



# FIORDLAND WAPITI FOUNDATION

Conservation Minded Hunters

## ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18

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# Introduction

The Fiordland Wapiti Foundation (FWF) was formed in 1993 and judging by some of the 2018 trophies one can only imagine what sort of trophies the herd would be producing today if we had the support to implement the current management system back then. 2018 will be labelled as one of the wettest bugles in living history but will also be remembered by us seeing a visual change in the quality of the antlers. A whole lot of collaboration has gone into achieving this and the rest of our management goals in Fiordland. Around us we are building a really good team of people, supporters and sponsors, a huge thank you goes out to each and every one of you.

Animal management has not changed since implementing the current program four years ago. There are two key objectives here, protecting the environment by managing the current population and enhancing the Wapiti experience for hunters by improving the quality of trophies in the Wapiti area, these go hand in hand.

Last year we changed our agreements with our operators and implemented a milestones based contract to help us reach our totals for the season.

This certainly has changed the game for the FWF ensuring we are reaching and achieving our end of year management totals more effectively. Another initiative that was trialled this year was closing the blocks earlier on the 15th of January. This enabled us to do a special animal management program to remove the less desirable males who were out in the open building strength for the mating season. This worked a treat and next year the Wapiti area will be closed as of the 1st of January allowing us to repeat this program in January and February. We see this as key to reducing the unwanted deer and benefiting the herd.

Managing the Wapiti is a balancing act, Wapiti Vs People, if we get either bit wrong it affects the other.

Partnerships are hugely important to the Wapiti Foundation and are vital to our success and our future. The FWF are a hunter management group or should I say that's how we started out but just like the program we have evolved. Conservation is a huge part of our organisation. We feel responsible for all of our fauna and flora in the Wapiti area of Fiordland and feel connected to it. Hunters are now taking ownership of it and now understand that we need a healthy environment to have a healthy herd.

## **Conservation is important to Kiwi's and key to the future of the FWF.**

Our predator control program run by our very dedicated team in partnership with Doc had another wonderful year. These programs are very rewarding and seeing results like juvenile birds certainly encourage the team. There has been a couple of new initiatives in the Wapiti area for 2018. Our partnership with the Kea Conservation Trust stepped up another level with the capture and banding of live Kea during January. These guys are great to work with and it's looking likely that the Wapiti area may have a reasonable population of kea. Going forward we hope to be able to help these birds more and more.

The other initiative that is under conception as I write this is the FWF is undertaking the maintenance of the six huts in the Wapiti area. Starting with the oldest hut in Fiordland the Lake Hankinson hut built in 1923. So as you can see the team is getting busier and we are adding more projects to our portfolio, so if you would like to get involved don't be shy to let us know.

The committee is not only getting busier the work is getting more complex. Our stake holders are expecting more and more from us. The future holds two options, the committee reduces its work load but if we were to take this road eventually the wapiti program would fail. The other is to work smarter and employ someone to oversee our daily activities and administration.

It is no secret that The FWF holds the key to the future of this herd. So to future proof it we are in the process of employing a part time person for 20 hours per week. The team work very hard and in my personal opinion, the foundation has never been in such a positive state and by employing a person this will enable us to take our programs to the next level.

Thanks

**Roy Sloan**

**FWF President 2018**



# The Ballot



The Wapiti management program and ballot has become engulfed with large amounts of administration. To ensure we continue to keep up with the demands from hunters and sponsors, and ensure our conservation and hunter programs are successful, the Foundation needs to employ a staff member for around 20 hours per week.

The workload is getting far too large for a group of volunteers. To enable us to hold on to key committee members we need some support for them. So at our last Wapiti area meeting it was decided to increase the donation for the ballot to a compulsory \$50 administration fee. Twenty percent of this will be used for the day to day administration and the other 30 percent will go towards animal management.

The Wapiti program is the most successful program of its type in NZ and continues to become more complicated, though hunters are expecting and demanding more and more from the committee. So we are putting systems in place to meet these demands.

**Briefing** - there has been a major change to our briefing with an educational video made and now played. This video has an animal management theme to it as well as an H&S and conservation section. We would like to thank the team from NZ Hunter for putting this together for us.

