



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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WYOMING LAND SWAP ADDS ELK'S MIGRATION ROUTE TO NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

Secretary of the Interior Don Hodel announced today a 354-acre land swap that will help protect the route that one of the Nation's largest elk herds uses to migrate from the Wyoming high country to winter habitat on the National Elk Refuge at Jackson, Wyoming.

The trade was worked out among the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the Wendell Wilson family, owners of the Teton Valley Ranch properties at Kelly, Wyoming, north of Jackson.

"This exchange of public lands for private property is an example of how the federal government can accomplish its wildlife objectives without always resorting to costly land purchases," Hodel said. "Through a creative swap, we've shown there are other avenues to incorporate valuable wildlife habitat into the National Wildlife Refuge System."

The land transaction involved the trade of 1,838 acres of BLM-managed coal lands east of Rock Springs, Wyoming, for the Wilson property--acreage that had development potential in the Jackson Hole resort area. The Wilson property, in turn, will be incorporated into the northern end of the National Elk Refuge.

The 354-acre Wilson property was appraised at a value equal to that of the BLM lands and mineral interests. Some royalty rights in the BLM lands were retained by the United States Government. The Wilson family will retain a 60-year use reservation for grazing and other rights in its original property.

A closing ceremony involving the Wilsons and representatives of the two federal agencies was held April 1 at a private title company in Jackson.

Because of concerns that development of the ranch properties could be harmful to refuge operations and to the 7,500-head elk herd that normally winters on the refuge, the Fish and Wildlife Service has sought to buy the Wilson property since 1978. The elk cross this property and adjacent land to migrate to the refuge each fall.