



SUPPORT SB26-141: Funding Wildlife Crossing Solutions for Colorado

Sponsored by State Sens. Dylan Roberts & Cleave Simpson | Speaker Julie McCluskie & State Rep. Rick Taggart

THE ISSUE

Vehicle collisions with wildlife are a significant concern in Colorado, costing lives, damaging property, and placing financial burdens on families. In 2024, approximately 7,500 crashes with animals occurred on roads across the state, according to roadkill data—though the true number could be 67% higher due to underreporting. From 2010-24, these tragic accidents resulted in 48 motorist fatalities and 5,152 injuries, as well as scores of roadkill. What's more, the total estimated annual cost of wildlife-vehicle collisions in Colorado is \$321 million—the highest of any state in the West—with the average cost of hitting a deer exceeding \$23,700. These incidents negatively impact the health of wildlife populations, diminish hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities, and harm our state's robust \$65.8 billion outdoor recreation economy.

Wildlife crossing structures have proven to yield a high return on investment by significantly reducing collision rates. For instance, a system of wildlife crossings installed in 2015 on State Highway 9 near Kremmling has reduced crashes with wildlife by 92%.



THE SOLUTION

SB26-141 aims to dramatically reduce motor vehicle crashes with wildlife by supporting all aspects of planning, engineering, building and maintaining safe passage infrastructure on the state's most dangerous roadways. The bill authorizes an optional \$5 collision prevention fee that will be collected during annual vehicle registrations beginning in 2027. This new Collision Prevention Fund will provide reliable, dedicated funding for proven solutions. A portion of the funds will also benefit the Wildlife Cash Fund, administered by Colorado Parks and Wildlife, to conserve habitat on either side of the crossings to ensure that animals can continue to use them in perpetuity.

Over the past 5 years, Colorado has been uniquely successful in leveraging federal funding opportunities, including the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program and numerous other U.S. Dept. of Transportation programs, to complete priority projects. The 2022 creation of the Colorado Wildlife Safe Passages Fund in Senate Bill 22-151, which, to date, has spent all of the one-time general fund appropriations it has received, allowed the Colorado Dept. of Transportation (CDOT) to unlock approximately four federal dollars for every one state dollar invested in life-saving crossing structures.

Building safe passages for wildlife and drivers is a bipartisan, win-win proposition that is incredibly popular in the Centennial State. According to the 2024 Colorado College Conservation in the West Poll, 87 percent of Colorado voters "support constructing wildlife crossing structures across major highways that intersect with known migration routes." In addition to saving lives, these projects will reduce insurance claims and minimize costly road closures.



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Though state agencies have managed to make progress on building effective crossings in recent years with one-time general fund allocations and federal grant awards, many more identified wildlife-vehicle collision hotspots require urgent attention. A lack of reliable and dedicated funding is the primary barrier to building wildlife crossing infrastructure that will help prevent life-altering collisions and save Coloradans money.

SB26-14I will make a dramatic difference for road safety and our state's iconic wildlife populations by addressing a critical lack of infrastructure funding. The new source of voluntary annual funding is a prudent investment that will improve road safety, avoid property damage, reduce traffic on our congested roads, and facilitate healthy wildlife migration and movement.

COLLISION PREVENTION FUND SUPPORTERS

Picture: U.S. Highway 160 Chimney Rock Wildlife Crossing Project in SW Colorado. A collaboration of CDOT, CPW, the Southern Ute Tribe and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation completed in 2022. (Courtesy J. Neal, CPW)



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