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Contact: Becky Tillson, Conservation Alliance Wildlands and Community Planning Associate,
Rebecca@jhalliance.org or (307) 733-9417

**Conservation Alliance's Dec. 8 annual meeting to feature talk by biologist Bruce Smith
and awards honoring Steve Kilpatrick, David Gonzales and Skinny Skis**

(JACKSON, WYO.) Drive past the National Elk Refuge on any winter day and you're all but guaranteed to see hundreds if not thousands of elk, gathered around feedlines on the snowy grounds northeast of Jackson.

But Bruce Smith, a biologist at the refuge for 22 years, author of the newly released book, "Where Elk Roam," and the featured speaker at the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance's Dec. 8 annual meeting, believes that continued artificial feeding of this iconic elk herd at current levels is not in the best interest of the animals in the long term.

"The long-standing policy of state and federal agencies to maintain an overstocked range by feeding the elk is outdated and the root of most conservation problems," Smith asserts. "But now, what changes everything is the threat that chronic wasting disease will find its way to western Wyoming's 23 elk feedgrounds."

The Alliance has worked with partner agencies and organizations for years to encourage programs aimed at enhancing and expanding native winter range, while phasing out artificial feeding on the National Elk Refuge in efforts to help stem the spread of deadly disease in the Jackson herd. We're hosting Smith at our annual meeting on Thursday, Dec. 8, to stimulate discussion about why reducing wintertime feeding on the refuge would be best for the herd's health. Smith holds B.S., M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in wildlife biology and zoology. Widely published, "Where Elk Roam: Conservation and Biopolitics of Our National Elk Herd" is his second book.

The evening of the 8th will begin with our annual membership meeting at 6 p.m., followed by light holiday refreshments, and then the presentation and Q&A session with Smith from 7 to 8 p.m. The public is invited to attend any and all of the evening's events; a suggested donation of \$5 to cover speaker costs is encouraged. Door prizes have been generously donated by WorldCast Anglers, Mountain Khakis and Cloudveil.

"Bruce's presentation will help bring the spotlight to the ongoing debate about elk feeding," says Alliance Program Director Louise Lasley. "He draws from his years of experience as a wildlife biologist with the National Elk Refuge to make a rational and compelling case for phasing out elk feeding."

Yearly Awards Conferred

During the membership meeting, the Alliance also will honor three community members for their invaluable work and dedication toward keeping Jackson Hole wild and beautiful.

Annually since 2003, the Alliance has recognized an Outstanding Conservationist of the Year. The award was created to honor those who have shown a lifetime of commitment to conservation, and this year, we're thrilled to grant it to someone who has worked for decades on behalf of the wildlife of this valley – Steve Kilpatrick.

After 33 years as a habitat biologist for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Kilpatrick recently joined the Conservation Research Center of Teton Science Schools. One of the most respected biologists in the region, he has played key roles in habitat enhancement and elk, moose and bighorn sheep research projects over the years, and is an incredible asset to our community and wildlife. Kilpatrick is widely known and appreciated for his ability to build teams and bring unlikely allies together to, as he puts it, "speak for the critters." The Alliance is honored to recognize his accomplishments and name him our Outstanding Conservationist of 2011.

In addition, the Alliance is pleased to announce "Hats Off" awards to David Gonzales of TreeFight and to Skinny Skis for their leadership in valley conservation efforts.

Gonzales heads up TreeFight, an initiative that informs the public about the plight of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem's whitebark pines, and searches for solutions to prevent the species' extinction.

Skinny Skis has also shown vision and dedication to our community through their consistent, unstinting support of local environmental initiatives, community events and awareness of safe practices in the backcountry. The business, led by Phil Leeds and Jeff Crabtree, is a solid and invaluable part of this community.

"Steve, David and Skinny Skis are three community forces that are working consistently and diligently to make our valley and its environment better," says Alliance Executive Director Trevor Stevenson. "We are lucky to live in a community with so many engaged individuals and businesses, and are honored to recognize these three at our annual meeting."

Details in Brief:

What: Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance annual meeting, featuring guest speaker Bruce Smith

When: Thursday, Dec. 8, from 6 to 8:30 p.m.

Annual membership meeting: 6 to 6:30 p.m.

Holiday beverages and hors d'oeuvres: 6:30 to 7 p.m.

Speaker: 7 to 8 p.m.

Book signing and further socializing: 8 to 8:30 p.m.

Where: St. John's Episcopal Church, Hansen Hall, 170 N. Glenwood, Jackson

Cost: \$5 suggested donation to cover speaker costs

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More information: www.jhalliance.org, www.brucesmithwildlife.com, www.tetonscience.org, www.treefight.org,
www.skinnyskis.com

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The Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance is a nonprofit organization dedicated to responsible land stewardship to ensure that human activities are in harmony with the area's irreplaceable wildlife, scenic and other natural resources.