

# ROOM *to* ROAM


Saving Wildlife Linkages Along the  
Spine of the Continent



WILDLANDS PROJECT







**S**AVE THE WILD. It's an idea as old as Yellowstone, the world's first national park—protect wild land and the animals and plants that live there will be protected too. But more than a hundred years later, wildlife is still being lost at an alarming rate. Why? Parks—even Yellowstone—are just too small. It is this realization that has led to a revolution in wildlife conservation.

#### CROSSING TO SAFETY

Like this highway overpass in Alberta—built for wildlife—keeping connections between wild areas can mean the difference between survival and extinction.



# BIG, WILD, CONNECTED



A PARK HERE AND A POND THERE isn't enough for many kinds of plants and animals. Over the past two decades, biologists have come to understand that we must have bigger protected areas—and we must connect these big areas—to ensure that wildlife has the room it needs to roam, to find food, to mate, to survive.

From the Yukon tundra to the high deserts of Mexico, bears, wolves, native trout, and other wild animals are struggling. The West is being fractured into small slivers. Logging, mining, real estate development, oil and gas drilling are destroying habitat and stranding wildlife in isolated islands of backcountry.

That's why the Wildlands Project's team of conservation biologists and partner groups have created maps and plans—from the grand scale down to the local level—that link parks, wilderness areas, and other large areas of protected lands through corridors of connected natural habitat—such as wildlife refuges, state parks, national forests, and local land trust holdings.

This strategy uses cutting-edge science to establish conservation priorities and proposals for restoring natural processes in once-wild areas. It is a strategy the Wildlands Project and partner groups are putting into practice now along the spine of the Rocky Mountains—working with communities from Canada to Mexico to put the pieces together, to weave a tapestry of life thousands of miles long.



## THE WILDLANDS PROJECT'S WORK TO RECONNECT THE CONTINENT BEGINS WITH "MEGALINKAGES"—

vast pathways that tie natural places together. Each MegaLinkage is made up of regional "Wildlands Networks." Within the Spine of the Continent MegaLinkage, six Wildlands Networks have been proposed, and within these networks, the Wildlands Project has launched a campaign to protect "Endangered Linkages"—the critical connection within each network that is most threatened.



1.

## YELLOWSTONE TO YUKON (Y2Y)

Nearly 2000 miles of mountains, the northern reach of the Rockies, stretch from Yellowstone National Park to the Mackenzie Mountains. Huge snow and ice fields feed a dozen major rivers, including the Columbia and Fraser, that provide clean water to most of western North America—and homes to salmon. The land supports Dall sheep and mountain goats, elk and moose, wolves and bears—and, of course, rumbling herds of caribou. Yellowstone to Yukon is often called the wild heart of North America. The Y2Y Conservation Initiative is leading the effort to keep its heart beating.



2.

## HEART OF THE WEST

This region is known for its stunning scenery—sagebrush-covered basins which are home to prairie dogs and sage grouse, lodgepole pine forests with gray wolves and bighorn sheep, juniper forests where black bear and mule deer thrive. Magnificent herds of pronghorn still travel across vast uplands, and grizzly bears, wolves, and wolverines roam the wildest strongholds. Developed primarily by the Wild Utah Project and Biodiversity Conservation Alliance, the proposed Heart of the West Wildlands Network presents a scientific blueprint for saving this ecological mosaic.

# PLANNING FOR WILDLIFE CONNECTIONS

This map presents planning areas for each Wildlands Network along the Rocky Mountain spine where the Wildlands Project science team and partner groups are identifying the most important habitat for wildlife, based on scientific principles, and the most sensible places to protect, based on political common sense.



3.

## SOUTHERN ROCKIES

The Southern Rockies reach from mountaintop tundra to lower-elevation forests and grasslands. The region's alpine peaks, foothills, rugged canyons, and plateaus create habitat for elk, mountain lion, beaver, black bear, cutthroat trout, and Canada lynx. Developed primarily by the Southern Rockies Ecosystem Project, the proposed Southern Rockies Wildlands Network would expand and sustain protections for this extraordinary country.



4.

## NEW MEXICO HIGHLANDS

Here, herds of pronghorn outpace the wind; cranes and ducks thunder like a living storm; on pine and fir-clad mountains, bighorn sheep, elk, and black bears roam; on dry desert floors abundant populations of reptiles make a living among the cacti while fish and flycatchers travel cottonwood-lined river corridors. This ruggedly beautiful country is where the Rocky Mountains, Great Plains, Chihuahuan Desert, and Great Basin meet, forming a continental crossroads for wildlife. Recently completed, the New Mexico Highlands Wildlands Network Design sets out a practical vision for keeping the region wild.





