

Wildlife Migration Corridor and Private Lands Forestry

August 9, 2023 - Chama, NM

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Tour stop at the Humphries Wildlife Management Area.

Context

The Chama area is the gateway to a major migration corridor used by elk and mule deer to move between their summer range in the San Juan Mountains to the low country of northern New Mexico. This migration corridor is roughly 90 miles long and 4,000 square miles. It crosses the Colorado/New Mexico state line, four National Forests, several BLM parcels, two Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), the Jicarilla Apache Nation, the Southern Ute Reservation and at least 20 large private properties. This multijurisdictional migration corridor faces many threats, including habitat fragmentation, barriers to connectivity, drought and disease. While the quilt of land management in this area is a significant challenge, many private landowners are doing their part to protect the migration corridor, which acts like a highway for these animals. The warm-dry mixed conifer forest ecosystem is in serious need of management on this landscape, and there are several funding programs that provide assistance for landowners to do restoration projects on their forested lands.



Humphries WMA

The 2-3-2 Partnership visited the Humphries WMA, one of two WMAs that the NM Department of Game and Fish (DGF) manages near Chama. Surrounded by the Jicarilla Apache Nation to the south and private land to the north, DGF collaborates with adjacent land managers to provide safe passage for the thousands of elk and mule deer that travel through this area.

The Partnership discussed strategies for working with private landowners to accomplish goals for wildlife preservation at the landscape scale. Chama Peak Land Alliance (CPLA), a local conservation group that focuses on private land stewardship, has worked with landowners in the area to promote wildlife-friendly fencing and water distribution for animals. CPLA is dedicated to finding ways to keep private land profitable so it isn't subdivided or developed.



Top: Kyle Tator talks about the wildlife corridor that passes through the Humphries WMA. To learn more about this wildlife corridor, check out the [meeting notes](#).

Bottom: participants gather for a discussion about wildlife corridors at the Humphries WMA.

Partners also discussed the perceived issue of wildlife on roadways. Kyle Tator, wildlife biologist with Jicarilla Game and Fish, explained how wildlife bridges can sometimes do more harm than good because they require fencing that can prevent connectivity across the landscape. In other cases, collisions with vehicles can do real harm to the population. Tour participants who are residents of the Chama area agree that watching for elk and deer on the road is a part of life here.

Rancho de la Roca

Rancho de la Roca, previously known as the Quinlan Ranch, is a 16,000-acre private property that borders the Ed Sargent and Humphries WMAs. Under new ownership, the ranch manager is focused on responsible grazing, mulching, erosion control and weed management on the property.

There is an active forestry project funded through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), a program of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The 30-acre project is designed to reduce wildfire risk, improve forest resilience, and promote better forage for wildlife in the understory through mastication. The initial acreage of this RCPP project was reduced due to funding limitations.

Forest Service employees Michael Tooley (RGNF) and Adam Tlachac (SJNF) gave an overview of the ecology of the mixed-conifer forest type at this site. They explained the susceptibility of white fir to wildfire and the western spruce budworm. The presence of white fir at this location indicates that there hasn't been fire here in a long time. Mastication, as Adam and Michael explained, mimics a disturbance like wildfire.

The 2-3-2 Partnership knows that management on private lands is a critical part of achieving landscape-scale change, but a single landowner usually can't move the needle. In conjunction with adjacent landowners, this treatment could help provide protection of source-watersheds against wildfire, and it will also promote great forage within summer range for elk and mule deer.



Top: 2-3-2 Partners gather for a group photo at Rancho de la Roca.
 Bottom: 2-3-2 Partners talk shop and enjoy time in the field.
 ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF USFS

Landscape Overview

