

December 1, 2022

Malcolm Long  
Director  
Montana Department of Transportation  
2701 Prospect Ave.  
Helena, MT 59620

Re: Support for Wildlife Accommodations Work on Montana Public Roadways

Dear Director Long,

The below conservation organizations made up of Montana hunters and anglers are writing to encourage the Montana Department of Transportation to take full advantage of new federal funding opportunities that support the construction of wildlife accommodation projects on Montana public roadways to reduce vehicle-wildlife collisions.

Wildlife-vehicle collisions in Montana are costly to residents and communities. In a 2020 report published by State Farm Insurance Company, Montana was cited as having the second-highest number of deer collisions in the country. The report states that the number of overall large mammal vehicle collisions in Montana are estimated to be between 6,000-7,000 per year. State Farm Insurance Company also estimates that each collision with a deer costs an average of \$6,617, collision with an elk average \$17,483 and a moose \$30,000. Tragically, recent collisions in the Paradise, Gallatin and Flathead Valleys have highlighted the risk these accidents cause to human life. And as sportsmen and women, it is also significant that deer killed in vehicle collisions in Montana represent over 14% of the annual hunter deer harvest.

Research and monitoring of wildlife accommodations for public roadways already constructed in Montana and other states have shown that investments in such highway infrastructure dramatically reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and save human lives, reduce costs to citizens, and support robust wildlife populations. For the past several years, the Montana Department of Transportation has been working with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks on a joint strategy for planning and proposing wildlife accommodations on public roadways. The Montana Wildlife and Transportation Steering Committee was formed in 2018 to address these wildlife and transportation challenges. We know that the agencies have also been working with Montanans for Safe Wildlife Passages to develop tools and processes to identify priority areas for wildlife accommodations work.

Given the commitment Montana has shown to improve road safety for people and wildlife, the state is poised to effectively take advantage of new federal funding to support this work. The Infrastructure, Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), passed by Congress in 2022, created a first of its kind competitive grant program to fund wildlife accommodations (e.g. fencing and under/over pass accommodations for public roadways) in order to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and protect people, property and wildlife.

The Federal Highway Administration is expected to issue the first Notice of Funding Opportunity for this competitive grant program in early 2023 and will ultimately grant out \$350 million over five years. Eligible applicants for this funding include state departments of transportation, federal land managers, local governments and tribes. While formal non-federal matching requirements have not yet been announced, it is clear that the more an applicant is able to leverage federal funding through matching funds, the more competitive the proposal will be.

We encourage the Montana Department of Transportation to pursue this new competitive grant funding to advance priority wildlife accommodation projects across the state. As the number of people in Montana continues to grow, our organizations support efforts by the state to plan, design and construct important highway infrastructure that can save human lives and maintain viable populations of wildlife.

Sincerely,