

## **MWTP Frequently Asked Questions**

### **PROJECT PROGRAM Questions**

#### **How did the Montana Wildlife and Transportation Partnership come about?**

The Montana Wildlife and Transportation Summit, held in December 2018, brought together Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), Western Transportation Institute (WTI), Montanans for Safe Wildlife Passage (MSWP), and other key partners to build common ground around wildlife and transportation issues in Montana. The purpose of the Summit was to bring stakeholders together to strengthen working relationships, share information, and develop strategies to plan and implement wildlife accommodations across state highways.

Following the Summit, the Montana Wildlife and Transportation Partnership (MWTP) was formed to provide strategic direction and a foundation of resources, information, and knowledge for broad stakeholder engagement to address wildlife and transportation challenges across the state.

#### **How did the Project Program come about? What is the purpose?**

The Partnership developed this Project Program based on a recognition of the need to create a process to identify and implement collaborative solutions, provide a stronger suite of tools and resources to interested stakeholders, and catalyze strategic partnerships. The Planning Tool and Project Program establish an avenue for a strategic investment of resources into on-the-ground, partnership-based wildlife accommodation projects around the state.

The Project Program is a standardized and collaborative approach to receive and evaluate project proposals and select “stand-alone” wildlife accommodation projects to reduce wildlife-vehicle conflicts and provide safe wildlife passage across Montana highways. The projects may be implemented by MDT and/or other governmental entities with stakeholder involvement or implemented by the stakeholder depending on the scope and scale of the proposed project.

### **PROJECT Questions**

#### **Who can apply for projects?**

Any federal, tribal, state, or local government agency or entity, non-governmental organization, or individual may submit a project proposal. Project proposals stemming from robust collaborative partnerships will be more competitive.

## **Where do applicants get funding for these projects?**

There are a number of possibilities for securing funds for wildlife accommodation projects. Funds do not have to be secured in order to propose a project to the program, however applications with a clear proposal for securing necessary funds will be more competitive. There are a variety of federal funding programs made available through the federal infrastructure bill (IIJA or BIL). For more information on federal funding programs visit the Animal Road Crossings (ARC) Solutions' document [Wildlife Infrastructure Funding Opportunities within the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act](#) or the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) [Guide to Federal-Aid Programs and Projects](#). MDT, FWP, federal agencies, or local governments may be able to contribute funding as well. Private/philanthropic contributions are another potential funding source. There is no one-size-fits all approach to funding wildlife accommodation projects, and developing a funding plan for your proposal may require creativity and piecing together a variety of different funding sources.

## **Is there MDT/State funding available for these projects?**

Some project proposals may be eligible for MDT funding for engineering/cost feasibility analysis, to accelerate the development of high quality project concepts requiring further engineering or technical analysis. Roughly \$100,000-\$500,000 a year could be allocated to project feasibility analysis through this program. Allocation of state funding for feasibility analysis will depend on the number and scope of projects selected and identification of other funding sources.

## **Does every project in Montana that includes wildlife accommodations need to go through this process?**

No. MDT has an internal business process called the Wildlife Accommodations Process for evaluating the need for and determining the feasibility of including wildlife accommodations within highway projects addressing condition, operation, safety, or capacity. These accommodations may be included as a component of a highway project programmed for highway maintenance, preservation, or capital investment and are not stand-alone wildlife-accommodation projects. MDT has a robust public engagement process incorporated into the project development and can incorporate funding contributions from partner agencies, stakeholders, or private entities and philanthropists for the inclusion of wildlife accommodations in highway projects through agreements.

The MWTP Project Program establishes an avenue for public-private partnerships to propose stand-alone wildlife accommodation projects. The Program addresses the need for transportation projects specifically dedicated to accommodating wildlife with the collaborative engagement of stakeholders, including the leveraging of capacity and capital investment. These projects are expected to be proposed by interested parties outside of the agencies. The project selection process integrates information from the Planning Tool with other evaluation criteria and considerations (e.g., community support, surrounding land use, engineering feasibility) to rate project proposals. Visit the [MWTP Project Program](#) website for an overview of expectations detailed guidance on requirements for project proposal.

**What types and scales of projects are eligible for consideration in this program?**

An applicant can apply for projects that are of various scales and stages of development. Applications proposing complex projects may need to include more information than applications proposing less complex projects. Less complex projects may include: minor fencing or wing-fencing, signing, or vegetation management within the Right-of-Way. More complex projects may include: additions or modifications to existing infrastructure with system impact, longer stretches of directional wildlife fencing with jump-outs, and installation of new wildlife crossings or modifications to existing infrastructure. Detailed project application guidance, project requirements, and the project selection process are provided in the [MWTP Project Program Application Guidance Document](#), which is available at the [MWTP Project Program](#) website

**When determining locations, does this program prioritize projects addressing wildlife conservation or human safety? Regarding wildlife conservation, is the focus primarily on large mammals or does it include other wildlife?**

The application and criteria evaluation considers both human safety and wildlife conservation, as well as many other components of project need and opportunity. The project selection process integrates information from the Planning Tool with other evaluation criteria and considerations (e.g., community support, surrounding land use, engineering feasibility) to rate project proposals. Projects that are believed to both reduce the potential for wildlife-vehicle collisions *and* provide for increase permeability of the highway corridor to wildlife movement may be of higher value than those that address one or the other, depending on the magnitude of the challenge being addressed.

