

**Western Governors' Wildlife Council**  
***Work Plan***  
**January 2012 --- January 2013**

**WILDLIFE COUNCIL MISSION STATEMENT**

The Wildlife Council works to identify key wildlife corridors and crucial wildlife habitats in the West, as well as to develop and coordinate policy options and tools for conserving those landscapes. With this aim, the Council strives to provide a public, user friendly online tool with consistent and region-wide information on crucial habitats for fish and wildlife, for all interested parties to use to assess landscapes and connectivity while better informing land use decisions.

**WILDLIFE COUNCIL OBJECTIVES**

- Develop and coordinate policy options for conserving crucial wildlife habitats and key wildlife corridors.
- Improve analysis of landscape-scale energy, land use and transportation projects as well as land conservation and climate adaptation strategies by providing prioritized information through individual state-level tools and a regional-level Western Wildlife Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool (CHAT).
- Integrate customers and other stakeholders into the development, maintenance and roll out of the CHAT both at the state and regional level.
- Seek widespread use of CHAT so that decision makers at all levels rely on it to better inform planning, while providing healthy and productive landscapes.
- Ensure federal, state and local agencies consult CHAT and integrate its wildlife information early into land management, energy/transmission or transportation planning processes.
- Seek resources for internal and external state agency efforts to develop and maintain the CHAT and to support regional compatibility efforts.

## **WILDLIFE COUNCIL BACKGROUND**

In June 2008, the Western Governors adopted the “Wildlife Corridors Initiative Report.”<sup>1</sup> This report was developed through a multi-state collaborative effort that included six separate working groups, each of which was charged with developing findings and recommendations on various aspects of wildlife corridors and crucial habitat.

In adopting the report, the Governors established the Western Governors’ Wildlife Council (WGWC) “for the purpose of coordinating and overseeing implementation of the report, so that we can identify key wildlife corridors and crucial wildlife habitats in the West, and conserve these lands—and the vast wildlife species that depend upon them—for future generations.” This purpose was reaffirmed with the adoption of WGA Resolution 10-10<sup>2</sup>, when Governors set a goal of 2013 for the public display of crucial wildlife habitat and corridor information across the region.

## **WGWC WORKPLAN FOR 2012-2013**

The proposed Work Plan below continues to draw heavily from the WGWC’s initial direction from the Governors with some adjustments based on the work of the Council over the last year and other developments, primarily the Department of Energy resources obtained by WGA.

### ***Task I***

#### ***Coordinate Development of the Western Wildlife Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool (CHAT) and Further Develop and Implement DOE-Funded Projects***

- A) Continue to assess region-wide needs for geospatial wildlife data and recommend strategic action. The system of consistent protocols and funding priorities established by the WGWC (see CHAT White Paper) will help guide state-level investments by highlighting areas that require extra attention for wildlife habitat and corridor conservation.
- B) Continue to guide and direct state agency staff in their technical effort to identify crucial habitats, including corridors, in a regionally compatible fashion as commonly articulated in the CHAT White Paper. WGA and WGWC members will support at the highest level the progress of this work within state agencies, and will seek future funding availability for that work beyond remaining DOE resources.

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<sup>1</sup> The Wildlife Council home page and the *Wildlife Corridors Initiative Report* can be found at: <http://www.westgov.org/initiatives/wildlife>.

<sup>2</sup> WGA policy resolution 10-10, *Conserving Wildlife Corridors and Crucial Wildlife Habitat in the West*, can be found at: <http://www.westgov.org/policies>.

