

January 31, 2020

The Honorable Michelle Lujan Grisham  
Governor of New Mexico  
490 Old Santa Fe Trail, Room 400  
Santa Fe, NM 87501

Dear Governor Lujan Grisham,

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 legislative work to pass the Wildlife Corridors Act (herein referred to as "the Corridors Act") in New Mexico. This bill is the first of its kind in America. We are encouraged by this legislation as it should benefit state agency coordination and cooperation for managing and conserving migration corridors, especially regarding wildlife-vehicle collisions and priorities for constructing necessary wildlife crossings. In addition to state 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 big-game winter range and migration corridor habitat on Federal lands. These two policy actions affecting New Mexico, while different, have brought much needed and deserved attention and resources to these vital habitats for western big game animals like mule deer, elk, and pronghorn.

We understand current funding for planning and coordination under the Corridors Act is limited to transportation-related issues affecting wildlife migration. However, we feel it is important to note that wildlife migration and corridor conservation transcends 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.

Other components of the Corridors Act pertaining to monitoring protocol development, economic benefits, identifying other movement barriers, habitat use, habitat quality and developing a wide variety of maps will also require funding for completion of the plan outlined in the Act and its long-term implementation. Funding will likely have to come from outside of the State's game protection fund. Without additional resources, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF) will have to utilize funds intended for other agency priorities to take on newly mandated initiatives. We encourage New Mexico legislators to work closely with NMDGF and the New Mexico State Game Commission to ensure adequate funding is made available to support implementation of this program while maintaining funding for other agency priorities. The state should consider exploring ways to secure new sources of funding to support the Act and its long-term implementation, perhaps including general fund dollars.

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 or, ignored or forgotten during management and conservation planning. The public often does not distinguish between these seasonal habitats. In the effort to manage wildlife populations, all seasonal ranges and connectivity

between them must be addressed. Broad habitat management and restoration efforts will be needed to ensure the full suite of habitats are available in adequate supply and quality to sustain populations. To this end, it is critically important to determine what is and is not a migration corridor. This will require extensive data collection and that requires funding and collaboration. We encourage your office to support the NMDGF's endeavors and needs as they work to generate needed data in a scientifically credible manner. Such efforts take time to complete and it may take years before results and recommendations are available. Additionally, not all corridors or important areas will be identified and mapped with the latest technology, but that does not mean they are any less important. As such, we encourage the state to develop interim guidance and recommendations while data are being gathered to ensure appropriate management and protection of potentially unmapped corridors.

Human perturbations such as oil and gas development 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 request leasing deferrals, possible no-surface-occupancy prescriptions, or implementation of special management recommendations for all forms of potential disturbance by land management agencies including the State Land Office.

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, notably in Wyoming where leasing deferrals in corridors requested by the Governor were granted. As such, we emphasize how important your office's support for ensuring NMDGF recommendations are adhered to by the BLM and USFS. We encourage your continued support for recommendations from the NMDGF— under their cooperating agency status with federal agencies - to ensure the functionality of corridors and all seasonal habitats for wildlife.

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, and private landowners all must have long-term, institutionalized support for corridor conservation. We encourage the state of New Mexico to pursue all avenues that secure long-term support for conservation that will transcend multiple Administrations at both the state and federal levels.

We appreciate you considering our feedback on the largely bi-partisan supported issue of wildlife migration corridor conservation. We again thank you for your leadership on this issue in New Mexico and are happy to assist you and your staff members and agencies as you move forward with your conservation efforts.

Respectfully,

**Bennett A. Brown**, Ph.D., Retired Professional Wildlife Ecologist; 50 yrs in academic, federal, state and private wildlife research, natural resources conservation, and management; New Mexico resident

**William C. Dunn**, Ph.D. Principal, Big Picture Conservation, LLC, Environmental Consulting; Adjunct Faculty, New Mexico State University Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Conservation Ecology. 40 yrs of professional experience in private, state, and academic positions. New Mexico resident

**Brian L. Dykstra**, M.S. Wildlife Management  
Retired U.S Forest Service Southwestern Regional Wildlife Program Leader  
31 yrs experience in natural resource management; 7-year resident of New Mexico

**Randall Gray**, Certified Wildlife Biologist® Former National Wildlife Biologist, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, former Sage Grouse Initiative Coordinator with the Intermountain West Joint Venture; 37 yrs experience in natural resources management; New Mexico resident

**Alan Hamilton**, Ph.D. Executive Director, Rio Grande Return and Director for the North American Wetland Conservation Act Program with the New Mexico Wildlife Federation. New Mexico resident for 40 years

**Volney W. Howard, Jr.**, Ph.D. Wildlife Sciences, Certified Wildlife Biologist® Full Professor, Wildlife Sciences, NMSU, 33.5 yrs, 10 yrs private Wildlife Consultant, specializing in large ungulates and predator research; New Mexico resident

**Robert K. Murphy**, Ph.D. Biology and Wildlife Management. Former wildlife biologist for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Wildlife Refuge System; USFWS Division of Migratory Bird Management; university professor in biology and wildlife management; and (currently) Vice President of Eagle Environmental, Inc., Santa Fe (wildlife resource assessment and conservation planning). 33 yrs experience in wildlife and natural resources management/education. Resident of New Mexico for 11 yrs

**James M. Ramakka**, M.S. Wildlife Management, Certified Wildlife Biologist® Vice Chair NMDGF HSP Citizens Advisory Committee; Retired Bureau of Land Management National Wildlife Program Lead; 34 yrs experience as a BLM/FS Wildlife Biologist and Land Use Planner (22 yrs. in NM); 11 yrs experience as a consultant to wind energy and oil and gas companies and BLM, New Mexico resident

**Harley G. Shaw**, M.S. Wildlife Management, Certified Wildlife Biologist® Retired Research Biologist, Arizona Game and Fish Department 27 years; additional 29 years of experience as wildlife consultant and writer; Resident of SW New Mexico for 19 yrs

**Gail Tunberg**, B.S. Wildlife Biology and Rangeland Management; Founder and owner Tunberg Resources, LLP; Retired USDA Forest Service Southwestern Regional Wildlife Program Leader; Former Instructor USDI National Training Center. 38 yrs experience in wildlife habitat management and rangeland management, 28 years New Mexico resident

**Blair O. Wolf**, Ph.D. Professor of Biology, The University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM, 30 yrs experience in the biology and management of migratory birds and other wildlife. Resident of New Mexico for 20 yrs

**Edward B. Arnett**, Ph.D. Forest Sciences, Certified Wildlife Biologist® Chief Scientist, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership; 30 yrs experience in private, federal, academic and NGO wildlife research, management and conservation