



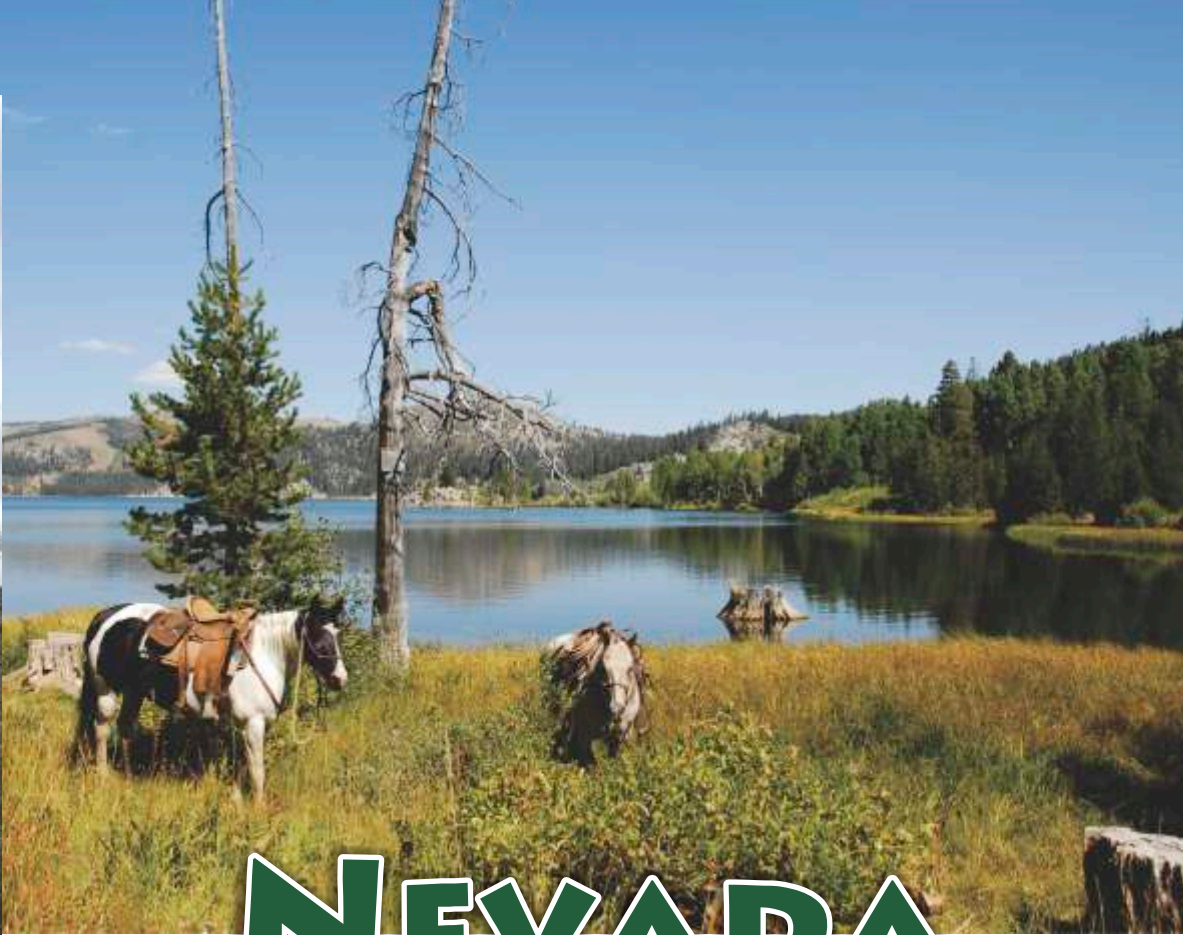
Nevada State Game Warden Cameron Waithman investigates the scene around a bull elk whose antlers were entangled in a fence.



Sand Harbor State Park Lake Tahoe, Nevada.



Fly Geyser.



NEVADA

DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE HAS A HISTORIC MISSION

by Edwin Lyngar

Since the early days of wildlife protection, the job of a Nevada game warden has grown to include public safety, boating enforcement, search and rescue, and every manner of police work. Game wardens are some of the few public servants working in Nevada's far-flung places, and at the heart of their work, just as in any wildlife agency, is a never-ending mission to eliminate poaching.



**Wheeler Peak,
the highest peak
entirely within
Nevada**





With an ever-growing roster of duties, wildlife protection itself has changed in

complexity over the past few decades. The number of hunting seasons and big game hunts has more than tripled, and the number of people living in Nevada—even accounting for a recent slowdown in growth—has exploded over the last twenty years. At the same time, the number of game wardens dedicated to wildlife protection has grown very modestly. Nevada has 31 fulltime field game wardens and two reserve boating officers on Lake Tahoe. Of that number, roughly twenty wardens are primarily responsible for wildlife enforcement on land, only a slight increase from fifteen wardens thirty years ago.

