


American Wildlands' *Corridors of Life* Program

– *Conserving Critical Habitat Connections throughout the Crown of the Continent Region* –

American Wildlands seeks \$ over two years from the LaSalle Adams Fund to support the implementation of our wildlife corridor conservation work in Montana's Crown of the Continent Ecosystem. Our project work during the next two years will include [1] using the results of our Priority Linkage Assessment (PLA) to work with a diversity of conservation interests to develop and implement strategies for conserving the 30 habitat linkages we identified in The Crown; and [2] working with climate change computer modelers to incorporate the issue and influence of climate change into our PLA process, and the prioritization and conservation of these habitat linkages. American Wildlands will accomplish our goals through a highly leveraged strategy that includes synergistic work with existing conservation initiatives, and a tactical approach to individual corridor conservation.

It is worth noting American Wildlands is quite confident that full funding from the LaSalle Adams Fund would allow us to hire a new field staff and open a new field office in the Kalispell/Whitefish area.

– **Brief Summary of American Wildlands** –

This year, American Wildlands is celebrating thirty (30) years of conservation programs and accomplishments. While our strategic forte had changed a few times in those three decades, the primary focus of the organization has remained the same – to use the best available science, respectful advocacy, community engagement, and the most cutting edge conservation tools available to address the most pressing wildlands and wildlife conservation issues of the day.

American Wildlands' latest focus on identifying and conserving critical wildlife movement corridors and habitat connectivity is grounded in the sciences of conservation biology. American Wildlands is best known for our pioneering work of mapping wildlife corridors across the Northern Rockies. Our promotion of maintaining “cores, corridors and connectivity” has helped these concepts become part of conservation terminology and goals. Our corridors analysis and mapping have been used by government and non-government organizations of all stripes.

Based on the best available science, AWL's *Corridors of Life* and *Safe Passages* programs identify and pursue priority “landscape-level” conservation projects that address threats to habitat connectivity on public lands, private lands and across highways and railroads. We implement this work by organizing and facilitating working groups that include state and federal wildlife and land agencies, highway departments, railroad companies, local community groups, county planners, land trusts, conservation groups, ranchers and others. We also provide the science and expertise needed to help inform, guide and strengthen the conservation efforts of these groups.

Our experience and expertise in this issue is highlighted by these most recent accomplishments:

1) our Priority Linkage Assessment data is now incorporated into regional U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Montana Department of Transportation, the Western Governors Association, and Nature Conservancy planning documents;

2) Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks provided American Wildlands with contract funds to complete our Priority Linkage Assessment in “the Hub” regional conservation area (just south of the Crown of the Continent);

3) AWL was invited as a co-author of policy recommendation in the Western Governors Association Wildlife Corridor Initiative transportation subcommittee

Working from our offices in the heart of the region (Bozeman, Missoula, and Dillon), American Wildlands has a staff of eleven with a combined 70+ years of conservation experience, and a Board of Directors that live throughout the region.

– Maintaining Habitat Connectivity: A Problem to be Addressed –

In the late 1960s, renowned ecologist E.O. Wilson and Robert McArthur established the theory of island biogeography - which looks at how species diversity diminishes as islands of habitat are increasingly reduced in size and cut off from the mainland (or ‘core’ habitat area). The theory of island biogeography holds that the number of species found on an island is determined by two factors: the distance of an island from the mainland and the size of an island. These researchers noticed that [1] as islands became cut off from the mainland, they lost their native species; and [2] that larger islands, and those closest to the mainland retained the largest number of species. They reasoned that islands closer to the mainland are more likely to receive immigrants from the mainland than those further away - the distance effect. The size effect reflects a long known relationship between island size and species diversity - the chance of extinction (or species loss) is greater on smaller islands than on larger ones.

Herein lays the reason why habitat reduction and fragmentation has been acknowledged as a primary cause of species decline throughout the world. The designation of national parks, refuges, wilderness and roadless areas – without conserving the habitat that ties them together – tragically creates a series of core habitat “islands”. These islands of habitat may eventually spell extinction for resident wildlife because of negative influences common amongst small, isolated populations of wildlife – such as inbreeding, the effects of natural disasters and the inability for wildlife to re-colonize an area.