5.



## THE SKY ISLANDS

Forty mountain ranges adrift in a sea of desert and grassland. This glorious place, where subtropical and temperate ecoregions overlap, harbors wolves, jaguars, northern goshawks, four thousand plant species, and more than half of all breeding birds in North America. Today, the completed Sky Islands Wildlands Network Design is helping to protect land in the region.

Each of these six areas contains some of North America's biologically important, and threatened, wonders of Nature. Connected, they form the spine of the continent.

6.



## NORTHERN SIERRA MADRE

The mountains and prairies of this region are among the best preserved, yet unprotected, natural areas in Mexico. Grizzly bears are gone, but jaguars and black bears still roam the wildest country, thick-billed parrots chatter in old-growth forests, and the largest complex of prairie dog towns in North America bustles with life. With intact linkages to the north, Mexican wolves might someday come home. Planning for a Wildlands Network in the Northern Sierra Madre is underway.



# ENDANGERED LINKAGES

The Wildlands Project has identified local areas most important for wildlife movement—and most at risk of being lost. Saving these five endangered linkages—located within the circles at right—is a crucial part of the broader work underway to reconnect the spine of the continent. This map presents a basic portrait of Wildlands Networks; please contact us for a detailed map and comprehensive plans.

## WILDLANDS NETWORKS



Planning Boundaries



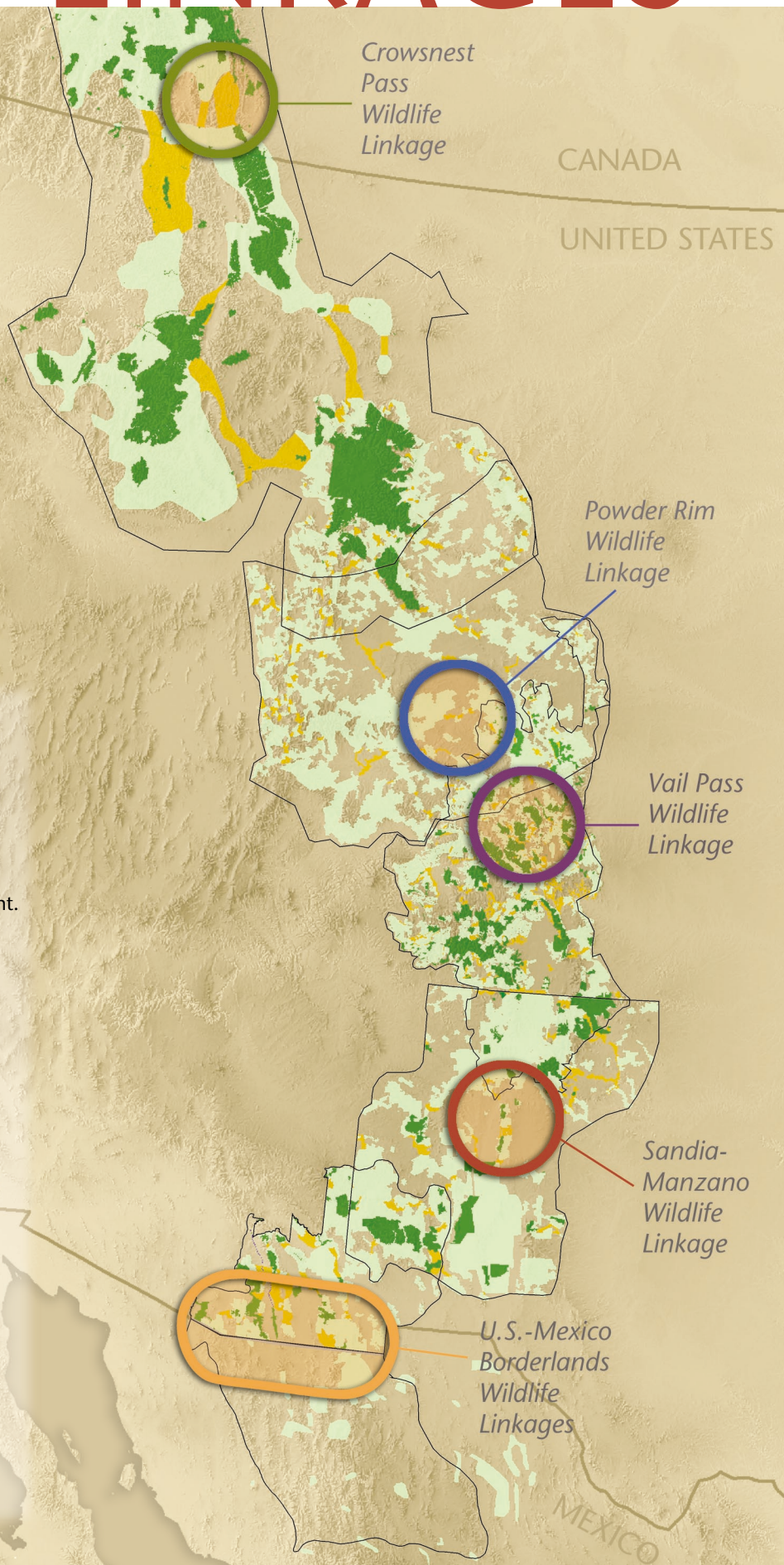
**Core wild areas**  
land already in protection  
(e.g., parks, wildlife refuges,  
wilderness areas)



