

Jackson Hole News and Guide
Bridger-Teton protects pronghorn

By Cory Hatch, Jackson Hole, Wyo.
Date: June 3, 2008

Bridger-Teton National Forest Supervisor Kniffy Hamilton signed documents Saturday to protect a pronghorn migration corridor from Sublette County to Grand Teton National Park.

Using an overhead projector, Hamilton signed an amendment to the forest plan in front of a crowd of roughly 200 pronghorn fans at the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance's Party for the Pronghorn at Snow King Resort.

"We won't do anything to screw up the migration," Hamilton said at the signing, "and you can hold us to it."

The legally binding amendment won't change many current activities in the corridor, but it is designed to make sure future activities don't harm the migration.

The amendment could affect fencing and vegetation management such as prescribed burning, fuels reduction and aspen restoration. Any proposed actions in the corridor that require a National Environmental Policy Act analysis would also be subject to the amendment.

Bridger-Teton spokeswoman Mary Cernicek said Hamilton's next step is to try to convince other land-management agencies, wildlife agencies and private landowners to take similar action. Officials with Grand Teton National Park and the National Elk Refuge have already signed a pledge to protect the corridor.

"[Hamilton] is expanding the pledge now to get other partners in line to do what they can, when they can, to ensure that habitats remain connected," Cernicek said.

Key players could be the Bureau of Land Management's Pinedale office, as well as land trusts in both Teton and Sublette counties.

During the public comment period on the amendment, 19,400 people wrote e-mails and letters in favor of protecting the corridor.

Louise Lasley, public lands director for the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance, said protecting the pronghorn migration route is a first step toward recognizing the importance of habitat connections for other animals.

"Most certainly, the greatest value of this, beyond allowing sustained pronghorn migration, is the recognition of the importance of migration corridors nationwide," she said. "The directions given for management activities on the forest will not only benefit pronghorn movement but will advance better management practices for all species."

For more than 5,800 years, pronghorn have traveled 350 miles from summer range in Grand Teton National Park to winter range as far south as Rock Springs and back. In the spring, between 300 and 400 pronghorn travel at high speeds, up to 50 mph when fleeing predators, past Pinedale and into their summer range in the foothills and on the flats north of Jackson.

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