

WGA Wildlife Corridors Media Compilation

Governors agree on preservation effort

Create new agency to protect wildlife habitat

[By Robert Gehrke](#)
[The Salt Lake Tribune](#)

Article Last Updated: 06/30/2008 12:58:13 AM MDT

JACKSON, Wyo. - Governors across the West agreed Sunday on a regional effort to help protect wildlife habitat and migration corridors that are being overrun by rapid growth and resource development.

The Western Governors Association voted to create the Western Wildlife Habitat Council, which will be assigned to identify crucial wildlife corridors and habitats in the West and to help shape policy to preserve those important landscapes.

"This is a process by which we are also able to . . . say, 'What are those lands that really are important longer term to our state?' instead of just letting the federal government forget about action because it gets lost in the shuffle," said Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr., the incoming chairman of the Western Governors Association.

"It's just not happening at the federal level. We're just not getting any resonance with the BLM in terms of the lands that are getting increasingly fragile and vulnerable, that we as a state need to step up," and take the lead, he said.

Preserving the wildlife habitat is important, a report adopted Sunday by the governors argues, because it is an economic engine and defines the Western way of life. But the systems are at risk from growth, new roads and rail lines, and energy projects and power lines that have diced up the ecosystem and cut off seasonal migration routes.

Utah, the report said, has spring and fall migration corridors for elk, mule deer, bighorn sheep and habitat for black bear, sage grouse and pronghorn sheep.

Climate change has changed the suitability of some habitat for Western species, and is expected to continue in the coming decade. The focus has to be regional, the governors agreed, because the at-risk wildlife frequently roam across borders.

"These aren't just state-by-state, it's got to be cross-borders, which means standardizing the way we recognize the issue, the way we quantify the issue, the importance we place on habitat preservation and energy security," Huntsman said.

John Harja, coordinator of Huntsman's Utah public lands policy office, will represent Utah on the council.

"This is powerful," Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne said of the regional initiative. "We need to have what the Western Governors are suggesting in a solidified effort, because there's power in this."

Reliable data can help policymakers and the public shape the decision, said Jack Dangermond, CEO of Environmental Systems Research Institute, which specializes in mapping software. He showed maps illustrating how human development has conflicted with wildlife habitat and how those clashes will likely worsen as the West continues to grow.

"Wildlife habitats are disappearing," he said. "We need to be able to acknowledge this is a problem, recognize it is a problem and be more thoughtful in the way we guide development in the future."

Reliable doesn't necessarily solve the problem, however. Steve Elbert, vice chairman of the energy firm BP America, said companies like his have reduced the environmental impacts of energy development, but there is still disagreement over whether it is enough.

Governors seek new tools to protect wildlife from development

By CHRIS MERRILL

Star-Tribune environment reporter

JACKSON -- Three-dimensional computer programs similar to Google Earth could help humans better "co-evolve" with wildlife, and could assist state and federal officials in protecting critical habitat and migration routes while still developing vital energy resources, speakers said Sunday at the Western Governors' Association meeting.

The annual meeting kicked off with speeches and discussions about how Western states can better protect crucial migration corridors for animals such as antelope, moose and elk, while still extracting energy resources such as oil and natural gas. The meeting at Teton Village opened with speeches by Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne and former NBC News anchor Tom Brokaw, among others.

Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal, chairman of the Western Governors' Association, recommended that the governors from Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Utah, Colorado, Nebraska and other Western states create a collaborative planning system for new development, with a common vocabulary and based on shared interests. The purpose would be to protect wildlife migration routes and corridors, many of which cross state lines and include federal, state, public and private lands.

In his speech, Kempthorne outlined what he sees as the basic conundrum authorities and energy companies face throughout the West: "You often have world-class habitat sitting right above world-class energy reserves."

Jack Dangermond, CEO of Environmental Systems Research Institute, in a presentation to the governors, said technologies similar to those used in the popular geographic program Google Earth could help authorities and residents of states such as Wyoming, Utah, Colorado and Wyoming better understand "the expanding human footprint" and actually see, with computer modeling, how the footprint interacts with known wildlife movements.

"Here in Wyoming, it's not like the rest of the West," Dangermond said. "In Wyoming, the impact is not so much from urbanization. The challenge here is the development of oil and gas."

Through computer modeling it's now possible to see, from a bird's-eye perspective, how recent growth in the town of Pinedale, coupled with nearby oil and gas drilling, has narrowed an antelope migration corridor that has been used by the animals for at least 6,000 years, he said.

In one area the migration route has been shrunk down to a "narrow neck," which could be choked closed by development, he said, if planners aren't cautious.

"That little neck is now only a few hundred meters wide," Dangermond said. "Currently there is enough space, but there is a chance that neck could close up."