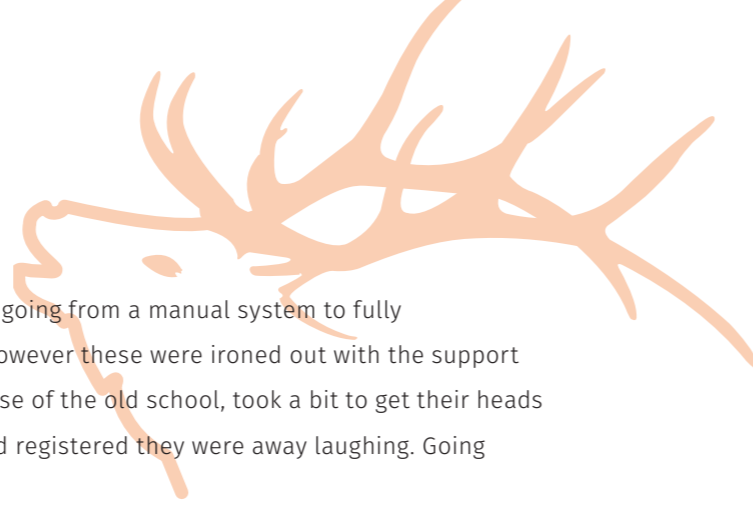
Weather for the 2018 ballot was nothing less than atrocious. The following records are taken from the Niwa website for Milford Sound, it will give you an idea on the conditions in Fiordland. What the record does not show is the huge winds that hit Fiordland. With these records you need to take into account that the first half of March wasn't that bad. For March and April there were 49 days of rain and 1.770 metres of rain. So when you read the following data you need to take the weather into account.

Also for those people who did not return their data please expect to be refused entry into the 2019 ballot. This also includes the hunters who have not returned their jaws. Sixty two animals were shot and 39 jaws were returned. The FWF are going to take a hard line on this as we have warned hunters for a couple of years now. Please play your part and at the very least return your data - it's not a huge ask.

Data Return comparison for 2017-2018										
	No. Parties	Returns recieved	Males Seen	Females Seen	Males Shot	Females Shot	Cost per person	Kea seen	Kea heard	Whio seen
2017	126	112	1267	1772	96	10	\$2,209	1127	187	252
2018	122	108	809	1003	59	3	\$2,419	557	104	239



# The Ballot



This year has been a big one for the Ballot and Ballot System, going from a manual system to fully computerised. We had a few teething problems at the start, however these were ironed out with the support of Tim Mann and his expertise. A lot of hunters, especially those of the old school, took a bit to get their heads around the changes. Once they had uploaded their photos and registered they were away laughing. Going forward, the following years will be a piece of cake for them.

As you can see from the graph, even with the online registration happening, the number of parties entering the ballot were still up on previous years. Since the ballot, there have been another 45 hunters registered already for this year's ballot draw, which looks as if it is going to be a big one.

The one big thing that these changes have achieved is that the whole system is tamper proof. Once everybody has paid their administration fee and entered on line, no one can remove them or change their parties. This puts an end to any rumours of the ballot being rigged. Once the police pushed the button for the draw, there was no going back.

A real concern for the FWF is the growing trend for hunters using illegal water taxis. This past season there was an incident where an illegal water taxi took some parties to their blocks for a cash payment. This is illegal as they did not have a concession from the Department of Conservation to do so, also the boat had not been surveyed by Maritime NZ. To top this off the skipper of the boat did not have a skipper's ticket? Not only was the boat breaking the law but so were the passengers for paying him cash.

One of the parties that were dropped off by this illegal operator didn't get picked up again by him and had to be rescued. Which is where the real concern is for the FWF? The FWF advocate safety and silly acts like this reflect badly back on us and all hunters. Both Doc and Maritime NZ have spoken to the offenders.

The other side of this story is the rising cost for people to get to Fiordland and hunt the Wapiti. It's not a cheap exercise as the average cost per person this year was \$2419. This includes flights, gear, food and travel costs. When the FWF talked to the boat operators re costs there advice is to book early and they will try and fit maximum numbers of people on the boats therefore greatly reducing fees.

From left to right: Tim Mann (Programme Designer), Constable Levi Hayes, Roger Foote (Ballot Coordinator) & Andrew Pealing (Programme Designer) – Constable Hayes is about to do the 2018 draw.



# Animal Management

Due to venison prices being buoyant this season has been a good one. Our target for the 2017/18 season was 900 deer but as of the 28th June our total is sitting around 950 and we still have July to go before the season ends. Managing deer numbers is the most important thing that the FWF do. If we get this right both the herd and conservation are winners. Get this wrong and we will lose the management of the herd- it's as simple as that. So, a lot of energy goes into animal management

One key objective of the program is based around not removing the males until after the age of 4.5 years and this is really starting to pay dividends as we are starting to see some very nice trophies coming out of the blocks. This also creates a problem with the un-wanted males left in the area that need to be removed. So in 2018 we closed the Wapiti area on the 15th of January especially to do a pre rut males cull and the results of this cull was really rewarding with 65 animals removed and 90% of them were target animals.

