

Agreement Under the June 2009 Memorandum of Understanding
Regarding coordination among federal agencies and states
in identification and uniform mapping of wildlife corridors and crucial habitat

The members of the State-Federal Implementation Group established under the June 15, 2009, Memorandum of Understanding among the Western Governors' Association, the Department of Energy, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of the Interior, having met and discussed at length a variety of ways in which the purposes of that MOU can be better achieved, have agreed upon the following principles, which they will convey to their respective agencies:

1. The State-Federal Implementation Group (SFIG) affirms its continued commitment to accomplishing the goals of the 2009 MOU. Further, the SFIG recognizes the dynamic nature of the state-federal relationship relative to managing wildlife and other natural resources and seeks to assure that the purposes of the MOU will serve new needs that have arisen since the MOU was executed. More specifically, federal initiatives such as Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, Climate Science Centers and Rapid Ecoregional Assessments create new demands on states for participation. Moreover, each of these initiatives can be benefitted by state-level wildlife Decision Support Systems (DSSs). For context, Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) are federal, state, tribal and non-governmental self-governing partnerships that seek to apply the best science available to landscape and natural resource management in the face of climate change and other environmental stressors. Climate Science Centers (CSCs) are regional collaborations between the U.S. Geological Survey, LCCs and leading universities established to identify or develop science that can be applied to landscape management by LCC partners. BLM's Rapid Ecoregional Assessment (REA) is a comprehensive inventory and assessment of wildlife, habitat and ecosystems on BLM land for the purpose of informing federal land management decisions on those lands. DSSs are geospatial representations of the conservation priorities of state wildlife agencies, displayed in a consistent manner across political jurisdictions in the western U.S.
2. The federal land managing agencies wish to make extensive use of information about crucial wildlife habitats and important wildlife corridors that is expected to become available from state-level DSSs currently being developed by the Western states pursuant to the work of the Western Governors' Wildlife Council. State agencies appreciate leadership from the White House in the 2011 America's Great Outdoors report that calls on federal agencies to "work with states and other partners to use and disseminate scientific data and other information concerning the locations of and threats to critical wildlife corridors to ensure effective investment in restoring and conserving of those corridors" (Action Item 8.3.a) and to "Incorporate wildlife corridor conservation and restoration into federal agency plans, programs, and actions" (Action Item 8.3.b). In particular, federal agencies will seek to use such information from the Western states, whenever it is adequate and at an appropriate scale, as a principal, though not sole, source to inform their

land use, land planning and related natural resource decisions. When information needed for such decisions is not available from the state level DSSs, but may be available from a state in other usable form, the federal agencies will explore the possibility of using such information. When needed information is neither available from a state-level DSS or in another usable form, the federal agencies will explore the possibility of the states developing such information in a manner that meets the needs of the federal agencies in terms of timeliness, cost and quality of information.

3. States developing DSSs that identify crucial wildlife habitats and important wildlife corridors will confer with federal natural resource and land managing agencies of the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior to better understand the expected information needs of such agencies, and will seek to develop their DSSs, as much as possible, to meet those needs. The federal agencies will also confer with state wildlife agencies and do not intend to duplicate the analysis of raw data previously analyzed by the states in the course of developing their DSSs. As a result, the federal agencies will endeavor to use these analyses to the greatest extent possible, in compliance with federal law. The states, in turn, understand that the methodologies, assumptions, and limitations of the analyses undertaken as part of their DSSs need to be transparent and clear in order for the federal agencies to make effective use of such analyses and to determine whether such analyses suffice to meet their needs and obligations under federal law. The states further understand that the information in individual data layers of their DSSs or from other sources may be particularly useful for certain federal decisions, and will endeavor to make such information available under reasonable terms of use.
4. The states and the federal agencies recognize that LCCs are intended to be self-directed partnerships in which states, federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, and others with an interest in conservation cooperate in whatever manner they deem most effective. As such, LCCs are free to adopt whatever principles governing the development, sharing, and use of information they think appropriate. However, the members of the State-Federal Implementation Group agree that the principles embodied in a January 3, 2011, memorandum entitled “Aligning the Deployment and Use of Landscape Assessment Information and Approaches for Management Benefit Along the Idaho-Montana Divide and the Greater Yellowstone Area” represents a well-considered approach that may serve as a useful model for similar undertakings by other LCCs. Accordingly, the members of the State-Federal Implementation Group will bring that memorandum to the attention of their agency representatives participating in other LCCs and encourage them to consider whether adoption of similar principles would be useful to them. (For ease of reference, the memorandum from the Great Northern LCC is attached as an addendum to this agreement.) Furthermore, the SFIG recognizes that local and regional sharing of information between state and federal governments, and others, regularly occurs. Thus, the high level agreement established in the 2009 MOU and this agreement are not intended to pre-empt or


otherwise limit the flexibility of such initiatives relative to sharing of data, other analyses and associated costs.

