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Coeur d'Alene, Idaho - Western governors announced today an agreement with the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) that will enable the federal government to make extensive use of state information about crucial wildlife habitats and important wildlife corridors.

The wildlife information, being developed by Western states, is pursuant to the work of the Western Governors' Wildlife Council. The agreement signed by leadership of the Wildlife Council and representatives from DOI and USDA builds upon a June 2009 memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Western governors and the secretaries of USDA, DOI, and the U.S. Department of Energy.

The primary objective of the 2009 MOU is to support the development of spatial planning tools that provide information from states about important wildlife areas in the West and to coordinate the states' efforts with complementary federal initiatives.

"This agreement is an important step in reaffirming State authority to manage fish and wildlife populations," said Governor Otter, WGA chairman. "Local offices of these federal agencies will use this agreement to work closely with our State wildlife experts to inform their land use, land planning and natural resource decisions."

The agreement also seeks to align Western states' wildlife mapping objectives with federal initiatives such as the Landscape Conservation Cooperatives and the Bureau of Land Management Rapid Ecoregional Assessments to make wildlife mapping approaches compatible across political boundaries.

DOI Secretary Ken Salazar said, "This partnership with the Western states will help provide additional, helpful information to Interior as we work to manage our public lands and natural resources in a sustainable, science-based manner."

USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment Harris Sherman said, "Working together with our state and federal partners in identifying priority wildlife areas will benefit forest managers as they implement restoration projects and new forest plans once the National Planning Rule is in place."

Gov. Christine Gregoire (Wash.), WGA's incoming Chairman, emphasized the importance of states and federal agencies not duplicating efforts.

"It is in our mutual interest - particularly in these difficult budget times - to avoid duplication of effort, make efficient use of limited state and federal resources, and ensure complimentary end products. This agreement will allow us all achieve all of these goals."

The Western Governors' Wildlife Council is in the midst of identifying important wildlife habitats and corridors and displaying that information in geospatial tools that will be publically available in 2013.

The wildlife tools are intended to better conserve wildlife and important habitats on a large scale and also provide wildlife information early to assist in the pre-planning of economic development projects that are vital to the region.

More information can be found at: www.westgov.org/initiatives/wildlife.

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