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For
Freedom to Roam
"A Coalition to Conserve Wildlife Corridors"

House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
"The Role of Federal Lands in Combating Climate Change"
Tuesday, March 3, 2009

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am Rick Ridgeway, Director of Environmental Initiatives for Patagonia Company. Patagonia and a group of business and conservation partners have recently formed Freedom to Roam. This is a new model for landscape protection: a collaborative effort among businesses and conservation organizations to bring ecological connectivity to the forefront of public attention through sound science and effective policies. Freedom to Roam's continental vision encompasses the United States and Canada while facilitating local solutions to landscape connectivity.

We're the only organization I know of that brings together groups such as the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, business leaders from Wal-Mart and Microsoft, energy providers such as BP America and Southern California Edison, hunting and angling groups including the National Wildlife Federation and the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, conservationists from the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies, Defenders of Wildlife, and Yellowstone to Yukon, and scientists from the Wildlife Conservation Society. We also are working with the Western Governors' Association and the Department of Defense. Together this effort is galvanizing policies, practices and on-the-ground efforts designed to ensure that landscapes across the continent maintain their ecological integrity.

I am appreciative of the work of Committee Chairman Rahall and Subcommittee Chairman Grijalva and the members of this Subcommittee on your efforts to develop tangible solutions in the face of a changing climate; in particular, for seeking to define the role of federal lands to lessen the impacts of climate change through sound stewardship. I am pleased that the Committee and Subcommittee members and their staff are showing such a willingness to devote their time to address this critical issue. It indicates to me that you, too, feel that our public lands heritage is at a crucial crossroads.

The Challenge Ahead

There is no doubt that the planet is warming. The International Panel on Climate Change predicts that we could lose as many as 40 - 70 percent of the species on Earth if nothing is done to address the impacts of climate change. No one, including our best scientists fully understands the entire gamut of consequences this biological loss could have on us.

But scientists agree that the ability to migrate across the landscape in response to this phenomenon will be key to the survival of many North American species in the coming decades. The public lands will play a critical role in allowing this migration to take place. In fact, if habitat is fragmented by development and then altered by climate change, many of our native species won't survive. Thus many in the scientific community agree that the most effective option we have to address climate change adaptation for biodiversity is via corridors and connectivity. (see Heller, N. and E. S. Zavaleta, 2008, Biodiversity management in the face of climate change: a synthesis of 20 years of recommendations, *Biological Conservation*).

Convergence of Wildlife Corridors and Habitat Connectivity as a Policy Strategy
In the past year, a steady stream of new policy documents have been developed by working groups, task forces, committees and other groups of knowledgeable specialists to assist decision makers in identifying the importance of protecting ecological connectivity. As a result, new policies for corridor protection will be central to adaptive management strategies that seek to address the impact of climate change on wildlife. In the past six months, three new policy reports were prepared and circulated by a) the 19 western states via the Western Governors' Association, b) the U.S. Forest Service, and c) the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. All three reports incorporated corridors in developing strategies to address climate change.

The first political acknowledgement and support of corridor conservation occurred in the West, where the 19 states are made up of a patchwork of federal, tribal, state and local governments as well as private lands. These are the members of the Western Governors' Association (WGA) who unanimously passed a Wildlife Corridors Initiative. In the Initiative's call to action the governors acknowledged "[w]estern ecosystems do more than sustain wildlife. Crucial habitats and corridors provide ecosystem services that range from enhancing water quality to creating recreational opportunities to ensuring the pollination of our crops. To a great degree, the viability of wildlife is an indicator of the functionality of ecosystems—and so contributes to the sustainability of our communities, our economies, and our general well-being." (see "WGA Wildlife Corridors Initiative Report" 2008 Western Governors' Association, Denver, CO)

The U.S. Forest Service is beginning to develop a response to climate change. In its recently completed framework on this topic, the agency spelled out several actions it can take to facilitate adaptation. This includes a category of anticipatory actions "intended to prevent serious disruptions due to changing climate." The report suggests such potential actions as "… genetic conservation of species, assisted migration of species to suitable habitat, development of wildlife corridors to facilitate migration…" (see "Forest Service Strategic Framework for Responding to Climate Change," Version 1.0, October 2008, U.S. Forest Service, Washington, DC)

