National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

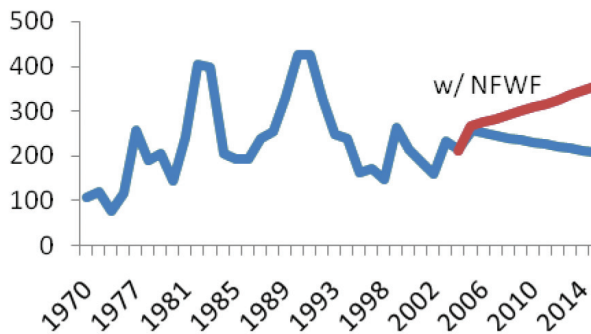Executive Summary for the Path of the Pronghorn Business Plan

March 24, 2009

Path of the Pronghorn Business Plan

Executive Summary

Conservation need: Pronghorn in the Upper Green River Valley of Wyoming are one of the best examples of an American wildlife population whose survival is dependent on the freedom to roam a vast landscape. These pronghorn — a population of fewer than 1,000 animals that has been slowly growing since the 1970's — work to survive by migrating several hundred miles each year between summer range in Grand Teton National Park and winter range in central Sublette County, Wyoming. This stands as the longest-known terrestrial animal migratory route in the 48 contiguous states.

Performance targets: A new investment of approximately $4 – 5 million over 5 years would result in a 75% decline in human-caused mortality (excluding hunting) during migration and approximate 3% instead of 10% 5-year decline. An additional $23 – 25 million investment, largely in land conservation and gas field mitigation will complete 60 percent of conservation actions necessary to achieve long-term viability of this population and shift the outcome to a 15% increase over 5 years.

Key partners: Green River Valley Land Trust, Bureau of Land Management, Wildlife Conservation Society and Wyoming Department of Game and Fish are key implementers and the Bureau of Land Management and private landowners voluntary cooperation is critical because they own or manage almost all the land on which activities need to occur.

Major threats include: blockage of migratory routes caused by stock fences; mortality when animals cross road; displacement from winter range habitat by gas field operations; subdivision of private rangeland; and decline in habitat quality from gas field operations.
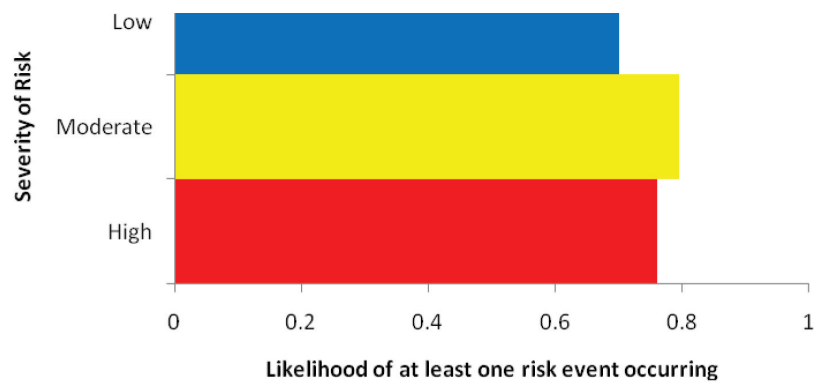
Implementation plan, key strategies, and annual budget: Four key strategies will prevent future declines and allow an increase in population size:

- ☐ Replace 100+ miles of fencing with wildlife-friendly fencing — $ 600,000 – $800,000 annually.

- ☐ Installation of wildlife crossing structure on Highway 191 at Trappers Point — $1.4 million to $5 million in total.

- ☐ Voluntary protection of 20,000 of 37,000 acres of private land in the migration corridor (including at least 8,000 acres of donated easements) population assessment and monitoring to better measure success of conservation actions — $21 to $24 million in total

