

Gravelly Landscape Collaborative
June 2017 news article
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Red winged blackbirds, elk, coyotes, mule deer, bobcats, sage grouse. The wildlife found in the Gravelly Mountains and surrounding foothills is diverse and indicative of the health of the forests, waters, soil, and rangelands. The presence and absence of wildlife can be a clue to the health of our surroundings, and so it has the attention of the Gravelly Landscape Collaborative.

The Gravelly Landscape Collaborative (GLC) has hosted discussions on landscape management since 2012 and has advanced the Greenhorn Project currently under development with the US Forest Service. Local stakeholders enthusiastically identified opportunities for wildlife habitat improvement. They also shared concerns about management impacts on uses such as grazing, and the impacts of no management. The group wrestled with frustration when policies directed the need to manage habitat for species that do not currently reside here like the Canadian Lynx. Regardless of frustrations there are plenty of opportunities for improvements and the individuals and groups around the table rolled up their sleeves to develop wildlife goals and how to reach them.

The GLC identified the preferred approach of managing for habitat that can rebound from disturbance like drought, fire and insect infestations rather than focusing on one species over another. Kris Inman from Wildlife Conservation Society says, "the work proposed is important for wildlife as it will build the landscape's resiliency to withstand events like drought and better avoid large catastrophic fires". Inman's work focuses on finding solutions that benefit local communities and the environment, "I am excited about the proposed work in the Greenhorns and the benefits that wildlife will have as well as the benefits the community will see in reducing fire danger."

For every action there is a reaction, no one understands this better than those involved in agriculture. Management activities on the forest have impacts on users including those holding grazing permits. However, sometimes short-term impacts can produce beneficial win-wins in the long run. John Anderson is watching with hope that the burning of conifers on lowland foothills will benefit livestock grazing and sage grouse. John Anderson recently shared, "It has been a privilege to be a part of a group of conservation minded folks who share agriculture's passion for the natural resources which sustain our ability to maintain our way of living on the land."

The Greenhorn project also has the attention of sportsmen. Over the years we have seen a loss of suitable winter range for ungulates. These conditions not

only impact herd health but also the success of hunters. Dan Durham shared that “Hike up in the Greenhorn in the spring and it is easy to see that the elk, deer and moose have eaten just about every bit of last year’s growth on any curleaf mountain mahogany, aspen, maple or chokecherry that wasn’t buried in the snow. These plants can only take so much pressure before they start to die out. Projects that remove conifers and stimulate an increase in shrub and forb production will be a huge benefit to ungulate species that use this area for winter range. This project is necessary to maintain the quality and quantity of hunting opportunities we have in the Greenhorn and the entire Ruby watershed. The alternative is to watch these critters eat themselves out of house and home, leaving us with a much different hunting scenario than we have today”.

More conversations on wildlife are on deck during an upcoming field tour on July 7th, the GLC encourages everyone to join and take a look. Please **RSVP** if you are interested in attending so that we can get a head count: kweber@fs.fed.us, 406-683-3928.

What: Greenhorns Project Area field trip

When: July 7th at 10 AM

Where: Meet at the Alder Fire Station