

WGA Resolution 07-01

• February 2007: Protecting Wildlife
Migration Corridors and Crucial Wildlife
Habitat in the West.



Resolution Goals:

- identify key wildlife corridors and crucial wildlife habitats in the West
- make policy recommendations to ensure those landscapes are preserved





WGA Wildlife Corridors Initiative

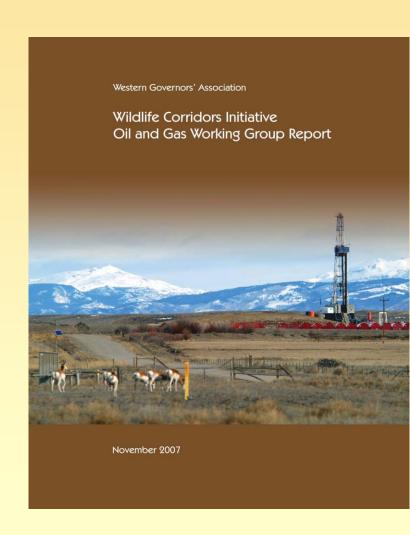
Six working groups:

- Science committee
- Energy working group
- Land Use working group
- Oil & Gas working group
- Climate Change working group
- Transportation working group



Participants:

- Local and state governments
- Sportsmen and conservation groups
- Scientists and academics
- Federal land management agencies
- Tribes
- Industry
- Private landowners' groups



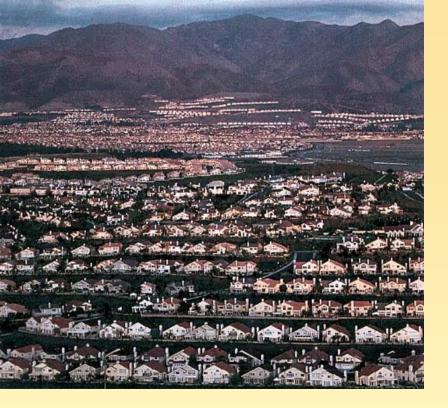
Why?

- Economic benefit of wildlife-related recreation
 - 43.6 million people hunted, fished, or wildlife-watched in Western states in 2006
 - Generated \$33.6 billion
 - Wildlife needs quality habitat and migration corridors



Wildlife is at risk





...from human land use

- Habitat loss
- Habitat fragmentation & degradation





...from transportation

- Roads and rail lines fragment habitat
- Vehicles collide with wildlife
- Pollutants are often concentrated near roadways





...from renewable energy

- Energy plant construction reduces habitat
- Associated power lines and access roads fragment habitat
- Direct threats from electrocution, wind turbine collisions for birds





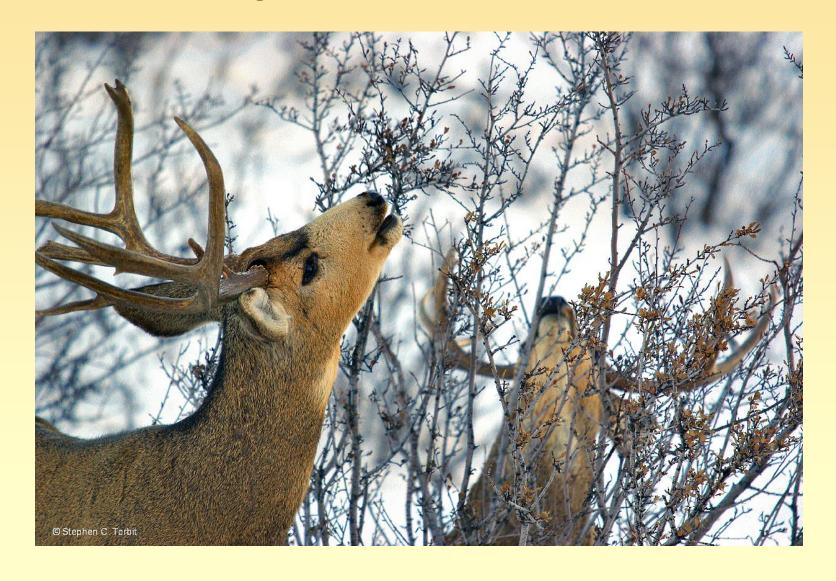
- Fragmentation of sagebrush habitat
- Infrastructure displaces wildlife
- Mule deer are displaced from their winter habitat

...and from climate change.