Within a few years of this island biogeography theory being published, its application to the field of conservation biology was realized as the concept of “cores, corridors, and connectivity” was integrated into regional conservation planning. Just as people must be able to safely travel from one town to another to meet our daily and life long needs, animals must also travel safely between varying patches of habitat to meet their needs, such as denning, finding mates, giving birth, and taking advantage of seasonal food sources.

While the importance of habitat connections and wildlife corridors has been gaining attention for more than a decade, it seems to have reached a tipping point in the last two years. As one of the first non-government organizations (NGOs) to recognize and promote the need for wildlife corridors, American Wildlands is pleased to see how many agencies and organizations are now focusing on this critical conservation issue.

This increase in agency and NGO attention and resources has manifested itself in some significant ways:

- Western Governors Association Wildlife Policy Initiative: In 2007, the 19 western governors of the Western Governors Association created Policy Resolution 07-01, the Wildlife Corridors Initiative to develop policy recommendations for wildlife connectivity as affected by transportation, climate change, oil and gas development, renewable energy development, and land use policies. The report incorporating the recommendations was formally adopted in June 2008. Wildlife connectivity is enough of an issue for the WGA that the bulk of the 2008 Annual Meeting was devoted to this issue. The governors demonstrated further commitment to implementing these new recommendations by forming the WGA Western Wildlife Habitat Council, made up of various state and federal agencies, to create accountability by states for implementing the WGA policies.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Most recently, in September 2008, the de-listing of the Gray Wolf was reversed after a re-evaluation of if current wolf population numbers could be maintained in the current landscape where habitat is fragmented by both physical and social factors.
- Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks: In summer 2008, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks initiated a substantial revision of their Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy (also known as the State Wildlife Action Plan) to refine this strategy so that it includes: landscape scale wildlife habitat connectivity, land use and development, transportation systems, and fine-scale wildlife habitat use information. The agency has asked American Wildlands to play a role in this process, because of our recently completed Priority Linkage Assessment.
- Montana Department of Transportation: In the last few years, MDT has significantly increased its commitment to creating safe passages for wildlife across highways. This includes crossing projects along several transportation routes to allow for wildlife connectivity, such as Highway 93 north of Missoula, 1-90 near Bozeman, and Highway 206 southwest of Kalispell. In addition, MDT is an active participant on an advisory committee that is helping American Wildlands develop a wildlife corridor-roadkill hotspot analysis for western analysis.
- Idaho Fish and Game and the U.S. Forest Service: These two agencies recently collaborated to fund a wildlife linkage biologist position for the Caribou-Targhee National Forest in southeast Idaho. This person will coordinate agencies, local communities, and conservation groups in an effort to further wildlife connectivity within the national forest.

Each of these examples is indicative of an increased attention to the issue of habitat connectivity – together, they highlight that habitat connectivity is now a major focus of state and federal land and wildlife agencies. While American Wildlands is proud to be one of the first NGOs to recognize and promote the value of, and need for, wildlife connectivity, we are pleased to see how many organizations are now focusing on habitat connectivity and wildlife movement corridors.

In the Crown of the Continent region alone, American Wildlands is already working with the following NGOs, land resource agencies, and conservation groups: Defenders of Wildlife, Glacier National Park, Great Northern Environmental Stewardship Area, Freedom to Roam, Montana Department of Transportation, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, National Parks Conservation Association, Northwest Connections, The Swan Ecosystem Center, The Blackfoot Challenge, Missoula County Open Lands Committee, The Nature Conservancy, Wildlife Conservation Society, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative.

FY 2009 and 2010 *Corridors of Life* Work Plan – Crown of the Continent

- Grant Objectives, Strategies, and Outcomes -

To address the problem of fragmentation, American Wildlands developed our *Corridors of Life* program. In 2007, we built upon the solid foundation of our decade-old corridors modeling work by conducting a comprehensive assessment of the most important habitat connections, or “linkages,” in the U.S. Northern Rockies – our Priority Linkage Assessment. Adding to our past use of the best published science, with this updated assessment we interviewed more than sixty state, federal and independent biologists – those biologists with the most direct knowledge of how and where wildlife move across the landscape – to get their professional, expert opinion regarding wildlife movements and critical habitat connections. This assessment focused on the movement needs of four carnivore species (grizzly bear, wolf, wolverine and lynx) and four ungulate species (elk, moose, bighorn sheep and antelope).