- ☐ Refine and expand adoption of wildlife best management practices for gas field development and operation — $350,000 annually.
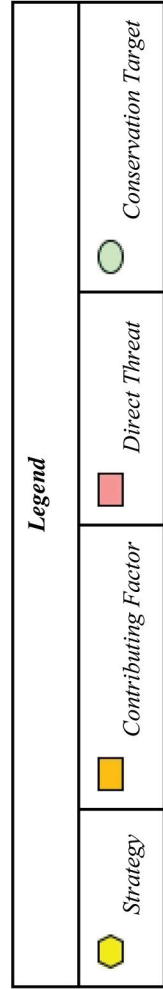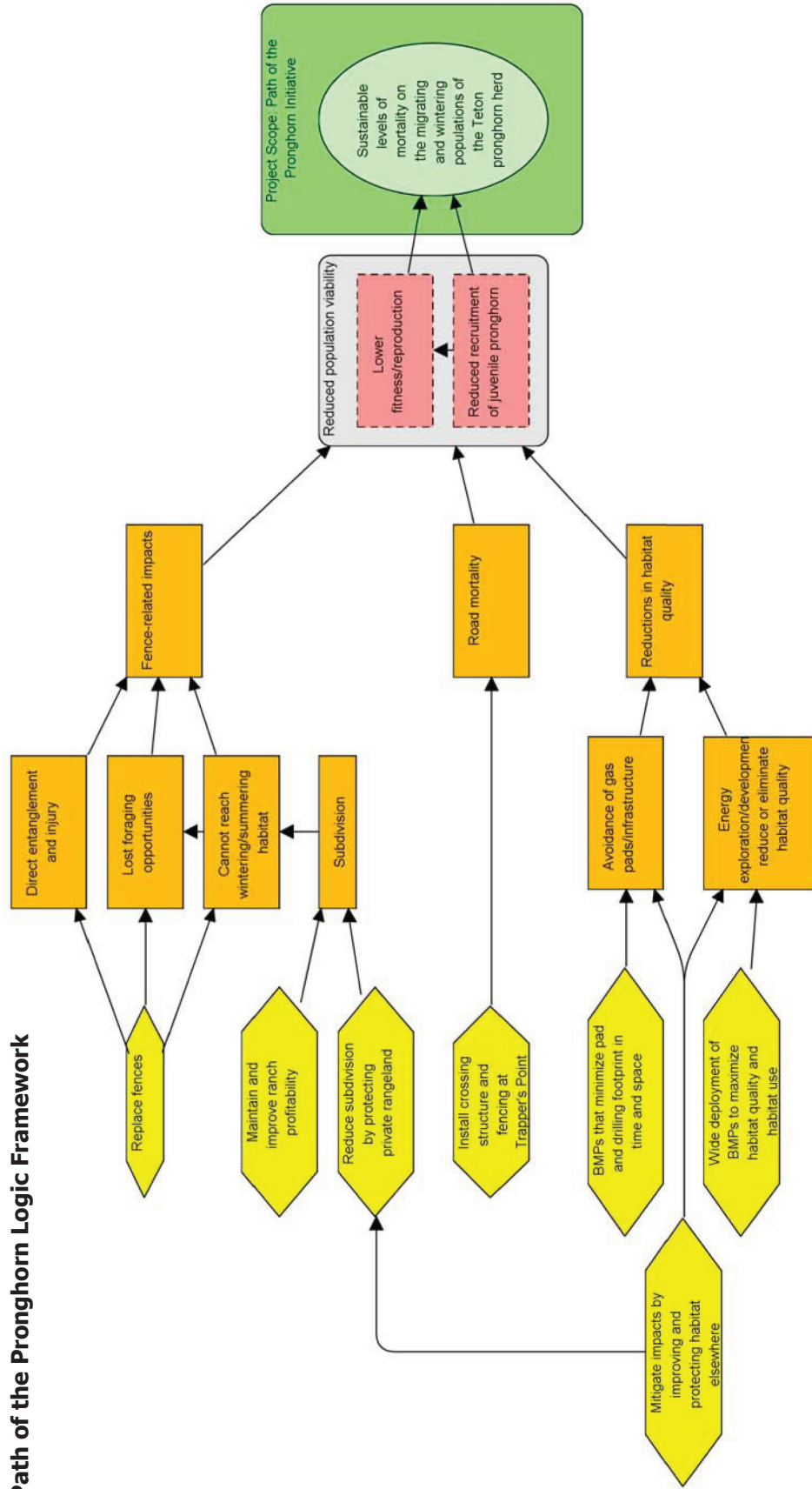
Significant ancillary benefits: Approximately 10% of Green River Valley mule deer will benefit from fence and road related interventions as will 3 – 4% of Sublette pronghorn herd; sage grouse, burrowing owl and other sage brush-dependent wildlife will benefit from land protection and gas field best management practices.

NFWF financial leadership: NFWF will need to provide about 1/10th of annual costs, or about $600,000/year. Gas field mitigation funds will be available for many of these strategies and Department of Transportation funding will be necessary for a wildlife crossing structure, perhaps funded through the economic stimulus legislation.

Risk: The largest risk for this initiative is that one or a few housing subdivisions in the most confined parts of the migration corridor could completely disrupt migration, resulting in the elimination of this population. The other major risk is that only in bad years will it become apparent how significantly the decline in winter range accessibility and quality affects the pronghorn; the greater distance Path of the Pronghorn antelope migration compared to other animals is could create an unsustainable level of winter stress to this herd resulting in their disappearance after a few harsh winters.

Path of the Pronghorn Logic Framework

Project Scope: Path of the Pronghorn Initiative

Sustainable levels of mortality on the migrating and wintering populations of the Teton pronghorn herd

Reduced population viability
- Lower fitness/reproduction
- Reduced recruitment of juvenile pronghorn

Fence-related impacts
- Direct entanglement and injury
- Lost foraging opportunities
- Cannot reach wintering/summering habitat
- Subdivision

Road mortality

Reductions in habitat quality
- Avoidance of gas pads/infrastructure
- Energy exploration/development reduce or eliminate habitat quality

Replace fences

Maintain and improve ranch profitability

Reduce subdivision by protecting private rangeland

Install crossing structure and fencing at Trapper's Point

BMPs that minimize pad and drilling footprint in time and space

Wide deployment of BMPs to maximize habitat quality and habitat use

Mitigate impacts by improving and protecting habitat elsewhere

Legend

Strategy	Contributing Factor	Direct Threat	Conservation Target

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