 Persistent drought, reduced snowpack, earlier runoff and increasing temperatures

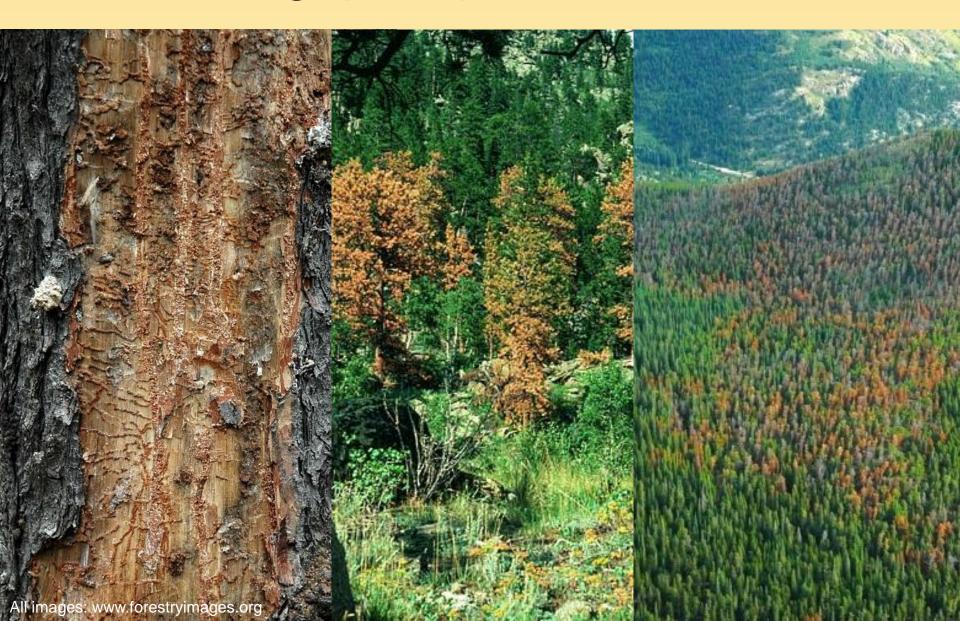


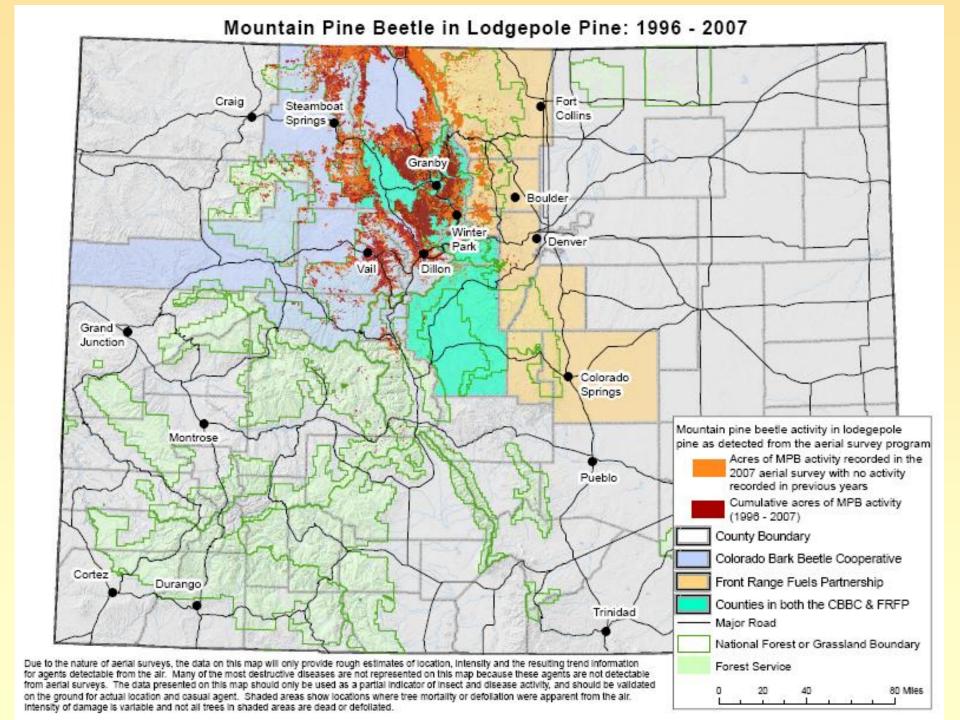
Decreasing western shrub habitat





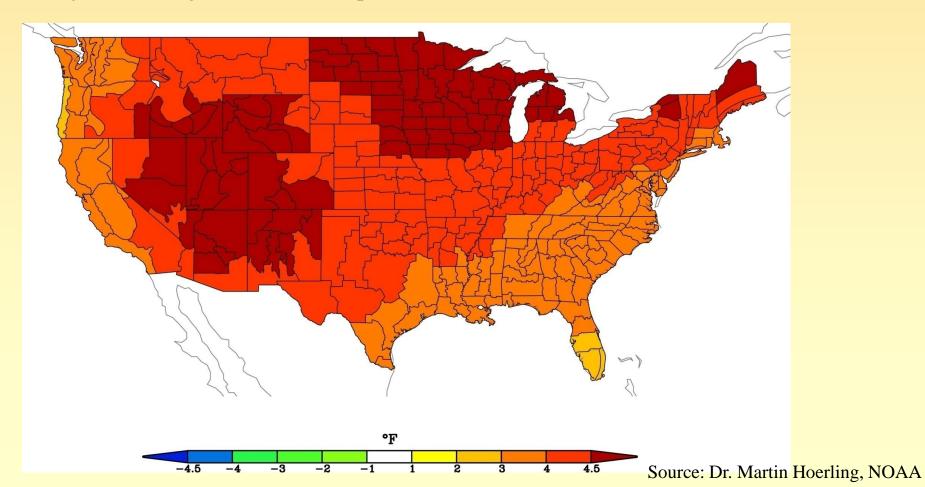
Lodgepole pine die-off



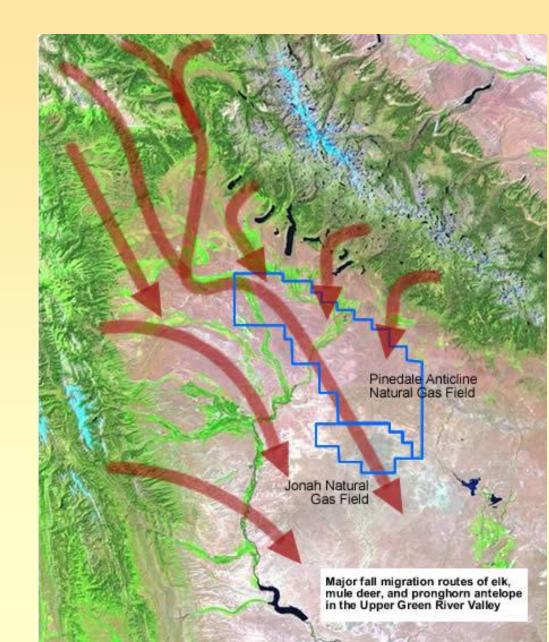


 Increasing temperatures will result in range shifts and changes in timing of life-history traits

Projected Change in Annual Temperature 2035-2060



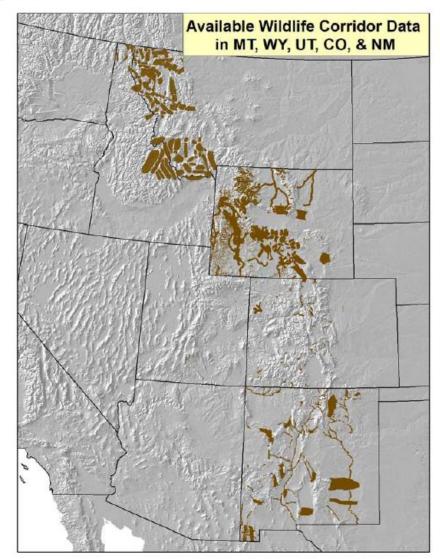
Migration corridors can help mitigate the impacts of climate change by allowing populations to move to more suitable habitat