Designing wildlife crossing structures to meet the movement and habitat needs of multiple species creates the most impact for biodiversity. Different species respond differently to wildlife crossing structure placement, design, and size.

### **STATEWIDE Questions**

**What is Montana doing to take advantage of new funding opportunities for wildlife crossings in the federal infrastructure law?**

MDT has identified several projects within the 5-year transportation plan that include wildlife accommodations within the scope of projects implemented for other highway improvements. These projects will be evaluated for compatibility to the criteria within the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO). The project(s) in need of additional funding support meeting the majority of criteria may be submitted for discretionary grants.

The MWTP Project Program provides a new pathway for public-private collaborations to advance stand-alone wildlife accommodation projects in Montana, without those projects needing to be part of a planned highway improvement project by MDT. Over a dozen programs under the current [federal infrastructure law](#) provide potential funding sources for states, tribes, and local

governments and their partners to build or modify infrastructure to allow wildlife passage and remove barriers to fish passage under roads.

### **Is there state funding available for wildlife/transportation issues?**

MDT's state funding sources for matching federal grants could be part of the funding package for a proposed project. Applicants will need to work in partnership with MDT, FWP, and others to develop a plan for funding their proposed project.

### **Have priority areas for these types of projects been identified across the state?**

The Partnership has not developed priority areas for advancing wildlife accommodation projects. We have identified highway stretches of greatest need for improving human safety and wildlife movement/conservation, via the Planning Tool. Identifying specific project locations and types will require finer scale analysis in partnership with key stakeholders. There are many other factors (e.g., adjacent land conservation, engineering feasibility) that could dictate the viability of a project. Therefore, the intention is to collaborate and pool resources in the planning and implementation of wildlife accommodation projects in areas of need across the state, while not ruling out project opportunities in areas that may be important but don't clearly emerge as an area of greatest need based on the criteria in the Planning Tool.

### **How does this program change the state's process for addressing wildlife and transportation issues?**

This Project Program does not affect MDT's internal Wildlife Accommodation Process, but areas of greatest need for wildlife accommodations don't always coincide with highway improvement projects planned through MDT's 5-year plan. This program provides a new pathway for advancing stand-alone wildlife accommodation projects, through collaborative vision and public/private partnerships.

### **What are/have been the greatest challenges to increasing the number of wildlife accommodations in Montana?**

The greatest limitation preventing most states from increasing the number of wildlife accommodations on highways is insufficient financial resources to address the multitude of needs throughout the state. Given that states rely heavily on federal funding for highway improvements — including Montana, where federal dollars provide 87% of infrastructure improvement funding — the new funding eligibilities for wildlife-collision reduction and wildlife connectivity eligibilities permitted through the current [federal infrastructure law](#) have potential to help fund wildlife accommodation projects.

The Partnership developed this Project Program based on a recognition of the need to create a process to identify and implement collaborative solutions, provide a stronger suite of tools and resources to interested stakeholders, and catalyze strategic partnerships. The Planning Tool and

Project Program establish an avenue for a strategic investment of resources into on-the-ground wildlife accommodation projects around the state.

## APPLICATION Questions

### We have an idea for a project. Where do we start?

If you have an idea for a project, we encourage you to examine the [MWTP Project Program Application Guidance Document and Appendices](#) to understand the process, application requirements, and criteria important to the MWTP for advancing a project concept. These documents may provide guidance regarding where to begin collaborating with potential project partners.

### Who can help answer our questions?

You can submit a question via '[Contact Us](#)' button on the [MWTP website](#). The question will be emailed to the Partnership and will be answered by the most relevant person according to the topic. Prior to submitting a question, please refer to the Application Guidance Document and other resources available on the website.

### Who can help us with parts of an application?

The application requires connecting with engineering, technical experts, biologists, and transportation ecologists. The links below are provided as an option for applicants, but applicants can use any qualified firm(s) they prefer:

- Engineering Consulting Firms: [MDT Design Consulting Pre-Qualification roster](#)
- Environmental and general Consulting Firms: [DOA Contract Term Consultant List](#)
- Montana Wildlife & Transportation Partnership: [Contact Us](#)

### How do we get the kind of information we need to fill out an application?

Robust project applications should include detail regarding:

- The need at the project site and the benefits of the proposed solution, with supporting data or information
- Landowner and community support
- Land protections and land uses adjacent to the project location
- Complementary projects planned or underway in the vicinity of the project location
- Current partnerships in place to support the project
- Project cost, funding contributions, and potential funding sources
- Engineering/technical feasibility
- Biological/ecological feasibility
- Recommendations for construction, monitoring, and maintenance

Detailed information about the requirements above can be found in the [Project Program Application Guidance Document](#). Applicants are encouraged to build public/private partnerships around project proposals. Potential partners could include NGOs, MDT, FWP, Federal agencies, Tribal entities, local governments, community organizations, or philanthropists. Staff of the entities involved in the Montana Wildlife and Transportation Partnership are available to help direct applicants to appropriate technical experts around questions regarding project costs, feasibility, and implementation. Please submit an inquiry to the Partnership at [Contact Us](#) if you are unsure of who to reach out to for assistance with technical questions.

