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Designating and Funding the Wyoming Range Mule Deer Migration - Grant

Grant Name	Designating and Funding the Wyoming Range Mule Deer Migration - Grant	Today's Date	12/14/2023
Staff Size	7	Organization Name	Wyoming Wildlife Federation
Total Membership	20,000	Annual Operating Budget	\$592,000.00
BIPOC-led	No	Operating Budget Year	
C-Suite Staff		Tax Status/Organization Type	501c3 Organization
Notes			

Project Information

Project/Campaign Name	Designating and Funding the Wyoming Range Mule Deer Migration	Project Address	
Project Location (State or Territory)	WY	Amount Requested from Alliance	\$45,000.00

Proposal Questions

<p>1. Purpose/History Of Organization</p>	<p>The Wyoming Wildlife Federation delivers leadership in conservation for the State's wildlife, hunters, anglers, and conservationists through policy, education, advocacy, and habitat projects. The Wyoming Wildlife Federation was established in 1937 as a conservation voice for hunters and anglers. The ultimate aim of the WWF is a Wyoming with well-conserved fish and wildlife populations, healthy habitats, and engaged conservationists. WWF achieves its conservation objectives by organizing and educating the public on issues affecting wildlife, habitat, and outdoor opportunities. WWF supports strong, science-based policies to restore and reconnect wildlife habitat as well as sustainably funded wildlife management. WWF's vision is sustained by a base of hunters and anglers who understand and value the cultural and conservation significance of wildlife in Wyoming.</p>	<p>7. Measurable On-Ground Outcomes</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Creation of a support network of local stakeholders to support the designation and conservation of the Wyoming Range mule deer migration corridor. 2. A letter of request to the Wyoming Game and Fish Department officially asking for the designation process of the Wyoming Range mule deer migration corridor begin. 3. Official Wyoming Game and Fish Department designation of the Wyoming Range migration corridor as important mule deer habitat. 4. Help to fully fund the Hwy 189 Wildlife Crossing. 5. Inclusion of the Wyoming Range Migration Corridor and measurable protections for corridor habitat in the Bridger Teton National Forest Plan.
<p>2. Final Success</p>	<p>The Wyoming Game and Fish Department will formally designate the 1.3 million acre Wyoming Range Mule Deer Migration Corridor as vital habitat, and that habitat designation will be formally recognized by affected federal land agencies who will effectively protect them from development into the future and the HWY 189 Wildlife crossing will be fully funded by end of year 2024.</p>	<p>8. Evaluate Your Progress</p>	<p>The success of this project can be measured first in awareness and engagement through outreach measured by the number of attendees at WGFD meetings, number of participants in training and tours, and the number of individuals who participate in public action with BTNF and other decision makers in support of protecting the migration corridor. This would include the number of comments and testimonies as</p>

well. The second measure of success will be the corridor becoming officially designated by the state of Wyoming and incorporated into BTNF land use planning documents as an important habitat with accompanying protections. Specific language restricting development in the migration corridor is an ideal result. Success of this project will also see a fully funded Hwy 189 wildlife crossing in 2024.

3. Location Details

The Wyoming Range is large and encompasses Thompson Pass, Horse Creek, McDougal Gap, North and South Cottonwood Creeks, Wyoming Peak, and Piney Creek. Wildlife in the Wyoming Range include genetically pure Colorado River cutthroat trout, Snake River cutthroat trout, black and grizzly bears, elk, half of the state's moose population, and the longest mule deer migration corridor in the world. The high grassy alpine basins, steep avalanche chutes, and dark lush forests that make up the Wyoming Range create incredible habitat for over 300 species of wildlife. The Wyoming Range is a favorite of hunters, wildlife watchers, backpackers, overland motorcycle riders, snowmobilers, fishermen, and other recreationalists from around the world.

This project focuses on the Wyoming Range Mule Deer Migration Corridor. Rather than a single path, the Wyoming Range mule deer migration corridor is a highly braided set of routes that deer use to pass between the Hoback Rim above Bondurant south to Kemmerer. The longest treks measured are over 130 miles long.

