



COLORADO

**Department of
Natural Resources**

Executive Director's Office
1313 Sherman Street, Room 718
Denver, CO 80203

October 3, 2019

Mr. Scott Fitzwilliams
Forest Supervisor
White River National Forest
Supervisor's Office
900 Grand Ave
Glenwood Springs, CO 81601

Dear Supervisor Fitzwilliams,

On behalf of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources (DNR), we are grateful for the work you do and the partnership that exists between the U.S. Forest Service and the State of Colorado.

As you know, DNR has been engaged in the consideration and analysis of a proposed access road across National Forest land near Edwards to facilitate development of a new subdivision called Berlaimont Estates. Our prior comments acknowledge the impacts this access road would have on wildlife. We are writing to provide you with new information that was not available when we commented on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and that is relevant to your consideration of the proposal.

Recent Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) population counts show a considerable decline in post hunt estimates for game management unit 36 elk herds between 2005 and 2018. Additionally, there is information showing a meaningful correlation between habitat fragmentation and the resilience of elk populations – suggesting we may have reached a threshold of disturbance that undermines the ability of local elk populations to recover to historic levels.

In addition, on August 21, 2019, Governor Polis signed the enclosed Executive Order (EO) D 2019-011, which underscores the importance of conserving big-game wildlife corridors and winter range habitat in Colorado. We ask that you strongly take the EO into account as you consider the removal of the seasonal closure of the current road that protects important winter wildlife habitat, and also evaluate to what degree this action may set an undesirable precedent for future development proposals in the state.

Thank you for your additional consideration regarding this matter. Your service to Colorado and our public lands is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Dan Gibbs
Executive Director





D 2019 011

EXECUTIVE ORDER

Conserving Colorado's Big Game Winter Range and Migration Corridors

Pursuant to the authority vested in the Governor of the State of Colorado and, in particular, pursuant to Article IV, Section 2 of the Colorado Constitution, I, Jared Polis, Governor of the State of Colorado, hereby issue this Executive Order to conserve Colorado's big game winter range and migration corridors.

I. Background and Purpose

Colorado's natural environment and numerous native wildlife species contribute greatly to the economy and enhance Coloradans' quality of life. Sportsmen, outdoor enthusiasts, and tourists from across the world visit Colorado to experience our State's outdoor landscapes and abundant wildlife. Colorado boasts the largest Rocky Mountain elk herd in the world, which contains over 250,000 animals. The State is also home to significant populations of other iconic big game species like mule deer, bighorn sheep, pronghorn, moose, and numerous other endemic wildlife species. Simply put, wildlife is essential to Colorado's outdoor recreation economy and landscape heritage.

The conservation of big game migration corridors and seasonal habitat for big game has been a focus of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) for many years. The mission of CPW is to perpetuate the wildlife resources of the State, to provide a quality State parks system, and to provide enjoyable and sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities that educate and inspire current and future generations to serve as active stewards of Colorado's natural resources. To achieve this mission, CPW works to conserve habitat essential to the survival of the State's wildlife. Intact seasonal habitats, and the migratory routes that connect those habitats, are vital to ensuring that Colorado's wildlife populations continue to thrive. Habitats that support big game wildlife migration in Colorado also support many other migrating and non-migrating species.

Colorado's population continues to grow, placing pressure on the natural habitats that wildlife depends upon for survival. Habitat loss and fragmentation affects wildlife populations in general, and particularly species that migrate annually between seasonal habitats. Specifically, roadways disrupt annual big game migration, and vehicular collisions with wildlife pose risks to people, property, and the animals that contribute so much to Colorado's reputation as a place to



admire natural wonders. In Colorado, nearly 4,000 vehicle crashes involving wildlife are reported to law enforcement every year, resulting in injuries and fatalities to humans, and costing an estimated \$80 million annually. This figure does not include the value of wildlife killed in vehicular collisions, the impact on the health of wildlife populations, or the loss and fragmentation of the vibrant habitats wildlife call home.

In 2018, the Colorado Wildlife and Transportation Alliance (Alliance) was established to improve human safety while ensuring safe and successful migration of Colorado's big game wildlife each year. The Alliance includes CPW, Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), Tribal Governments, federal agencies, and non-governmental partners that represent academia, nonprofit organizations, and biological and engineering sciences. The Alliance has already successfully reduced wildlife-vehicle collisions and has helped maintain robust wildlife populations.

