



USDA Unveils New Framework for Migratory Big Game Conservation

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(Boise, ID, June 2, 2026) – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today unveiled a new framework for migratory big game conservation, bringing together federal, state and Tribal partners across 17 states to address threats to big game like elk, pronghorn and mule deer.

The [Migratory Big Game: A Framework for Conservation Action](#) is the most unified, landscape-scale approach undertaken by the USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to support big game conservation while putting farmers and ranchers first by keeping working lands working.

USDA made the announcement at the summer meeting of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) to recognize the key role state fish and wildlife agencies play in managing wildlife species in the United States.

"We know that migratory big game rely on large and connected landscapes to meet their daily, seasonal and annual needs," said **Richard Fordyce, USDA's Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation**. "This new Framework for Conservation Action helps us better target our resources and align our efforts, which benefit wildlife as well as ranching operations. USDA introduced its first frameworks in 2020, during President Trump's first term, and we want to continue using this successful model of supporting wildlife and ranching productivity and operations."

"Across the West, the future of iconic big game herds—elk, mule deer and pronghorn—depends on the health of our working lands," said **NRCS Chief Colton L. Buckley**. "Privately owned lands provide the vital seasonal habitats and connectivity required to sustain these healthy, resilient herds."

"We're supporting migratory big game conservation by offering farmers and ranchers program opportunities that benefit big game and strengthen agricultural operations," said **FSA Administrator Bill Beam**. "Like the ranchers who are stewards of our Western Grasslands, USDA recognizes that agriculture and conservation are most effective when they work together to strengthen the working lands and protect wildlife such as big game species for future generations."

"This Framework represents a historic alignment, ensuring that the management authority of states is backed by the full strength and resources of the USDA to collaboratively conserve the West's iconic migrations," said **Zach Lowe, Executive Director of WAFWA**. "By investing in sustainable ranching practices, we are improving habitat quality, boosting rangeland resilience, and ensuring these iconic

herds can continue to move safely across vast and open grazing lands."??

State fish and wildlife agencies (SFWAs), which have the trust responsibility for migratory big game populations, have identified that these species face increasing threats to habitat quality and connectivity. Improving habitat quality requires restoring native plant communities, improving forest health, and addressing invasive species. Improving connectivity requires mitigating physical barriers, such as highways and fences, and minimizing landscape fragmentation.??

About the Framework??

The Framework provides a strategy for using Farm Bill resources, including NRCS programs, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, Agricultural Conservation Easement Program and Regional Conservation Partnership Program, as well as FSA's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).??

Through these programs, USDA provides assistance for delivering the Framework's three strategies:??

- **Protecting Habitat and Connectivity:** Voluntary conservation easements and CRP contracts help keep working lands intact, preventing fragmentation from development and securing movement corridors for future generations.??
- **Reducing Barriers to Movement:** Modernizing fences is a centerpiece of the strategy, replacing hazardous designs with wildlife-friendly alternatives and, where possible, removing fencing entirely. The Framework also highlights emerging solutions like virtual fencing, which reduces conflicts between livestock management and wildlife migration while lowering costs for producers.??
- **Improving Habitat Quality:** Actions include controlling invasive annual grasses, removing encroaching conifers, restoring mesic (wet) habitats, and improving forest health to boost forage and habitat quality on summer and winter ranges. These steps strengthen rangeland resilience, reduce wildfire risk, and maintain reliable water and forage sources critical to livestock and wildlife alike.??

States include: Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.??

This is USDA's fifth [Framework for Conservation Action](#). In the western United States, the Sagebrush and Great Plains Frameworks for Conservation Action provide a collective roadmap for the conservation of working rangelands. USDA developed its first framework on the Great Plains Grasslands in 2020.??

Blueprint for Success??

The frameworks build on USDA's efforts through Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW), the Department's premier approach for conserving America's working lands to benefit people, wildlife, and rural communities. WLFW uses win-win solutions to target voluntary, incentive-based conservation that improves agricultural productivity and wildlife habitat on working lands. WLFW takes an ecosystem approach and uses focal wildlife species as barometers of success to help guide conservation delivery.

Spatial targeting lies at the heart of WLFW's threat-reduction strategies.

As the flagship effort of WLFW, the Sage Grouse Initiative showed what can be achieved through voluntary conservation, helping reduce threats at unprecedented scales, benefiting wildlife, and precluding the need for listing sage grouse under the Endangered Species Act. Interwoven into this framework for big game migrations are lessons learned from 15 years of WLFW implementation, along with new science and technology to inform future delivery.

Next, USDA will incorporate the framework into the locally led process for prioritizing conservation in collaboration with SFWAs, federal land managers and other stakeholders. More details are forthcoming on how this will look in the Framework's 17 states.

Work with USDA

Farmers and ranchers interested in conserving habitat and implementing wildlife-friendly practices should contact FSA and NRCS at their [local USDA Service Center](#) to learn about available practices and programs. Additionally, FSA and NRCS State Offices will share additional information related to efforts in their states.

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