

# Scientific effort focuses on Green River Basin

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LARAMIE -- Scientists gathered Tuesday to discuss their latest research on how energy development and restoration projects are affecting fish and wildlife habitat in the Green River Basin of southwest Wyoming.

Federal, state and local groups formed the Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative two years ago to coordinate their research into gas development and wildlife habitat in the 15-million-acre region. Federal agencies manage most of the area, which covers all or parts of Sublette, Fremont, Lincoln, Sweetwater, Carbon and Uinta counties.

Participants say their goal is provide data for a broad "landscape scale" approach to responsible energy development that preserves wildlife and local agriculture.

This week's three-day conference included dozens of research presentations on topics such as revegetation on the Pinedale Anticline project area, the health of sagebrush songbirds in development areas and a proposed mule deer highway crossing near Baggs.

"The biggest difference between what was happening before and what's happening now is the WLCI is a coordinated approach to gathering the science and applying it to the decisions that are made at the land-use level," said John Linn, a Sublette County commissioner and chairman of the initiative's executive committee.

"It's exciting to know that we're finally going to be making decisions based on science rather than emotion," Linn said. "Whether its pro- or anti- whatever, those emotions can drive decisions about development."

The Green River Basin has an estimated 83 trillion cubic feet of recoverable natural gas reserves. That's nearly four times the amount used annually in the United States, according to the group. The area is also home to major populations of deer, pronghorn antelope, elk, moose, big horn sheep and 151 non-game species.

The U.S. Geological Survey is coordinating the initiative, which had a budget of \$4.25 million in 2008, including funding from the USGS, the Bureau of Land Management and the Fish and Wildlife Service. USGS officials said funding decreased by about \$750,000 this year, but they hope the reduction will be restored for 2010.

The initiative provided funding and coordination for 29 projects last year, including fencing, wetland creation, prescribed burns and weed treatments.

Zack Bowen, chief of ecosystem dynamics at the USGS' Fort Collins Science Center, said his agency is providing technical assistance for research being done by scientists from various federal and state agencies, as well as from energy companies.

One of USGS' first tasks was to compile existing research data from the region to help prevent redundant work and also to provide information to land managers, Bowen said.

The project also includes coordinating studies of wildlife, such as mule deer migration routes, he said. A third element is monitoring the effectiveness of various habitat restoration projects and the overall effectiveness of the initiative, he said.