

# PATH OF THE PRONGHORN

by Dave Klein

Wyoming is host to one of the longest migrations in the world. Pronghorn that summer in Grand Teton National Park spend their winters near Pinedale. The path they take between their two homes is known nationwide as the "Path of the Pronghorn."

Pronghorn are prolific in Wyoming. Indeed, there are as many or more pronghorn in Wyoming than there are people. It can be difficult to find places in Wyoming that don't have pronghorns. They run incredibly fast and appear to have eyesight unmatched by most animals. However, they so rarely jump fences, most people believe they cannot jump. It seems that even pronghorns believe this, as groups of them have become hopelessly trapped and starved by sheep fencing that a deer would have easily jumped over. Along the Path of the Pronghorn, pronghorn are threatened in many ways. Groups of sportsmen and conservation agencies have joined together to help alleviate some of the threats. Namely people and the impediments we place in the way of migrating pronghorn.

"This migration is an important part of Wyoming's history and we want to do all we can to maintain it," said Kniffy Hamilton, then Supervisor of the Bridger Teton National Forest.

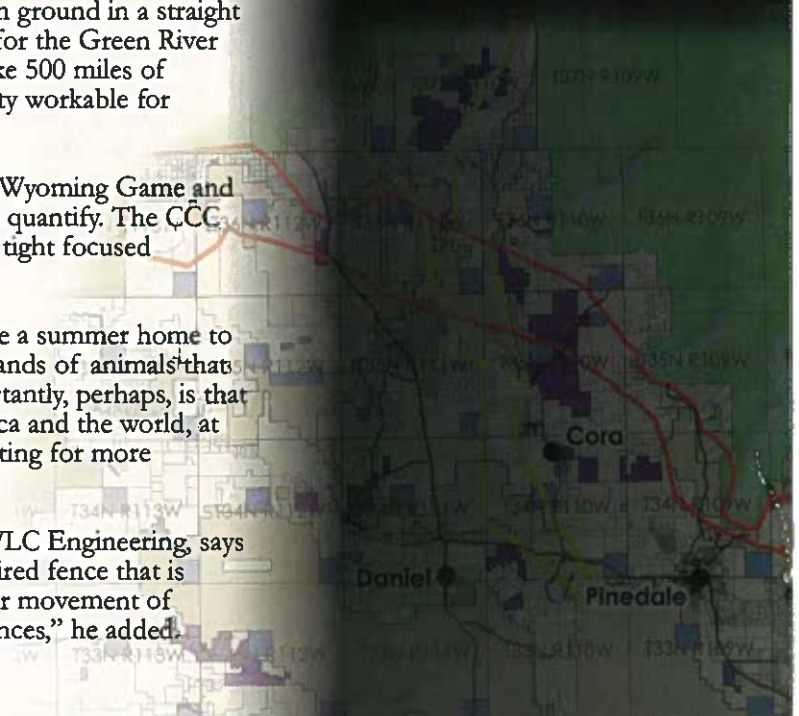
In 2008, the Bridger-Teton National Forest (BTNF) decided to recognize the Path of the Pronghorn migration route on BTNF lands. Archaeologists believe this path has been used for more than 6,000 years and it stands as one of the longest non-avian migration routes in the world. Recognizing this route, BTNF established the nation's first designated wildlife migration corridor. Pledging support for those efforts, Green River Valley Land Trust (newly christened the Wyoming Land Trust) started the Corridor Conservation Campaign (CCC) to expand those efforts onto private and other public land in Sublette County.

"The CCC has brought together a host of non-traditional partners like sportsmen, environmentalists, industry and agencies, who've found common ground in a straight forward solution," says Jordan Vana, Director of Conservation for the Green River Valley Land Trust (GRVLT). "The CCC is a 5 year effort to make 500 miles of existing fences in key wildlife migration routes in Sublette County workable for ranchers and passable for wildlife at no cost to landowners."

According to Bernie Holz, Regional Wildlife Supervisor for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's Pinedale Region, the impacts are "difficult to quantify. The CCC program helps provide a broader general migration instead of a tight focused migration. It benefits all migrating animals."

Even though the BTNF and Grand Teton National Park provide a summer home to only a few hundred pronghorn, the CCC program effects thousands of animals that migrate through Trappers Point, north of Pinedale. More importantly, perhaps, is that it helps protect one of the last great migrations in North America and the world, at the same time that it helps protect animals that have been migrating for more generations than any of us can truly appreciate.

Brian Gray, a professional engineer and program manager for WLC Engineering, says there are benefits for landowners as well. "Landowners get repaired fence that is wildlife friendly." And sportsmen benefit because there is "better movement of wildlife for migration... fewer animals getting hung up in the fences," he added.







his passions. A cooperative between multiple artists, the gallery hosts work from six other artists that work in different mediums and they offer custom framing.

“The local joke is that I have the police department working for me,” he says. In fact, three local police officers are part of the cooperative, showing diverse work from photography to woodwork. “We

have something for everyone.”

Kevin describes the gallery as “a cooperative energy that promotes their art in their area. It’s owned and operated by artists. It’s an interactive gallery... the whole experience.”

When asked about the future, he laughs, “I want to paint. I want another gallery like this in a warm place so I can go there in the winter.” Saratoga has been good to him though. “I love it here. I found a town I knew I could make it in.”

People have been filtering through the gallery during our conversation and photo session. Some are buying, some are looking, all of them are impressed. “I just love this place,” says one woman. Kevin, the consummate host, has them all laughing and talking. Clearly enjoying himself, he says, “meeting people is great. Knowing my art is hanging in some of their homes... that is really rewarding.”



