



Parks & Open Space

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PARKS & OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Time/Date of Meeting: 6:30 p.m., Thursday, April 25, 2024

Location: Boulder County Courthouse
1325 Pearl Street, Third Floor, Boulder

TO:	Parks & Open Space Advisory Committee
FROM/PRESENTER:	Susan Spaulding, Environmental Resources Specialist
AGENDA ITEM:	US Highway 36 Wildlife Crossing Project
ACTION REQUESTED:	Information Only

Introduction

The **US36 Wildlife Crossings Project** is being undertaken by BCPOS, with Community Planning and Permitting (CPP) collaboration related to the US36 Bikeway Feasibility Study/Project.

Why are we pursuing Wildlife Crossings on US36?

It has been a priority within the BCPOS Wildlife Program for many years to reduce vehicle related wildlife mortality, and increase human safety in Boulder County AND is in line with the following:

In April 2022, the Colorado Dept. of Transportation/Colorado Parks and Wildlife **Eastern Slope and Plains Wildlife Prioritization Study** (ESPWPS) was released. The objectives were to identify regional priorities needing actions to decrease wildlife-vehicle collisions on the State's highways.

- The section of **US36 between Boulder and Lyons (emphasis on Nelson Rd to Hygiene Rd) was rated in the top 5%**, and as the top ranked for actions in CDOT's Region 4.
- This ranking score is calculated based on modeling that includes Wildlife-Vehicle Collisions, deer/elk density of winter range use, deer/elk migration routes, and traffic volumes overall.
- The data from CDOT for the past 10 years documents that 235 animals were hit and killed along this stretch, including 3 bears, 103 deer, 68 elk, 1 lion, and 53 smaller animals including badgers, bobcats, prairie dogs, and foxes. (CDOT, 2013-2023)
 - The unfortunate caveat on these numbers is that wildlife crashes are up to 60% unreported, so unfortunately these numbers are much higher (Kintsch et al. 2021)
- Wildlife strikes along this corridor **average 3.2** animals per mile/per year which is more than 10 times higher than the rest of Boulder County, which **averages .26** strikes per mile/per year. (CDOT, 2018-2022).
- The **human cost** of wildlife collisions is significant. Each accident typically costs drivers \$11,100 in property damages, and injuries usually cost over \$101,000 (CDOT, Traffic and Safety Unit, 2022).

The BCPOS Red Hill Elk Management Plan outlines the objective to alleviate barriers to wildlife movement. BCPOS has earmarked \$150,000 out of Capital and Stewardship (CAST) Funds towards future wildlife crossings projects, as match towards design and/or implementation efforts. The Red Hill Elk Management Plan was created in collaboration with CPW and went through a thorough public process.

Current Funding Opportunities

To complete this project, we will need to pursue significant grant funding. Currently there are several federal and state grants available at this project scale:

Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program (WCPP)- funded at \$350 Million, has been established under the **Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act** to provide grants for projects that seek to:

- Reduce the number of wildlife-vehicle collisions,
- Improve habitat connectivity for terrestrial and aquatic species.

America the Beautiful Grant (ATBC)- The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) has funded this grant at \$85 million annually to be awarded in support of conservation projects. This grant is aimed at the development of large-scale, locally led projects spanning public and private lands. Priorities include: Connecting and reconnecting wildlife corridors, large landscapes, watersheds, and seascapes.

Big Picture

In the past few years, elevated interest and emphasis is being placed on wildlife connectivity and safe crossings, including human safety. In fact, Colorado is one of only a few states that has completed statewide analyses of all highways related to wildlife-vehicle collisions. Some other Colorado high points are listed below:

Governors Initiative- Safe Crossings for Colorado Wildlife and Motorists Act-SB22-151- Provides \$5 million from the State's general fund specifically towards leveraging match for the FHWA WCPP Grant. This initiative also guides collaboration between CPW and CDOT which resulted in the 2018 establishment of the: **Colorado Wildlife and Transportation Alliance (CWTA)** to ensure safe and successful migration of wildlife species.

Governor's Proclamation of September 29, 2021, as 'Wildlife Habitat and Connectivity Day'.

SJR21-021- Colorado's legislature unanimously passed SJR21-021, June 2021, which recognizes the importance of wildlife corridors and connectivity.

Summary

We are working towards making this project a reality, and given the supporting reports, initiatives and funding opportunities, we are hopeful that we can achieve success with this large-scale, multi-partner, multi-departmental project. We will be conducting public outreach, beyond POSAC, over the next several months, in conjunction with our WCPP grant application process. We are working closely with CPP on their North Foothills Bikeway

Feasibility Study process and are ensuring that both projects are coordinated over time (one won't impact the other and vice versa). Both projects will 'leave room' for the other in designs.