Through our Priority Linkage Assessment (PLA), we identified more than one hundred twenty (120) critical habitat linkages – thus surpassing our 1990s corridors analysis as the most comprehensive assessment and identification of wildlife corridors to date in the U.S. Northern Rockies. We also identified the following list of threats to habitat connectivity and wildlife movement on public lands, private lands and across highways and railroads:

- Forest management and energy development on public lands
- Road building and motorized access (summer and winter) on public lands
- Conversion of agricultural/forest lands to suburban development; lack of county planning
- Private ranchland management to benefit wildlife (addressing fencing, sanitation issues, etc.)
- Predator-livestock conflicts and social intolerance, particularly of predators
- Wildlife mortality on highway/railroad corridors

Specifically, in the Crown of the Continent, experts initially identified 27 major wildlife linkage areas. As recently as August 2008, American Wildlands received new data from Crown regional biologists that will add several new linkage areas along the eastern edge of The Crown regional conservation area – making for a total of 30 linkage areas in the region.

In 2009 and 2010, American Wildlands is moving from identifying *where* critical wildlife corridors exist and *what* threatens them, to *how* to protect them. Given that the latest data shows that climate change is happening at a rate faster than predicted, American Wildlands will also begin pursuing opportunities to infuse the impact of, and need for wildlife to adapt to, climate change in the Crown of the Continent and across the U.S. Northern Rockies region. Our approach to this new dynamic will reflect the interplay between climate change and habitat connectivity: where climate change will have an effect on habitat connectivity, but conserving connections between habitats will help wildlife adapt to those climate change-induced impacts. With plans to complete and distribute the final Crown of the Continent PLA report by the end of 2008, American Wildlands will pursue three major objectives during FY 2009 (10/1/08 – 9/30/09):

Objective 1. Implementing the Results of Our Priority Linkage Assessment: Given the 30 linkage areas we have identified in The Crown, it will be impossible for American Wildlands to take a lead role in developing and implementing a conservation strategy for each linkage area. Clearly, this ambitious undertaking requires more resources and expertise than American Wildlands has. However, given our organizational expertise in coupling strong habitat connectivity science with on-the-ground conservation, and our track record of establishing and facilitating synergistic working groups, AWL is well positioned to facilitate and coordinate a comprehensive program to ensure that the 30 critical habitat connections we identified are maintained or restored for wildlife.

To that end, in 2009 American Wildlands is initiating a multi-year program to facilitate the orchestration and resources needed by local conservation interests (NGOs, local community groups, agencies, others) to develop and implement linkage-specific conservation strategies. In this coordinating capacity, American Wildlands will, more often than not, play a behind the scenes role as we support a local organization, community or working group and/or other advocate(s). For each linkage area, our implementation strategy consists of five stages:

- 1) Conduct a conservation capacity analysis for each linkage area.
- 2) Host an initial meeting for each linkage area to introduce our PLA findings and identify which local conservation interests want to work with American Wildlands on this linkage-specific project.
- 3) Work with those interested parties to establish/engage local “working groups” to address the threats to, and opportunities for, conserving these linkages.
- 4) Support implementation of each conservation strategy with our expertise and connections to other needed resources
- 5) Establish a tracking system to monitor the progress and needs of each working groups

At the linkage level, American Wildlands expects to spend most of 2009 engaged in Stages 1-3, as we establish/build partnerships. Given that in most areas established working groups do not exist, and that building relationships and trust is of preeminent importance in rural landscapes like the western portion of The Crown, the actual development and implementation of a conservation strategy will likely not occur until the end of 2009 and into 2010. Developing working relationships in these rural landscapes is a time-consuming process. Yet, it is time well spent, as a solid working relationship will increase our ability to engage local communities and “get conservation done” in a long term, sustainable way.

This does not mean, however, that we will not engage in any “project implementation” during 2009. It is worth noting that when ever and where ever possible, we will “speed up” the process of getting to the implementation phase by working with existing working groups or other collaborations (such as the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative and network, the Great Northern Environmental Stewardship Area group, or the new National Parks Conservation Association initiative). Also, when ever and where ever possible, we will work to reduce the number of working groups/collaborations we need to help facilitate and support by finding opportunities to “lump” individual linkage areas into a larger effort (such as a forest management planning process, which would address multiple linkages in one conservation effort).

