

**Committee on Natural Resources**

**United States House of Representatives**

*“Access Denied: The Growing Conflict Between Hunting, Fishing,  
and Energy Development on Federal Lands”*

10:30 AM, March 27, 2007

Room 1324 Longworth HOB

Morris K. Udall Hearing Room

Testimony of Stephen P. Mealey

Boone and Crockett Club

Leaburg, Oregon

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am Steve Mealey, Honorary Life Member of the Boone and Crockett Club and co-chair of the USDI/USDA Advisory Sporting Conservation Council Wildlife/Energy Subcommittee. It's a privilege to be here today representing the Boone and Crockett Club to address the challenge of balancing wildlife conservation and energy development on federal lands, especially in the West. As my fellow Boone and Crockett Club member Don Young knows, successfully meeting this challenge is a core value of the Club, America's oldest organization of hunter/conservationists founded by Theodore Roosevelt in 1887. The Club has a great legacy of protecting wildlife, especially big game, as well as federal land habitat. It's fair to say the Club is the "godparent" of America's national forests, national parks and wildlife refuges. We are proud to extend that commitment to conservation and shared use of natural resources here today.

Mr. Chairman, the challenge of balancing energy development and wildlife needs in the West is not new to either of us. I remember well your visit to the Shoshone National Forest, WY in the spring of 1987, when you and your sub-committee were reviewing energy development on national forests in the Greater Yellowstone Area. I was proud then to show you the "North Fork Well", a well drilled in grizzly bear, bighorn sheep, elk and mule deer habitat on the North Fork of the Shoshone River. It was an exploratory well drilled by Marathon Oil Company and you may recall we visited the site by helicopter because the whole operation was completed without roads, and timed to minimize disturbance of wildlife, especially bighorn sheep lambing in the spring.

Today Mr. Chairman, I offer a brief case study of cooperation among sportsmen, and folks from the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WG&F), the BLM, and the Secretary's Office of the USDI who continue to work hard together to balance wildlife and energy development in the Upper Green River Basin in Wyoming.

First some background:

In the summer of 2000, 35 dedicated wildlife conservation organizations representing nearly 4.5 million hunter/conservationists, met in Missoula, Montana at the Boone and Crockett Club headquarters at the invitation of the Club, and formed the American Wildlife Conservation Partners (AWCP), a loose federation of groups that works together to unify its collective strength and apply it to common challenges and opportunities to protect wildlife, habitat, hunting, trapping and the way of life they represent. AWCP rarely acts on behalf of the partnership as a whole, rather it works through “sign on letters”, usually written by one partner and offered to the others for “sign on” affiliation. AWCP has acted formally as a body only twice – once in March 2001, in publishing Wildlife for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Recommendations to President George W. Bush and again in May 2005, when Recommendations: Volume II was published. One of the 12 recommendations in Volume II was: “*Fully incorporate the conservation of wildlife and other natural resources into energy development.*” Today AWCP has 45 partners representing roughly 6 million outdoorsmen and women.

Each August, the AWCP has an annual meeting. In 2005, it was at the Safari Club International Headquarters on the Gros Ventre River in Wyoming. The field trip included a four-hour tour of part of the Pinedale Anticline Energy Development Project in Wyoming’s Upper Green River Basin.

On December 12-13, 2005, at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, WV, several members of AWCP groups and some other interested parties met to discuss and analyze observations and information from the Pinedale Anticline field trip. This “Energy Working Group” prepared a DRAFT report which identified several major issues grouped under Current Issues, Research, and Desired Future Conditions. These include:

- Accountability for Records of Decision;
- Implementation of adaptive management;
- ESA concerns – especially sage grouse;
- Evaluation of stipulations; and
- Importance of implementing a large-scale habitat initiative.

These issues were shared informally with then BLM Director Kathleen Clarke in February 2006, and again with USDI Deputy Secretary Lynne Scarlett in an Energy Working Group meeting in March 2006.

Also in March 2006, then USDI Secretary Norton created a new Sporting Conservation Council (SCC) to advise the Department on resource conservation issues, including energy development and wildlife resources. Twelve individuals were appointed to the council from AWCP partner organizations, including:

- Boone and Crockett Club
- National Wild Turkey Federation

- International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
- Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation
- Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
- National Rifle Association
- Ruffed Grouse Society
- Ducks Unlimited

The SCC charter has been revised to include USDA as an SCC advisee. On January 8, 2007, the SCC sent Secretaries Kempthorne and Johanns recommendations including ones supporting a large scale (landscape scale) energy/wildlife conservation initiative and a cooperative sagebrush initiative to protect dry shrublands and sage grouse (recommendations attached).

There are several recent and very positive signs of progress toward reaching balance between energy development and wildlife conservation in the Upper Green River Basin.

1. **The Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative (WLCI):** A partnership among federal and state agencies, industry and stakeholders to improve habitat conditions and long-term viability of species at the landscape scale.
2. **The Cooperative Sagebrush Initiative:** A mostly private partnership designed to conserve the shrub-steppe ecosystem and sage grouse.
3. **The Healthy Lands Initiative:** A USDA-BLM program to emphasize and fund landscape-level approaches for continued multiple uses. The \$22 million program will support energy/wildlife planning in Wyoming, New Mexico, Utah, Southern Idaho, Colorado, and Oregon-Idaho-Nevada. The Green River Basin will receive a major part of the funding.

A most hopeful fact is the commitment of the BLM in the updated BLM Pinedale Resource Management Plan documents to “manage to provide habitat consistent with WG&F department population objectives for the area.” That means the BLM is committed to providing the habitat necessary to support the wildlife population levels WG&F thinks appropriate for the Pinedale area.

In the end, wildlife populations, habitat and places to hunt on federal land in the Upper Green River Basin are a function of the WG&F Department, the BLM, and the energy development companies doing their jobs effectively, separately and together. The right commitments to wildlife population numbers and landscape level planning have been made with substantial funding provided. Elk and pronghorn are at or above WG&F desired population levels, while mule deer numbers are below, but not far from objectives. The stage is set to find a sustainable balance point for energy development and wildlife.

I am confident that success will be found if current commitments to cooperate are maintained. Without doubt, the Energy Working Group and the SCC have been “heard” by the BLM, the Secretary USDI, and the WG&F. In the spirit of sharing, we’re glad we’ve been able to help.

There are, however, some continuing concerns:

The following may be necessary to assure that the WLCI succeeds:

1. Slowing development of existing leases;
2. Completing landscape level analysis before new leases are issued;
3. Verifying that current staffing and funding are sufficient; and
4. Involving state agencies at the earliest opportunity in BLM project planning.

And a helpful option may be for the Secretary of Energy to ask the National Petroleum Council to provide a study group to help the energy companies implement new ways of minimizing the footprint of development.

Finally, let me finish where I started – with a commitment to balanced and shared use of natural resources. The intellectually easy solution to a competing use problem is simply to exclude one of the uses. In the present case, our great Nation simply cannot afford that option now – if it ever could. The art of natural resource management is to find a way to make potentially competing uses harmonious, and we appear well on the way to improving that art in the Upper Green River Basin. With the continued commitment of most involved to cooperation and sharing, we’ll succeed.

Mr. Chairman, I’ll submit this testimony as a “sign-on” opportunity to the AWCP partners. The final copy of the testimony with whatever endorsements received, will be sent to you and the Committee.

Thank you.