

Western Governors' Association
Plenary I – Protecting Wildlife Corridors in the West
Sunday, June 29, 2008

Transcript of discussion

Governor Freudenthal

Thank you. That was the final presentation. You'll all be relieved to know that the staff has 3 ½ pages of notes that I'm suppose to share with you at this point. But I've been sitting just as long as you have so I'm going to skip that. What I would like is, if time permits, if any of the governors or panel participants or Mr. Brokaw or the secretary have some comments for our benefit prior to the consideration of resolution we would be delighted to hear them. Ok fine.

Tom Brokaw

Well you never have to invite an anchorman to talk. First of all, I want to commend the Western Governors for addressing this issue and doing it in the manner which we have seen demonstration here today with the scientific foundation for it; obviously the interested parties, petroleum and gas. And the spirit in which you've come together to talk about it and what we ought not to overlook is the other ally that we have in all of this which is technology.

Everything that was available to you in this room today can also be available to any citizen, any developer, any city county commissioner in the West. And I would hope that part of the mission of the Western Governors would be to create if you will, either through the Westerns Governors' Association or independently of that, a website in which people could access the scientific information that we had shared here today and an additional body of information so when you want to make a decision in a county, or in a municipality, you have a place that you can go to, or even if you're an individual.

We've just gone to solar at the ranch on a small piece of the ranch. Four years ago we couldn't have done it because the technology wasn't there, the companies weren't there and when we made the decision we had lots of choices and lots of information that we could make a wise decision on, so I would hope that electronically that this would be shared and make it a part of zeitgeist if you will, of the west electronic.

Governor Napolitano

On the data, the suggestion about the continued collection of data and the overlaying of it as we make different decisions underlying that is, I think, a suggestion that we make some regional decisions about what kinds of data, how it will be collected and the format in which it will be used so that Arizona is not using a different type of a map for data than Southern California. You know Utah's not using a different type of a map than Colorado but they were trying to also and for some regionally specific data standards as we implement these data strategies.

Governor Freudenthal

I believe that's correct. In fact there has been some discussion among, particularly about the State Game and Fish agencies and you can imagine how well they work together. They're actually starting to get there about some mapping protocols and we're also trying to, on a more

specific basis in regards to safety, develop some maps in protocol terms. Part of the issue is not only that the data be the same among the states but the data be gathered and cataloged in a manner that is considered scientifically reliable. Because otherwise it's just a bunch of stuff and it's not decision-relevant so it's not really data.

Premier Doer

Thank you. The Nature Conservancy is working across the borders and I agree with the governor in her suggestion that we have a common system of data collection as we are now talking about in terms of measuring greenhouse gas emissions in a common way in the Western Provinces and in the Western United States.

I also want to say to the Secretary that, speaking as a Manitoban with over a 1,000 polar bears that travel in and around Cape Churchill, and some of you have been there to witness those magnificent animals, I want to applaud your decision to list the polar bear as a threatened species. It's not universal in terms of that view but we are seeing, we talked about catch and release, with polar bears we have catch, hold in a polar bear jail, and release when the ice forms as our system of conserving that animal. And those polar bears are coming off the ice three weeks earlier in the summer than they did just a couple of years ago and we actually have to put air conditioning in that polar bear jail if you can believe it to preserve their well being in that compound. So the latest study is almost completed on polar bear populations. Your decision will be the correct one. I'm confident that the data, unfortunately, will even present a greater risk to those animals and your decision is the right one. Not all Canadian territories agree with you, I agree with you strongly and I think you made the right call and I want to thank you very much for that. Thank you.

Governor Freudenthal

Mr. Secretary somebody said something nice about the department, did you want to comment? (everyone is laughing)

Secretary Kempthorne

I love Canada (everyone is laughing and applauding) and Gary I appreciate your comment. It's not universal and we won't go into it here. I actually brought some data, actual area photographs from NASA on that polar cap. I mean the science is there and all of this is tied together.

It is not a plenary session on climate change and then a different plenary session on energy and mitigation. It is all tied together and I really believe that these new practices will become best practices. The technology that has been incorporated by industry, there in the outer continental shelf which is now being utilized here in the interior, a variety of things that I alluded to in my comments, all of it is going to be beneficial. Mr. Chairman to your comment about is this good.

I will tell you that from a perspective, and I've always found this funny because you know I voluntarily left the United States Senate to run for governor. To serve because I believe in states rights and then to be called back to Federal Service and I believe when you're asked by your president serve, you serve. When we ask our young people to serve, that's what they're expected to do, but to then go to these hearings and have audiences point at you Feds and go on and on

and I would just sit there and kind of smile and they say ‘what are you smiling at?’ I say, ‘well, I know I personify the Federal Government but I’m one who believes also in the states.’

This is powerful, because the Federal Government is comprised of all of we citizens and I look at Lyle or Steve, any of the folks that are working in the Federal Department of the Interior, we’re looking for solutions. I think we have brought forward to the table some vary good suggestions, management practices, but we need to have the same sort of input from the states. If you had 11 separate suggestions, then it dilutes it. We need to have what the Western Governors are suggesting in a solidified effort because there’s power in this.