One of the main concerns we received from people around leaving the males till 4.5 years was that they would never be seen again but contrary to belief this does not seem to be the case as we actually think the bulls get complacent being flown past all the time. Next season the area will be closed on the 1st of January and two special male culls will be done. Mid-January so we can take advantage of the late velvet season when they are in the open and mid-February when they are back out in the open before the rut.

The FWF must keep advocating to hunters to let those young bulls live. The 2018 season revealed a couple of excellent examples. One particular bull that was shot at the age of 7.3 years scored 360 odd DS. This bull was collared and ear tagged by the FWF back in 2014 at the age of 3.5 years. When this bull was caught in 2014 he was nothing special and in the day could have quite as easy been shot on recovery. But age made a huge difference to this guy. It is very well documented that Wapiti do not reach full maturity till 10 to 12 years.

\*(See Page 10 Photo 1 & 2)

The other example was this four year old bull that was shot and at four years had a real special head. You would say he had the potential to crack the magic 400DS mark if left to live to 10 years. The herd has come a long way in a short time and if we want it to get to the next level these young bulls must live. \* (See Page 10 Photo 3)

Hunters need to get this into their mind set. Hunt your trophy thinking WAPITI animal not red deer. The size of the antlers we are seeing in Fiordland now are heading towards the 50 inch mark, some of the animals hunters are shooting thinking they are red deer are in fact young wapiti and our data returns do support this.

We have talked about the reason why we have closed the area on the 1st of January to benefit recovery but there is a second and equally as important reason, this is to ensure bulls get the opportunity to breed with cows before they are shot. Bulls shot pre rut do not add value to this herd. So many of the bulls shot pre rut are just juveniles and most likely have not bred yet in their short life. The herd cannot sustain its sires to be removed before they breed. The point we are trying to make is three-four year old bulls may not have bred in their short life.

PHOTO 1



PHOTO 2



PHOTO 3



# Animal Management

The FWF invests so much time and energy into managing this herd and we talk so much about how important the males are but the females are just as important. The following is a question we put to Cam Speedy based around the reasons for our animal selection criteria.

Question: Explain why controlling the cow population is important to Trophy management in the Fiordland Wapiti Area?

Model Answer:

1. "Family groups associated with breeding cows cause proportionally higher environmental impact than Bulls, due to their smaller home ranges (i.e., their browsing is more localised). Keeping cow numbers down will ensure the herd remains within environmental limits and provide better feed quality for all Wapiti. Bull condition especially is critical to Trophy development, but the better start a Bull calf gets from a well-conditioned mother is also very important";

2. "When cow numbers are lower, the FWF culling programme has to remove fewer deer each year to keep the herd within environmental limits, as breeding rates are reduced. This reduces cost and provides more of a "buffer" against herd expansion – 'future proofing'".

There is a third reason but it might be more related to the herd structure question (somewhere else?)

3. "When many Bulls compete for fewer well-conditioned cows during the rut, the competition is intense. This ensures the strongest (usually older) bulls dominate the breeding; reducing the contribution of young/poor bulls to gene flow; and increases the intensity of the rut experience for hunters".

There are other 'cow management issues' that hunters need to also understand but these are more the "how" (might be another question?). These are about maintaining the core breeding base (capital stock) – those 5 to 9 year old cows. The girls who know where to take the calf when a southerly blows in, who knows where the best feed is, when it is seasonally on tap, and generally have life in Fiordland sussed. This is critical knowledge the calves need to learn to survive and thrive. It is important to maintain this core of knowledgeable cows in the sweet spot. To clip them off once they hit 10yrs, and most importantly to just keep the young cows "trickling" in the bottom end. Hence, cow culling needs to be primarily focused on young cows (<3yrs) and old cows (>10yrs). The 5 to 9yrs need to be looked after.

Cam Speedy



# The Huts Project

In conjunction with DoC the committee have been looking at administering the maintenance and upkeep (but not bookings) of the huts in the Wapiti area. We are very close to finalising an arrangement with the Department under our current agreement.

The huts involved are the Hankinson, Thomson, George Sound, Caswell, Glaisnock and Worsely. The hut in most urgent need of attention is the Hankinson Hut. It is the oldest hut in the Park and is in desperate need of work.

To this end we have applied for and been granted \$15,000 from the Backcountry Huts Trust specifically for this upgrade and the building assessment will begin soon. The other huts are in varying states of disrepair. The Thomson Hut was upgraded a few years ago by a team led by Roger Foote and is in pretty good shape.

The George Sound, Glaisnock and Worsley huts all require assessment. The Caswell hut is an historic hut that may also require significant work. The work done here will benefit both Wapiti hunters and other users of the Wapiti area.





