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WMI Outdoor News Bulletin

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New BLM office building to cut off critical pronghorn migration route:

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has contracted to construct a new office building for itself within a narrow corridor used by an already seriously stressed segment of migratory pronghorn, reports the Wildlife Management Institute.

When BLM allowed oil and gas development in the well-known Trapper's Point big game migration route along the Upper Green River, a few miles west of Pinedale, Wyoming, the agency was met with a storm of protest. Records from archaeological sites along the route document thousands of years of mule deer and pronghorn migration and use of those animals by aboriginal hunters. At the time, BLM managers professed not to

have known of the route's importance and, under intense pressure from a wide range of constituents, they backed off allowing some development.

Now, however, BLM officials appear to be about to add insult to injury by repeating their mistake just a few miles closer to Pinedale. They are on the verge of building a new Pinedale Field Office directly in the path of about 1,500 pronghorn that pass each spring and fall through a narrow 200-yard wide gap of remaining habitat (referred to as "antelope alley") between the town of Pinedale and massive development in the Pinedale Anticline gas field. Pinedale and Sublette County officials also have contributed to constriction of the migration route by repeatedly allowing new subdivisions and even municipal buildings to be constructed in the path of the pronghorn.

The Pinedale area has changed markedly during just the last five years. Wildlife corridors and other prime habitats that sustain the wild beauty of the area and attract hunters and tourists are in jeopardy from rapid, extensive development of the Pinedale Anticline and Jonah gas fields. Residential growth and sprawl have occurred partly as a result of an influx of people for the area's wildlife and scenic beauty and partly to accommodate large numbers of influx of energy field workers and their families. Housing prices have skyrocketed and locals worry about Pinedale becoming more like nearby Jackson Hole, where working people have trouble affording to live.

With new hotels in place and a city bus barn under construction in antelope alley, there seems to be no plan for sustaining pronghorn migration when the path is blocked by the new BLM office. To the contrary, because the BLM office is literally and figuratively permitting fast-paced development in the surrounding area, with negative impacts on pronghorn and other wildlife, conservationists are left to wonder what the agency is thinking and doing by not only allowing, but causing a final blow to this pronghorn migration route so close to town.

Apparently, no environmental analysis will be done to assess the impact of the construction decision. Bald eagles use the area at several times each year. Part of the area is wetland. There are a number of important archaeological sites. The key concern, however, is what will become of the pronghorn when the migration route is shut down.

Conservationists maintain a hope that BLM will not add to the area's loss of critical wildlife habitats by insensitive siting of its new office building and, instead, that it will act to conserve and safeguard the already jeopardized migration route. They argue that there is an opportunity for BLM_in partnership with Pinedale, Sublette County, and property developers_to show leadership and create a positive outcome for all, by constructing the new office on one of many available sites, including those offered by large acreages of nearby BLM-administered public domain. Furthermore, if additional funding is required to effect this responsible relocation, conservationists point to the $3+ billion dollars in oil and gas revenues that were returned last year in Sublette County alone. (rpd)

Three receive high honors:

During the 71st North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, last month in Columbus, Ohio, a wildlife working group, a fish and wildlife agency director and a wildlife conservation board were accorded the highest honors of the Wildlife Management Institute (WMI). The California Wildlife Conservation Board received WMI's 2006 Presidents Award. Duane Shroufe was given the 2006 Distinguished Service Award. And the Mule Deer Working Group of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies received WMI's 2006 Touchstone Award.

The Presidents Award honors an agency or agency faction for ingenuity, initiative and accomplishments within the past several years and which has significantly advanced professional management of natural resources in North America. The California Department of Fish and Game's Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) received recognition for its determined efforts and leadership to protect hundreds of thousands of acres in the Golden State.

The WCB was established nearly 60 years ago to administer a capital outlay program for wildlife habitat protection. Its principal goal is to select and acquire selected wildlife habitat and develop public access facilities. Since 2001, the WCB has worked with more than 275 partners who have contributed more than $1 billon towards the conservation of California¹s wildlife and diverse habitats. The endeavors have increased wetland acreage in the Central Valley by more than 70,000 acres, protected 63,000 acres of San Francisco Bay wetlands, and restored 61,850 acres of the bay¹s wetlands and riparian habitats since 1990. In the past five years, these projects have protected 300,000 acres of rangelands and oak woodlands, 90,000 acres of forest lands, 23,000 acres of vernal pools and 9,000 acres of riparian habitat.