Further, incentive-based conservation programs for habitat management have a long track record of success in Colorado. Coordination with government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and private landowners is critical to the safe migration of wildlife across numerous jurisdictions. Many heavily used migration routes were created through voluntary, proactive, and on-the-ground conservation measures.

Through partnerships, technology, and collaborative funding efforts, there are emerging opportunities for Colorado to further support big game wildlife migration and protect wildlife habitat. Recent technological advancements allow wildlife managers to better understand big game wildlife migration patterns. In addition, big game corridor work in Colorado has recently been bolstered by new funding opportunities from the United States Department of the Interior Secretarial Order 2018-3362. As such, it is timely for the State to conserve our migrating big game populations and their habitats. This Executive Order will ensure that future generations of Coloradans will enjoy a safe, prosperous relationship with the natural world and Colorado's native wildlife species.

II. Directives

To conserve Colorado's big game winter range and wildlife migration corridors, I hereby issue the following directives:

- A. DNR shall compile a status report on Colorado's big game migration patterns and related scientific materials on seasonal habitats for the Governor by April 1, 2020. This report will include:

1. Information regarding the location and known threats to seasonal big game habitat and migration corridors in Colorado;
 2. Data gaps and barriers to identifying the location and known threats to Colorado seasonal big game habitat and migration corridors; and
 3. A recommended timeframe and action plan outlining how frequently CPW will need to update its list of high-priority big game migration corridors and seasonal habitats throughout Colorado.
- B. DNR shall identify policy, regulatory, and legislative opportunities to ensure the ongoing conservation of seasonal big game habitat and migration corridors. DNR shall compile a report of such opportunities for the Governor by July 1, 2020 that includes:
1. Opportunities to include big game migration corridors in new or existing division policies and regulatory permitting processes;
 2. Opportunities to work with private landowners, local governments, public landholders, and tribes through existing or other voluntary, non-regulatory programs to sustain migration corridors; and
 3. Opportunities to work with neighboring states on cross-boundary migration corridors.
- C. DNR shall work with CPW to incorporate information concerning big game migration corridors into relevant public education and outreach efforts and shall meet with stakeholders to discuss big game migration corridors to implement this Executive Order.
- D. CDOT shall enable safe wildlife passage and reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions, and incorporate consideration of big game migration into all levels of its planning process, to the greatest extent possible. In implementing this directive, CDOT should undertake the following:
1. Identify policy, regulatory, and legislative opportunities to ensure the ongoing conservation of seasonal big game habitat and migration corridors;
 2. Consider incorporating big game migration and associated conservation measures into planning processes in locations where regulatory processes do

not currently formally require wildlife mitigation measures; and

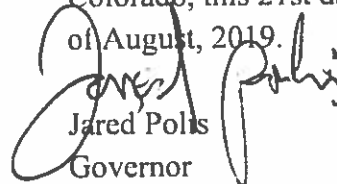
3. Seek outside funding partners if conservation measures require financial support.
- E. CDOT and DNR shall enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) by December 31, 2019. The MOU should outline expectations for collaboration on the following actions:
1. Identify priority areas for the implementation of big game crossings over and under roadways in Colorado. Priorities should be set using the best available science regarding wildlife migration patterns and vehicle collision data. CDOT and DNR shall identify priorities and opportunities that are cost-effective, and establish wise stewardship of State financial resources and natural resources; and
 2. Continue to support the Alliance, and utilize the Alliance to raise awareness, forge partnerships, and identify potential public and private funding opportunities to construct new wildlife crossing structures in priority areas.
- F. DNR and CDOT shall implement current fiscal year actions within existing budgets and authorities. If necessary, DNR and CDOT shall engage with the Office of State Planning and Budgeting to identify resource requirements and incorporate those requirements into the annual budget development process for any actions to be implemented in future fiscal years.

II. Duration

This appointment and this Executive Order shall remain in effect unless modified or rescinded by future Executive Order of the Governor.



GIVEN under my hand and the
Executive Seal of the State of
Colorado, this 21st day
of August, 2019.


Jared Polis
Governor