

Colorado wildlife guidelines could go national

By MIKE McKIBBIN The Daily Sentinel
Sunday, June 10, 2007

SILT — A retired Bureau of Land Management employee hopes his work as a member of a sportsmen's group to protect wildlife and habitat from energy development leads to similar national legislation.

Bob Elderkin of Silt represents the Colorado Mule Deer Association, and he helped develop wildlife guidelines in the recently signed Colorado Wildlife and Habitat Stewardship Act. It lessens surface disturbance by oil and gas companies to protect wildlife and important habitat.

The bill, backed by a coalition of 67 Colorado conservation groups, received unanimous support in every vote in the Colorado House and Senate.

"I hope we can move this to the national level," Elderkin said.

Bill sponsor Dan Gibbs, D-Silverthorne, did just that when he testified before the U.S. House Natural Resources Committee earlier this spring on the legislation, guidelines and sportsmen's involvement. Core themes in the Colorado legislation are expected to be included in federal legislation that calls for best-management practices to protect the nation's wildlife and habitat.

Colorado Mountain Club Conservation Director Clare Bastable of Carbondale said the Colorado bill resulted from "unprecedented collaboration among a broad coalition of sportsmen, recreation and other conservation organizations."

"It has been a powerful experience for all members of our diverse coalition to see the principles set in our wildlife guidelines supported unanimously throughout the legislative process," Bastable said. "This is a victory we are likely to never forget."

Elderkin, an avid hunter and angler who regulated energy development for the BLM, teamed with veteran wildlife biologist Dennis Buechler of the Colorado Wildlife Federation, a recent appointee to the Colorado Wildlife Commission, to develop the guidelines.

Both men said the specific involvement of sportsmen and other conservationists is especially important.

"For the first time anywhere in the West, a state wildlife agency will be asked to make specific recommendations for the protection of wildlife as energy development occurs," Elderkin said. "It's something we can all be proud of."

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