Animals in this region have been following their migration paths for millennia. Today, changing conditions can affect the long-term health of these herds. Some issues are simple barriers, like fences. Others are more complex, like rural development, treacherous roadway crossings, and energy development. The GPS collar data that identified the target corridor also pinpointed significant bottlenecks and obstacles.

One of the most prominent obstacles faced by migrating wildlife is roads. The stretch of road between Evanston and Kemmerer Wyoming, known as the Hwy 189 crossing, was identified as a high priority for wildlife crossing work and lies within the target migration corridor. Migration corridor integrity and safe wildlife crossings are critical to maintaining the continuity of the landscape and to the continued health of Wyoming's ungulate populations. In addition, the corridor encompasses crucial habitat for many of Wyoming's

9. TCA Funding Plan

Strong local support is critical for success. WWF will use funds for staff time to educate local citizens, decision makers, and sporting and conservation groups on the importance of this corridor and the significant benefit of its conservation. Funded activities will include ground tours and two aerial tours to show the importance of the land in need of protection and building a network of engaged stakeholders. Further funding will be used for staff time to mobilize people to attend public meetings, submit testimony or comments in favor of designation, aid WWF with state level decision makers, and act as local resources for tours.

In summary, WWF would use The Conservation Alliance funding to support overflights, local meetings, travel, ground tours, media, and a portion of the staff time needed to complete the project.

Project funds would be used as matching funds to build funding for the Hwy 189 crossing project.

other iconic wildlife species.

The herd and landscape are under pressure from a variety of sources, including human development, energy resource use, and the spread of chronic wasting disease. Any action that improves habitat health and connectivity helps mule deer herds and the ecosystem as a whole and ensures a future for this foundational piece of Wyoming's recreational landscape.

4. Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

What:
Organize support to designate and protect the 1.3 million acres of federal, state, and private lands within the identified Wyoming Range Mule Deer Migration Corridor and to help fund an important wildlife crossing within the corridor to increase the connectivity of landscapes important to the Wyoming Range and Unita mule deer herds.

Why:
Designating this corridor would increase protection for all wildlife within its boundaries and ensure future landscape connectivity. Maintaining connected landscapes is one of the best ways to foster ecosystem resilience in the face of changing climate and land uses and maintain their recreational value. Once recognized, the habitats will be removed from many development proposals on public lands and receive increased funding for habitat work on private lands.

Wyoming has a designation process outlined by executive order. This process for the Wyoming Range corridor needs to begin as soon as possible. Designation in the face of entrenched interests will require robust advocacy and organizing efforts to bring sportsmen together to support designation.

The need for designation of this habitat is timely for several reasons. The Bridger Teton National Forest (BTNF) is writing a new Forest Plan including these lands, a process that will impact the area for 20 years or more. Increased protections dovetail with the 30x30 initiative and federal efforts to protect corridors for wildlife. Designation will increase funding for reclamation and climate change resilience projects as well as reducing new development. Another factor is a proposed nuclear power plant that will increase traffic on a stretch of highway 189 (an identified crossing priority) already treacherous for humans and wildlife. Wildlife crossings are up to 90% effective in mitigating roadway collisions with ungulates. Lastly, all states in the Intermountain West are developing processes for wildlife corridor designation, and Wyoming can help set the tone.

10. JEDI Efforts and Impact

Wyoming Wildlife Federation approaches JEDI like the rest of our actions, prioritizing doing things with authenticity. In the past year, WWF created a strategic plan that includes a goal is to have board of director representation from all of Wyoming, including tribal representation, recognizing that relationship building will be needed to make this connection authentic. WWF is also working on outreach plans specific to the Hispanic and LGBTQ communities both of whom do not see themselves in WWF at this time. WWF is also offering opportunities to board and staff to participate in JEDI training that will help the organization be more aware of and responsive to issues of equity and justice. At the moment the impacts are in focus and tone, with changes in representation moving at a speed where we can ensure they are being completed with integrity and that changes represent an organic organizational cultural shift rather than a surface level policy shift.