Nick Finer, the photographer-policeman, has come into the gallery now. As he and Kevin banter back and forth, it is easy to see what draws people into the gallery. Taking a moment to really look around the gallery, I am struck by the quality of what I see. Brett Deacon, a photographer who is also a professor at the



University of Wyoming, has his photography in the studio along with Nick’s. Many of his spectacular photos are of the nearby Snowy Range.

Trisha Kauffman’s stained glass casts color around the gallery. Pat Malone’s incredible antler carvings make me wonder how someone can carve in such detail. Tom Knickerbocker’s woodwork is a testament to the quality that Kevin demands of the artists allowed to participate in the cooperative.

“I hate telling artists no,” says Kevin. But there is only so much room in a gallery and he wants to keep a balance between mediums. He adds, “I just want to continue making a living with my paint brush.”

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"The entire Upper Green River Valley is a migration route," says Bernie Holz, noting that, "only animals that survive the winter continue the species." Protecting migration routes is a very high priority for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department and one of the reasons that they have partnered with GRVLT in the CCC program.

"The project is going very well. There is less bureaucracy, less red tape, with a non-profit. Things get done more easily than the government could have done it," Holz says.

Brian Gray agrees. "The goal is very reachable, considering over 250 miles are in process or complete now. It's a tough goal, but reachable."

The CCC program, being implemented in 5 phases, is in its second phase and has already shown positive results. The program calls for monitoring the improved fencing with game cameras to ensure that animals are successfully negotiating them. During the fall of last year, Rick Ridgeway of Patagonia and photographer Joe Riis walked the Path of the Pronghorn and witnessed first hand how the improved fencing is helping the migration. As they watched near Trappers Point, they counted over 700 pronghorn using the wildlife friendly fencing.

Jordan Vana has proof that the fences are working too. "The Phase I modifications are working. Earlier this summer, we retrieved the first photos from 3 game cameras we put up along the migration route on a private ranch in the Upper Green River Valley. The photos are wonderful and clearly demonstrate the difference our wildlife and livestock friendly fence modifications make for migrating animals." He adds, "Fence crews tell us that 'within hours of making the fences more wildlife friendly, the antelope were just scurrying under them very rapidly and appeared to be moving through the corridors a lot easier.'"

Data is also being shared among agencies. GRVLT shares GIS data on inventoried and modified fences with their project partners who in turn overlay their data, such as radio-collar transmissions, to help judge the effectiveness of the improvements.

As Bernie Holz noted, "It benefits all migrating animals." Phase II of the project will modify approximately 200 more miles of fence along a crucial mule deer migration route at the foot of the Wind River Mountains.

According to Vana, "The route covers 86,000 acres and was confirmed by the Sublette Mule Deer Study done in the 1990s. The study was a collaborative effort between oil and gas operators, federal and state wildlife agencies and private organizations that started with the proposed development on the Pinedale Anticline natural gas field."

Collaboration is a key factor in the success of the CCC program as well as the other aspects of protecting the migration route. The CCC program will have an expected cost of 7 to 10 million dollars, all of which will be donated.

"Thus far, federal and state government agencies like the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust, Jonah Interagency Office, Wyoming Game and Fish Department and Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative have contributed approximately \$1.5 million to the project. The gifts, together with others from private individuals, charitable foundations, energy companies and sportsmen's groups, demonstrate a meaningful, collaborative commitment to common sense conservation," says Vana.

As the project progresses, other aspects of migration route hazards are being addressed. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department is working with the Wyoming Department of Transportation on a project to build wildlife bridges over roadways along the migration route. The wildlife bridges are still in the planning phase, but Bernie Holz is hopeful that they will come to fruition. Wildlife bridges have been used successfully in other



GRVLT photo

**Pronghorn successfully utilizing wildlife-friendly fencing near Pinedale.**



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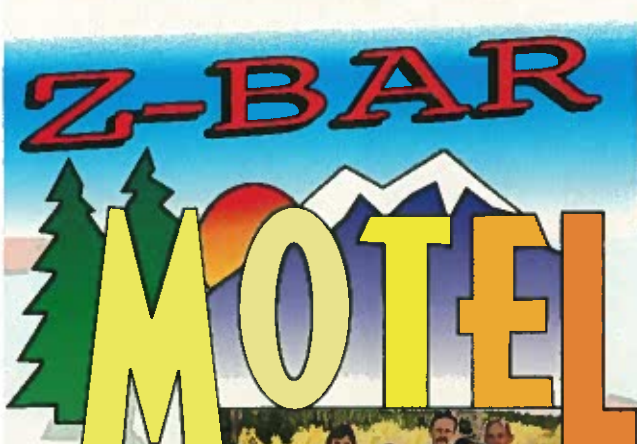
GRVLT photo

With all of the development in the Upper Green River Valley, including subdivisions, new roads, pets, and all of the energy development, pronghorn and other wildlife in the area have a lot to contend with. Even though pronghorn have proven to be very adaptable to the development, protecting and improving their migration routes and thereby improving their survivability is good management of what has become an icon of Wyoming's wildness. Seeing pronghorn in the middle of Casper or feeding around homes across the state, it is easy to take them for granted. Our presence dictates that we provide for and take care of the wildlife we are displacing.

Thanks to the GRVLT and their partners, this is happening. Says Jordan Vana, "Our organization exists to work with private landowners to conserve Wyoming's natural and agricultural resources." 🐾

places where high concentrations of wildlife come into contact with the human migration corridors we know as highways. "These will be bridges instead of underpasses for wildlife because pronghorn aren't use to having anything over their heads and won't use an underpass," says Holz.

For more information and a complete list of CCC partners, contact Jordan Vana at the GRVLT, (307) 367-7007, or visit their website at [www.grvlandtrust.org](http://www.grvlandtrust.org)



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