- 1) By November 2012 each state through the CHAT projects will; 1) Complete development of Tier 1 data and edge matching (at the species level where possible with current project partners, and at the aggregated crucial habitat level where possible with other neighboring states); 2) Apply crucial habitat definitions to data in a compatible manner; 3) Continue to build and improve upon individual state CHATs; and, 4) Provide assistance to WGA in conjunction with development of the west-wide CHAT.
  - 2) WGA, with assistance from state technical staff, will develop options for constructing and maintaining a west-wide CHAT. Technical experts will be consulted to help understand the level of effort and actions necessary, specifically considering factors of efficiency, cost and effectiveness. WGA and state technical staff will generate a set of preliminary options for the Council to consider for displaying crucial habitat in a west-wide CHAT, as directed in the CHAT White Paper.
  - 3) State CHAT project leads will work in a coordinated fashion to develop west-wide products or processes to support every state's effort to identify crucial habitat. In individual states are expected to, at a minimum, review regional products to ensure their suitability in their state. Additionally, individual states may need to conduct additional data development and will certainly have to conduct prioritization activities to identify crucial habitat in a regionally-compatible manner.
  - 4) State project leads and WGA staff will report regularly to the Council on the progress of the west-wide efforts, and a presentation will be delivered on regional products or processes for final approval by the Council.
  - 5) CHAT projects will be undertaken in a transparent fashion and will seek formal and informal partnerships to accomplish the objectives of the pilots with federal agencies, local governments, tribes and other stakeholders.
- C) In establishing the west-wide CHAT, Council members and state agency staff will build on existing efforts to develop and display data, identifying efficiencies.
- D) The Council will include climate change concerns as a central part of its CHAT development and other efforts. To that end the Council will support research to understand climate change impacts on wildlife corridors and crucial habitat, and will take steps accordingly to support climate adaptation planning and projects.
- E) Council members will report semi-annually to their colleagues on progress toward achieving CHAT development in their states, and securing necessary funding to support long-term maintenance and use of the systems.

#### **Timeline:**

- August 2011 – October 2012 – Specific tasks under 1.B will be accomplished

- The expectation is that from November 2012 to December 2013 (generally considered Phase 3 of this effort) the focus of activity will be to knit each state's crucial habitat layers together in the west-wide CHAT and continue state efforts to improve upon their data. Some states may choose to work towards developing an individual state CHAT.

## ***Task II***

### ***Establish Policies, Mechanisms and Agreements that Conserve Crucial Wildlife Habitats and Key Wildlife Corridors***

- A) Work with the Council-established State/Federal Implementation Group and other relevant federal agencies to implement the June 2011 agreement, established under the 2009 MOU between Western Governors and Secretaries of Agriculture, Energy and the Interior. Activities will include establishing necessary policy options that 1) support conservation of crucial wildlife habitats and key wildlife corridors; and 2) require use of the CHATs for federal actions that may affect crucial wildlife habitat and wildlife corridors as determined by the states. A goal of such policies is to ensure that Governors, under their cooperating agency status, work with federal land managers to facilitate earlier and more effective communication among interested parties in landscape planning efforts, as well as site-specific NEPA analyses.
- B) The Council will review policy recommendations from the 2008 *Wildlife Corridors Initiative Report* and consider which recommendations are relevant for inclusion in a strategic policy implementation plan. The Council will then work with the Stakeholder Advisory Group to review these recommendations and identify actions necessary to implement them. The policy implementation plan will focus on the Wildlife Council's broad mission to identify key wildlife corridors and crucial wildlife habitats in the West, as well as to develop and coordinate policy options and tools for conserving those landscapes.
- C) Consider and share model Executive Orders and model statutes and regulations that require state and local governments to consider the impact of their proposed actions on crucial habitat and wildlife corridors, support conservation of crucial wildlife habitats and key wildlife corridors, and to use the CHATs when making land use decisions that affect crucial habitat or wildlife corridors.

**Timeline:** Ongoing

## ***Task III***

### ***Participate in WGA Regional Transmission Planning Processes***

- A) The Council will maintain a representative on the WGA Transmission Planning Steering Committee to identify appropriate opportunities for wildlife information to be considered in their efforts. The WGA Steering Committee efforts will include (i) identify relevant policy-based input to be incorporated into the transmission scenarios to be studied; and, (ii) inform the technical process about the economic and environmental implications of alternative electricity supply futures and their associated transmission needs. To be most useful, wildlife information provided by the Council will need to be geographically specific and provided at critical points in the technical work when assumptions are being made on the location of future generation and transmission facilities. Ultimately, CHATs will help inform this kind of planning work in the future and the build out of future transmission lines, however crucial habitat data layers currently available in many states can act as surrogate information.