"Much of the Wildlife Conservation Board's work has involved public and private partnerships," said Steven A. Williams, WMI president. "Since 2000, the WCB has leveraged and invested millions of dollars for the purchase and restoration of thousands of acres. Such collaborative efforts are good for the state, its citizens and natural resources. We chose to honor the California WCB because of the foresight of the Board and the dedication, determination and accomplishments of its staff."

Al Wright, Executive Director of the WCB, accepted the award on behalf of the Board and staff.

The WMI Distinguished Service Award recognizes individuals who have made extraordinary and enduring, but largely unsung contributions to conservation of natural resources in North America. Duane L. Shroufe, Director of the Arizona Game and Fish Department, was accorded the honor for 2006.

WMI President Steve Williams stated that Duane's contributions to the continent's wildlife and habitats have been numerous and far-reaching. "Initiatives as diverse as jaguar

conservation in Mexico, wetland protection in Canada and advocacy for state agency excellence have benefited from his leadership."

Shroufe, who began his career with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, came to the Arizona Game and Fish Department in 1989. "In the leadership role Duane assumed, his contributions to the stability and progressiveness of his agency and his professional conservation agenda are truly too numerous to list," Williams noted. However, highlights of Shroufe's accomplishments include:

o Establishment of Arizona's Heritage Fund in 1990 to support projects to enhance and protect wildlife and habitats.

o Advancement of collaborative initiatives to aid in the recovery of Arizona's endangered species.

o Chairmanship of the North American Wetlands Conservation Council, which serves as the national coordinating committee for international wetlands conservation.

o Critical leadership in the Teaming with Wildlife Initiative, which for more than a decade, has led efforts to increase funding for wildlife diversity conservation to prevent wildlife from becoming endangered.

o Partnerships with wildlife concerns in Mexico, including the Sonoran Joint Venture, the first international effort of its kind to conserve habitats that benefits all birds in a region.

o Consistent leadership to improve customer service and wildlife conservation policies, programs and practices at the agency level.

Shroufe has received numerous special recognitions, including those from the National Audubon Society, Ducks Unlimited, Inc., Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, USDA Forest Service, American Fisheries Society, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Governor of Sonora, Mexico, for service and contributions advancing science-based wildlife management. AEach of those commendations is testimony to our recipient's long and unstinting history of distinguished service in the advancement of science-based conservation,@ said Williams. "WMI is pleased to add its testimony to the remarkable and continuing career of Duane L. Shroufe."

WMI's Touchstone Award recognizes individuals, groups, organizations or agencies whose ingenuity and initiative in recent years have notably advanced sound natural resource management and conservation in North America. The Mule Deer Working Group of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) was accorded the honor for 2006, for its work to improve the status and management of mule deer populations.

Founded in 1997, the Mule Deer Working Group consists of representatives from the WAFWA, a quasi-governmental organization of 23 agencies charged with the conservation and management of wildlife resources in the western United States and Canada. The Working Group's goals are to develop strategies to reverse the trend of declining mule deer populations, to improve communication among mule deer biologists and to provide a forum to supply the information needs of agency administrators.

The Working Group has notably aided mule deer management in recent years through development of: the North American Mule Deer Conservation Plan; a mule deer information website (http://www.muledeernet.org/); the technical book, Mule Deer Conservation: Issues and Management Strategies; and a popularized version of the book, to help non-biologists understand mule deer management issues. The Working Group also produced an interactive GIS map of North America's mule deer habitat, to help biologists manage the species on a landscape scale. And perhaps the most impressive achievement is an ongoing effort to create a set of habitat guidelines for the seven ecoregions encompassing mule deer home range.

"These accomplishments have dramatically helped all people involved in mule deer management," said Steven Williams, WMI president. "Agency administrators now have excellent tools to respond to the public's desire to understand mule deer management issues, and biologists have more information to make solid management decisions concerning the species. The energy, creativity, dedication and excellent work of the Mule Deer Working Group reflect the highest standard of cooperative conservation professionalism."