5. REAs represent an effort that could benefit from closer coordination with the efforts of the states to develop DSSs. Accordingly, BLM and the relevant state agencies should fully explore all practical means to improve coordination, reduce duplication of effort, and promote state and federal cooperation in the further develop of such REAs. Because REAs will be used in BLM's planning processes, BLM will offer the relevant states the opportunity to review REAs before they are finalized.
6. The state members of the SFIG have expressed an interest in exploring how the DSSs the states are now developing can play a useful role in the Forest Service's National Planning Rule. Accordingly, the Forest Service agrees to explore that issue in greater detail with such state members as individual National Forests implement their new Forest Plans under the new Planning Rule, and to closely consider comments on state authority and wildlife information that may be submitted within the draft planning rule comment period.
7. Similarly, the SFIG will regularly discuss the potential use of state-level DSSs and related information for use by CSCs and other similar federal planning activities and encourage such use when appropriate.
8. Although the June 15, 2009, MOU pertaining to important wildlife corridors and crucial wildlife habitats explicitly acknowledged the right of the parties to carry out or participate in similar activities with other public or private agencies, it is nevertheless highly desirable that related initiatives of any agency be planned and undertaken with consideration of the staff funding, and practical constraints of other agencies to participate in or contribute information to such other initiatives. Further, it is recognized that, in a time of severe financial stress for the states, as new federal initiatives further strain states' ability to engage and contribute, a complete, synthesized and well-coordinated network of DSSs can eliminate unneeded redundancy and improve efficiency for both state and federal agencies. Accordingly, it is agreed that the parties will seek to increase efficiency of information requests, improve coordination of meetings, and in general, work to implement continuously improved practices to create a better environment for coordination and collaboration.

9. The states and the federal agencies agree that implementation of this agreement is essential to achieving the purpose of the June 15, 2009 MOU. The following actions are committed to:


- This agreement will be transmitted by the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, or Under Secretary in USDA and DOI to relevant agency Directors.
- This agreement will be transmitted by the Governors or Wildlife Council leadership to state wildlife agency staff.
- The SFIG will meet regularly, in conjunction with WGWC meetings, to monitor ongoing coordination across relevant state and federal initiatives. Ongoing discussions should include:
 - Identification of specific opportunities to reduce duplication of effort, create efficiencies and ensure the development of complementary mapping products;
 - Recognition and sharing across the region of successful approaches for agency to agency coordination of data and processes;
 - Establishment of appropriate forums for technical staff to engage in the development of DSSs – including data sharing and edge matching across political jurisdictions; and
 - Consideration and support for the use of state wildlife DSS information by BLM in their REAs and by the Forest Service in their National Planning Rule and Integrated Resource and Protection Strategies.

Agreed to this 20th day of June, 2011:


Michael Bean
U.S. Dept. of the Interior


Anne Zimmermann
U.S. Forest Service


John Harja
State of Utah
WGWC Chairman


John Mankowski
State of Washington
WGWC Vice Chairman

Attachment A

ALIGNING THE DEPLOYMENT AND USE OF LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT INFORMATION AND APPROACHES FOR MANAGEMENT BENEFIT ALONG THE IDAHO – MONTANA DIVIDE AND THE GREATER YELLOWSTONE AREA JANUARY 4, 2011

FINAL

INTRODUCTION

As technology has increased the ability to exchange and use information, the opportunity to collaborate exists when ecological boundaries, as well as administrative and political boundaries, overlap. A case for this collaboration can be demonstrated by the Western Governors' Association (WGA) efforts to develop pilot projects for compatible, landscape-scale Decision Support System (DSS), the U.S. Department of Interior's (DOI) Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCC) and Rapid Eco-regional Assessments (REA); and Integrated Resource and Protection Strategy (IRPS) of the U.S. Forest Service's Northern Region. The DSS effort will be used by states to identify fish and wildlife information including crucial habitats and wildlife linkages and corridors; the LCC effort is intended to provide a coordinating framework for support of science and information that informs a collective vision for landscape conservation in the face of landscape stressors for efforts such as the WGA DSS's; REAs are intended to synthesize natural resource conservation information in order to develop an all-lands synthesis and assessment to assist the Bureau of Land Management in land management decision making; and IRPS will support the U.S. Forest Service with land management decision making.

Individually, these efforts demonstrate approaches that reflect emerging conservation principles and take advantage of modern technology to: 1) work across jurisdictions and boundaries and 2) improve the use and dissemination of landscape assessment information for decision making. Overlapping in nature and scope, these efforts run the risk of being competitive, duplicative, and inefficient as many of the same data and information are required for each project to be successful. Alternatively, these efforts present an unprecedented opportunity for collaboration among conservation organizations and agencies that has the potential to increase effectiveness and accountability towards a greater public benefit. Such is the risk and potential presented in the area roughly represented along the Idaho-Montana border/Greater Yellowstone Area. The success of these projects will depend on clarifying the authority for managing fish and wildlife resources and establishing a consensus on roles and responsibilities.