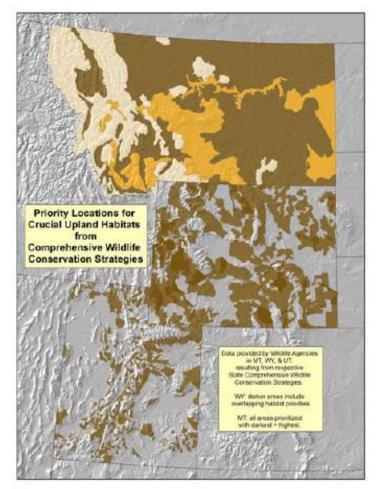
Science Committee Outcomes:

- Identified mapping resources
- Mapped wildlife corridors based on existing data from five state fish and wildlife agencies

Figure 9. Available information about wildlife corridors provided by State fish and wildlife agencies.



3a. 3b.



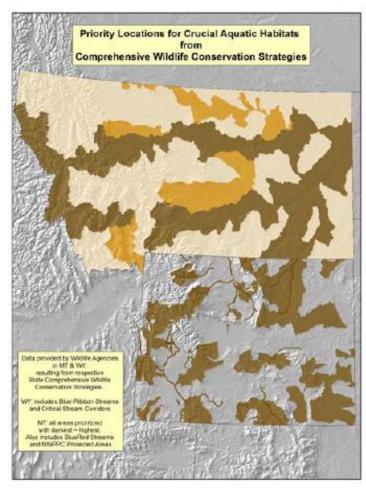


Figure 3a. Priority locations for crucial terrestrial habitats from the State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs). Darker areas in Wyoming include overlapping habitat priorities. Darker areas in Montana represent the highest priorities.

Figure 3b. Priority locations for crucial aquatic habitats from the State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs). Wyoming data include blue-ribbon streams and critical stream corridors. Montana data include blue-ribbon streams and NWPPC protected areas.

Source: Montana, Utah and Wyoming State Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

Fig. 4. The TNC Ecoregional Assessments (portfolio sites in green) provide a more consistent depiction of important biodiversity areas across the Western States. Source: The Nature Conservancy.



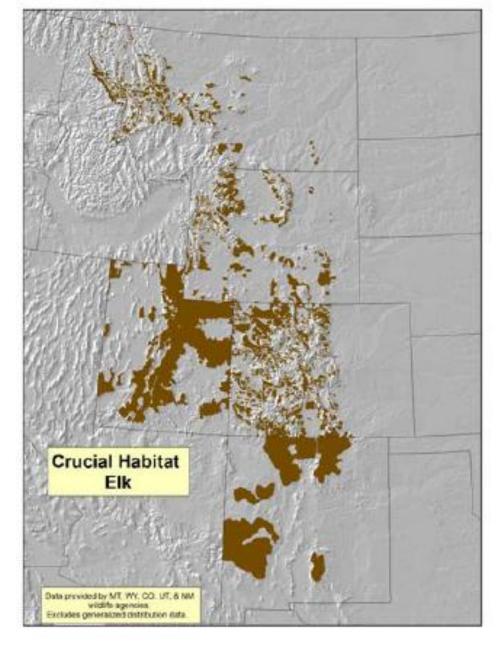
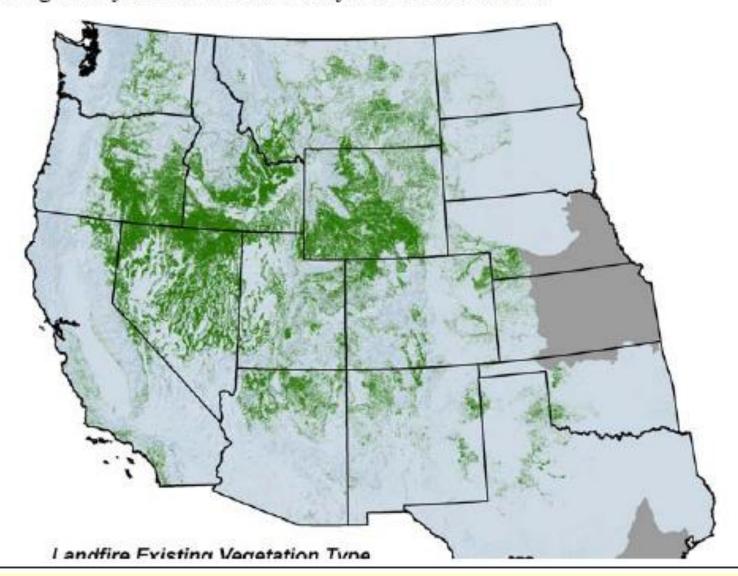