Jim DeVos of the Arizona Game and Fish Department, and chair of the Mule Deer Working Group, accepted the award on behalf of the group members and the western states and provinces they represent.

IP sale of almost 5.7 million acres is sign of the times:

In a move foreshadowed by global market changes in the forest products industry, International Paper Company (IP) recently announced sales of 5.675 million acres of timberland, reports the Wildlife Management Institute. The divestiture is part of a three-part strategy announced by IP in 2005, to improve returns, strengthen the balance sheet and return cash to shareowners. The strategy proposed to improve shareowner returns by improving and/or realigning IP mills and evaluating sale of IP forestlands in the United States. IP projected that divestitures would return $8 billion to $10 billion. If forestland sales proceed as expected, proceeds likely will be $11 billion or higher.

Forestland sales have been spread between the Southeast and Great Lakes States. Buyers include The Nature Conservancy (TNC) (173,000 acres in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia, and 69,000 acres in Wisconsin), The Conservation Fund (1,000 acres in Florida and North Carolina and 39,000 acres in South Carolina (with TNC as a partner)), and timber investment-management organizations (275,000 acres in New York, 440,000 acres in Michigan and 4.67 million acres in Louisiana, Texas and Arkansas).

Impacts to wildlife and recreational access are not yet clear. Most of the lands purchased will be governed by a 5-, 10-, 30- or 50- year fiber supply agreement, so forests will con-

tinue to be harvested for forest products. Changes in the landscape are likely, however, as new owners advance towards different market products or focus on nontimber assets.

IP has a long history of participation in the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), and the majority of acres sold included provision that the lands would continue to be managed and third-party certified under the requirements of the SFI Standard. The SFI Standard integrates the production and harvest of forest products with conservation of soil, air, water quality, biological diversity, wildlife and aquatic habitat, recreation, and aesthetics. (sjw)

"Split estate" at issue across the West:

The growing controversy over development of federally owned energy resources on private lands has resulted in the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) initiating a review and at least one state legislature debating legislation on the matter, reports the Wildlife Management Institute.

The federal review was ordered by Congress in the Energy Policy Act of 2005, and was prompted by complaints from private landowners about the process. This controversy is referred to as the "split estate" issue. A split estate occurs when mineral rights lying beneath private property are owned by the federal government and surface rights are retained by private landowner. This ownership division dates back to the Homestead Act of 1862, when many acres of land across the West were transferred to private individuals and interests but the federal government retained rights to mineral resources underneath those lands.

As western energy developments accelerate, split estate conflicts also are increasing and intensifying. Under current law, an energy company can lease mineral rights from the federal government and extract minerals on private land just as on federal property. Private landowners often legitimately feel that they are given little to say about when, where and how the development occurs. A growing number of new property owners in the West who are unfamiliar with split estate prerogatives have made the issue even more contentious.

Under federal rules, energy companies must make an effort to obtain from the surface rights owner an agreement that specifies how the development will be done and identifies the amount of compensation offered. In cases whereby an agreement cannot be reached, BLM requires the energy company to post a bond for damages before the development begins. Landowner complaints focus on inadequate notification of forthcoming development and insufficient bonding to cover damages.

In Colorado, the state legislature has been debating legislation dubbed the "Surface Damages Compensation Bill" (HB 1185). The legislative proposal would encourage agreements between landowners and oil and gas companies before drilling by the former on

the latter's property. If agreement could not be reached, this legislation would ensure the landowners some financial compensation if the development operation were to damage the land or reduce its property value. Predictably, disagreement over the amount of compensation threatens the bill's passage.

The federal review, consisting of listening sessions with public comments, began in New Mexico in late March and is scheduled to continue into April in Colorado, Wyoming, Montana and Washington, DC. After the hearings, an analysis will determine if "fixes" are in order and, if so, whether they are administrative or statutory in nature.

Obviously, if changes in statutes are needed, Congress will have to intervene. (lhc)

Initiative becomes fish-or-cut-bait action plan:

The National Fish Habitat Initiative is now the National Fish Habitat Action Plan. This unprecedented multi-partner Plan to protect, restore and enhance fisheries and aquatic habitat, got a green light from state fish and wildlife directors and others last month during the 71st North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, in Columbus, Ohio.

