

# WYDOT to ask for \$100 million

Agency requesting funds for highway improvements to I-80, state highways

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The Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT) has announced it will apply for \$100 million in federal economic stimulus funds for a series of highway-improvement projects to reduce the number of animal-vehicle collisions.

WYDOT issued a news release on Tuesday saying it would apply for the stimulus funds for a series of projects to improve highway safety through wildlife-crossing underpasses and overpasses to reduce the 1,800 collisions that happen between animals and vehicles each year.

The projects would be combined with additional fencing along sections of U.S. Highway 191, Interstate 80 and U.S. Highway 189 in what some refer to as the heaviest deer, elk and pronghorn antelope migration corridors in the nation.

"We think this could become a model for projects to reduce animal-vehicle collisions not only in Wyoming but around the country," Del McOmie, WYDOT's chief engineer, said in the news release.

McOmie stressed the importance of the stimulus funds in giving WYDOT the opportunity to address the issue of animal-vehicle collisions.

"It's an innovative project that we really haven't had money for in the past," he said.

In addition to safety and environmental improvements, the projects could reduce conflicts with energy development and production since many of the wildlife migration routes are currently in natural gas fields, the news release says.

The proposed wildlife-crossing projects to address animal-vehicle collisions include 30 underpasses and five overpasses coupled with 192 miles of fencing to direct animals to safe crossing areas at points along migration routes.

On U.S. 191, the project would be in the Trapper's Point area west of Pinedale and the Dry Piney Creek area southeast of the town.

The structures on U.S. 189 would be added between I-80 and Kemmerer.

The I-80 projects would take place in the Elk Mountain and Wamsutter areas, as well as between the U.S. 189 and French interchanges east of Evanston.

WYDOT spokesman Dave Kingham said on Wednesday the Elk Mountain projects would involve building some of the first wildlife overpasses in the state.

The wildlife overpasses would look like a standard overpass. However, instead of a road going across the top, they would have a type of "green roof" covered with vegetation and soil that matches the terrain in the area.

The overpasses would be built with the Pronghorn in mind, since the animal isn't keen about crossing highways underground, Kingham said.

"They do work better for antelope because antelope are a little more skittish about going through an underpass," he said. "We have underpasses west of Kemmerer, and we have had some antelope using those. But ... we think the antelope would be more likely to use an overpass than an underpass."

The overpasses would be built above the eastbound and westbound lanes of I-80 at mile markers 265.5 and 252.1, which are located in the Elk Mountain area between Walcott and Arlington.

The fencing to direct the Pronghorn to the overpasses would be placed between mile markers 246 and 280, Kingham said.

"There would be additional fencing on either side of those to direct the animals to the safe-crossing area," he said.

Each wildlife overpass would cost an estimated \$10.7 million to construct, whereas the fencing would cost about \$7.1 million to build.

Kingham said wildlife overpasses have been built in other states but not on the scale as proposed in the WYDOT plan.

The WYDOT news release says state highways cross the migration routes of some of the largest wildlife herds in the country.

Compounding the conflict between animals and motorists is the fact that many roads were originally built, traffic volumes were lower and little consideration was given to accommodating wildlife movements, the news release states.

To help identify the critical points of wildlife migration routes across state highways, WYDOT has enlisted the help of the Game and Fish Department, Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and Fish and Wildlife Service in putting the projects together.

McOmie hopes the proposed projects would go a long way in reducing the number of conflicts between wildlife and vehicles.

"We think going in and addressing the problems on half a dozen of the major migration corridors across the state at once would be a great benefit to Wyoming," he said.

For more information, contact WYDOT at (307) 777-4375 or visit <http://www.dot.state.wy.us>.

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