
MODIFYING BARRIER FENCES IN KEY WILDLIFE LINKAGES IN WESTERN MONTANA

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American Wildlands has identified landscape level wildlife linkages and corridors throughout western Montana and eastern Idaho. We are working cooperatively to implement on-the-ground projects to maintain or enhance this habitat connectivity. On a local scale, wildlife movement through these linkages is often impeded by livestock and property boundary fences. Fences with bottom wire spacing less than 16-18 in above ground level and taller than 40-42 in are usually barriers and entanglement hazards to deer, elk, bighorn sheep, and pronghorn, particularly for their young. BLM and Forest Service policy directs that public land fences will accommodate wildlife movement using wildlife-friendly fence specifications have been available for years, and some modification has been completed. But hundreds of miles of wildlife-unfriendly fences still exist throughout southwestern Montana on both private and public lands, and the miles are increasing. In 2008, American Wildlands initiated a fence modification program to cooperatively “fix” wildlife-unfriendly fences located in key wildlife linkages with emphasis on pronghorn movement. To date, nearly 50 mi of fence have been modified or reconstructed in the Centennial Valley, Grasshopper Valley, and East Pioneers, mostly on private lands and often using volunteer labor. Modification costs are minimal for simple wire adjustments or removal to achieve appropriate wire spacing, and represent little or no cost to the landowner. Although more expensive, modifying net wire fences can have dramatic benefits for wildlife movements.