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) recently completed its first draft of a strategic plan to address climate change. Although the strategy is currently only available for internal review and labeled "internal discussion draft" and has not been commented upon by external entities, it too promotes habitat connectivity to address habitat

fragmentation and climate change. One of the goals in the plan is to "deliver landscape conservation that supports climate change adaptations by fish, wildlife and plant populations." One of the objectives for this goal is for the USFWS to work with partners to identify and conserve landscape-level corridors to help build connectivity within and between landscapes. This indicates that habitat connectivity at two different spatial scales is considered a key consideration for allowing plants and animals to move and adjust to changing environmental conditions. (see "Rising to the Urgent Challenges of a Changing Climate, Strategic Plan for Responding to Accelerating Climate Change in the 21st Century [Internal Discussion Draft]." U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, December 12, 2008, Washington, DC)

At this time, there is an emerging consensus by the scientific community, federal agencies, many of the states, and leading national conservation organizations that it will be necessary to identify and protect wildlife corridors and habitat connectivity so that wildlife will be able to adapt to a warming world. Therefore, any future federal legislative efforts to address climate change will be greatly enhanced by assuring connectivity conservation.

Federal Legislative Action

The federal government plays an important role in leading the nation's efforts to identify and protect ecological connectivity as a climate change adaptation strategy. I believe that the federal government's land and water management agencies need to have the appropriate authority, direction, and funding to ensure habitat connectivity is conserved across all affected landscapes and water bodies. In addition, the federal government must work with many partners to further this goal across all jurisdictions, including state and local governments, tribes and Native Americans, as well as private land owners.

As I mentioned, the supporters of Freedom to Roam have just begun to review and collect information on policies and practices to implement this vision. The following concepts are some of the suggested methods to achieve the overall goal of improving connectivity opportunities.

As this Subcommittee and other congressional committees develop climate change legislation, it would be extremely helpful to consider the following actions be incorporated as a means of identifying and protecting wildlife corridors and habitat connectivity as an adaptive management strategy.

Create a new federal lands designation: wildlife corridor

Perhaps the boldest, most visionary piece of legislation would create a series of linked ecological networks around the country that would provide for the migration and dispersal of wildlife and other native species. Such a system would allow for a level of landscape connectivity that assures that animals and plants could adjust to shifts in habitat caused by human activity, natural environmental cycles, and global climate change. Weaving a web of habitats across the nation will secure the long-term survival and vibrancy of America's cherished natural heritage for present and future generations.

In order to ensure that wildlife and other biota can migrate and disperse safely across landscapes for their continued health and vigor, a system of connecting habitats could be congressionally designated as "national wildlife corridors." We envision these as part of a National Wildlife Corridor Conservation System.

National Parks, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Wildlife Refuges, and Wilderness areas are national systems developed to serve an important purpose to conserve our nation's natural heritage. Today, given the challenges of addressing climate change, our generation has an opportunity to develop an equally important national system that allows species to move and adapt. These "national wildlife corridors" could be administered in such a manner as to leave them unimpaired to sustain flows of wildlife and plants between different areas of a landscape or region, over time, as well as for the use and enjoyment of the American people.

Include wildlife connectivity in federal land management planning
Climate change legislation must promote the identification and protection of connectivity or migration habitat via federal land and water management agency planning. Currently, I am aware of two examples of the identification and protection of a wildlife migration corridor via federal management plans.

The Bridger-Teton National Forest in Wyoming, on the southern end of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, has completed the first administrative designation of a wildlife corridor in the nation on Forest Service lands. This unprecedented action was sought to maintain secure habitat for the annual migration of a special herd of pronghorn that moves an estimated 45 miles across national forest lands, comprising approximately 29,400 acres, in its semi-annual 150-mile-long trip between their winter range in Upper Green River Basin near Pinedale, Wyoming, and their summer range in Grand Teton National Park. This is one of the longest remaining land-based wildlife migrations in North America, and it is the longest in the lower 48 United States. Archeological evidence suggests that this wildlife pathway has been used for over 6,000 years.

To protect this migration, the Bridger-Teton amended its Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) by identifying the wildlife corridor on a map and developing a management standard to ensure that no new projects or activities impede the migration corridor, known as the Path of the Pronghorn. Such an administrative designation formalized in the Forest Plan can be replicated on national forests across the country.

Part of the Path of the Pronghorn also falls on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands in Wyoming. In the recent revision of its Resource Management Plan, the Pinedale District in Wyoming protected a portion of the pronghorn migration on their lands by approving the designation of the Trappers Point as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) whose management goal is to preserve the viability of the big game migration. In future BLM planning efforts, ACEC designations to protect wildlife connectivity can be utilized as a means to maintain connectivity.

