



**Written Statement Submitted by the Pew Charitable Trusts to the
U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Water, and Wildlife
For the record of the hearing held on November 14, 2023 regarding
“Challenges and Opportunities to Facilitate Wildlife Movement and Improve Migration Corridors”**

The Pew Charitable Trusts’ U.S. Conservation project seeks to sustain biodiversity and resilient ecosystems by collaborating with policymakers, communities and businesses, Tribes, and many others. Conservation of wildlife corridors is an essential component of this work. We appreciate the Subcommittee holding a hearing on this issue and ask that our statement be submitted to the hearing record.

The phenomenon of terrestrial wildlife migration—between higher altitude, cooler summer habitat and lower elevations with more accessible food sources in winter—is widespread among many species, particularly big game like elk, pronghorn, and deer. Many of these seasonal routes are thousands of years old and in some cases are known to be taught by one generation to the next. The act of migration, which may take place across hundreds, or even thousands of miles, is an essential strategy that animals use to survive, which in turn benefits communities that depend on revenue from hunters and wildlife viewing tourism, and families that rely on local big game for food security.

Yet new highways, subdivisions, and energy developments are encroaching on the open spaces, forcing animals to alter their routes or stop migrating altogether, threatening wildlife populations, and increasing roadway hazards, especially in rural areas. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, as many as two million collisions between motor vehicles and large animals occur each year in the United States, causing approximately 200 human deaths, 26,000 injuries, and at least \$8 billion in property and other losses.

Research from the University of California, Davis, has shown that reported collisions with large mammals likely caused over \$1 billion in economic and social costs to California alone from 2016-2020. In Wyoming, wildlife-vehicle collisions can represent almost 20 percent of all reported collisions. The state’s mule deer population, which supports more than \$300 million in annual hunting-related spending in Wyoming, has decreased by 40% since 2000, due in part to habitat fragmentation caused by roads and development.

But there is good news. With advances in research technology, such as GPS-enabled collars, we now have detailed information on how and where these animals travel between summer and winter

habitats, how barriers such as highways and development can negatively affect wildlife populations, and where infrastructure interventions can have the greatest benefit for both wildlife and people.

This new migration science and data eliminates much of the guesswork on annual movements of species, and enables elected officials, land managers, and transportation and wildlife agencies to adopt policies that more effectively address on-the-ground needs. For example, a well-placed underpass or overpass can reduce wildlife-vehicle accidents by over 90%, providing a high rate of return on federal and state investments in wildlife crossings.

In the past several years, more than two dozen states—including in CA, CO, NM, OR, UT, WY, and NV—have taken bipartisan actions to facilitate greater coordination among agencies to identify wildlife-vehicle “hotspots” and to provide funding for the construction of wildlife-friendly infrastructure, such as overpasses and underpasses. Similarly, federal investments in connectivity conservation—through the Inflation Reduction Act and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act—have helped to promote public safety and provide more ecosystem resilience for migratory species.

Despite these gains, the exploration of durable solutions to conserve migration corridors is just getting started, with federal agencies like the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture considering new ways of managing lands that maintain critical ecological linkages. In the face of climate change and other environmental stressors, sustaining these landscape connections is critical, as they provide ecosystem resilience for migratory species.

Pew supports congressional and/or administrative actions that will:

- Increase mapping and research efforts, as well as coordination and sharing of research. Collaboration with and among academia, Tribes, and all levels of government is needed to better understand where migrations occur, how widespread they are, and what challenges and threats migrating species face.
- Remove or modify fences in key migration corridors, as these barriers present significant challenges to wildlife. In addition, explore innovative technology, such as virtual fencing.
- Increase dedicated funding for federal grant programs that provide for the construction of wildlife-friendly infrastructure to reduce habitat fragmentation.
- Provide incentives to willing landowners for conserving wildlife corridors, such as those provided in the Big Game Conservation Partnership pilot program between the State of Wyoming and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).
- Consider habitat connectivity as a priority resource and allow efforts to reduce fragmentation eligible for payments under various USDA programs, including the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).
- Facilitate increased collaboration and alignment among managers of federal and state landscapes and private working lands (ranches, farms, forests, etc.), as migratory species do not recognize jurisdictional boundaries.

- Practice balanced energy and mineral development on federal lands. Site development operations away from migration corridors—or minimize their density within those corridors.

The Pew Charitable Trusts looks forward to continued engagement with Members of Congress, governors, wildlife and transportation officials, Tribes, land managers, scientists, and others to promote resilient and intact ecosystems, reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and sustain biodiversity by ensuring that species have room to roam.

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