



CONSERVATION EASEMENTS



A bull moose forages for food.

Ken Levy/Live Green Staff

KEEPING WILDLIFE CORRIDORS OPEN

Ken Levy/Live Green Staff

Sometimes the best way to go green is to keep what is already green intact.

That's been the goal of the Teton Regional Land Trust for more than 20 years, as it continues to find and preserve critical habitat and agricultural ground through conservation easements.

A conservation easement is a permanent legal agreement that protects a habitat from development, while ensuring that traditional ownership and land uses like ranching continue, said Emily Nichols, outreach coordinator for TRLT.

Key among its priorities when seeking land to preserve are wildlife corridors and

the connectivity they provide, said Chet Work, TRLT's executive director.

"A lot of people don't understand the value of private lands in eastern Idaho and the west side of the Greater Yellowstone as winter range or migration range," said Work. "We all attribute our great wildlife to Yellowstone, but nobody recognizes that it doesn't stay in Yellowstone."

Wildlife needs access to winter ranges through wildlife corridors, or "hallways" that give them that access. While some animals, such as elk, are resilient enough to walk around obstacles, "mule deer have been known to stare at a fence, and starve," he said.

Animals heading toward winter range,

and back, tend to follow rivers and cover. With the exception of pronghorn, not many want to be out in the open, Work said.

In the valley, these corridors include Fox, Darby, Teton and South Leigh creeks. Badger, Bitch, North Leigh and Spring creeks are also favored.

"They're all walking along those tree lines," he said. "Losing one of these little bottlenecks could really throw a wrench in the system."

TRLT is using scientific research to refine which are the most important corridors and have the most animals moving

WILDLIFE continued on page 14

through them. Idaho Fish and Game researchers place collars on small samples of these animals, Work said, to get an idea of where the majority of the animals are going.

“The corridors are probably what we know the least about and what could potentially be the most threatened,” Work said. “You don’t need just winter or summer range. Without either one of those you don’t have a population.”

Mule deer that spend their summers in Grand Teton National Park come up and over the Tetons to winter here in the Teton River Canyon, he said.

“That’s a pretty good migration, 40-50 miles,” Work said, “and now we’re seeing those routes, and that helps us prioritize one private property over another for conservation.”

Work said TRLT is working with landowners on three properties in the Teton Valley, all associated with the Teton River corridor.

“These properties could in essence be helping big-game winter range if we can ensure they stay undeveloped,” he said.

Three high-priority properties along the South Fork of the Snake River closed with TRLT at the end of 2010. He anticipates 3-4 more this year. One is near the Lorenzo interchange at Highway 20, crossing over the South Fork, with others in the canyon reach.

Once a property is identified, the next step is to work with the landowner to understand the importance of protecting their land. Negotiations then begin to create an easement that would limit uses that would hinder wildlife movement or range.

Tax incentives help provide motivation for some landowners to protect their land. More than 6,000 acres have been preserved through the use of these incentives, said Work.

“A good portion of the work we do is with people who can’t

make use of the tax deduction. When we work with a big farmer or rancher, they don’t have any use for that, and we end up compensating them fully for their property, or they give of themselves.”

Work said the wildlife attributed to the valley and Yellowstone evolved using agricultural lands as its winter and transitional range.

“It’s not agriculture that’s causing

these populations to decline,” he said. “It’s the conversion of agricultural lands to something that’s less viable to wildlife that’s going to make a change in our populations.”

TRLT often serves as an advocate for the landowner. In some cases where easement lands have weed problems, TRLT will help the landowner find grants or discounts on supplies to help eradicate the weeds.

When stream restoration or water quality issues arise, often eliminating the causes of damage helps alleviate the problems. Work calls this passive restoration, where taking away the problem lets the land heal on its own.

In cases where active restoration is needed, TRLT can help identify funding sources or consulting firms to build fences or otherwise help mitigate these issues. Sometimes, volunteers will help plant streamside willows or otherwise roll up their sleeves.

“We tend to leverage our energy on behalf of the landowner, putting in a lot of time, using a lot of contacts and writing grants,” he said.

Conservation easements aren’t about creating parks, locking up the land and keeping people out.

“We’re doing this for people, for the hunters and fishermen to keep populations abundant,” Work said. “We’re doing this for people who want to see wildlife in Yellowstone and outside.”

For more information about TRLT visit tetonlandtrust.org.

We’re doing this for people, for the hunters and fishermen to keep populations abundant. We’re doing this for people who want to see wildlife in Yellowstone and outside.

Chet Work
Teton Regional Land Trust executive director

We’re proud

to let Teton Valley know

WE RECYCLE

We send out our used fluids for recycling. We don’t burn them.

We sell environmentally-safe synthetic products.



FREE Valley towing with major service.



8am-5:30pm, Mon-Fri • 787-3090 • 295 S. Agate Victor
Located behind Victor Gateway & Subway on Old Jackson Hwy

Sustainable Builders

General Contracting • Remodels
Framing • Custom Finishing
Building Green

(208) 201-2591

www.sustainablebuildersinc.com