The specific activities for each of the five stages include:

1) Conservation Capacity Analysis for Each Linkage Area: identify the conservation interests (NGOs, community groups, agencies, etc.) that might be interested in working with AWL on each linkage, as well as the expertise they bring to the effort of addressing the threats and opportunities for that linkage.

Outcomes (to be completed by the end of December): AWL will determine whom we should attempt to engage in each linkage area, as well as have a well-informed initial idea of what additional capacities may be needed to deal with the threats and opportunities for a given linkage.

2) Host an Initial Meeting for Each Linkage Area: Hold meetings, one for each linkage area, with the conservation interests identified in the Capacity Analysis to: [1] share our PLA results, [2] ask participants for additional information about the ecology of that linkage area, as well as other threats and opportunities to conserve connectivity in that linkage; and [3] identify who would like to work with AWL to develop and implement a local conservation strategy for addressing the threats and opportunities identified for that linkage area.

Outcomes (January through June): Local conservation interests will have an in-depth understanding of the PLA results, and local conservation leaders who are ready to help AWL address the linkage-specific threats and opportunities will have been identified.

3) Establish/Engage Local “Working Groups”: For specific linkages, AWL will facilitate additional meetings with interested conservation partners to begin to identify specific conservation projects and opportunities, as a first step toward developing a collaborative connectivity conservation strategy for that linkage area. Our objective is to help facilitate these working groups to become as self sufficient as possible, so that AWL can help facilitate and advance as many linkage-specific working groups and conservation strategies as possible. AWL’s on-going level of engagement in each of the “working groups” will be contingent on three factors: [1] our ability to lump some linkage areas into one working group and conservation plan; [2] the level of existing capacity that can translate into a working group’s self-sufficiency in terms of developing and implementing a plan without too much support from AWL; and [3] the timeliness of the threats and opportunities of a give linkage area (in some case we expect the working group can simply monitor the identified threats and take advantage of opportunities as they arise, versus needing to immediately develop and implement a conservation plan to address more timely threats and/or opportunities).

Outcomes (on-going): Local “working groups” will have developed and begun implementing a connectivity conservation strategy for one or more linkage areas

4) Support the Implementation of Each Conservation Strategy: AWL will offer support and build capacity to help implement the conservation strategy. In each linkage area, AWL will use the set of guidelines listed below to determine our level of engagement (which will largely be driven by the amount of existing conservation capacity in that area):

A) Where ample local conservation capacity exists, AWL will simply provide information and guidance toward: [1] working with those interests to incorporate our linkage information (threats and opportunities) into their existing conservation efforts, as well as [2] supporting their efforts with our science, GIS and policy expertise, and connections to other needed resources.

B) In areas with limited conservation capacity, AWL will engage in a more substantive manner, as a more active, more visible, member (if not organizer) of a local working group or collaborative (as opposed to the more behind-the-scenes supportive role outlined above in “A”).

C) Next, in identified linkage areas where no conservation capacity exists to take the local lead, AWL will [1] work with capacity building organizations (such as Sonoran Institute or Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative) to establish local interest and capacity, or [2] be the sole conservation interest in that linkage area until we build some local interest and capacity. Ultimately, whether AWL is involved as an active player or a behind-the-scenes support will depend on our ability to establish local interest and engagement.

D) Finally, some threats and opportunities will pertain to multiple linkages. In these situations, AWL will take a lead role in working with multiple local/regional/national interests to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy for addressing a geographically broad threat or opportunity.

Meanwhile, as American Wildlands has been doing for years through our “working group” model, we will help our local partners identify, find and secure whatever resources they need in order to be most effective in maintaining these habitat connections. Based on our experience with other working groups, we expect these needs to run the gamut from specific conservation project expertise (ex: Defenders of Wildlife regarding co-existence issues), to administrative and capacity building support, to help raising funds for on-the-ground projects.

Outcomes (on-going): AWL is able to provide support and resources to as many of our linkage areas as possible, so that we can keep up with the prioritization and timeliness of the threats to, and opportunities for, conserving each linkage area.

E) Establish Tracking System to Monitor Progress of Working Groups: We will establish a system to track and monitor the progress of multiple working groups, and what they need in order to continue moving forward and making conservation gains.

Outcomes (on-going): AWL is able to determine where our support and resources are most needed on an on-going basis, so we can best help facilitate and advance connectivity throughout the Northern Rockies region.