**Proposed conservation areas**  
(e.g., important habitat on public  
land, proposed wilderness areas,  
private stewardship lands)



**Wildlife linkages**  
connections between core wild  
areas and other conservation lands



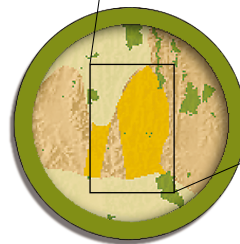
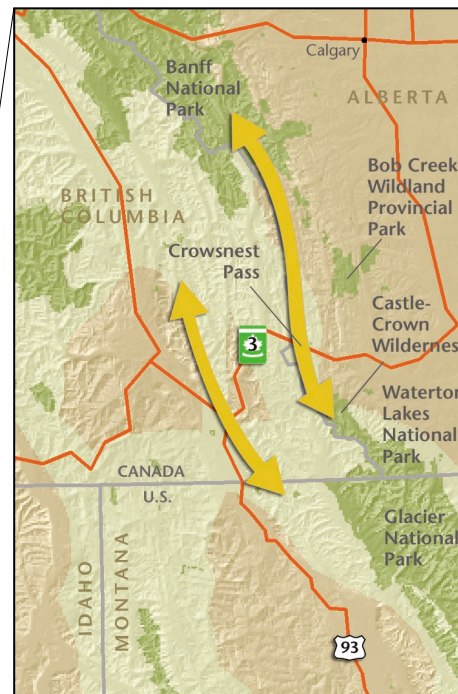


# CROWSNEST PASS

## ENDANGERED WILDLIFE LINKAGE

**Location:** southwest Alberta and southeast British Columbia near Montana border

Uninterrupted wild country from Yellowstone to the Yukon once allowed wide-ranging species like grizzly bears, wolves, wolverines, and caribou to thrive. Wild creatures now find their home ranges severed by highways and sprawling subdivisions, industrial forestry and mining, oil and gas operations. Increasing levels of recreational activity in backcountry areas also threaten sensitive wildlife. A critical choke point in the northern spine of the continent is Highway 3 through Crowsnest Pass, which bisects the Rocky Mountains at one of its narrowest stretches. This potential habitat fracture zone is often referred to as the “soft underbelly” of the Y2Y region; leading bear biologists believe that if Crowsnest Pass becomes impassable to grizzly bears, they will eventually go extinct in the Lower 48.



*Species of Special Concern:* Grizzly Bear



**Threats:** proposed doubling of Highway 3, motorized recreation, industrial development, rural development and sprawl

**Key Natural Areas:** Waterton Lakes and Glacier National Parks, Bob Creek Wildland Provincial Park, Castle-Crown Wilderness, Flathead River (North fork) Basin

**Solutions:** effective wildlife crossings, development controls in bear habitat, appropriate land protection and management



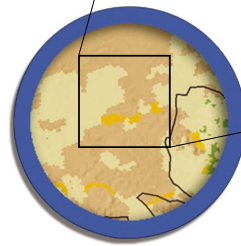
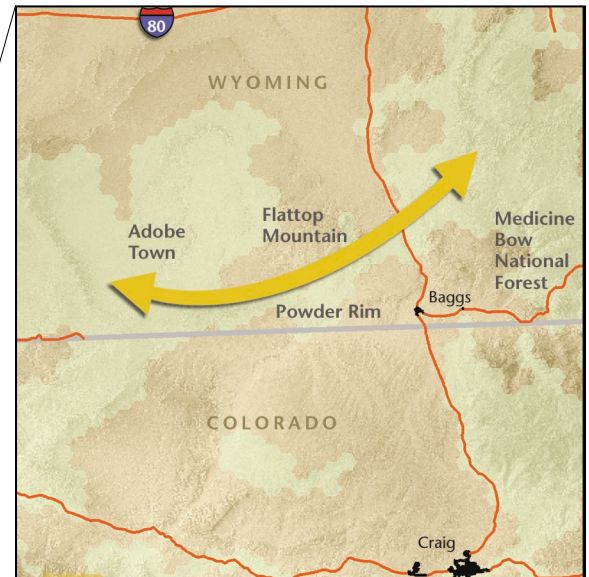
# POWDER RIM



