, click on "Wildlife".**

**Internet Center for Wildlife Damage Management – Information on a wide range of wildlife and how to responsibly handle wildlife damage problems. The principle contributors are from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Utah State University, Cornell University, and Clemson University.**

**Wyoming Game and Fish Department bulletin No. 53, Fencing Guidelines for Wildlife**

the animal is acting aggressively or unusually it may have rabies; in this case, stay away from the trapped animal and call a veterinarian, animal control, or the local WGFD office. Skunks are often unintentionally caught in live traps creating another problem. In this situation, use a large piece of plastic or unwanted tarp and approach the trap using this as a shield, then drape the plastic over the trap and wrap it up to haul it away or release it.

Killer traps work well as long as pets, kids, or non-target animals are not in the area. When disposing of the dead animal, make sure and wear a long-sleeve shirt, pants, gloves, and insect repellent. Dispose of the animal in a place pets and other animals cannot get to. If you have neighbors close by you may want to visit with them before starting so that they are aware and can keep animals in and kids away. Also, when using kill traps be aware of all the animals that are in your area. If you are using bigger traps that may catch fox or badger, for example, then you will want to contact your local WGFD office or game warden to find out the laws on trapping furbearing animals. You may have to obtain a license.

Wildlife can be a very enjoyable part of the rural lifestyle if one knows how to live with them. This section provides just a brief overview. There are many other sources of information to help with handling problem wildlife or creating habitat for desired species. For more information, contact your local WGFD, University of Wyoming Extension, conservation district, or Natural Resources Conservation Service office.

**Rex Lockman** is the wildlife and range specialist with the Laramie County Conservation District.

# Weeds, ways to



**W**hat is a weed, and why should I care about them? Weeds are simply plants growing where you don't want them to be. If a plant interferes with your management goals, it is considered a weed. Weeds know no boundaries, and they aren't just a problem of agriculture production. They impact small and large acreages, urban and rural properties, roadsides, rangelands, riparian areas, and forests. Just a few biological characteristics that allow weeds to flourish are their life cycles, growth habits, and reproductive abilities, which allow them to out-compete other plants. Add land-use issues such as overgrazing, past land history, and human-caused disturbance and we begin to see why weeds can be so persistent on our lands. With proper weed management strategies, you can help assure your property will maintain the desirable qualities that led you there in the first place.

There are nuisance weeds – these are usually annuals that appear after some sort of disturbance. Construction, agriculture activities, flooding – anything that causes seeds in the ground to be redistributed or “disturbed” and gives them the opportunity to grow. Disturbed lands are also vulnerable to weed seeds blowing in from neighboring lands. Kochia, Russian thistle or tumbleweed, and common lambsquarters are typical nuisance weeds (not listed as a Wyoming designated noxious weeds). Then there are the weed species that cause significant environmental and economic