

Western Governors Wildlife Council
18-Month Work Plan
January 2010 through June 2011

WILDLIFE COUNCIL BACKGROUND

On June 29, 2008, the Western Governors adopted the “Wildlife Corridors Initiative Report.” 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.”

The mission of the WGWC, consistent with WGA Resolution 07-01 and the governors’ adoption of the wildlife corridors report, is to identify key wildlife corridors and crucial wildlife habitats in the West and to develop and coordinate implementation of needed policy options and tools for conserving those landscapes.

WGWC 2009 WORK PLAN BACKGROUND

Guided by the recommendations contained in the Wildlife Corridors Initiative report, the Governors identified the following initial priorities for action by the WGWC that formed the basis for its 2009 Work Plan:

- 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.

The proposed Work Plan below continues to draw heavily from these four items 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.

PROPOSED 2010-JUNE 2011 WORKPLAN

Once adopted by the Wildlife Council, this work plan will be in effect from January 2010 through June 2011. This 18-month time frame allows the Council's work plan to align with the election of a new Chair of the Council. The Council's Charter calls for a new Chair of the Council to be elected at the first meeting of the Council after the WGA Annual Meeting that typically occurs in June.

Task I

Coordinate Development of a Regionally Compatible GIS-based Wildlife Decision Support System (DSS) and Further Develop and Implement DOE-Funded Pilot 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 will help guide state-level investments by highlighting areas that require extra attention for wildlife habitat and corridor conservation.
- B) In establishing the DSS, WGWC will build on existing efforts and to use data from state wildlife agencies, state natural heritage programs, federal agencies, tribes, local governments, conservation NGOs, and industry that meet accepted data quality standards.

- C) The WGWC will include climate change concerns as a central part of its DSS development and other efforts, and to that end, the WGWC will support research to understand climate change impacts on wildlife corridors and crucial habitat, and will take steps accordingly to support adaptation to climate change, i.e., climate adaptation planning and projects.
- D) To help accomplish the objectives above, Council members will be responsible for the conduct of wildlife pilot projects with funding from the Department of Energy that is being received by WGA. WGA and the WGWC will establish criteria for selecting appropriate pilot projects. A number of criteria and other factors are currently being considered to apply for and implement pilot proposals.
- 1) Pilots will develop a site-specific suite of consistent protocols (e.g., standards for defining and collecting data for shared use) that help guide future state- and regional-level investments in DSS by highlighting areas that are important for wildlife habitat and connectivity conservation. Pilots will develop site-specific standards and desired future conditions of wildlife habitat or corridors on the ground. Pilot projects will demonstrate how each state's DSS could ultimately compile information, assure data quality, and make the data, models and analyses available at useful scales to analyze proposed energy, transportation and other land use projects in terms of on-site impacts, regional context and a changing climate.
 - 2) Council members will report regularly to the Council on the progress of their pilot efforts and a final report of finding from each pilot project will also be developed.
 - 3) Pilot 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
 - 4) The DSS Subgroup will serve the Council as a state technical team and will work on activities as requested by the Council. The first activity for the DSS Subgroup in 2010 is to review proposed pilot project and refine them as necessary to ensure that collectively they will further DSS development in the region. The DSS Subgroup will also identify regional technical needs of the states in developing DSSs, including technical edge-matching capabilities and consistent technical platforms, and will work to fill those needs. The DSS Subgroup will consider the offer from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to host a workshop for the states on regional DSS development and will make a recommendation to the Council on the subject of and timing for such a workshop.
 - 5) A technical contractor may be retained to ensure compatible platforms and consistent data protocols are used within individual pilot studies and that these efforts are then consistent among all of the pilot studies being conducted by WGA

states. A “Circuit Rider” would help ensure future state-level investments in DSS will lead to a regionally compatible network of systems.

- E) Council members will report annually to their colleagues on progress toward achieving DSS development in their states and necessary funding.

Timeline:

Work on DSS development will be ongoing.

Pilots must achieve significant outcomes within 12-18 months of WGA’s award of a contract for resources to states.

Task II

Establish Policies, Mechanisms and Agreements that Ensure Application of the DSS in Relevant Planning and Decision-Making Processes

- A) 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, and to use the state DSS when making land use decisions that affect crucial habitat or wildlife corridors.
- B) Work with the Council-established State/Federal Implementation Group and other relevant federal agencies to establish policies that require use of the state’s information (each state’s DSS) 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 site-specific NEPA analyses.

Timeline: Ongoing

Task III

Participate in WGA Regional Transmission Planning Processes

- A) The WGWC will have a representative on the WGA Transmission Planning Steering Committee to identify appropriate areas 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 WGWC 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, DSSs in each state will help inform this kind of future work and the build out of future transmission plans.

- B) As part of the Western Renewable Energy Zones Phase IV work, WGA will organize a series of public forums for permitting entities to identify actions to improve coordination of permit reviews and to respond to federal legislation. The WGWC will provide information on how the state DSS can inform transmission permit reviews.

Timeline:

Reviewing state input into scenario development is currently scheduled for the 3rd Quarter of 2010 and the 1st Quarter of 2012.

A first interconnection-wide transmission plan or plans will be completed in June 2011, a second plan will be conducted in June 2013 and additional plans will be developed every two years thereafter.

Siting forums are currently scheduled for 2011.

Task IV

Washington, D.C. Opportunities and Fundraising

- A) The WGWC will monitor Congressional and administration activities and consider strategic fund raising opportunities for DSS 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 Wildlife Corridors Report (and the WGWC Charter regarding lobbying).

Timeline: Ongoing

Task V

Interacting with WGA

- A) Address tasks as requested by WGA or by WGA Staff Council. These presently include:
 - 1) At its winter 2009 meeting WGA's Staff Advisory Council tasked the WGWC to review and make recommendations on the draft North American Sagebrush Ecosystem Conservation Act (NASECA) that a Task Force affiliated with WAFWA has developed. The WGWC will review this proposed legislation in early 2010 and will submit its recommendations. Additionally, at the request of the Staff Advisory Council, the WGWC will develop a roadmap and timetable for

state actions should the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service make a ruling on the listing of the sage grouse

2) Update the current wildlife policy resolution for consideration at the 2010 WGA Annual Meeting. The current wildlife policy resolution 07-01 “Protecting Wildlife Migration Corridors and Crucial Wildlife Habitat in the West” is set to expire in June 2010 and the Council will propose revisions to WGA’s Staff Advisory Council.

B) Through the WGWC, the states will annually report to the WGA on their progress to achieve the Wildlife Corridors Initiative recommendations.

Timeline: Ongoing

NASECA legislation recommendations to Staff Council in January 2010 and a roadmap should a listing occur by February 2010.

A proposal for a revised WGA policy resolution will be prepared for delivery to Staff Council by April 2010.

Task VI

Interacting with the Public

The newly formed Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) will be the primary vehicle for the Council as a whole to interact with the public. Initial requests for assistance from the Council to the SAG will include:

- A) Provide feedback to enhance the Council’s white paper on developing a regional decision support system framework;
- B) Assist the Council and individual members with feedback including sharing relevant data and information, coordination and communications as they develop and implement DOE-funded pilot projects;
- C) Highlight opportunities for Council engagement on wildlife issues of regional interest; and
- D) Assist the Council with communicating its work plan and products to SAG member colleagues and constituents and with seeking feedback from them.

Timeline: Ongoing