

# Casper Star Tribune

## August 8, 2005

### Protect the corridor?

*By Mary Clare Jalonick  
Associated Press*

PINEDALE, Wyo. - Pronghorn antelope have traveled through here for thousands of years, gradually adapting to roads and subdivisions as they migrate between the high peaks of the Grand Tetons and the warmer, flatter lands of the Red Desert.

But the animals, which make the 160-mile trek every spring and fall, may not be prepared for the metamorphosis coming to this sagebrush-covered swath of western Wyoming. What was once a quiet, barren landscape is becoming a land of gas rigs and expensive housing developments.

Conservationists are concerned the pronghorns' journey - thought to be the second-longest land-based animal migration in the Western Hemisphere - will get lost in the local population boom, much of which is caused by a dramatic increase in energy development.

A number of local groups have proposed the creation of the country's first "national migration corridor" to protect the traveling animals. Such a designation would urge companies and developers not to block the migration, and possibly penalize them for doing so.

Members of the state's congressional delegation - who would have to push the idea in Washington - range from wary to strongly opposed.

"No chance," says Republican Rep. Barbara Cubin, the state's only House member.

"I would be reluctant to go in on a national level," said Republican Sen. Craig Thomas, who said the problem should be looked at locally.

Several state officials, along with the international energy companies that profit from the land, agree with Cubin and Thomas.

"I think we can solve this problem locally," said state Rep. Keith Gingery, R-Jackson, who represents part of the corridor. "Sometimes we run out and get a baseball bat when all we needed was a fly swatter."

At issue is an area just west of Pinedale called Trapper's Point, where the corridor shrinks to an area only a mile wide, flanked by the Green and New Fork rivers. Roads and newly built housing developments, along with nearby gas development, further squeeze the corridor to a half-mile stretch.

Conservationists call these constricted areas pronghorn "bottlenecks" because the high-strung animals refuse to cross rivers or travel through riparian or developed areas where they cannot get a wide view of the landscape. More rigs or

structures could block their view completely, ending the migration or significantly disrupting it.

Gas drilling here has exploded in recent years as prices have skyrocketed, and the town is bracing for more rapid expansion.

The boom has brought not only more rigs but also more houses, and pronghorn often get caught in fences that aren't built high enough for them to slip under. Because the animals will not jump over fences, local officials have urged homeowners to build pronghorn-friendly barriers.

Louise Lasley of the Wildlife Conservation Society, a local environmental group that is spearheading the fight for federal oversight, said the group was open to a federal or state designation that would not have any real authority to penalize those who build fences or structures along the migration route.

That kind of designation would at least raise awareness, she said, and help the state lobby for financial incentives for those who help preserve the corridor.