REQUEST

The Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative Steering Committee (GNLCCSC) recognizes the need to make landscape level state and federal assessment projects collaborative rather than competitive or duplicative. The GNLCCSC has requested these partners and projects develop a recommended strategy(ies) to insure the mutual success of these efforts. In order for these large-scale projects to be successful and

complimentary, trust between state and federal agencies, needs to be established and maintained. State authority for managing most fish and wildlife must be respected, as does federal authority for managing habitat on federal lands. State DSSs were intended to promote a close partnership between state wildlife and federal agencies and were designed to generate a consistent source of crucial wildlife habitat and corridor data at a landscape scale across the western region. DSSs will promote the conservation objectives of each state, therefore federal investment in DSS development will inform and strengthen state input into any efforts connected with the federal landscape conservation initiatives.

Initiatives and policies that approach transboundary natural resource management issues should be complimentary and synergistic and provide specific guidance on how to achieve an integrated and collaborative adaptive management approach shared by natural resource agencies and stakeholders. This agreement provides a framework to assist in coordinating information sources, approaches, and methodologies, of geographically overlapping efforts within the GNLCC.

By coordinating and understanding the scope and information needs of each effort, individual projects can benefit by not duplicating work completed or planned in other efforts, and focus resources on data gaps or other needed information. These efficiencies exist for fish and wildlife information, landscape disturbance history, land cover information, and other data themes. For example, as those with the primary trust and legal obligations to manage fish and wildlife in the United States, state agencies most often are the collector, repository, and custodian of raw and refined fish and wildlife data and information that supports decision making for the management of fish and wildlife regardless of private or public land ownership.

The goal of the partnership is to insure these efforts work closely together so they are not duplicative, the efforts produce consistent and complimentary products, and to effectively and efficiently use information for decision making among respective agencies. Currently the partners are operating under an existing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU; June 2009) between the WGA and the Departments of Interior, Agriculture, and Energy. The MOU states that these Departments would assist the WGA and the western states in creating DSSs “that develop, coordinate, make consistent and integrate quality data about wildlife, corridors, and crucial habitat across landscapes.” The states in turn, are committed to collaborating with the federal agencies on their landscape-scale efforts. However, a framework must be in place to identify state and federal agencies’ roles and responsibilities and how individual landscape approaches are structured to be supportive and not duplicative. Collaboration among these projects will be implemented within the following basic framework.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Analyzed fish and wildlife data layers including crucial areas and corridors and fitting to scale, that are used in these collaborative efforts will be compiled and analyzed by the states from data provided by state and federal agencies and non-

governmental organizations (NGOs). The process and products developed will be peer reviewed by state and federal agencies, tribal governments, NGOs, and other stakeholders as identified recognizing the states authority. An opportunity to comment on and suggest modifications to the state driven process/products will be given, and if modifications to the products offer improvement towards accuracy and reliability, changes will be made. The federal efforts will incorporate state-developed fish and wildlife related spatial products into their DSSs and/or where data layers are not available, the states and federal agencies will work collaboratively to create them in a timely manner.

- Federal agencies will use data collected internally and externally and utilize their expertise to create spatial products on risks to and vulnerabilities of natural resources including wildlife, habitats, and corridors. State wildlife agencies will participate in the development of these spatial layers but will recognize that these federal agencies have the unique capacity to do this, and states will incorporate the federally developed risk and vulnerability spatial products into their DSSs.
- Coordinating the absorption of fish and wildlife information from the DSSs into federal products and absorbing risk and vulnerability information from federal REAs and LCCs into state DSSs will require addressing technical challenges including determining appropriate scales, technological foundations, and other necessary structural alignment.
- The state and federal products that are developed utilizing these datasets will not compete with one another as they will be using the same data layers, even though the intent of a system or its purpose may vary. State and Federal agencies will strive to avoid duplicative or competing state and federal products on public web sites. Agreements must be reached on what will be deployed prior to public release.
- Respect for time, management, and capacity must be understood between the agencies. There must be more efficient involvement between efforts (i.e. one meeting for all federal efforts in a region).

These 5 concepts will be piloted in the Idaho/Montana/Wyoming border area. This area is included in the WGA Idaho/Montana Pilot, the WGA Wyoming Pilot, the BLM Middle Rockies REA and the GNLCC. While each project has their own goals and objectives, partners agree to pilot a variety of collaborative approaches that will include but not compromise the original intent of each project. These include:

- Identify project values, cross-project values, and associated datasets required/desired.
- Identify common species for each project; determine species occurrence data availability and methodologies for fish and wildlife distribution models including wildlife corridors/linkages.
- Develop transboundary data layers with regional compatibility related to fish, wildlife, habitats, change agents, and risk assessment models.
- Incorporate climate change and other landscape level information and assessments downscaled to appropriate scales.

- Identify what gaps in data, assessments, or other decision support elements that may be filled as updates occur and information is refined.
- Define how data will be compiled and integrated among overlapping efforts for maximum benefits.

COLLABORATIVE TEAM

The following representatives have been named by their agencies to represent their projects and agencies and implement the problem solving steps within the describe roles and responsibilities. This collaborative team and its members will be responsible for devising collaborative strategies to insure the goal described here is successful. The collaborative team will consist of representatives from the USFS, BLM, MFWP, IDFG, WGFD, the WGA, USFWS and GNLCC.