Figure 2. Existing information on crucial habitat for elk. Source: State fish and wildlife agencies

Figure 7. Sagebrush dominated land cover in the Western United States. Compiled by Bureau Land Management from the national Landfire EVT on 5-8-2008.



Land Use WG Outcomes:



- Support an assessment by Western States Water Council of how current water use management affects crucial habitats
- Encourage compact development, which reduces natural resource use

 Support open space protection near international borders and military bases to provide contiguous wildlife habitat



Land Use WG Outcomes cont.:

- Return-flow rights: support legislation that would provide voluntary options for reallocating water to natural systems without harming agricultural water rights
- At a minimum, legislation should include the right to lease water without losing the right through non-use.



Transportation WG Outcomes:

- Continue building bridges and culverts to facilitate wildlife movement
- Improve public transit to reduce traffic
- Standardize wildlife-vehicle collision data across jurisdictions



Energy WG Outcomes:

- Accelerate permitting for energy projects in areas with low conservation priority
- Support over-sizing transmission lines to reduce the need for multiple transmission corridors





Oil & Gas WG Outcomes:

- Advocate for federal buybacks or trades to be offered where current leases overlap with crucial habitat or corridors
- Develop strict protocols for wildlife monitoring
- Seek funding for additional research on energy development's impact on wildlife corridors and crucial habitat



Climate Change WG Outcomes:

- Establish a Wildlife Adaptation Advisory Council
- Use incentives to encourage private landowners to protect crucial habitats and wildlife corridors
- Maximize water conservation in the short-term



Climate Change WG cont.:

 Examine existing reservoirs with respect to current water management and the potential for beneficial modifications for fish and wildlife, including temperature control operations to reduce elevated temperatures resulting from climate change that are detrimental to aquatic resources.



Summary of Recommendations:

- Science WG: Create an integrated fish and wildlife Decision Support System (DSS), to coordinate definitions, facilitate mapping, and provide regional recommendations.
- Coordinate data, goals and processes across agencies and jurisdictions
- Prioritize future scientific research regarding wildlife corridors and crucial habitat
- Use incentives to encourage private landowners and industry to conserve crucial habitat
- States need to further prioritize wildlife habitats so that development can take the proper steps with regard to avoidance, minimization, or mitigation.
- Get funding!



Western Governor's Association, Wildlife Habitat and Corridor Initiative Context, Process, Results and Implications

Stephen C. Torbit, Ph.D. Regional Executive Director National Wildlife Federation

In February 2007, the Western Governor's Association (WGA) passed a resolution entitled "Protecting Wildlife Migration Corridors and Crucial Habitat in the West." The Governor's recognized that many rapid changes are occurring across the west that are impacting wildlife habitats and are hampering state and federal agencies abilities to manage wildlife and their habitats. The Governor's recognized that population growth, transportation infrastructure development, energy development and climate change, especially drought, are or will be major contributors to habitat loss. The Governors also recognized the valuable cultural and economic role that fish and wildlife resources play in the west and that their future ability to provide those cultural and economic values must be incorporated into the development of the west.

Passage of this resolution catalyzed a process that pulled stakeholders from a variety of interests together to assess wildlife distribution, processes of assessing impacts, ways to mitigate impacts and methods to share data among states and federal agencies. The WGA designated 6 committees to report back to the Governors on how to implement the resolution. The following working groups were designated:

Science Committee Oil and Gas Working Group
Energy Working Group
Land Use Working Group
Transportation Working Group

Each group provided and endorsed a final report. These reports were then reviewed by each Governor and the reports were adopted by the Governors at the WGA 2008 summer meeting in Jackson, Wyoming. The complete set of reports is available on line at:

http://www.westgov.org/wga/publicat/wildlife08.pdf

This presentation will summarize the rational leading to the resolution, process of preparing reports, challenges confronting and results of these working groups and provide an update of the current status of the process.