## ENDANGERED WILDLIFE LINKAGE

*Location:* south-central Wyoming,  
along Colorado border

The Powder Rim, a broad swell of high country robed in a mix of juniper woodland, sagebrush, and grasslands, is a key wildlife linkage between the Medicine Bow National Forest and public lands administered by the federal Bureau of Land Management. On the edge of the spectacular Red Desert country, the region is precious habitat for sage grouse, mule deer, pronghorn, and golden eagles. A rash of oil and gas development threatens the region's wildlife and wild character.



*Species of Special Concern:*  
Greater Sage Grouse



*Threats:* oil and gas development, livestock  
grazing practices

*Key Natural Areas:* Medicine Bow National Forest, federal public land in the Red Desert including Adobe Town, Powder Rim, and Flattop Mountain

*Solutions:* banning drilling and grazing in sensitive areas; land protection, including additional wilderness designations and agency protections for the Red Desert



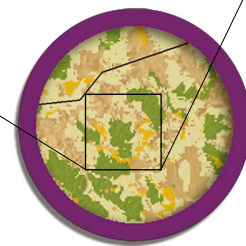
# VAIL PASS



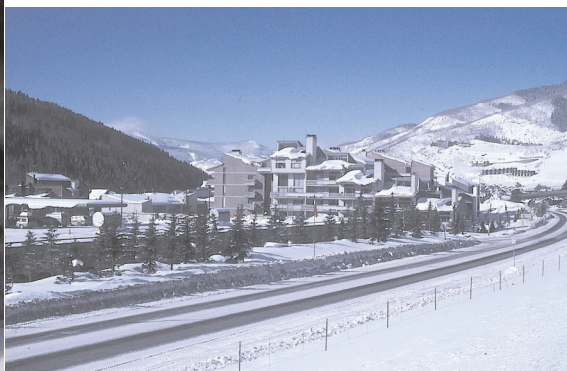
## ENDANGERED WILDLIFE LINKAGE

### *Location:* north-central Colorado

Once plentiful in the large roadless areas of the Colorado Rockies, Canada lynx populations declined through the 1900s due to trapping and habitat loss from logging and development. Now a Threatened species, a reintroduction program is underway to return these magnificent wild cats to their former home. Barriers to the lynx's full recovery include logging in roadless areas, motorized backcountry recreation, large-scale ski area expansion, and roads that limit movement between protected habitats. These threats also imperil the region's other wildlife, including mountain lions and American marten.



*Species of Special Concern:*  
Canada Lynx



*Threats:* Interstate 70, resort development,  
uncontrolled recreation

*Key Natural Areas:* Eagles Nest and Holy Cross Wilderness Areas, White River National Forest, Arapaho National Forest

*Solutions:* effective wildlife crossings, recreation and development controls in potential lynx habitat



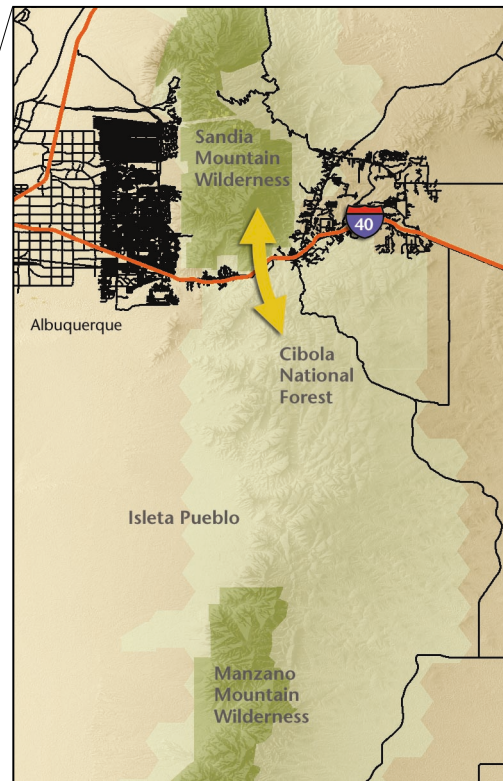
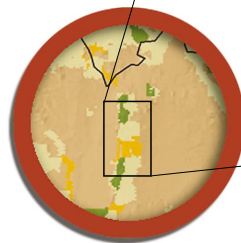
# SANDIA-MANZANO



