



Are we **Serious** about investing in **Wildlife** Conservation?

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For years I have worked at the national and local levels on sportsmen's issues and long promoted the American Wildlife Conservation Partner's recommendations within their *Wildlife for the 21st Century*, Volumes I, II, and III, as priorities for the conservation community.

Beyond access, wildlife management and habitat, sportsmen want certainty for conservation. The biggest challenge in obtaining certainty for wildlife conservation is increasing public and private funding to make investments. This issue was discussed at length during the 2008 White House Conference on North American Wildlife Policy and is an action item identified in the Recreational Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Plan, developed as a result of the conference. Implementation of the plan is a primary mission for the Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council, a federal advisory committee which makes recommendations to the secretaries of the Interior and U.S. Department of Agriculture on behalf of the conservation community. The funding challenge remains.

In an environment where competition for funding and resources is at its peak, public-private partnerships are a vital component to long-term funding for wildlife conservation. With all of the negative media attention surrounding impacts to wildlife from energy development in the West and the continual cry for "responsible energy development," creating partnerships with the energy industry may not be first in mind for the conservation community. I argue that the energy industry is not only an obvious partner for wildlife conservation, but a necessary one.

More than ever, industry must deal with political, economic, and public pressures to produce more energy with less impact to wildlife, while maneuvering through an uncertain regulatory process that discourages long-term investments. While the political and emotional debate continues regarding what mix of energy sources the United States should rely on, one thing is for certain: sportsmen want to see a balance between energy production and the conservation of wildlife in the West.

What constitutes "balance" regarding energy development depends on who you talk to in the conservation community. Some protest or go to court. Nineteen protests, two lawsuits and one appeal were filed by a "sportsmen's" organization between 2007-2008, with

legal fees of over a half million dollars (money that did not go on the ground), creating distrust of sportsmen within the energy industry and resulting in the loss of job opportunities, budget declines for local economies, and less collaboration among the entities that manage and use public lands.

Others will tell you that mitigating impacts from energy development in the West means striking an appropriate balance between ranching, production agriculture, residential development, and wildlife. I work on two projects that exemplify how innovative sportsmen's organizations have helped spearhead efforts with energy companies—without lawsuits or protests—to create immediate, effective, and efficient on-the-ground results for wildlife conservation.

Wyoming produces more energy for America than any other state. In late 2008, the Green River Valley Land Trust (now the Wyoming Land Trust) collaborated with the energy industry, sportsmen's organizations, agencies, and others to launch the Corridor Conservation Campaign (CCC) and began working on mitigation in Sublette County, one of the core energy producing areas in the state.

The CCC is a groundbreaking five-year, 500-mile effort to work with landowners to install cost-free wildlife- and

livestock-friendly fencing in areas critical to the migration of pronghorn, mule deer, elk, and moose. This project would not be possible without the partnership of the energy industry, which contributed 57 percent of the \$5 million the trust raised in 2009, with significant contributions continuing in 2010. Among the sportsmen organizations involved, the Mule Deer Foundation, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and the Pope and Young Club have financially sponsored the CCC. Safari Club International provided stealth cameras that have been used to track the movement of the animals through the corridor and document the success of the effort.

The CCC is currently focusing on the Sublette mule deer migration route between winter and summer ranges to allow for unimpeded seasonal movement and to maintain the successful management of the herd, which recently showed a decline in the Pinedale Anticline Project Area. The work of the CCC to eliminate barriers to migration can help reduce species mortality. Energy operators in the area will contribute \$36 million toward mitigation over time, some of which will hopefully go toward the CCC.

In Colorado, subdivisions of large ranches and fire suppression policies have

resulted in a decrease in big game migratory corridors and winter range. The Colorado Mule Deer Association (CMDA) launched its Molina and Battlement Creek Habitat Restoration initiatives on the Western Slope in 2009 to create or enhance big game habitat on public and private lands with funds donated by the energy industry, and leveraged with state wildlife grants and contributions from sportsmen's organizations. The effort is investing targeted funding from industry into wildlife corridors for habitat manipulation to increase wildlife populations and generate sound investments in wildlife conservation. This project would not be possible without the energy industry partnership.

The goals of this effort are to produce opportunities for access, and recruitment and retention of sportsmen, alleviate damage claims from private landowners to the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW), increase hunting license revenues, and assist federal land management agencies in implementing projects. To date, nearly half a million dollars have been committed to the projects, and industry partners are working closely with the CDOW to ensure the industry's efforts are recognized as mitigation for future development.

If the conservation community is ever to leverage long-term funding for its priorities, it must collaborate with partners who have "the will and the way" to invest where it matters most—not in the courtroom, but on the ground. Some in the conservation community have recognized this, a testament to which is support of the recent proposal to develop natural gas on the Roan Plateau in Colorado. The proposal included state-of-the-art technology, consultation, and mitigation planning with the CDOW and establishment of a conservation fund of up to \$50 million that would be administered by sportsmen for wildlife in Colorado. Unfortunately, however, the proposal remains in court, challenged by leaders in the environmental litigation business that appear to be more interested in funding lawyers than wildlife.

With the unending crusade to increase public and private funding for wildlife conservation—and the impacts that lack of funding is having on access, wildlife management and habitat—it seems to me that partnering with the energy industry can lead to certainty for conservation. Why aren't more sportsmen working with the entities that have the funding to invest in sportsmen's priorities? ■

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