



Parks & Open Space

5201 St. Vrain Road • Longmont, CO 80503
303-678-6200 • POSinfo@bouldercounty.gov
www.BoulderCountyOpenSpace.org

PARKS & OPEN SPACE/Community Planning & Permitting PMI April 1, 2024

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| TO: | BOCC |
| FROM/PRESENTER: | Therese Glowacki, BCPOS Director; Stefan Reinold, RMD Manager, Susan Spaulding, Environmental Resources Specialist, D'Ann Lambert, BCPOS Grants Coordinator |
| AGENDA ITEM: | US36 Wildlife Crossings Project |
| ACTION REQUESTED: | Discussion/Support |

Introduction

The **US36 Wildlife Crossings Project** is being undertaken by BCPOS, with CPP collaboration related to the US36 Bikeway Feasibility Study/Project.

We request BOCC support for moving forward with the necessary project planning which will include applying for funding through the Federal Highway Administration's Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program (FWHA WCPP) and completing public outreach efforts.

Project Objective: Implement wildlife crossing structures on US 36 between Boulder and Lyons (mainly between Nelson Road, and Hygiene Road).

Background

BCPOS has recently released an RFP: North Boulder County Wildlife Crossing Assessment, Prioritization and Cost Estimation Study. The goals of this RFP include:

- A review and prioritization of CDOT endorsed wildlife crossing locations on US36.
- To obtain associated cost estimates for prioritized crossing locations.
- To assist in a grant application for FHWA WCPP funds (made available by the Infrastructure Bill) due July 1, 2024.

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 CDOT/CPW **Eastern Slope and Plains Wildlife Prioritization Study** (ESPWPS) was released. The objectives were to identify regional priorities needing actions to decrease wildlife-vehicle collisions.

- The section of **US36 between Boulder and Lyons (emphasis on Nelson to St. Vrain) was rated in the top 5%**, and as the highest priority for actions in CDOT's Region 4.
- The report ranks US36 as having the highest prioritization score in CDOT's Region 4. This is based on modeling that includes Wildlife-Vehicle Collisions, deer/elk density of winter range use, deer/elk migration routes, traffic volumes overall, and distance from suburban housing density.
- Wildlife strikes **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 as well. Each accident typically costs drivers \$11,100 in property damages, and injuries usually cost drivers over \$101,000 (CDOT, Traffic and Safety Unit, 2022).

Boulder County's Vision Zero Plan is a result of the County's 2020 Transportation Master Plan Update. The objective of Vision Zero (VZ) is to eliminate major injury and fatal traffic crashes in unincorporated Boulder County by 2035. US36 is identified as a priority. Using the Traffic Crash data from 2009-2018, wildlife-vehicle collisions are most numerous on US36 between Boulder and Lyons.

The Red Hill Elk Management Plan outlines the objective to alleviate barriers to wildlife movement. BCPOS has earmarked \$150,000 out of Capital and Stewardship 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. The concept of wildlife crossings was introduced to the public during this process.

North Foothills Bikeway Feasibility Study-The objectives of this project are to identify and evaluate alternative alignments for a new hard-surface multi-use bikeway parallel to US36. The scope of work for the feasibility study included consideration of wildlife crossings as part of the study's objectives. BCPOS and CPP have remained in close communication about both projects and are supporting each effort collaboratively.

Partner Support for US 36 Wildlife Crossings Project include:

- Colorado Parks and Wildlife
- Colorado Department of Transportation
- Municipalities

Funding

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

- Requires 20% match.

America the Beautiful Grant (ATBC)- The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF)- funded at \$85 million to be awarded in support of conservation projects. This annually renewed 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

The Wildlife Crossing Fund- The National Wildlife Federation (NWF) has recently partnered with private and public entities to secure \$500 million dollars towards wildlife crossings.

Other Supporting Information

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 WCCP 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.

Discussion Questions

1. Do the Commissioners have questions for staff?
2. Federal and state grants require matches. Often federal grants can be matched with state grants, and state grants matched with non-profit and local funding. Discussion.
3. Is there any other information Commissioners need before a decision can be made whether staff can apply for this FHWA WCCP funding opportunity? We can present updates to the Commissioners if other funding sources are being sought.

Next Steps

- POSAC April 25th- US36 Wildlife Crossings Project is being presented jointly with North Foothills Bikeway Feasibility Study.

Attachments:

1. North Boulder County Wildlife Crossing Assessment, Prioritization and Cost Estimation Study RFP
2. 2020 BOCO Transportation Master Plan Update-Figure 1- All Wildlife Crashes in Unincorporated Boulder County and Mountain Towns-Vision Zero Wildlife Crashes 2009-2018