



Working to Protect Native Species and Their Habitats

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August 20, 2009

Secretary Raymond L. LaHood
U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Re: Wyoming Dept. of Transportation proposal for TIGER discretionary grant

Dear Secretary LaHood:

Biodiversity Conservation Alliance would like to encourage you to fund the request from the Wyoming Department of Transportation for wildlife crossing projects in Wyoming, including Trapper's Point (U.S. 191), LaBarge to Dry Piney Creek (U.S. 189), Creston Junction to Wamsutter, Coopers Cove, and others (I-80), and the U.S. 189 – I-80 interface, under a Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant.

In Wyoming, the restoration of wildlife migration corridors is of primary concern, both for motorists (collisions with wildlife crossing highways creates millions of dollars in damage plus injury and loss of life for both drivers and wildlife) and for the wildlife themselves (in addition to being a major cause of mortality, highways can sever migration corridors and prevent big game from reaching the seasonal ranges that they need to survive). The Western Governors' Association recently passed their Wildlife Corridors Initiative targeting the maintenance and restoration of these migration routes, and we would like to see the federal government support this visionary effort by funding wildlife passage structures across Wyoming highways.

In particular, studies by the University of Wyoming in the 1970s documented that the construction of Interstate 80 across the heart of the Red Desert caused a 50 percent loss in pronghorn antelope populations, a loss attributed to the fact that the best winter ranges lie south of the Interstate, while the best summer ranges are to the north. The construction of the Interstate resulted in a virtually impassable barrier to pronghorns, and the ranges on either side were only able to support half as many animals once the migration route was severed. Construction of a wildlife overpass between Creston and Wamsutter would help to restore the lost connections.

In addition, the pronghorn migration from Grand Teton National Park to Seedskaadee National Wildlife refuge in southwestern Wyoming has been nationally celebrated as the longest terrestrial migration corridor left in the lower 48 states. This migration corridor is threatened by

both oil and gas development along the southern part of its length and by highway fatalities at Trapper's Point, a key bottleneck where the migration corridor crosses U.S. 191. The massive increase in traffic resulting from the gas drilling boom has led to major increases in collisions with both mule deer and pronghorns here (and along U.S. 189 as well). There is a very small box culvert at this location, which is completely inadequate as it is so small and constricted that wildlife do not use it to an appreciable degree, and motion-activated warning lights have also failed to bring collisions down to acceptable levels. The construction of an overpass or large underpass at this location would give migrating wildlife an opportunity to gain safe passage across the highway.

We would encourage you to provide sufficient funding to construct overpasses preferentially over underpasses, as wildlife (especially pronghorn) are more likely to use the overpasses. Pronghorn in particular evolved in wide-open spaces of the High Plains and sagebrush deserts in the absence of trees, and habitually avoid entering even loose woodlands, let alone cave-like culverts where they would feel vulnerable to ambush by predators. Overpasses, being open to the sky and without dark recesses that could hide predators, are therefore superior structures to entice pronghorns to cross a highway away from traffic.

Biodiversity Conservation Alliance enthusiastically supports WYDOT's efforts to address the problems posed by these obstructions to migration corridors. Feel free to contact us for further information if you wish.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Erik Molvar". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Erik Molvar
Wildlife Biologist and
Executive Director