# Kea Conservation Trust



The Kea work in the Wapiti area is continuing to return great results. For the third year running hunters during the ballot undertook the largest kea survey in NZ. Even though this program is called citizen science it does such a great job raising the awareness of this special species and the benefits should not be questioned. Each March/April around 400 hunters venture into the Wapiti area and spread themselves over 150,000 hectares. Where no one sane dares to go, and what do they do in their spare time- they spot Kea.

What a great fit this Kea program and the Kea Conservation Trust have been. The Kea project took the Kea work in the Wapiti area to another level with the 10 days capture program where Kea were fitted with bands and some collars.

The following report about the capture program is from Tamsin Orr-Walker, from the Kea Conservation Trust.

Community driven Kea monitoring in the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation Block. Funded by Paradise Valley Springs, Clever Kiwis and Nga Whenua Rahui

This multi-year project is building on the Community – Kea project plan (funded by DOC) and Fiordland kea sightings project initiated in partnership with the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation (FWF) in March 2016.

The broader monitoring of Kea in Fiordland NP project has 3 main aims:

- 1) run an annual community (FWF) Kea survey in March-April,
- 2) run a formal summer Kea population survey and catch trip annually (year 1) to enable attachment of transmitters and bands to adult females and bands to adult males, fledglings and juveniles (beginning January 2018), and
- 3) monitor kea nest productivity and predator impact through the following breeding seasons and develop a predator control grid network as necessary. All data collected will be analysed to establish a baseline for the local kea population and to develop a sustainable community protection programme for Fiordland Kea.

# Conservation Trust

This project is important for Kea conservation efforts for the following reasons; 1) little is known about the population status of kea in the Fiordland NP, 2) this area has expressed extensive, ongoing commitment by the local community (Fiordland Wapiti Foundation and membership), 3) Kea are considered an important species to the wider community and concern has been raised as to anecdotal reports of decreasing numbers and 4) there is currently no management or support directed towards local kea populations.

Little is known about the Fiordland kea population. A 3 year population survey covering approximately 4,000 ha was conducted in the Borland Valley in January 2009, 2011 and 2012. This area has no pest control programmes in place. A total of 17 Kea were caught up over the 3 years (7 adult males, 3 adult females, 6 sub adult males and 1 fledgling). A total of 8 transmitters were attached (2011 and 2012). Follow up nest monitoring occurred in 2009, 2011 and 2012 but was hampered due to high snowfall closing the Borland Rd and difficulty locating nests. Overall the Kea sightings and fledglings produced were significantly lower than other survey sites (Nelson Lakes and the Hawdon Valley in Arthur's Pass).

The Fiordland NP contains prime Kea habitat and large tracts of Wilderness areas. The Fiordland Wapiti Foundation runs the Wapiti ballot annually which covers an area of over 200,000 ha, half of which is a designated Wilderness area. Up to 450 hunters spend up to 10 days each across a month period (March – April) in this area and are committed to sending in sightings of Kea over the years due to concerns of declining kea populations in the area. This level of community support for Kea in such an extensive area is one of a kind and makes this project particularly unique.

## 2018 Results :

The first of the Kea survey trips ran for 8 nights in January 2018. 28 sites were surveyed for 3 hours each night and 3 hours each morning. 14 personnel made up the survey team (experienced Kea handlers teamed up with volunteers from the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation, Nga Whenua Rahui and DOC).

44 Kea were caught and banded during the survey period and 2 adult females were fitted with transmitters to allow for follow up nest monitoring this coming breeding season. The majority of Kea were adults with a few sub adults, 2 juveniles and only 2 fledglings.

Thank you to all of those people and organisations involved in this first year of the survey. We couldn't have done it without you!

**We need more funding to help this project run over the next few years. With a donation of \$500 you or your organisation can name one of our banded survey Kea – please visit our Give a Little page or contact us directly to find out how.**

# Predator Control

The work the team and volunteers do in the area for predator control continues to be very successful, checking 500 traps in the Wilderness area, eight times per trap per year. This is a huge undertaking.

A lot of people do not understand that each of these valleys, the Glaisnock, Nitz, Lugar Burn, Castle and the Worsley are all walked on foot.

The total number of pests caught this year was 90 stoats and 97 rats - less than last year because there was no beech mast the previous autumn. We did seven runs - monthly from September to late April/early May apart from March because of the hunting season. The Whio surveys done by DOC in December and January show an upward trend, especially in the Glaisnock and Nitz.

