



Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal, right, chats with Tom Brokaw of NBC before the Western Governors' Association meeting Sunday in Teton Village. Brokaw interviewed Freudenthal the day before for the Sunday morning broadcast of "Meet the Press."
Bradly J. Boner

Brokaw backs wildlife

*By Noah Brenner, Jackson Hole, Wyoming
June 30, 2008*

Former NBC news anchor Tom Brokaw urged the leaders of Western states and the Department of the Interior to protect wildlife corridors when considering energy and other development.

Brokaw made his remarks during his keynote opening address at the Western Governors Association annual meeting Sunday afternoon at Walk Festival Hall in Teton Village. In his speech he endorsed a Western Governors Association initiative that calls for increased awareness of wildlife corridors and a greater effort to gather information on critical areas as energy development and population growth threaten western landscapes.

He also endorsed the "Freedom to Roam," campaign launched by the Patagonia clothing company that is focused on wildlife migration corridors and encouraging their protection. A coalition of private companies, conservation organizations and recreation groups has joined the campaign, and Brokaw said the partnership can be "a model for other regions, other challenges."

Brokaw, who was born in South Dakota and owns a ranch in Montana, told the crowd that the West and its people hold a special place in his heart.

"I come to you as someone with a great appreciation not only of the region and its culture," Brokaw said, "but especially the people and they way we get things done out here"

Protecting wildlife and wildlife habitat are crucial to maintaining Western culture because nature is important to residents and visitors in the West, he said.

"To survive and thrive and protect all that is unique and precious about this amazing region will mean more cooperation and shared vision," Brokaw said. "And what is most precious about the West is mother nature – the native creatures that have always been there and always must remain because they are crucial to the DNA of people that inhabit the region. They depend on us to keep their world a fit place for them to survive and thrive."

Brokaw told the story of astronaut Jim Lovell, who was one of the first to see the Earth rise above the lunar horizon. From space, Lovell read the first ten verses of the book of Genesis, ending with line "And God saw that it was good," Brokaw said.

"All God's creatures are counting on us to make sure it stays good," Brokaw said, ending his speech to a standing ovation.

On Saturday evening Brokaw taped a portion of "Meet the Press," at Jackson Hole Golf and Tennis with

Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal and Colorado Gov. Bill Ritter. Brokaw took over the program at least through November following the sudden death of Tim Russert.

On the program, the two governors discussed the struggle to balance energy development and wildlife protection and the West's burgeoning political importance in the upcoming presidential election. Brokaw also spoke with California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger but Schwarzenegger's portion of the program was taped outside Wyoming.

The Western Governor's Association is a nonpartisan organization that involves the heads of 19 states and 3 Pacific island territories. It was formed to allow governors to identify and address common issues in their states.

The governor's association is holding its meeting in Wyoming because Freudenthal is the organization's chairman. Each year the chairman picks the venue for the annual meeting.

This year the governors were joined by Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne as well as officials from provinces in western Canada.