Objective 2: Address Broader Policy Proposals That Will Affect Connectivity in the Crown of the Continent: We already know of four broader policy opportunities we will engage in: implementation of the Western Governors Association recommendations on wildlife corridors; the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks’ “Crucial Habitat Area and Corridors Initiative”; and National Parks Conservation Association’s “Conservation of the Crown of the Continent Initiative”, and the Trans-Wild collaborative to positively influence the 2009 federal transportation appropriations bill.

Western Governors Association: American Wildlands has been an instrumental committee member that developed the recommendations for the Western Governors Policy Resolution 07-01, the Wildlife Corridors Initiative. These recommendations are geared to the integration and consideration for wildlife corridors within local and state government/agency missions and policies. The report was formally adopted in June 2008 by nineteen western governors. The governors then created the Western Wildlife Habitat Council (WWHC), made up of agency members, to implement the policy recommendations.

In September 2008, several conservation organizations convened in Durango, Colorado to discuss how we could effectively interact with and assist the WWHC in implementing the WGA policy recommendations. An outcome of that meeting was the creation of state committees, where conservation groups would work on an individual state level to help implement WGA policy recommendations. American Wildlands has taken the lead in facilitating this effort for Montana.

After an initial scoping meeting in late September 2008, American Wildlands is hosting the first face-to-face meeting in late October 2008. The Montana conservation groups determined that specific land use and transportation policies within the Policy report were of particular importance for Montana. American Wildlands will endeavor over the next year to implement these policies with other conservation and agency partners to ensure that wildlife connectivity is maintained.

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks: American Wildlands is one of four organizations invited to contribute data and advice toward Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks' 2008 revision of its Comprehensive State Wildlife Action Plan. This effort, called the "Corridors and Crucial Areas Initiative", will develop a single map of crucial wildlife habitat and wildlife corridors, which the state wildlife agency will promote for common use by all state and local agencies/governments. American Wildlands will work with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MFWP) during the next year to incorporate all of our linkage data into this effort.

National Parks Conservation Association. American Wildlands has been asked by National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) to play a leadership role in the development and implementation of its new "Conservation of the Crown of the Continent Initiative." Based on conversations with Tony Jewett and Mike Clark, we all see opportunities for AWL to support this initiative in the following ways: [1] provide our PLA data to help inform, guide and strengthen this effort; [2] provide our supplemental climate change data once we have it; [3] bring our networking expertise and PLA connections to this initiative; [4] provide another conservation staff person to the local effort, once we hire a field representative in the Kalispell/Whitefish area. More specific to the recommendations in NPCA's Summary Assessment, we believe American Wildlands can play a supportive role in the following areas: *Science and Land Management* recommendations #1-3; *Communications, Collaboration, and Coordination* recommendations #1, 2, 3, and 6; and *Communities* recommendation #1 and 3.

Transwild Alliance. This alliance was formed to promote the incorporation of wildlife considerations in the upcoming federal Transportation Bill (SAFETEA-LU), which is slated to be reauthorized in Spring 2009. This bill provides money for Transportation Enhancement, including address wildlife concerns for the benefit of motorist safety. The 2005 version of the federal bill included \$61 million dollars for such enhancement projects, but only \$11.5 million of those funds have been used for addressing wildlife/vehicle issues on our highways – state transportation agencies and the conservation community is only starting to become savvy about obtaining these funds for wildlife mitigation measures.

In support of the Transwild Alliance, American Wildlands will provide [1] our scientific expertise and data on habitat connectivity and wildlife corridors; [2] our expertise in writing wildlife connectivity language that can be placed in the new legislation; [3] background and details regarding U.S. Northern Rockies on-the-ground projects that could be funded to demonstrate the financial needs of states for wildlife mitigation measures; and [4] stories of existing successes to demonstrate how federal funding has already been used to advance wildlife/vehicle mitigation projects.

Objective 3) Integrate the latest information regarding climate change into our regional Priority Linkage Assessment and associated corridor conservation implementation strategies: Molly Cross, climate change ecologist for the Wildlife Conservation Society, has stated that “We see connectivity as a symptom of the problem, in that climate change could fragment habitats even further. We also see connectivity as a solution for enabling species to respond to climate change. So, we want to think about: ‘Can we design connectivity, or protect habitats, in a way that allows species to move in response to climate change.’”