The Plan began as an idea of an ad hoc group convened by the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council. The idea gained momentum as fisheries experts around the country outlined a science-based foundation for documenting habitat and fish population trends, establishing habitat-improvement priorities, and tracking and reporting results of partnership efforts. With the help of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) and in collaboration with federal, state, regional and local partners in both the public and private sector, the Initiative was transformed into an Action Plan. AFWA will now take the lead in administering the plan in collaboration with an unprecedented number of diverse partners.

A Special Session at last month¹s 71st Conference highlighted the foundation of the Action Plan for North American natural resource leaders. Leading experts from the fisheries sciences and management community presented compelling reasons for the Plan and for joining the effort to improve the continental fisheries and their habitats.

William Taylor, of Michigan State University, presented case studies of current water resource challenges and the promising path the Action Plan offers for addressing them, using "fish as our indicator, and using knowledge building, efficiency and collaboration as our tools." Ryan Broddrick, of the California Department of Fish and Game, provided a critical consideration of the Plan by California, where collaborative management of aquatic resources often is driven by conflicts associated with water use and land use. Broddrick's agency has endorsed the Action Plan as a means of expediting improved aquatic resources throughout the Golden State. Doug Austen, of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, announced the imminent approval of the Action Plan by state fish

and wildlife agency directors: "This Plan now sets the stage for significant new investment and collaboration in fish habitat conservation across the country." Mamie Parker, of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, heralded the Action Plan as a model of cooperative conservation. She noted that, as support for this effort grows, the investment and work of its partnerships are expected to double the number of assessed habitat miles, eliminate hundreds of fish passage barriers, and restore critical stream and shoreline miles and wetland acres to benefit fish populations and improve water resources. "One hundred years from now," stated Ms. Parker, "we hope our great grandchildren will say that we got it right_that the National Fish Habitat Action Plan was an historic benchmark in fish and aquatic habitat conservation, and that we changed for the better the way conservation is done in this country."

Jim Martin, of the Berkley Conservation Institute, concluded the Special Session with an appeal to other agencies, organizations and businesses "to make a real difference for fisheries in America," by becoming a partner in the National Fish Habitat Action Plan, helping set regional and national priorities, and assisting completion of the most accurate and comprehensive status and trends report on fish habitat ever developed.

Kathryn Boyer of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service invited participants to an open house where they could learn more about the Action Plan and become a partner. She highlighted the strength of the Plan in its partnerships, which now include private land managers, industry, government, tribal, academic and conservation interest and individuals committed to focusing their attention and resources on fish habitat improvements where most needed.

Although there is no explicit date for completion of the objectives of the Action Plan, its partners recognize that time to address fish and fish habitat issues is dwindling, and aggressive implementation of the Plan is paramount to its success. On April 24th, there will be the public/media rollout of the Action Plan, at Casting Call on the Potomac River in Washington DC_an annual event that emphasizes important fishing-related issues and initiatives to Congress and the Administration. This summer, the National Fish Habitat Board will be selected to oversee implementation of the Action Plan. And during the next year, a major expansion of new regional fish habitat partnerships is anticipated. For more information about the Action Plan and partnership opportunities log on to http://www.fishhabitat.org/.

Worth reading

It was a close call, but *Being Caribou* made the worth-reading list. It is the story of a Canadian wildlife biologist/author Karsten Heuer, and his filmaker bride, Leanne Allison, who chose to spend five months traipsing 1,000 miles to find, follow and keep up with the Porcupine caribou herd during its migration from inland wintering grounds in Canada's Northwest Territories to summer calving grounds in the Arctic National Wildlife

Refuge (ANWR) in northeastern Alaska, and part way back. Their undertaking was an ambitious camping trip and a rather odd honeymoon.

Walking, skiing and slogging over tundra and mountains, crossing cold waters, tenting in snow-, wind- and rainstorms, eating freeze-dried foods and testing the limits of their endurance, the couple made a go at experiencing the compelling forces of caribou migration. Theirs was a quest to comprehend the animals' eons-old migratory impulse and, by doing so in the most subjective manner possible, to become part of the herd, i.e., to succeed at being caribou. Ostensibly, they sought to understand and experience what drove the animals, when and where, or at least to confirm quite firsthand what other biologists had already noted. But there were other motivations_a book and a film, with which to protest the proposed opening of ANWR's unprotected 1002 area, the herd's calving ground, from the sunder of oil and gas extraction. Noble stuff.