Humans are able to understand and accurately model these types of conflicts today because of breakthroughs in computer-based geographic information systems. He urged the governors to work toward developing an interstate information system which integrates Google-Earth-style three-dimensional models along with data on wildlife inventories and movements, among other data, to create a visual presentation accessible to most everyone.

With a tool shared by all interested parties, states and municipalities could model proposed development and visually "watch" its effects on given wildlife populations by running proposals through "conflict models."

Such a tool would support the type of collaborative action Freudenthal is calling for, he said.

"We could get a picture of cumulative effects before they happen," Dangermond said. "Information systems will help all interested parties to see the big picture. I think this will actually make a difference."

Brokaw suggested making the tool available to all citizens, as well as local, state and federal officials, on the Internet. The governors, in general, seemed to like the idea.

Steve Elbert, vice chairman of BP America, the largest producer of domestic oil and gas in the United States, said energy prices will stay high for the foreseeable future, as national and international demand for energy continues to outpace upticks in supply.

The global competition for energy is intensifying, he said, and even if America is successful in its conservation efforts, "the U.S. will need more coal, more oil, more natural gas in 2030 than it does today."

"The West is and will remain a crucial supplier to the nation for energy," Elbert said.

He said BP supports the Western Governors' initiative to protect wildlife corridors and to "make resource development decisions based on rigorous science and information."

Technologies like those Dangermond spoke of could help all interested parties protect essential wildlife corridors and habitat, while attempting to meet energy demands, Elbert said.

"We can work together to produce the energy we need in ways that are compatible with healthy

wildlife populations,” he said.

Freudenthal, in a discussion after the speeches, said some companies “are doing a good job” of protecting wildlife and habitats and following regulations, “but some aren’t.” He called on Kempthorne to improve oversight on federal lands and for the Bureau of Land Management to provide better site inspections to make sure operators are following environmental regulations, and abiding by planning restrictions.

Freudenthal received perhaps the biggest laugh of the day from the several hundred in attendance when he said to Kempthorne, “I’m always amazed how such a troublesome agency can be headed by such a charming man.”

The governors' meeting will continue today and Tuesday with discussions on the limited water supply in the West and the need to expand the region’s electricity grid, among other topics.

Brokaw backs wildlife

By Noah Brenner, Jackson Hole, Wyoming

Date: June 30, 2008

Former NBC news anchor Tom Brokaw urged the leaders of Western states and the Department of the Interior to protect wildlife corridors when considering energy and other development.

Brokaw made his remarks during his keynote opening address at the Western Governors Association annual meeting Sunday afternoon at Walk Festival Hall in Teton Village. In his speech he endorsed a Western Governors Association initiative that calls for increased awareness of wildlife corridors and a greater effort to gather information on critical areas as energy development and population growth threaten western landscapes.

He also endorsed the “Freedom to Roam,” campaign launched by the Patagonia clothing company that is focused on wildlife migration corridors and encouraging their protection. A coalition of private companies, conservation organizations and recreation groups has joined the campaign, and Brokaw said the partnership can be “a model for other regions, other challenges.”

Brokaw, who was born in South Dakota and owns a ranch in Montana, told the crowd that the West and its people hold a special place in his heart.

“I come to you as someone with a great appreciation not only of the region and its culture,” Brokaw said, “but especially the people and they way we get things done out here”

Protecting wildlife and wildlife habitat are crucial to maintaining Western culture because nature is important to residents and visitors in the West, he said.

“To survive and thrive and protect all that is unique and precious about this amazing region will mean more cooperation and shared vision,” Brokaw said. “And what is most precious about the

West is mother nature – the native creatures that have always been there and always must remain because they are crucial to the DNA of people that inhabit the region. They depend on us to keep their world a fit place for them to survive and thrive.”

Brokaw told the story of astronaut Jim Lovell, who was one of the first to see the Earth rise above the lunar horizon. From space, Lovell read the first ten verses of the book of Genesis, ending with line “And God saw that it was good,” Brokaw said.

“All God’s creatures are counting on us to make sure it stays good,” Brokaw said, ending his speech to a standing ovation.

On Saturday evening Brokaw taped a portion of “Meet the Press,” at Jackson Hole Golf and Tennis with Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal and Colorado Gov. Bill Ritter. Brokaw took over the program at least through November following the sudden death of Tim Russert.

On the program, the two governors discussed the struggle to balance energy development and wildlife protection and the West’s burgeoning political importance in the upcoming presidential election. Brokaw also spoke with California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger but Schwarzenegger’s portion of the program was taped outside Wyoming.

The Western Governor’s Association is a nonpartisan organization that involves the heads of 19 states and 3 Pacific island territories. It was formed to allow governors to identify and address common issues in their states.

The governor’s association is holding its meeting in Wyoming because Freudenthal is the organization’s chairman. Each year the chairman picks the venue for the annual meeting.

This year the governors were joined by Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne as well as officials from provinces in western Canada.