STEPHEN C. TORBIT, Ph.D.

BACKGROUND SKETCH

Dr. Torbit has a diverse educational and work history. Dr. Torbit earned his Ph.D. in wildlife ecology from Colorado State University specializing in ungulate nutritional ecology. Since earning his doctorate, Steve has worked in every aspect of wildlife conservation. He not only has been an academician, by continuing on the faculty of Colorado State as an instructor and researcher, but he has also worked as a biologist for two state wildlife agencies (Colorado and Wyoming). While with the Colorado Division of Wildlife, he was presented with the "Wildlife Professional of the Year" award by the Colorado Division of Wildlife. He has managed wildlife habitats, wildlife populations and served as a wildlife advocate to development proponents, federal and state agencies. During his tenure with Wyoming Game and Fish, Steve coordinated the agency's responses to various development proposals and represented Game and Fish interests with federal agencies and the Wyoming Governor's office. Steve moved on to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1990 and served as the agency's endangered species biologist on matters affecting listed species in Wyoming. Steve was intimately involved in the first reintroduction of black-footed ferrets to the wild in Shirley Basin. Later Steve was transferred to the Regional Office in Denver and served the Black-footed ferret Recovery Coordinator and Biodiversity Coordinator. Through his career as a state and federal wildlife ecologist, Steve has implemented or facilitated the implementation of virtually every federal environmental statute and regulation. Steve has not only commented on Environmental Impact Statements, authored Section 7 consultations, but also has written EIS' and Proposed Federal Rules under the Section 10j provisions of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. Steve has served on the IUCN Species Specialist Group for both black-footed ferrets and bison. Steve also served as a member of the Species Survival Plan team for black-footed ferrets. Steve was invited to and assisted with the conservation of predators in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at the request of both the U.S. and Saudi government. Steve's conservation efforts in Saudi Arabia included desert wolves, Arabian leopards, baboons, caracals and sand cats.

In 1993, Steve brought his research, agency and management experience to bear on wildlife conservation issues in the west for the National Wildlife Federation. He assisted NWF in their policy development concerning the re-authorization of the Endangered Species Act. In 1996, he was appointed to the Green River Basin Federal Advisory Committee by Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt. This group evaluated the development of oil and gas resources on federal lands in the Upper Green River Basin of Wyoming and Colorado. Steve has provided invited testimony to the United States Senate regarding energy development on public lands in the west. Steve has also served as an expert witness in many legal forums including federal district court. In addition, Steve has served as technical advisor for over 10 NWF wildlife films broadcast on PBS and the Turner Broadcast System and large format (IMAX) films. Steve has served as technical advisor, writer and on-camera commentator.

Steve's duties with NWF currently include overseeing the operation of NWF operations in an 8-state region that includes Wyoming, assisting the indigenous tribal people of the western U.S. in the restoration of bison and other wildlife species to their reservations. He also remains intimately involved in conservation of wildlife and wildlife habitat on public and tribal lands. Steve oversees both the public and tribal lands programs for NWF.

For his work on behalf of bison restoration, Steve was presented the first annual "Friends of the Buffalo" award from the InterTribal Bison Cooperative. Steve also works with tribal governments to restore other components of their prairie ecosystems, serving both as a technical consultant to the tribes and as an advocate to the federal government for the tribes. He has assisted with the reintroduction Black-footed ferrets on the Ft. Belknap and Cheyenne River Sioux Reservations and with the management of wolves by the Nez Perce Tribe in Idaho and Mexican wolves on the White Mountain Apache reservation. Steve serves as the Senior Scientist for National Wildlife Federation and Regional Executive Director of NWF's Rocky Mountain Natural Center in Boulder, Colorado.

Steve is a member of the Wildlife Society, the Colorado and Wyoming Chapters of TWS, the U.S. Animal Health Association, the Native American Fish and Wildlife Society and is an Associate Fellow at the Center for Great Plains Studies at the University of Nebraska. Steve has retained his affiliate faculty status at CSU since 1986 and currently serves on the Advisory Committee for the Department of Fishery and Wildlife Biology.