I enjoyed this book for a couple nonliterary reasons. First, I liked the couple's gumption and pluck, and for giving me the opportunity to use the word pluck. And both gumption and pluck were necessary. For the average pedestrian, attempting to negotiate the mountains, tundra and watercourses of the Brooks Range would be to tempt full-body blisters, frostbite and dementia. I have spent some weeks in that vast and remote region and, as an average pedestrian, escaped the above consequences, but not by much.

I especially liked their tight and convincing litany of arguments against turning 1002 into Prudhoe Bay East and another boom for Big Oil under the shallow guise of national need and at the expense of an even rarer commodity_wilderness. And I was captivated by Karsten's repeated reference to hearing some sort of mysterious, intermittent, low thrumming.

On the other hand, Karsten and Leanne's excellent adventure was premeditated hardship. It was not easy for me to empathize with a couple that wittingly elected to face difficulty, court danger, then modestly imply something heroic in their sufferings. Vintage Farley Mowat. Both Heuers were veterans of wilderness trekking and camping, but they admittedly started out not physically fit enough for what they were doing. They began with packs much too heavy for an effort to keep up with animals that are lifetime marathoners. They weren't prepared for poor going in lousy snow conditions. Their precautions against inevitable bear encounters were minimal at best and not a little stupid. They didn't ration their food as wisely as they might have. All in all, the newlyweds knew precisely what they potentially faced. Chutzpa is admirable if one survives it, and the Heuers did just that.

They did so by Being Cold, by Being Hungry, by Being Grungy, by Being Vulnerable and by Being Deluded into thinking they somehow were being caribou. Unlike the Heuers, however, the Porcupine caribou didn't have a tent and sleeping bags to ward off the weather, or repellent and firecrackers to ward off predators, or netting to ward off insects, or food drops every two weeks, or Gore-tex anoraks, or a satellite radio to call for an airlift time-out to the village of Kaktovic. The couple was mainly Being Human Beings on one helluva hike.

It is a little awkward to criticize people who completed something epical_something I wouldn't have considered (the pluck variable) and probably couldn't have accomplished even during my immortality phase a score or two of years past. The book is an intriguing read, but it occasionally mires in baldfaced existentialism, e.g., "Yfor but a few brief weeks we'd become caribou, content in our suffering, secure in our insecurity, fully exercising the wildness that had been buried within us all along." And there are some amazing ironies. When the Heuers had about finished their journey, they met up with two hunters who had killed caribou. Karsten helped pack the carcasses, but conjured up some anthropomorphic angst over the fact of the animals' hard-earned survival, only to become meat and trophies for the hunters. For her part, Leanne glared indignantly at the hunters. Apparently forgotten was the fact that, just days before, the newlyweds hadn't shown much concern about the inherent survival difficulties of the Arctic ground squirrels they dug from their dens, chopped up, cooked and "wolfed down."

Another irony was featured in the epilogue. Less than a week after stumbling back from "a dimension that neither university education, religious teaching, nor anything else" could have taught them, the Heuers found themselves in Washington, DC, to talk congressional types into giving up that ANWR drilling nonsense. It didn't go well. Congressional types and their officious minions, it seems, don't extend their five-minute audience rule just because someone has walked to and been stuck in a tent on caribou calving grounds. Thinking they had the right ammunition to sway politicians and forgetting about Republicans amounted to Being Naïve. More precisely, they sucked at Being Lobbyists. As shell-shocked as they were by caribou antipathy in DC, the plucky pair did get to hear there a relatively loud and entirely constant thrumming, which turned out to be congested vehicle traffic, the grousing of migrating commuters and the squeaking wheels of government, altogether the din of humanity a world away from the Arctic on the same planet.

I haven't seen Leanne's film, but am told that it is quite good. I hope so.

Being Caribou, published in 2005, is available for $24.95 from Mountaineers Books of Seattle, Washington. Call 206-23-6303 or e-mail http://www.mountaineerbooks.org/.

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