**Results of FWF Stoat Trap Runs 2017-2018 Grand Total: 90 stoats + 97 rats**

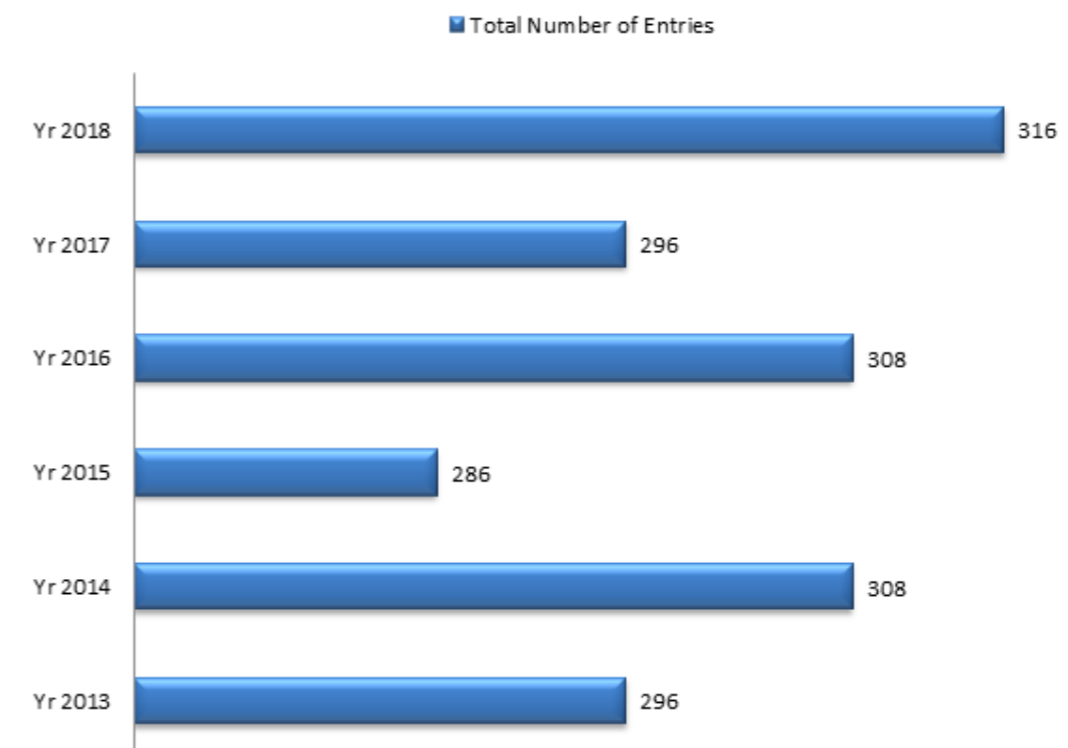


# Appendix

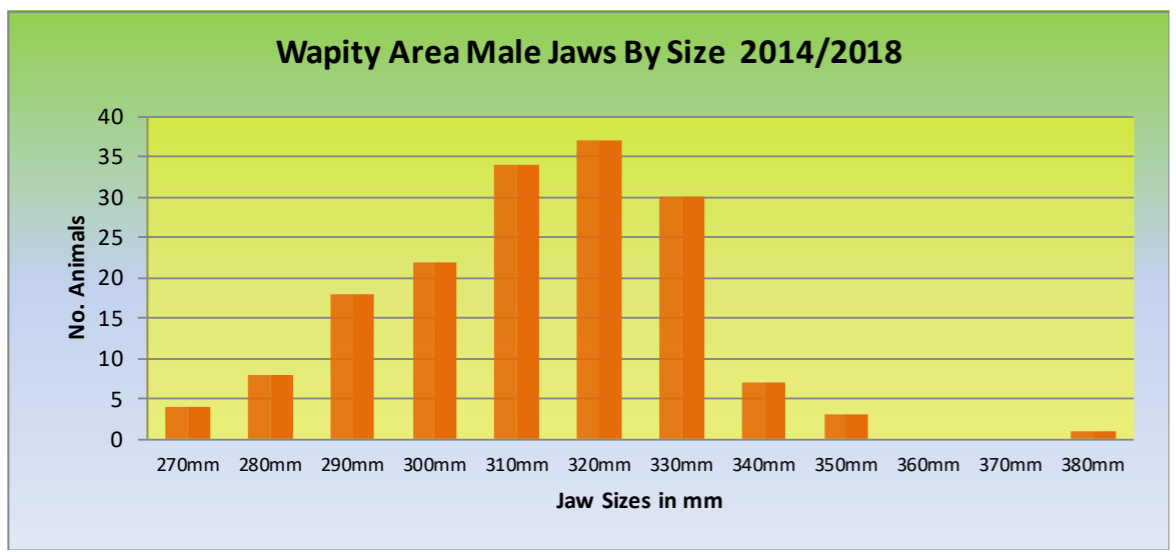
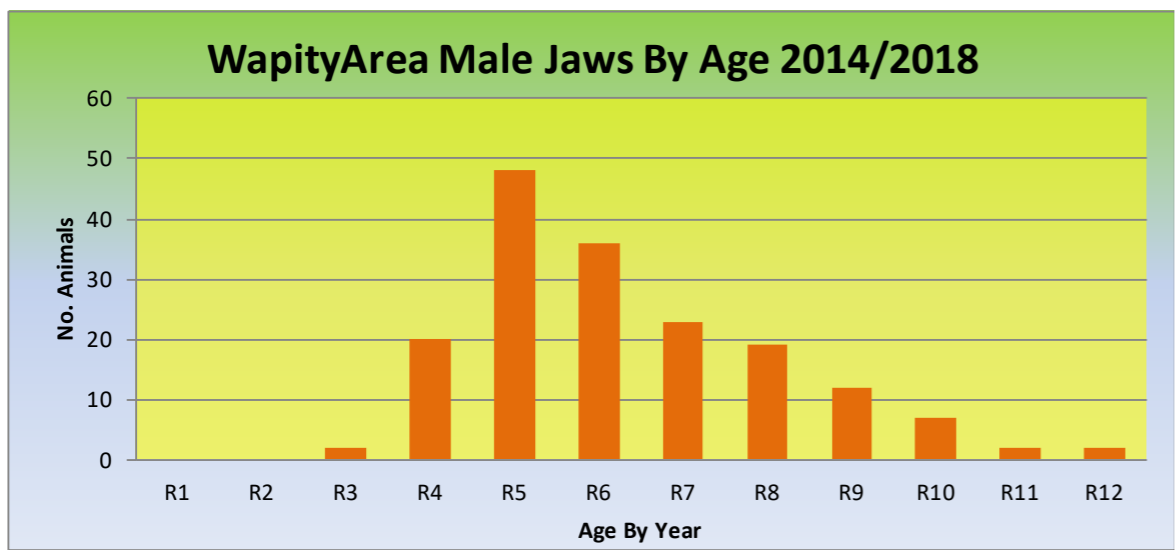
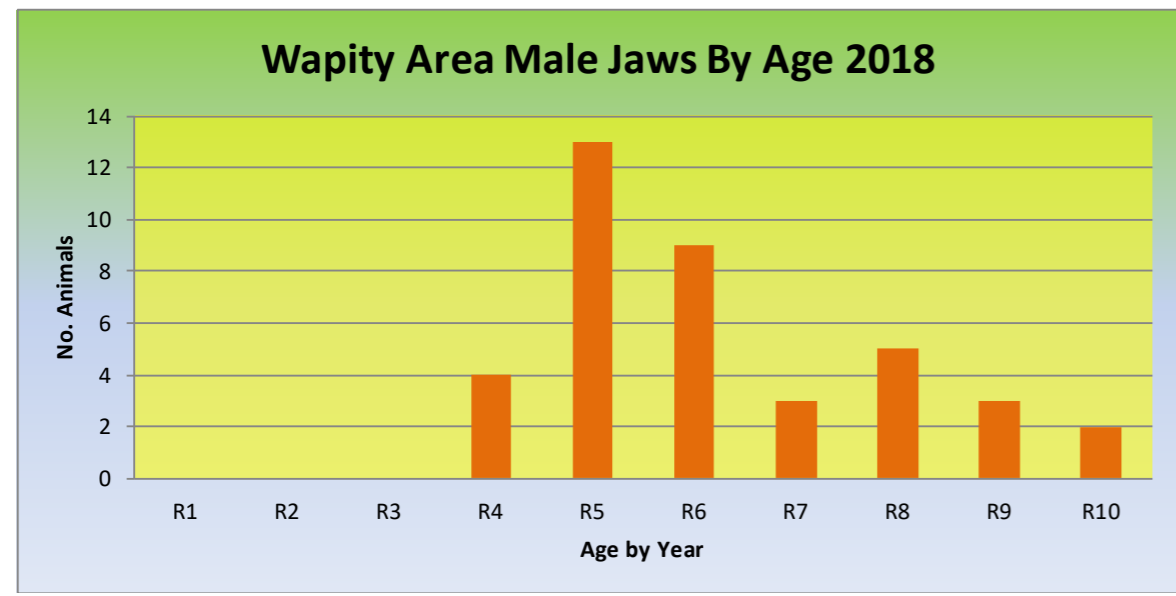
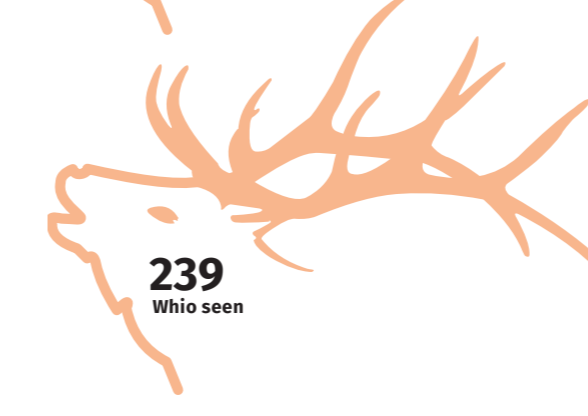
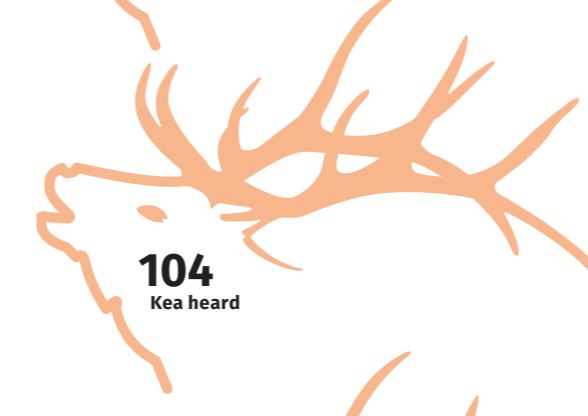
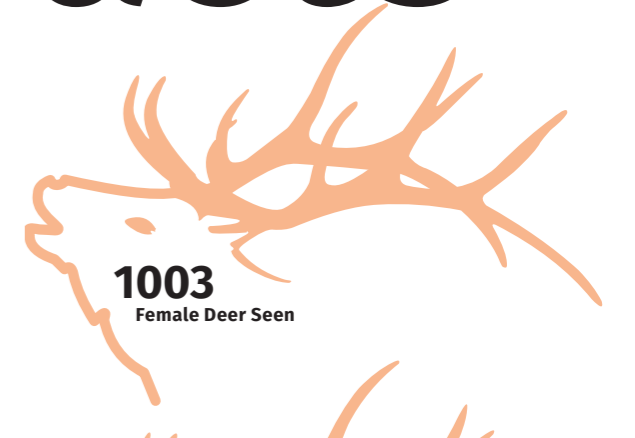
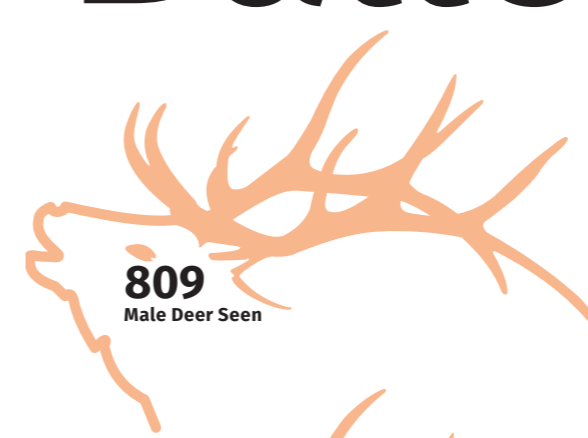
Wapiti Trophy Jaws 2018				
