



Breanna Ball <breanna.ball1@wyo.gov>

Migration Corridor Designation

1 message

Nick Wheeler <oaktrail5493@me.com>
To: breanna.ball1@wyo.gov
Cc: Todd Stoner <toddstoner63@gmail.com>

Wed, Jul 31, 2024 at 5:33 PM

Dear Breanna

I am the owner of the Hat Butte Ranch located about 11 miles west of Dubois. This ranch straddles the mule deer migration corridor which Wyoming Game and Fish is contemplating designating as critical according to the Wyoming Migration Executive Order. I hope I have the language right.

I believe it's important that agencies have the strongest policies to conserve our migration corridors. Additionally, potential bottlenecks, which are the most critical part of migration corridors, need to be recognized and protected. On Hat Butte Ranch we are working with the Nature Conservancy to eliminate existing fencing and build wildlife friendly fencing inside the private ranch boundaries and public lands to which we hold grazing leases. It would help us if we became eligible for additional funding for fencing along this corridor.

We have also been working on a large scale fire mitigation project with the help of Brian Russell, the former state forester in our area and Jim Gates from the BLM. We have already seen a dramatic increase in in the Pronghorn, Deer and Elk populations on the ranch as a result of these forest clearing efforts.

While the Executive Order doesn't impact private land - it does help provide funding incentives. Landowners will be missing out on being prioritized for millions of dollars of NRCS funding if this corridor is not designated. Only about half of EQIP projects were funded last year, because of the limited budget, and being in a designated corridor significantly increases the project ranking.

I also appreciate the state moving forward with addressing the wildlife-vehicle collisions on Hwy 26 around Dubois. With a goal of raising \$2.7 million from private funders in order to boost a multi-million dollar grant proposal from the federal Wildlife Crossing Pilot program, not designating the corridor would send an inconsistent message on the state's commitment to conserving this corridor.

As you likely know, the country around Dubois also hosts some of the most impressive elk and bighorn sheep populations and I ask that policy be implemented to conserve their migrations as well - since the current Executive Order does not include these species. Additionally, please request that NRCS include the entire Dubois region as a "priority area" for funding similar to the Absaroka Front in Park County.

On our ranch we have seen examples of every major wildlife population in Wyoming - Cougar, Mule and White Tail Deer, Elk, Antelope, Brown and Black Bear, Badger, Wolverine, Wolf, Fox, Marmot etc have all been observed or caught on wildlife cameras. Without further protections the presence of all these species will be eroded over time.

Thank you for your work for our incredible wildlife!

Nick Wheeler