

The position of The Wildlife Society is that the role of science in policy and decision-making is to inform the decision process, rather than to prescribe a particular outcome. Policy and decision-makers may make determinations that do not always provide maximum benefits or minimize impacts to wildlife and their habitats. Such determinations are appropriate if the best-available science and likely consequences from a range of management options have been openly acknowledged and considered.

Based on our collective scientific expertise, we believe that the proposed “Designation of migration corridors” bill is not in line with science-based wildlife management. Deferrals of land-use permits and mineral lease sales in certain corridors could help ensure functionality of migration corridors, yet this bill prohibits deferrals except when designated by the governor. Because of the documented effects of development on big game and their migrations, we do not support measures to prohibit deferrals in corridors.

Seasonal migration allows big game species to take advantage of abundant, high-quality food during the summer while reducing exposure to risky conditions such as harsh winters or predation.¹ In addition, the quality of an ungulate’s migration route can have direct effects on individual survival.² Scientists have demonstrated that species such as mule deer are incredibly faithful to their migration routes, with some individuals taking essentially the same path each year,³ even when encountering development that substantially alters habitat.⁴ This rigid behavior suggests a lack of ability to adjust migratory behaviors to accommodate changing landscapes. Evidence from bighorn sheep and moose populations suggests that if migration corridors are lost, it will take approximately 100 years for the population to redevelop migration.⁵ Furthermore, even species that are more flexible in their movements, such as elk, rely on migration to maintain robust populations.⁶

The effects of energy development on mule deer are significant and long-term. Oil and gas development was linked to a 36% decline in mule deer abundance over a 17-year study of nearly 200 deer.⁷ Further, when encountering disturbance to the landscape, mule deer migrate faster and stop less often to eat, which could cause them to miss foraging opportunities necessary to recover from harsh Wyoming winters.⁴ Migrations are crucial to maintaining the robust populations of big game in Wyoming, and taking actions to ensure continued functionality of these movements is essential to the continued existence of our revered big game populations.

Based on our collective experience participating in collaborative processes, we find the proposed bill is not sufficiently inclusive of all stakeholders, nor does it leverage

¹ J. M. Fryxell and A. R.E. Sinclair, “Causes and Consequences of Migration by Large Herbivores,” *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* 3, no. 9 (1988): 237–41, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0169-5347\(88\)90166-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0169-5347(88)90166-8).

² Hall Sawyer et al., “All Routes Are Not Created Equal: An Ungulate’s Choice of Migration Route Can Influence Its Survival,” *Journal of Applied Ecology*, no. March (2019): 1860–69.

³ Hall Sawyer et al., “Migratory Plasticity Is Not Ubiquitous among Large Herbivores,” *Journal of Animal Ecology* 88 (2018): 450–60.

⁴ Teal B. Wyckoff et al., “Evaluating the Influence of Energy and Residential Development on the Migratory Behavior of Mule Deer,” *Ecosphere* 9, no. 2 (2018): e02113, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ecs2.2113>.

⁵ Brett R. Jesmer et al., “Is Ungulate Migration Culturally Transmitted? Evidence of Social Learning from Translocated Animals,” *Science* 361 (2018): 1023–25, <https://doi.org/10.5061/dryad.8165qv5>.

⁶ Matthew J. Kauffman et al., *Wild Migrations: Atlas of Wyoming’s Ungulates* (Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Press, 2018).

⁷ Hall Sawyer et al., “Mule Deer and Energy Development—Long-Term Trends of Habituation and Abundance,” *Global Change Biology* 23, no. 11 (2017): 4521–29, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gcb.13711>.

representation from the scientific community. The proposed bill does not include a representative of the wildlife science community in the proposed working group structure. Scientific representation in the working groups and throughout the designation process will help to ensure that recommendations are made with consideration of the best-available science. Moreover, wildlife is held in trust for members of the public. Successful wildlife management hinges on incorporating stakeholders' desires in decisions related to wildlife, in tandem with science. Since the chairperson has the unilateral authority to appoint energy industry representatives to replace members that otherwise would be appointed to represent agriculture, conservation, sportspeople, recreation, and municipal government, there are no protections to maintain a voice for science, or other non-industry constituencies, in the group. Because of the importance of ensuring that science and all stakeholder groups have a role in determining the future of wildlife, we do not support trading a diverse constituency for individuals that only represent the interests of one group.

Wildlife management in North America is highly regarded across the world because of the forward-thinking philosophies that underlie our efforts; policies grounded in science that consider diverse stakeholder groups are integral to this high regard. **Given the concerns outlined here, we strongly recommend that members of the Committee vote against moving this bill forward and instead consider the recommendations from Governor Gordon's Migration Corridor Advisory Group that call for an Executive Order to identify policies for designating corridors.**

If you have any questions, please feel free to direct them to Rhiannon Jakopak, chair of the Legislative Affairs committee with WY-TWS. Thank you for your recognition of the importance of healthy wildlife populations to Wyoming's economy and people.

Sincerely,



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