



Transportation Interim Committee

69th Montana Legislature

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November 24, 2025

U.S. Department of Transportation
Docket No. DOT-OST-2025-0468
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

To the Honorable Secretary Duffy,

The Transportation Interim Committee of the 69th Montana Legislature writes to urge the Department to prioritize reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions and by connecting wildlife habitats across roadways. This letter is prompted in part by the rescission of \$63 million of the previously awarded \$75 million 2023 Neighborhood Access and Equity grant funds awarded to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) on August 6, 2025 (1). Consequently, the US 93 Ninepipe Eagle Pass Trail project will be scaled down to only include the Eagle Pass Trail section (2).

Each year, wildlife-vehicle collisions cause over 200 human deaths, 26,000 injuries, \$10 billion in costs, and millions of animal deaths nationwide (3). Fortunately, research has shown that well-designed and well-sited wildlife crossings, combined with fencing, can reduce collisions by up to 97% (4). Construction of crossings can create jobs, boost local economies, and increase private donor investment (5). By supporting the preservation of wildlife populations, crossings also support the preservation of hunting, fishing, and wildlife-watching opportunities that matter deeply to Montanans.

Since 2020, 16 states have considered or enacted legislation to identify, prioritize, and construct wildlife crossings where they are needed most (6). The 69th Montana Legislature passed HB 855 (Zolnikov) to establish a specialty license plate and utilize the proceeds to fund big game and wildlife highway crossings and accommodations (7). When the current infrastructure law created and funded the \$350 million Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program (WCPP), states saw the largest increase of introduced and passed wildlife crossing-related legislation and appropriations (8).

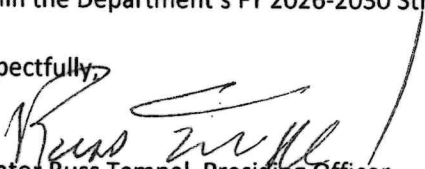
We submit this bipartisan letter in support of the following policies and programs that will help Montana reduce dangerous and costly wildlife-vehicle collisions:

1. Reauthorize and increase funding for the discretionary Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program (WCPP).
2. Maintain Wildlife-Vehicle Collision Reduction Measures as eligible expenses across federal programs.
3. Preserve existing bipartisan reporting, research, and training provisions.
4. To the extent possible, make maintenance of wildlife infrastructure eligible for federal funding.
5. Allow flexibility for wildlife infrastructure in Emergency Relief projects.

As Montana state legislators, we see wildlife-vehicle collisions, and the resulting costs, every day. We also see the vast potential of wildlife crossings to save lives, save money, and sustain Montana's outdoor heritage. We

respectfully request reinstatement of the rescinded \$63 million 2023 Neighborhood Access and Equity grant funds awarded to the CSKT. We thank the Department for its leadership on this issue and strongly encourage permanent wildlife-vehicle collision reduction programs within the U.S. Department of Transportation and within the Department's FY 2026-2030 Strategic Plan.

Respectfully,


Senator Russ Tempel, Presiding Officer


Representative Chip Fitzpatrick, Vice Presiding Officer

References:

1. Iron, Robyn. *CSKT Adjusts Highway 93 Improvement Plans after Funds Rescinded*. KPAX News, 7 Aug. 2025, www.kpax.com/homepage-showcase/cskt-adjusts-highway-93-improvement-plans-after-funds-rescinded. Accessed 15 Sept. 2025.
2. Montana Department of Transportation (MDT). *US 93 Post Creek Hill and Ninepipe Eagle Pass Trail*. Mt.gov, 2025, <https://mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/us93npostcreekhill/>. Accessed 15 Sept. 2025.
3. M.P. Huijser et al., *Wildlife-Vehicle Collision Reduction Study: Report to Congress*, FHWA-HRT-08-034 (Fed. Highway Admin., Office of Safety Research & Dev., Aug. 2008) (on file with U.S. Dep't of Transp.); ARC Solutions, *Inaugural Round of \$110 Million in Wildlife Crossings Pilot Funding Marks Landmark Investment in Solving a \$10 Billion Problem* (Dec. 5, 2023), <https://arc-solutions.org/article/inaugural-round-of-110-million-in-wildlife-crossings-pilot-funding-marks-landmark-investment-in-solving-a-10-billion-problem/>.
4. J.G. Woods, *Effectiveness of Fences and Underpasses on the Trans-Canada Highway and Their Impact on Ungulate Populations* (Report to Banff Nat'l Park Warden Serv., Banff, Alta., Can., 1990) <https://www.intrans.iastate.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2018/10/CMTtoolboxCrossings.pdf>.
5. *Willard Springs Wildlife Overpass Pumps \$15.8 Million into Northern Arizona Economy*, Flagstaff Bus. News (July 8, 2025), <https://www.flagstaffbusinessnews.com/willard-springs-wildlife-overpass-pumps-15-8-million-into-northern-arizona-economy/>; The Wallis Annenberg Wildlife Crossing in Southern California was primarily constructed with private grant dollars, and a 2024 Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program award was given to a Red Wolf Crossing Project in coastal North Carolina, where a private anonymous pledge supported the majority of the required matching funds.
6. Wicks, Matt. "How to Make Roads Safer for Drivers and Animals? Wildlife Crossings." *National Conference of State Legislatures*, 12 Aug. 2025, www.ncsl.org/state-legislatures-news/details/how-to-make-roads-safer-for-drivers-and-animals-wildlife-crossings.
7. Chapter 540, Laws of 2025 (HB 855) https://bills.legmt.gov/#/laws/bill/2/LC2103?open_tab=bill.
8. L. Christian & E. Sito, *State of the States: A Look at How Far U.S. State Habitat Connectivity Legislation Has Advanced and What Is Working* (Wildlands Network, May 2024), <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60b7e4e41506593f7f926fe7/t/6643a116b84aa32e721356ad/1715708201864/SoS+Master+Report+FINAL+5.14+1pm+EST.pdf>.