

## **Migratory Ungulates on Private Lands Workshop Summary**

**September 9-11, 2020**

The Western Landowners Alliance, the Property and Environment Research Center, UC Berkeley and the Buffalo Bill Center of the West co-convened an online three-day workshop led by renowned wildlife biologist Arthur Middleton that included many landowners from the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE), along with researchers and NGO leadership to develop landowner-led solutions to the challenges of migratory ungulates (elk and mule deer, in particular) on private lands in the region. The three main purposes of the workshop were to:

1. better define the problem(s) associated with conserving migratory ungulates on private land (combining landowner, NGO, and academic perspectives),
2. evaluate and develop new ideas to support migratory ungulates on private land, and
3. foster new and ongoing professional relationships and interdisciplinary collaborations.

Landowners representing diverse landowner types from the Cody area as well as community leaders from GYE communities in MT and ID participated in a panel discussion and provided feedback on various ideas that were under consideration for development later in the workshop. Many of the landowners acknowledged the positive aspects of having migratory ungulates on the landscape even as they articulated the challenges of having them. The challenges fell into four main categories:

1. disease transmission (mainly brucellosis being passed from elk to cattle);
2. fences (challenges fences pose to keeping the wildlife moving, damage to fencing caused by wildlife, and the cost of maintaining/replacing fencing);
3. lost forage (mainly elk eating vegetation and hay that the ranches depend on to feed their cattle); and
4. hunter management (the additional burden of managing the general public on private lands and the effectiveness of hunting as an elk management tool).

Landowner perspectives regarding best solutions were varied due to interest and eligibility. It was clear that there is no “one size fits all” solutions to these challenges. Calls to develop different tools for different needs that preserve local control and landowner autonomy were heard. Rather than incentives and compensation, landowners expressed a desire to be paid for the value in wildlife habitat that they create or enhance. Landowners and NGOs developing tools for landowners agreed



that it is necessary to create pilot projects to build a willingness to participate in novel solutions and to generate funding to take these ideas to scale.

Stakeholders came into the workshop with a number of ideas already in development. The group chose to focus their collective efforts in three main areas:

1. developing recommendations for how federal efforts could best support local efforts in support of migratory ungulates on private lands; '
2. developing landowner tools to mitigate identified challenges. These could include habitat leasing, occupancy agreements, a brucellosis risk transfer tool, and more; and
3. coordinating research efforts to more systematically understand landowner needs and priorities, parcel prioritization to better focus conservation investments, and best practices for communication and outreach.

Stakeholders in the event were invested in the wellbeing of the landscapes, wildlife, and human livelihoods connected to these issues. Stakeholders were also aware of the difficult tensions and trade-offs inherent in implementing any possible solutions. Workshop participants said:

"It is a BIG challenge to take ideas and coalesce them into actual serviceable products. It takes time, patience, and a great group of people. I think it was a good three days of brainstorming and knocking on wood."

"It was good to see possible recognition of the essential function of public land ranchers on the landscape and the development of another income source through ecosystem service payments. Even though wildlife corridors may seem important to some, ranchers' holistic landscape management, based on an inherent land ethic, far exceeds far exceeds the importance of any corridor designation."

The clearest marker of the success of this workshop is the fact that there is now much more to come.

**This workshop was generously supported by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and through a grant from the Band Foundation.**

*Expert facilitation by Carrie Bennett, Learning Through Difference, LLC, contributed to the workshop's success.*