How:

WWF proposes to work directly with decision-makers, land management agencies, and local stakeholders to designate and conserve the corridor through the state and federal management agency processes. WWF will also work with state and federal agencies and cooperating wildlife and sporting organizations to fully fund the Hwy 189 Wildlife Crossing Project.

WWF will organize a local support system; encouraging individuals to engage with public testimony and comments. Outreach will be driven by existing and newly cultivated supporters representing individuals and hunting, angling, and recreation organizations. WWF will coordinate advocacy with supporting organizations and conservation groups.

After designation, WWF will work to address the corridor in the BTNF planning process, specifically oil and gas leasing and stipulations in designated migration corridors. WWF will support specific language that will minimize risks for wildlife, including transportation and development within or near migration routes.

Project Objectives:

1. Create local campaigns around the migration corridor by building a strong, diverse collective to advocate for the designation and conservation of the corridor.
2. Support official designation of corridor as important mule deer habitat.
3. Work towards inclusion of the corridor and measurable protections for corridor habitat in the BTNF forest plan.
4. Continue work on wildlife crossing funding within corridors.

Project Action Plans:

1. Organizing at least 3 meetings with Wyoming sportsmen, private landowners, influential community leaders and key decision makers to communicate the sporting community's position for strong protections.
2. Planning and executing 2 overflights in key corridor areas with decision makers, scientists, press, and interested businesses.
3. Planning and executing 1 ground tour of the corridor for 20-30 advocates and decision makers.
4. Building a local multi-media campaign around migration corridors including additions to the WWF website, brochures, film, and social media featuring local people in support of migration conservation.
5. Using \$20,000 as matching funds for the Hwy 189 wildlife crossing.

When:

Both corridor designation and the BTNF Forest Plan are anticipated to be completed in 2025. Gathering support and informational outreach would begin in the 1st quarter of 2024 with the focus transitioning to advocacy in the 3rd quarter, continuing through the completion of these processes.

Impacts:

The benefit of this project is not in expanding recreational opportunities, but in maintaining current opportunities in perpetuity. Maintaining healthy ungulate herds allows continued hunting and wildlife watching opportunities.

Maintaining intact and connected landscapes benefits recreationists who hike, ski, fish, float, climb, and backpack in lands that receive protections from development. Funding wildlife crossing work leads to reduced costs from wildlife collisions.

5. Key Decision Makers

The primary decision makers are county commissioners, state legislators, the Governor and his staff, and WGFD commissioners. WWF will also have a secondary priority to influence diverse stakeholders such as Wyoming Stockgrowers Association, Wyoming Mining Association, Wyoming County Commission Association, and the Petroleum Association of Wyoming, and large local landowners. There is a high likelihood that WWF will be able to find common ground and support with decision makers as this is one of the more famous migration routes and is the lifeblood of the most famous deer herd in the state. The hard winter in 2022 has elevated the visibility of and concern for this herd and its habitat. Our approach to interactions is relationship building. WWF works through one on one and on the ground communications. Whenever possible, WWF works to show decision makers through field trips and flights, rather than just tell them about the values of these landscapes. Finally, WWF listens and looks for compromises that work for both sides and incentives for those who may be negatively impacted.

11. Confidential Items

There is no part of this project that must remain confidential.

6. Elevate Voices

This land was traditionally occupied by the Shoshone people. The Shoshone are now found on the Wind River Indian Reservation. WWF will advocate for a tribal seat on the corridor committee and honor and amplify concerns brought from indigenous cultural perspectives. WWF will also work to make meetings and events welcoming and accessible to people of all people regardless of background, ability, or identity. Beyond this, the primary goal is to see science-based protections on the landscape and being alert for, open to, and lifting any contributions from historically

underrepresented groups is the most relevant action.

Created By Joy Bannon, 12/14/2023, 11:58 AM

Last Modified By Kim Paymaster, 12/19/2023, 9:20 AM

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