## ENDANGERED WILDLIFE LINKAGE

### *Location:* central New Mexico

Roads and sprawling development are eating away at the New Mexico Highlands' last sanctuaries for black bears, mountain lions, and bighorn sheep. The linkage of natural habitat between the Sandia and Manzano Mountains east of Albuquerque is all but completely severed by Interstate 40, one of the busiest expressways in the West. Six lanes of highway, plus a two-lane frontage road, create a formidable barrier to animals. Roadkill of bears, mountain lions, and other wildlife is a growing problem. Without immediate conservation action, this critical connection may be permanently lost.



*Species of Special Concern:* Black Bear



*Threats:* Roadkill, sprawling development, bear-human conflicts

*Key Natural Areas:* Sandia Mountain and Manzano Mountain Wilderness Areas, Cibola National Forest

*Solutions:* effective wildlife crossings, land protection, public education

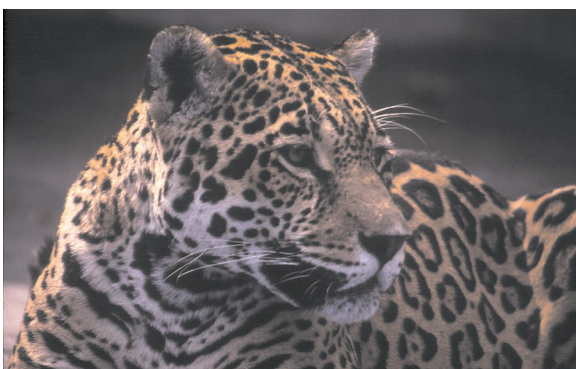
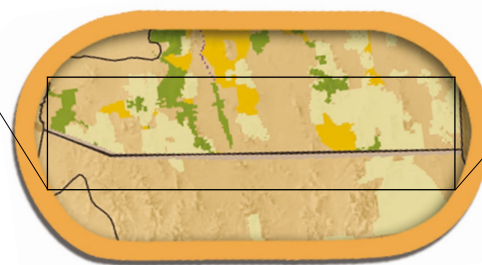


# BORDERLANDS

## ENDANGERED WILDLIFE LINKAGE

*Location:* southern Arizona, New Mexico, northern Sonora and Chihuahua, Mexico

Border fencing and other security infrastructure—access roads, 24-hour security lighting, and noise from aircraft patrols—have become a major threat to wildlife movement between Mexico and the Sky Islands region of southern Arizona and New Mexico. With proposals to greatly expand fencing, the border is becoming an impervious barrier to wide-ranging species such as jaguars, ocelots, mountain lions, and pronghorn. Without such landscape connections, there is no chance for natives like Mexican wolves and jaguars to return to their historic ranges.



*Species of Special Concern:* Jaguar



*Threats:* Border fencing and infrastructure, border patrol activities

*Key Natural Areas:* (U.S.) Peloncillo Mountains, San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area, Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge, Patagonia Mountains, and Pajarita Wilderness Area—all contiguous with the Mexican border; (Mexico) Sierra San Antonio, Sierra San Luis, and El Berrendo regions, identified as priority areas for conservation

*Solutions:* Transboundary conservation planning, international cooperation, wildlife-friendly security practices



# NETWORKS OF PEOPLE PROTECTING NETWORKS OF LAND

Biologists estimate that the world loses more than 100 species each day. But, with dozens of partners and allies, the Wildlands Project's strategy can help put the brakes on extinction. Using the best science and latest mapping technologies, our conservation plans not only make room for beetles and butterflies—they give the bears a fighting chance.

But while we work to connect the landscape for wildlife, the Wildlands Project also works to connect people to the land and to each other.

Who are we? We are parents and scientists, teachers and fishermen. We are county commissioners and hikers, ranchers and farmers. We are students, activists, highway engineers, land trust members, and retired folks who remember a wilder country from our youth. We are people across North America who want to share the prairies with bison, the mountains with bears, and the wonders of creation with our children.

We are people inspired by what can be. We look for solutions and hold a positive vision for the place we call home. Join us!



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