



wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org

262 Lincoln Street
Lander, WY 82520
307.332.7031

April 25, 2018

Ryan Zinke, Secretary TRANSMITTED BY EMAIL - EXSEC@IOS.DOL.GOV
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

RE: REQUEST FOR DEFERRAL OF OIL & GAS LEASE PARCELS IN AMERICA'S LONGEST BIG GAME MIGRATION CORRIDOR:

Dear Secretary Zinke:

On behalf of the Wyoming Outdoor Council, I write to request that you defer certain lease parcels from the BLM's 4th Quarter (December 2018) oil and gas lease sale in Wyoming. The parcels lie within Wyoming's only officially designated big game migration corridor, the Red Desert to Hoback Corridor, which extends approximately 150 miles from the Red Desert to the Hoback Basin, making it the longest known mule deer migration corridor in the world and one of the longest migration corridors in all of North America. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department considers the corridor "one of the most critical mule deer migration routes in the West," and "internationally-significant."ⁱ

Wyoming takes great pride in our vibrant big game herds and also in our commitment to leading the nation in scientific study of wildlife migrations. This research, which has documented the remarkable "Path of the Pronghorn," the concept and importance of "stop-over" habitat, and other findings, is nationally recognized. In fact, new research suggests that the Red Desert to Hoback migration may be 100 miles longer for some portion of this herd—reaching as far north as Island Park, Idaho.ⁱⁱ

We applaud your recent Executive Order #3362, *Improving Habitat Quality in Western Big-Game Winter Range and Migration Corridors*, because it recognizes, as we do in Wyoming, that "robust and sustainable elk, deer and pronghorn populations contribute greatly to the economy and well-being of communities across the West." This is especially true in Wyoming where our residents know that migrations support life for thousands of animals. Without these intact pathways, our herds would be substantially smaller; corridors such as the Red Desert to Hoback allow deer to take advantage of seasonal forage and move away from areas with harsh winters.

These cultural and economic realities play out dramatically in Wyoming. First, and contrary to trends in other western states, our Wyoming hunter participation rates have increased in the last eight years. Hunting and angling continue to be an important part of our Wyoming lifestyle and a heritage that citizens want to preserve for future generations. Second, hunting and outfitting are big business in Wyoming. In Sublette County alone—where some of these proposed lease parcels are located—hunting and fishing drives a \$22 million annual industry for this county of fewer than 10,000 residents.ⁱⁱⁱ Tourism, our second largest state industry, generates \$3.2 billion annually in spending and supports 32,000 jobs. Outdoor recreation, a category that includes hunting, angling, wildlife watching and other related activities supports a whopping \$5.6 billion annual industry with 50,000 jobs, and creates more jobs than oil, gas, mining & extraction combined (50,000 compared to 27,000).^{iv} Obviously, a good portion of our state's tourism and outdoor recreation industry depends upon the vitality of our wildlife.

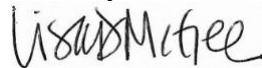
We are concerned, however, that the oil and gas leasing proposed within this corridor, and the subsequent surface occupancy and development that follows will cause significant, irreversible impacts to this iconic mule deer herd.

Leasing in this nationally significant migration pathway runs counter to the very stated purposes of your Executive Order, which is “to enhance and improve the quality of big-game winter range and migration corridor habitat on Federal lands....” The public land acres contained in these proposed lease parcels are small in scale compared to all the other potential BLM lands open for leasing in Wyoming; but they are large in importance for the health of this herd, and for Wyoming’s cultural and economic heritage.

We therefore request that you defer these parcels and direct the Wyoming BLM state director to defer these and all future nominated lease parcels that fall within the Red Desert to Hoback big game migration corridor.

Thank you in advance for considering this important issue. We hope that we may hear from you soon with a positive answer.

Sincerely,



Lisa McGee

Executive Director

lisa@wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org

cc: Governor Matt Mead
Senator John Barrasso
Senator Mike Enzi
Congressman Liz Cheney
Mary Jo Rugwell, WY BLM State Director
Scott Talbott, Wyoming Game and Fish Director
Wyoming Game and Fish Commission

Enclosures:

- Map of Red Desert to Hoback mule deer migration corridor
- Two maps with list and location of lease parcels for which deferral is requested

ⁱ For information on this remarkable migration, see *Red Desert to Hoback Migration Assessment*, prepared by the Wyoming Migration Initiative, at: <http://migrationinitiative.org/content/red-desert-hoback-migration-assessment>

ⁱⁱ See http://trib.com/lifestyles/recreation/wyoming-researchers-discovered-a-mule-deer-migration-almost-miles-longer/article_7d402f4e-1225-50e9-89d8-27917b5a82a1.html

ⁱⁱⁱ “Sublette County Related Hunting and Fishing Spending, 2015” by University of Wyoming, Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, 2017 at <https://wyomingwildlife.org/public-lands/wpli/economic-impact/>

^{iv} See the Wyoming Business Council report at http://wyomingbusiness.org/Uploads/DocumentLibrary/Misc/Outdoor%2010.31.17_4.pdf