Jaw No.	Hinge	Heel	Age (Mths)	Comments
22	352	332	40	Billy burn -3
29	350	330	40	Upper Glaisnock
23	320	306	40	White Water
34	-	-	40	Doon
24	345	335	52	Dark
21	348	332	52	George
2	337	330	52	Lugar
11	335	328	52	Dark
3	331	325	52	Lugar
27	332	325	52	Worsley
19	328	318	52	Large
1	330	315	52	Block 16
9	324	314	52	Mid Burn
16	322	311	52	Wapiti River
25	318	305	52	Cateseye
31	310	300	52	LockBurn
37	-	-	52	Doon
12	356	342	64	Dark River
10	352	337	64	Lugar
8	342	330	64	Mid Burn
17	349	330	88	Upper Glaisnock
7	334	320	64	Mid Burn
20	332	318	64	George
15	323	310	64	WapitiRiver
32	306	292	64	LockBurn
33	295	285	64	-
5	335	328	76	Edith
13	335	315	76	Narrow
14	320	311	76	Wild Natives
4	338	352	88	Lower Glaisnock
30	335	320	88	Upper Glaisnock
6	325	310	88	Lugar Burn
36	324	308	88	Billy Burn
26	300	292	88	Doon
18	334	325	100	Looking Glass
28	315	304	100	White Water
39	308	298	100	MT Tanilba
38	280	272	111	Doon
35	320	310	112	Billy Burn