That means that on the sage grouse for example, the fact that we have eight Fish and Game entities that are working together that are providing us the data, my goodness that is beneficial, but efforts of a region of the United States strengthens the entire United States. So this is good work. The fact that you have the Premiers here who have been here for some years and the fact that we have governors that go to the Western Premiers meeting shows the power of the West. And so again, this will be a tool that will be beneficial and I commend all of you and stay with it. Stay with it because these energy issues are not going away and the implications are not going away.

Governor Freudenthal

Governor Ritter would you like to comment?

Governor Ritter

I was going to mention this on Meet the Press but Governor Freudenthal didn’t give me much of an opportunity to say much on that so, it’s just another venue where I can talk about this. In Colorado, ten years ago we had a 1,000 oil and gas leases permitted that year. Last year, so 10 years later, it was 7,000, just under 7,000. So we increased the permitting seven fold in that ten year period without real cooperative, well not cooperative but I would say comprehensive planning around wildlife issues. So now we’re re-writing the rules and regs and we’re in the hearing process and there’s some opposition to sort of what has been announced as the draft rules but the notion that number one it should data driven I think is at the heart of this plan.

Secondly it should be urgent. Because I think too, your point Mr. Secretary it’s not going away. If you look at all of the permitting that has already happened, there’s not the capacity to drill it but the drilling will happen and the leases last for a time period where it’s gonna still impact very much wildlife corridors and so, I think we should do this very quickly.

The second part of it we absolutely have to have the Federal Government as a partner, the roadless plans, I think that Governor Otter and I are the only two states that have submitted actually a roadless plan but it has to be incorporated with our planning around wildlife habitat because its been a very difficult issue for us as a state for us to do this.

And finally, I think, just to echo your point Mr. Secretary, it is its climate change, its energy issues, its wildlife issues and its transportation issues. All of those things and more than that but I think the governors, the Western Governors Association plan around wildlife corridors, planning and mapping is really a template for a lot of things that we can do to make use of the technology available. It’s a precious resource and the sooner we get about this, the better.

Governor Freudenthal

Anyone else wishing to comment? You want to, get on with it. Now is that kinda Utah for get moving.

Governor Huntsman

Sometimes you have to remind the chairman here to get moving. He's not very much a self starter but we'll help anywhere. He's still my friend because we have yet to commit our National Guard troops to the border with Wyoming so we're pretty good friends.

The reason I love this organization, Western Governors is because we really get things done and I think here we have an excellent template and I appreciate those presentation. You hit right on what makes this organization so extraordinary. I mean we can kind of rise up as you did with Google earth and we can kind of see the region without borders and we can see from across borders stand point, partner to partner in the West, what needs to be done as we continue unprecedented development.

Demographic flows, economic development, land use. We need better ways of getting it done and I think this really does provide a roadmap of sorts so the bottom line, Mr. Chairman, is this as we move into next year's meeting as Chair, we'll want to embrace this and we'll want to take it to the next level so we thank you for your excellent presentations, the thoughtful way with which you presented the information and I think I'm hearing from my colleagues, this is something we do want to embrace and so we'll move on.

Governor Freudenthal

I think it's important for us, I've got to say this caveat. Wildlife and wildlife habitat are very important in Wyoming in part, because we hunt. And I want to acknowledge that as Governor I have yet to draw an elk permit in the last three years. Hence we're searching for a new Game and Fish Director.

But there are two things I want to say. One is, the states need guidance for efforts. Our state has set aside part of the mineral wealth into a wildlife trust fund, we then try and go out and figure out how to do projects. Some in conjunction with the Federal Government, some in conjunction with private parties and these issues about information about what are the critical areas that you want to address because that gives us a financial vehicle to respect private property rights, go out and purchase the habitat so that you in fact end up recognizing its importance, and we use state resources to do it.

The second thing is there are some companies who are doing a very good job. There are also companies who are not. And so, in addition to the information gathering and the focus on the rest of it, we also have to have some coordinated effort between the states and the federal agencies with regard to site inspections on some of these drilling plans, making sure that in fact they're doing that they say their going to do about pipeline corridors and there has to be not just an information component. Information has to be coupled with and relationship with the decision making and also a relationship with decisions that are ultimately gonna be enforced by the relevant agencies. Jack.

Jack Dangermond

Yes, Governor, let me remind you that these systems will not only support wildlife protection they are also geographic knowledge that will support evolution and development of all types, in the land use area, transportation planning area, seeing what's happening with demographics, seeing what's happening with crime, and reinforce homeland security. They're basically digital geographic knowledge that supports all of your different departments. And that's what excites me is that geography is moving from place name geography like the National Geographic and Gil Grosvenor has always promoted to the notion that it is heart and soul of government.

It's the way people understand the planet. They understand their own property that way. They understand environmental systems that way, they understand property evaluation that way, they understand how to extract resource that way. Geography is the foundation of our society in the future and this information and making it available, Tom, to everybody on the web is a key element of that because that gives them the notion of open democracy. They can see everything there, they can understand it intuitively, they get it, they plan with it, they create the future with it.

Governor Freudenthal

I'll wrap this up by moving that the Western Governors Association adopt The Western Governors Association Wildlife Corridors Initiative Report, is there second? Thank you. All those in favor? All those opposed? Motion carries.

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