
WILDLIFE BARRIER FENCES AND PRONGHORN HABITAT CONNECTIVITY CONCERNS IN EASTERN MONTANA

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Historically, eastern Montana was one of the largest sheep producing regions of the west. Although sheep production has decreased dramatically in the past three decades, several hundred miles of woven-wire and sheep tight fences continue to dissect this landscape. These fences are known to hinder wildlife movement patterns, cause entanglement mortality and

interrupt daily and seasonal habitat use. Miles City Field Office Bureau of Land Management (MCFO BLM) has removed 83 miles of such wildlife barrier fences since 2004. A more wildlife friendly, four-wire fence is constructed to maintain livestock distribution while reducing impacts to wildlife, most notably, pronghorn movements. Since 2009, 57 miles of wildlife barrier fences have been removed and modified, of which 47 and 29 miles were within crucial mule deer and pronghorn winter range. Since 2004, nearly \$100,000 of contributed funds and materials have been provided through partnership with MCFO permittees. These funds have resulted in additional miles of barrier fence being removed on deeded lands. Interagency efforts in 2010 with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks led to an agreement with TransCanada Pipeline Company to ensure the removal of 23 miles of wildlife barrier fences on deeded lands in southeastern Montana. MCFO continues to identify wildlife barrier fences for removal and pursues partnerships in an effort to address habitat connectivity concerns at a landscape scale.