“We do a great job with the resources we have,” said Paul Dankowski, Acting Chief Game Warden at NDOW. “To have twenty people patrolling a land mass that dwarfs many countries is an amazing feat.”

To get a sense of the size and scope of the job, just to patrol the Ruby Mountains area, a secluded and massive area of eastern Nevada, would take a game warden at least three or four long days. And that’s one mountain range out of more than one hundred. Nevada is the most mountainous state of the lower 48.



Nevada State Game Warden Zachary Blackwood talks trapping with a local trapper during a routine trap patrol.

Several Nevada game wardens have patrol areas that are close to 10,000 square miles in size. On top of the geographic reality, there has been an increase in various special hunts and hunt areas, proliferation of firearms, and explosive population growth. In addition, an animal poached and left to rot will be eaten by coyotes and other predators in just a day or two, creating only a small window to even locate a crime scene. The scope of the job of protecting Nevada’s

wildlife, of even detecting poached animals, is an overwhelming responsibility.

The number of hunters in Nevada is one statistic that remains fairly flat. It’s true that the public “at large” has a greater respect for the outdoors than ever.

Yes, more people care about the environment and wildlife, but hunters still pay the tab for protection of all wildlife.

Nevada State Game Warden Cameron Waithman provides security during a fire on the Colorado River that was set accidentally by 4th of July fireworks show.





Nevada State Game Wardens tranquilize and release a mountain lion accidentally caught in a trap.

“People in Nevada recreate with guns, often in the middle of nowhere. They may not even be sportsmen, but they might be killing things, and there are so many vast areas of Nevada, that a game warden isn’t necessarily nearby,” said Dankowski. “We don’t have a game warden in Lovelock, Mesquite, Wendover, Alamo, Hawthorne, different places where people recreate. We do a tremendous amount with the resources we have, but living in Las Vegas or Reno, it’s easy to forget just how massive this state really is.”

The very first role a law enforcement officer plays is that of deterrent. The more people see game wardens, the less likely “crimes of opportunity” are to happen. When you have one game warden in ten thousand square miles and multiple seasons that run over many weeks, the chances of a sportsman being contacted and of a warden detecting a crime in an area is low. When people don’t see a game warden for weeks, months, or even years, the law enforcement deterrent becomes less effective.

We know that Nevadans of all stripes are having a hard time making ends meet, but we also see evidence of our fellow citizens doing everything they can

SPORTSMEN AND THE PUBLIC AT LARGE CARE ABOUT WILDLIFE. ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES, WILDLIFE DIVERSITY, AND PROTECTION OF WILDLIFE ARE ALL CONCERNS FOR SOCIETY AT LARGE, NOT JUST GAME WARDENS AND SPORTSMEN.



Nevada State Game Warden Paul Hearne investigates a boat accident at Lake Mead.

to make our state a better place to live. And we are committed to doing the same.

This year, we had one boating fatality on Nevada’s waters, a tragic loss of life, but one of the smallest numbers of fatal



Rocky Mountain Goat



Nevada State Game Warden uses personal watercraft while doing patrols on the Colorado River.

accidents on record. We were hoping for a zero fatality year—an accomplishment we have not seen in 18 years—but we had an unexpected boating tragedy in December. Even though we didn't reach our goal of "absolute zero" boating deaths, we are encouraged by how much safer Nevada waters are becoming.

As part of our effort to improve boating safety, we also educated more boaters that any other previous year—nearly fifteen hundred. Our efforts to reach out to boaters and teach them to be safer are clearly paying dividends as more people take the Boat Nevada safety class, put these practices into action, and help to

make their recreational experience a safe one.

Although our boating program has shown great resilience in the face of declining budgets, we take nothing for granted. Due to funding constraints, we stand to lose two more game warden positions—jobs heavily geared toward boating safety. With the success we've had in protecting lives, we think this is no time to take away from our boating safety mission; however, we know that we can't change reality.

No matter the outcome of this year's budget cycle, we are committed to do all we can to prevent as many fatal acci-

dents as possible and to educate as many boaters as we can.

On the wildlife side, we are now in our third year of having a dedicated wildlife crimes investigator. This program is generating a higher-level of police work and driving the ethic of wildlife protection to new heights. Much of the investigative work is secretive by its very nature, so we don't talk about specific cases, but the program has grown beyond our early expectations. Nevada's wildlife is not getting shorted in tough times, and we are committed to this program in the long term.

Sportsmen and the public at large care about wildlife. Environmental issues, wildlife diversity, and protection of wildlife are all concerns for society at large, not just game wardens and sportsmen. Everywhere we look in the community we see tremendous support for the value that game wardens provide to society.

I hope to be writing about better financial news in this space next year. We think Nevada could use more game wardens, more wildlife protection and boating safety, not less. But even as we struggle against these tides, we know that we can count on you, our generous and concerned supporters to value the work that game wardens do on a daily basis. Whatever may be said about the politics of the moment, the future of wildlife and game wardens is very bright.

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