

Funding Wildlife Crossings in Nevada

Building on Success for People & Wildlife

June 4, 2024

Pew

Problem- Wildlife Vehicle Collisions and Habitat Fragmentation

- Each year, according to the Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT), more than 500 reported wildlife-vehicle collisions occur annually costing the state close to \$20 million.
- Collisions with deer and other species including elk, moose and bighorn sheep are notoriously underreported, and transportation officials estimate that the actual number is significantly higher. NDOT estimates that less than 10% of these collisions are actually reported in Nevada. Thus, actual numbers may be as high as 5,000 wildlife vehicle collisions annually.
- New research from September 2022 by NDOT finds that the total average national cost of a single deer collision is \$19,089 an elk collision is \$73,196 and a moose collision is \$110,397.
- Linear infrastructure like roads fragment migration routes limiting access to important habitat. Studies show that habitat fragmentation can reduce biodiversity by up to 75%. Climate change is exacerbating these impacts by altering the growth patterns and abundance of forage at key locations and times of year.

Wildlife Crossings as a Solution

- Wildlife crossings are highly effective at reducing crashes, improving safety for animals and humans alike. They also facilitate essential wildlife movement, making herds more resilient in the face of drought and other changes in their habitat.
- Wildlife crossings connect habitat facilitating critical ecological processes like pollination, nutrient cycling, and gene flow. If wildlife cannot move throughout our landscape to find food and water resources, climate refugia, and genetically diverse mates, the species has a much higher risk of becoming unhealthy and dying off

Wildlife Crossings as a Solution

- In addition to improving habitat connectivity, properly-sited wildlife crossings can reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions by upwards of 90 percent, helping reduce driver deaths, injuries, and costs from damage to vehicles.
- The Highway 93 overpass near Elko, which was the state's first project specifically for wildlife, found that more than 35,000 mule deer used the structure in its first four years resulting in significant reductions in wildlife-vehicle collisions.
- Based on the overall societal costs of wildlife vehicle collisions, properly-sited wildlife crossings and associated fencing will pay for themselves well before they are obsolete, where situated along highways that experience a high frequency of collisions.

Nevada Continues to Lead

- Nevada has a long history of leadership in addressing this issue and has 79 animal crossings in place for both large and small animals, including 6 overpasses (3 on I-80, 2 on US 93 and one on I-11)
- AB112's (2023) creation of The Wildlife Crossings Account as well as the \$5 million investment into the account is a significant step in establishing a framework to build upon.

Funding Challenges

- Despite this record of success, new science and known benefits, consistent funding remains the primary constraint for wildlife friendly transportation infrastructure.
- State governments struggle to obtain adequate funding sources for managing and maintaining existing and aging infrastructure, which can impact the ability to pursue new standalone wildlife-friendly transportation infrastructure projects.
- Developing dedicated funding sources at the state level would better position Nevada to attract federal funding.

Federal Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program

- The 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law allocated more than \$1 billion in funding across 15 federal grant programs eligible to support wildlife crossing infrastructure and habitat connectivity projects for states to access.
- Specifically, the Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program authorized \$350 million in grant funding for the design and construction of wildlife-friendly transportation infrastructure.
- But this federal investment is not enough, and competitive grant applications will require matching state funds. With the feds on average matching 5-1 for many of these grant programs, a \$10 million state investment can be leveraged to \$50 million

Neighboring States Take Action

- In the last 2 years, state legislatures in California, Colorado, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah and Wyoming passed new laws to conserve or restore habitat connectivity and advance wildlife-friendly infrastructure.
- The sharpest increase to date in state connectivity legislation across the nation occurred in the wake of Congress passing the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.
- Nevada stands poised to maintain its position as a national leader on this issue by prioritizing the allocation of dedicated funding for wildlife crossings in the upcoming 2025 legislative session

What is Needed?

- While the \$5 million from AB 112 is a fantastic start, this is a onetime appropriation, and these projects are expensive.
- Securing a dedicated funding stream for wildlife crossings will make Nevada more competitive for matching federal funding.
- Securing a dedicated funding stream for wildlife crossings will provide certainty for long-term planning, accelerating construction, making roads safer while connecting important habitat.
- Additional staff capacity needed for NDOT and NDOW to continue to coordinate and execute wildlife connectivity priorities.

Potential Revenue Mechanisms to fund the Wildlife Crossings Account

- **General Fund Appropriation-** Recurring year-over-year appropriation from State General Fund into Wildlife Crossing Account
- **Wildlife Crossing User Fee-** Fee paid by drivers traveling under or over crossing
- **Auto Insurance Surcharge-** Adds surcharge to collision auto insurance premiums
- **Mandatory Vehicle Title Registration Fee-** Increases fee for motor vehicle title registration and driver's licenses
- **Optional Vehicle Title Registration Fee-** Adds opt-in fee for motor vehicle title registration and driver's licenses
- **Specialty License Plate-** Adds opt-in fee for a specialty license plate
- **Speeding Ticket-** Allocates a portion of state speeding ticket revenue or establish a speeding zone in high WVC areas
- **Heavy-Vehicle Use Fee-** Increases in-state heavy-vehicles use tax based on weight and miles traveled
- **Opt-in hunting license fee-** Optional fee donation when purchasing hunting license or tags



Thank you

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