Climate change is happening faster than scientists originally predicted. Responses of natural systems may include increased migration; changes in the place and timing of migrations; and/or radical shifts in the landscape from one habitat type to another due to increased wildlife, increased temperature, and drought/lack of snow (example: pine forest shifting to sagebrush grasslands). These changes in habitat will strongly affect those wildlife species dependent on certain vegetation types for food, cover, denning habitats *and* wildlife movement corridors. The ability to adapt to climate change may be the best strategy for most wide-ranging wildlife. This means we need to provide more choices for wildlife movement, so if an animal like a wolverine loses a traditional, favored corridor, the animal has other options for getting from one important habitat to another.

During the next two years, American Wildlands will incorporate the impact of climate change, and the need for wildlife to adapt to those changes, into our wildlife corridors analysis and conservation efforts. To date, the biggest issue with applying climate change modeling to regional landscape conservation is a matter of scale. Current reputable climate change models are developed at a scale that is too coarse (i.e., to vast geographically) to [1] apply to the type of site-specific wildlife corridors work American Wildlands is engaged in, and [2] inform and influence most land use decisions, which are made at the more localized scale. Thus, there is a need for someone to work with these modelers to bring their work “to scale.” American Wildlands has identified that as an organizational goal for 2009-2010.

Ultimately, we want to be able to use these models to help us answer two important questions related to climate change and wildlife movement corridors: [1] if the corridors we have identified in the present will still be a corridor a decade from now (given the influence of climate change), and [2] if not, what type of conservation action should be taken to maintain both the corridors of today and tomorrow. Recently, researchers at Oregon State University (Ron Neilson) and University of Washington (Josh Lawler and Evan Grivetz) have been conducting some exciting work in tackling this difficult issue. These researchers are developing tools that would allow conservation interests like American Wildlands to make more precise determinations regarding the longevity of our identified corridors over the next few decades. This information will be critical as we proceed into the long-term implementation phase of our Priority Linkage Assessment.

Due to the uncertainty of our ability to bring these climate change models to scale in the U.S. Northern Rockies, and use them to inform our Priority Linkage Assessment work, it is difficult for American Wildlands to provide a detailed or comprehensive 1-2 year work plan for this program objective. However, we do know we will pursue the following:

- 1) Investigate the possibility of bringing the work of these climate change modelers, or others, to scale in the U.S. Northern Rockies.

- 2) Identify our best option for modeling climate change impacts on wildlife corridors and the ability for wildlife to adapt to climate change.
- 3) Secure funding for this modeling work.
- 4) Use the results of this work to inform our Priority Linkage Assessment, and to reprioritize the “ranking” of the linkages so that they incorporate these climate change predictions.
- 5) Modify our implementation strategies to accommodate what we learn.
- 6) Develop a communications strategy to inform other conservation partners, decision-makers and important public constituencies about these results and impacts. Specifically, work with public and private land owners, as well as state transportation departments and railroad companies, to use this data to inform their long-term land use decisions.

Evaluating Our Work, And Our Successes

For American Wildlands, success is conserving the 30 linkage areas in the Crown of the Continent so that they collectively facilitate wildlife movement throughout the region, while improving the ability for local people to better manage their land in a manner that conserves the wild landscapes and wildlife. For each linkage area strategy, we will develop three performance measures/benchmarks through which we will gauge our success. The first tier focuses on whether or not we met the objectives defined in this proposal. The second tier relates to how our data was used by agencies to inform and influence their decisions. Finally, a third set of measures is devoted to gauging how well we were able to make progress toward the protection of these linkage areas (based on the benchmarks for each linkage area conservation strategy/plan).

American Wildlands’ Qualifications

American Wildlands is well-positioned to play our lead facilitation role for four reasons: [1] as mentioned above, through our PLA process, we have re-established ourselves as regional, on-the-ground corridors group, and thus an increasing list of conservation interests are looking to us for help with this issue; [2] we have a field office on Missoula, and full funding for two years from the LaSalle Adams Fund would almost ensure that we would open a new field office in the Kalispell/Whitefish area in early 2009 – so we would be well situated, both literally and figuratively, to work on the ground throughout The Crown region; [3] many of our identified conservation partners in the region have voiced an interest in working with us to determine how to best use the results of our PLA to help inform, guide and strengthen their conservation efforts; and [4] we have a well-established organizational expertise in coupling strong habitat connectivity science with on-the-ground conservation, and our track record of establishing and facilitating synergistic working groups.