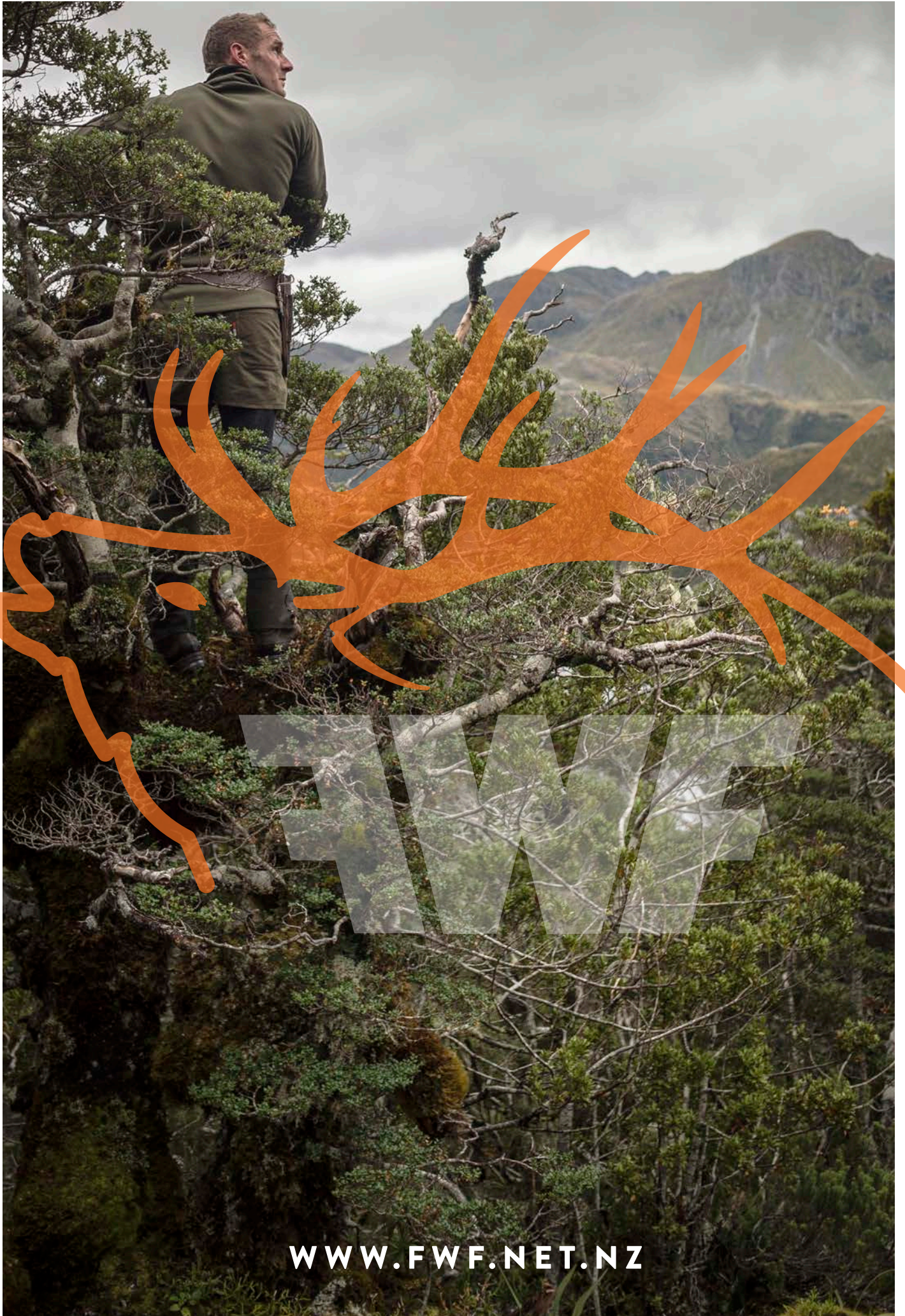
WAPITI AREA HUNTER JAW SUMMARY - Red/Wapiti by Jaw Size/Age							
YEAR	RED < 310 mm	RED AVE JAW SIZE (mm)	RED AVE AGE (Months)	WAPITI TYPE >310MM	WAPITI TYPE AVE JAW SIZE	WAPITI TYPE AVE AGE	Largest Jaw
2014	6@30%	298	62	14@70%	324	68.5	341
2015	5@27%	299	72	13@72%	324	70	351
2016	10@45%	295	62	12@54%	330	74	354
2017	25@36%	295	67	44@64%	327	68	388
2018	10@26%	298	72	29@74%	324	64	352

## Party Entry Numbers 2013-2018



# Ballot Facts





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