Wildlife corridor mapping supported

By RUFFIN PREVOST
Gazette Wyoming Bureau

TETON VILLAGE - From Jackson Hole - a frequent home for some of the nation's largest herds of elk, bison and antelope - governors of several Western states agreed Sunday to push for greater focus on the migration corridors used by those animals.

The Western Governors' Association meets through Tuesday to discuss water, energy, climate change and power transmission, issues that keynote speaker Dirk Kempthorne said were all related.

"All of this is tied together," said Kempthorne, secretary of of the U.S. Department of the Interior and former governor and U.S. senator for Idaho.

Kempthorne praised Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal, chairman of the association, for leading efforts to create the Wildlife Corridors Initiative, a plan to cooperatively share geographic data among states and the federal government.

The effort will use computer software and maps to overlay scientific data about the location of wildlife habitats and migration routes with energy exploration, land development, energy transmission and transportation corridors.

States will adopt common scientific protocols for gathering and reporting the data, which can be used by local, state and federal planners to help study how development across the West might affect wildlife.

Colorado Gov. Bill Ritter said better managing development's toll on wildlife was an "urgent" issue.

"I think we should do this very quickly," he said, noting that oil and gas leases in Colorado have increased seven-fold over the last decade, "largely without comprehensive planning around wildlife issues."

The initiative was a key step in states recognizing the importance of wildlife corridors, said Erik Molvar, a wildlife biologist with the Laramie-based Biodiversity Conservation Alliance.

Molvar said governors now face a challenge in implementing the goals outlined in their initiative.

The global appetite for both conventional and alternative energy is likely to continue growing for decades, said Steve Elbert, vice chairman for BP America.

That means greater pressure on domestic oil and gas producers to explore in potentially environmentally sensitive areas. But the industry "is pretty good and getting better" at working with regulators to protect wildlife, he said.

But some operators are better than others, Freudenthal said, adding that the same geographic mapping technology could also be used to coordinate information between states and federal agencies about bad players in the industry.

He said such a system could help in "making sure they do what they say they'll do."

Journalist Tom Brokaw, who interviewed Freudenthal and Ritter for Sunday's "Meet the Press" and who was a keynote speaker at the association's meeting, said the public information gathered as part of the initiative should be published on the Internet, "where any citizen can look at it."

Jack Dangermond, head of a leading geographic data mapping company that helped create a

demonstration of the technology, also backed making the data available online. He urged governors to aggressively pursue the overall initiative.

"This is monumental if you can pull this off," he said.

Contact Ruffin Prevost at rprevost@billingsgazette.com or 307-527-7250.

Governors launch wildlife plan

Denver-based staff to identify habitat, unify policies

Denver Post

Washington Post Writer's Group

Article Last Updated: 06/30/2008 12:37:04 AM MDT

TETON VILLAGE, Wyo. — Governors from several Western states established a group Sunday to identify key wildlife corridors and crucial habitat in the region in hopes of better coordinating management and policy options in the face of population growth and energy development.

At the annual meeting of the Western Governors' Association, featuring governors from 19 states and three territories, the executives voted to create the Western Wildlife Council. They charged it with creating a "decision support system" within each state to work on habitat issues in a manner that can be used across political and regional boundaries.

The system will rely heavily upon crafting common definitions and data and mapping systems that can be applied and analyzed at a variety of levels.

"We need to have what the Western governors are suggesting," said U.S. Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne. "That means, on sage grouse for example, the fact that we'd have eight fish and game entities that are working together, that are providing some data, that can prove beneficial."

Sage grouse are considered a key barometer of the overall health of the landscape because of their sensitivity to change, a report prepared for the governors said.

Protecting wildlife corridors is a paramount issue to Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal, the governors association chairman who oversaw the initiative that led to creating the council.

Each governor will appoint one person to the council who is a state employee and a policy expert. The council will hire a small staff to be based in Denver.

Colorado Gov. Bill Ritter said the council would be valuable in the face of the boom in oil and gas development that has occurred across Colorado and other intermountain states. He noted that the number of permits issued for oil and gas drilling in Colorado had increased from about 1,000 10 years ago to 7,000 last year.

"If you look at all the permitting that has already happened . . . the drilling will happen and it's going to impact the wildlife corridors," he said.

Wildlife, the Colorado Democrat said, "is a precious resource and the sooner we get about this, the better."

"At issue is not whether to grow our communities and economies, but how and where we should grow them," the Wildlife Corridors Initiative report stated. "These decisions will not only affect quality of life in our neighborhoods and communities. They will also determine whether the wildlife and landscapes that so characterize the West will persist in the future."

In addition to growth and wildlife issues, the council will examine transportation infrastructure and development as well as the impact "possible climate change" could have on the landscape.

For more information, visit [www .westgov.org](http://www.westgov.org).