The Forest Service, BLM and all other federal land and water management agencies should be provided direction and funding in climate change legislation to identify and protect key connectivity habitat via their planning processes.

Provide wildlife connectivity across federal lands highways
The Office of Federal Lands Highways "provides program stewardship and transportation engineering services for planning, design, construction, and rehabilitation of the highways and bridges that provide access to and through federally owned lands." Currently, maintaining habitat connectivity across surface transportation infrastructure has not been mandated in any past or current transportation legislation. To ensure busy roads running through federal lands provide safe passage of wildlife across transportation barriers in areas important for connectivity, legislation should direct the federal land agencies to assure that there are retrofits for current infrastructure and incorporate wildlife needs into future development plans for their federal highways. This means terrestrial and aquatic movement patterns must be considered in relation to the location, design, construction and operation of infrastructure projects.

Support state wildlife corridor initiatives
The Western Governors' Association (WGA) Wildlife Corridors Initiative is a prime example of states taking the lead in developing new policies to protect wildlife corridors in the face of a changing climate. The WGA states as well as all others will need support, cooperation and coordination from the federal government as they embark on efforts to address habitat connectivity and crucial habitats. One recommendation from the Initiative's climate change recommendations pertinent to my testimony today is:

"Western Governors should consider supporting establishment of new revenue streams to support wildlife adaptation to climate change in any relevant climate change legislation, such as carbon cap and trade or carbon tax legislation that may be enacted by the U.S. Congress."

Federal climate change legislation should make every effort to work with the states, as the primary authorities responsible for the management of wildlife, to support their efforts to identify and protect wildlife corridors. State efforts to develop new plans to assist fish and wildlife adaption to climate change, and to ensure that state wildlife action plans address this challenge, deserve greater federal encouragement and financial support.

Work with Native Americans and tribes
Federally-recognized Indian tribes have jurisdiction over a reservation land base of more than 52 million acres in the lower 48 states while Alaskan Native lands comprise another 45 million acres. In addition tribes control natural resources outside of reservations due to federal court decisions and voluntary cooperative agreements, which allow co-management status between tribes and states on more than 38 million acres. Climate change legislation that seeks to employ the conservation of wildlife corridors as an adaptive management strategy must work with Native American tribes to identify and protect wildlife connectivity on lands and in waters under their management authority.

Congress should also explore ways to provide Native American tribes with technical and financial resources necessary to develop and implement plans to facilitate the survival of species throughout lands that the tribes directly control or affect.

Support private land conservation
Often private lands are a critical component of many corridors and therefore are crucial to maintain habitat connectivity. One such opportunity for legislation would be to develop incentives within the Land and Water Conservation Fund to target the conservation of corridors and connectivity on private lands. Another would be for climate change legislation to create incentives and financial support to encourage willing land owners to manage their properties so they are wildlife friendly and allow for the unencumbered passage of species through their property in key areas. It may also be appropriate for Congress to consider making permanent existing tax incentives that encourage land conservation and habitat protection.

Provide new streams of federal funding
Given the immense challenges to protect wildlife in the face of climate change throughout the nation, the federal government must lend a financial hand to allow federal agencies, states, tribes and private land owners to implement protections on behalf of habitat connectivity and wildlife corridors. It would be appropriate to consider devoting significant revenues generated by any future climate change legislation to this purpose. In this regard, I applaud the U.S. House of Representatives for your recent passage of the FY09 Omnibus Appropriations bill which will fund a National Global Warming and Wildlife Science Center and directs the Secretary of the Interior to coordinate with other agencies in developing a national strategy to assist the survival of wildlife and ecosystems in the face of global warming. This legislation provides an excellent beginning to develop new solutions for federal land and water management and creates momentum for future endeavors on behalf of wildlife.

Conclusion
Climate change will challenge our ability to maintain our nation's rich natural heritage. However, most agree that identifying and protecting wildlife corridors and connectivity habitat is a key adaptive management strategy worth pursuing. Freedom to Roam appreciates being part of the growing effort of local, state and national conservation organizations, and state and federal agencies, who are working to ensure the long-term survival of America's fish and wildlife. On behalf of Freedom to Roam, I thank you for the opportunity to testify and look forward to working with the Subcommittee as it develops legislation to fully achieve the protection of our nation's wildlife.

Thank you.