**Timeline:** Ongoing

#### ***Task IV***

##### ***Washington, D.C. Opportunities and Fundraising***

- A) The Council will monitor Congressional and Administration activities and consider strategic fund raising opportunities for CHAT development. Appropriation bills and legislation such as the Farm Bill, climate change bills, energy bill, and the transportation bill will be monitored and considered. Timely letters, visits and phone calls from the Council to Congressional members and the Administration will be considered. Private foundation fundraising will also be undertaken to support the Council and its activities.
- B) The WGWC may help to inform decision makers regarding federal legislation or regulation if opportunities arise to advance policies consistent with the WGA Resolution 10-10 and the *Wildlife Corridors Initiative Report* (and the Council Charter regarding lobbying).

**Timeline:** Ongoing

#### ***Task VI***

##### ***Interacting with the Public***

The Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) will be the primary vehicle for the Council as a whole to interact with key interest groups. SAG membership may be adjusted to ensure representation from key constituencies. Initial requests for assistance from the Council to the SAG include:

- A) Assist the Council in implementing the approved communications plan targeted at effectively messaging and outreaching to key “users” of CHATs, seeking feedback from constituency groups;
- B) Provide feedback to enhance the Council’s white paper on developing a regional decision support system framework;
- C) Assist the Council and individual state agency representatives developing CHATs with engagement of relevant local/technical experts;
- D) Highlight opportunities for Council engagement on wildlife issues of regional interest;
- E) Explore opportunities to partner with SAG member organizations and/or their colleagues on CHAT mapping or other wildlife activities in individual states or groups of states.

**Timeline:** Communication plan implementation beginning Fall 2011, other activities ongoing to prepare for 2013 public release.

## ***Task V***

### ***Interacting with WGA***

- A) Address tasks as requested by WGA Staff Council. While there are no tasks presently assigned to the Council, previous tasks included WGA Resolution 11-9, *Sage-grouse and Sagebrush Conservation*, which directed the Council to develop a summary of the state and local policies and initiatives underway to protect sage grouse and sage grouse habitat for review at the 2011 WGA Winter Meeting. The Council concluded this task in December 2011.
- B) Through the Council, the states will annually report to the WGA Staff Council on their progress to achieve recommendations within WGA Resolution 10-10 and the *Wildlife Corridors Initiative Report*

**Timeline:** Ongoing  
Report to Governors at 2012 WGA Annual Meeting.

### **REFERENCE: 2008 Wildlife Corridors Initiative Report**

Guided by the recommendations contained in the 2008 Wildlife Corridors Initiative report, the Governors identified priorities for action by the WGWC that formed the basis for its initial Work Plan. The current Work Plan retains and builds upon these initial priorities:

- Coordinate and implement steps that foster establishment of a “Decision Support System” (DSS) within each state. Coordination shall include:

- Further develop and refine definitions for “Key Wildlife Corridors” and “Crucial Wildlife Habitats”
  - Ensure portability of definitions so that they extend beyond, and can be operationalized across, political boundaries as appropriate, while maintaining flexibility that recognizes localized needs and conditions.
  - Identify policies and best practices for avoiding, minimizing and mitigating impacts to wildlife corridors and crucial habitats.
  - Support research to understand climate change impacts on wildlife corridors and crucial habitat, and taking steps accordingly to support adaptation to climate change.
- Seek to establish policies, mechanisms and agreements that ensure information from state-led Decision Support Systems is considered early in planning and decision-making processes, whether federal, tribal, state or local, in order to preserve these sensitive landscapes through avoidance, minimization, and mitigation.
  - The WGA Western Renewable Energy Zone project (WREZ) will be a pilot for applying the wildlife corridors recommendations. In particular, WGA, in coordination with the WGWC, should ensure that development of the renewable energy zones 1) includes identification of relevant wildlife corridors and crucial habitat from the relevant state DSS, and 2) considers appropriate policies and actions to avoid, minimize, or mitigate impacts in these sensitive areas.
  - Seek funding from state and federal sources, and from private foundations to support the WGWC. Regarding federal funding, there are many recommendations in the report that point to Congressional authorizations and appropriations. WGWC should develop a Congressional strategy related to funding for wildlife corridor and crucial habitat issues, targeting such federal legislation as the Farm Bill, climate change bills, the energy bill and the transportation bill.