



Chairman, Conservation Affairs Committee
New Mexico Chapter of the Wildlife Society
9016 Freedom Way N.E.
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87109

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Forest Supervisors and Regional Office, U.S. Forest Service in New Mexico
District Offices and State Director, Bureau of Land Management in New Mexico

We understand that federal agencies are undergoing planning processes to better address their land management in New Mexico. The Forest Service finalized regulations in 2012 that stated plans should “maintain or restore the ecological integrity of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems and watersheds.” The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 requires the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to protect the ecological value of the land. Addressing wildlife habitat connectivity during the planning process is crucial to ecosystems and ecology. Planning and coordinating management in National Forests and areas managed by the BLM should include a larger area view that crosses agency boundaries. Wildlife require sufficient space for daily and seasonal movement as well as dispersal corridors. All of these requirements depend upon connectivity between habitats.

Habitat fragmentation has been targeted as one of the most serious threats to biodiversity worldwide and typically leads to the isolation of populations, thus creating local subpopulations scattered across a landscape. In many cases, habitat set aside for the protection of species of conservation interest may not be large enough to support the long-term viability of these populations. Furthermore, the isolation of the subpopulations may lead to localized extinctions, due to the inability of these populations to interact with one another over time.

Habitat connectivity has been recognized by various groups and agencies. In February 2007, the Western Governors’ Association unanimously approved Policy Resolution 07-01, “Protecting Wildlife Migration Corridors and Crucial Wildlife Habitat in the West.” To emphasize the importance of wildlife connectivity, travel and migration corridors, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and Colorado Division of Wildlife completed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) December 4, 2009 signed by the governor of each state. The MOU stated

that both agencies would work together to a) identify key habitat connectivity, travel and migration corridors, b) evaluate and prioritize corridors, c) map key habitat connectivity, travel and migration corridors, d) identify impediments that impact the viability of key wildlife corridors, e) develop and prioritize strategies to protect key wildlife corridors, and f) share recommended strategies with land management agencies.

To provide adequate management for wildlife, we encourage federal agencies to gather and use wildlife movement data and then coordinate management on large landscapes with other nearby agencies and other land managers. Connectivity is crucial for wildlife (Defenders of Wildlife 2015). If habitat is fragmented, then animals can not survive because they are lacking their essential needs. A recent document developed by Muldavin and McCollough (2016), Natural Heritage New Mexico identified “wildlife doorways”. Their approach was to first gather wildlife movement data and then locate areas where movement crossed agency owned property boundaries. This information can be used to evaluate management by several agencies to see if there are gaps in wildlife-oriented management in these heavily used areas important for connectivity, or there are areas with different management strategies that do not match. The study area was the Upper Rio Grande watershed that includes Colorado and New Mexico.

Wildlife professionals in New Mexico recognize the importance of wildlife corridors to preserving our natural resource heritage. In October 2009, over 100 natural resource professionals from New Mexico attended the Wildlife Corridors Information Sharing and Needs Workshop. The primary conclusion of this workshop emphasized the need for a statewide habitat linkages assessment. As a follow-up, a full-day Habitat Connectivity session was conducted at the New Mexico Wildlife Society’s 1st Annual Chapter Conference in October 2011.

We encourage the inclusion of wildlife movement and habitat connectivity data during the development of planning documents. Analysis can show where management can improve habitat or restore connectivity. Coordination between agencies is crucial to provide adequate habitat for movement that supports healthy wildlife populations.

Respectfully,



Brian Hanson, Chairman

Cc:

Conservation Affairs Committee, New Mexico Chapter of the Wildlife Society
New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, Santa Fe, New Mexico
The Wildlife Society, Washington D.C.

References

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