

March 25, 2020

The Honorable Jared Polis  
Governor of Colorado  
State Capitol Building  
200 E. Colfax Ave., Rm. 136  
Denver, CO 80203

Dear Governor Polis,

We, the undersigned fish, wildlife and natural resources professionals have been dedicated to conserving, enhancing and responsibly managing America's fish and wildlife resources on both public and privately-owned lands and waters. Over the past few years, we have watched as the phenomena of large mammal migration has taken center stage in the science, policy and management interface. We are encouraged by recent policy actions taken by both federal and state governments to conserve migration corridors in the West.

We very much appreciated your leadership and signing the Executive Order (EO) on "Conserving Colorado's Big Game Winter Range and Migration Corridors." We believe this Order will benefit state agency coordination and cooperation for managing and conserving mule deer, elk, pronghorn, and moose migration corridors, that in turn will benefit other wildlife that also use these corridors. The EO also brings renewed focus for constructing necessary wildlife crossings to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions.

In addition to Colorado's efforts, in February 2018, the Department of Interior (DOI) issued Secretarial Order 3362, which directs appropriate DOI bureaus to work in close partnership with 11 western states to enhance and improve the quality of large mammal winter range and migration corridor habitat on Federal lands. Indeed, your EO will help merge the states' commitments with those of the federal agencies and the shared trust responsibilities for our public wildlife resources.

The EO provides particular focus on safe wildlife passage and wildlife-vehicle collisions, which we agree is an important issue to address and resolve. We would point out, however, that wildlife migration and corridor conservation transcend well beyond wildlife-vehicle collisions and crossing structures. While not mutually exclusive, we feel it is important for policy- and decision-makers and the public to remember that wildlife corridors may not necessarily intersect highways and roads. Effective and necessary wildlife crossings may not always occur along established migration corridors either. It is important to ensure clarity when discussing the habitat needs of wildlife. Migration corridors and associated habitats used during seasonal movements – often called "stopover habitat" - are part of an animal and herd's overall habitat and home-range that cannot be managed in isolation, ignored or forgotten during management and conservation planning. The public often does not distinguish between these seasonal habitats, so to that end, we greatly appreciated the directive regarding public education and outreach and stakeholder engagement.

Human perturbations such as energy development, subdivisions, commercial development, and dispersed human recreation are known to disrupt wildlife migrations and can have long-lasting impacts. We anticipate potential conflicts with wildlife migrations that interface with all forms of energy development and other disturbances that disrupt or block animal movements. Ensuring migration movement and functionality may require the state wildlife agency to request leasing deferrals, possible no-surface-occupancy prescriptions, or implementation of special management recommendations for all forms of potential disturbance by federal and state land management agencies.

Secretary of the Interior Bernhardt has repeatedly stated that DOI and its agencies would defer to the states and their recommendations for managing migration corridors and other habitats, per S.O. 3362. The Secretary has honored such requests from the states where leasing deferrals in corridors, for example, requested by a Governor were granted. As such, we emphasize how important your office's support for ensuring the Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) recommendations are adhered to by the Bureau of Land Management. We appreciate your continued support for recommendations from CPW and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) - under their cooperating agency status with federal agencies - to ensure the functionality of corridors and all seasonal habitats for wildlife.

The EO also points out that, at least for activities coordinated by CPW and the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), no additional funding has been allocated for this initiative at present. Obviously, without additional resources, CPW and other agencies will have to utilize funds intended for other priorities to take on newly mandated initiatives. We encourage your office and Colorado legislators to work closely with DNR and CPW to ensure adequate funding is made available to support implementation of the EO while maintaining funding for other agency priorities.

Finally, we would point out that conservation is a long-term endeavor. To ensure that the current migration corridor initiative isn't simply a fad or flash-in-the-pan policy agenda, the state and federal departments and agencies, industry and private landowners all must have long-term, institutionalized support for corridor conservation. We strongly support the EO directive charging DNR to "identify policy, regulatory, and legislative opportunities to ensure the ongoing conservation of seasonal big game habitat and migration corridors." Long-term durability of policy and funding for big game winter range and migration corridor conservation that will transcend multiple Administrations at both the state and federal levels indeed will be critical for the future of big game populations in Colorado.

We again thank you for your leadership on large mammal seasonal habitat and migration corridor conservation in Colorado and are happy to assist you, your staff members and agencies as you move forward with your conservation efforts.

Respectfully,

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