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Route To:

Subject: Mapping of Wildlife Corridors and Habitat

To: Regional Foresters, R-1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10

On June 15, 2009, the Departments of the Interior, Agriculture, Energy, and the Western Governors' Association (WGA) signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to coordinate the identification and mapping of wildlife corridors and crucial habitat (enclosed). On June 20, 2011, an associated follow-up agreement was signed to implement the MOU (enclosed). The WGA Wildlife Council has coordinated the development of the Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool (CHAT) among the western States to conserve important wildlife habitats.

The purpose of the CHAT is to provide a new environmental planning tool to ensure that State wildlife crucial habitat and corridor information is readily available in a geographic information system and considered throughout the environmental planning processes. Large-scale planning efforts, such as transportation corridors and energy development and transmission routes, may have impacts to fish and wildlife habitat, and would benefit from CHAT information. Benefits of the CHAT include consistent interpretation of habitat across administrative boundaries, a single go-to source of State information, reduction in duplicate inventories and monitoring programs databases and maps, as well as improvement in intergovernmental communication.

In the 2011 America's Great Outdoors report, the White House 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." The CHAT contributes to this principle.

I encourage Forests and Grasslands to consider CHAT information as we implement the new planning rule and other large-scale planning efforts. Using CHAT information will enhance coordination with the States, ease data acquisition during the assessment phase, and provide context for monitoring important corridor function and crucial habitat condition. The CHAT is completed in Alaska, Arizona, California, Montana, Washington, Wyoming, and the Southern Great Plains. A complete Western region-wide CHAT is slated for 2013. The Bureau of Land Management also issued Instruction Memorandum No. 2012-039 encouraging the agencies' use of CHAT information during environmental planning.

CHAT information can be accessed at <http://www.westgov.org/initiatives/wildlife>. Please contact Anne Zimmermann, Watershed, Fish, Wildlife, Air, and Rare Plants Director, at 202-205-1676 or azimmermann@fs.fed.us for additional information.

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Enclosures