There are several resources available that offer best practices to identify, design, and implement wildlife accommodations. Some can be found at the [Wildlife Crossings website](#), the [USDA Wildlife Crossings Toolkit](#), and the [FHWA Wildlife Crossings Handbook](#).

Connect with relevant experts and MWTP partner entity/agency staff through the [Contact Us](#) email. Be sure to ask a very specific question and include a topic area in the subject line that lets us know what you're looking for (e.g., Engineering, GIS support, Biology/Ecology, Data Search).

### **What happens next if our project is not selected?**

If a project is not selected to move forward, the MWTP Steering Committee will notify the project contact why the project was not selected along with suggestions for improvements for future applications, as appropriate.

### **What happens next after our project gets selected?**

The MWTP Steering Committee will communicate the next steps for project feasibility, development and implementation to the project contact of selected projects. The duration and complexity of the process will depend on the scope and scale of the project. Next steps can include: completing project feasibility analysis, securing additional funding, drafting and executing applicable agreements, engineering survey and design, and ultimately construction. Other activities could include landowner engagement and agreements, right-of-way acquisition, utility relocation, public involvement, and Transportation Commission approval.

## **GENERAL Questions**

### **Why should we care about this?**

There are multiple reasons to care about wildlife conflicts on roadways, including: 1) human safety concerns, 2) preventing wildlife-vehicle conflicts, 3) wildlife conservation opportunities, 4) economic impacts, and 5) changing landscapes.

*Human Safety: Collisions with wildlife lead to human injury, and fatality, and can also take an emotional toll.* Each year, wildlife-vehicle collisions (WVCs) across the U.S. kill more than one million large mammals and cause hundreds of human fatalities and over 26,000 injuries—all at a

cost to Americans of nearly \$11B annually. Montana has the second-highest incidence of WVCs per capita in the nation. Each year, MDT maintenance crews collect and record 6,000 to 7,000 wildlife animal carcasses across Montana. This is very likely an underestimate of the number of incidences.

***Wildlife-vehicle Conflict is Preventable:** Tools that successfully mitigate the impacts of roads on wildlife and human safety have been implemented in many locations across the United States (and the world).* A large and growing body of research is proving the efficacy of these tools. There are resources available to address wildlife-vehicle conflict, and a lot of collaboration and coordination around the issue is underway in Montana. Recent federal funding sources have expanded and created new funding opportunities to build WVC mitigation infrastructure. Montana can work to secure these new investments to reduce the impact on Montana drivers and wildlife.

***Wildlife Conservation Opportunities:** Montanans care about wildlife for many reasons - and roads can negatively impact wildlife.* Collisions with wildlife lead to loss of valued Montana wildlife – many game animals, species that attract tourism, and rare species die on Montana roads. Some wildlife are deterred from crossing roads and traffic levels can make it impossible to safely cross. Roads may cut wildlife off from important habitat, resources, and other members of the population that can impact the health of wildlife individuals and the population as a whole.

***Economic Impact:** Economic impacts from collisions are costly and include associated impacts from loss of means of transportation, absence from work, increased insurance costs and a direct impact on local livelihoods.* Research indicates that the average collision costs for deer, elk, and moose are \$14,014, \$45,445 and \$82,646 respectively (Huijser et al. 2022), without even taking into account the conservation value of the animal itself. The livelihoods of Montanans can be financially impacted in the wake of an animal collision. Safer highways support local and statewide commerce and reduce the negative financial impacts associated with WVCs. Reduced WVCs result in safer roadways, improved health, and sustainable livelihoods.

***Changing Landscapes:** Montana's human population is increasing, traffic is increasing, WVC rates are increasing, and development is increasing in important wildlife habitats.* Because of these increases, opportunities for straightforward or successful implementation of wildlife accommodations to improve human safety and conserve wildlife will become more challenging. There is a time urgency to this work.

## **Do these mitigation techniques work?**

Wildlife crossing structures include overpasses, underpasses, bridges, culverts, and tunnels that allow wildlife to move across roads. Wildlife exclusionary fencing guides wildlife to the structures and keeps them from otherwise crossing the road at-grade nearby. A growing body of research proves that wildlife crossing structures - paired with wildlife fencing - significantly reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions (WVCs) while also improving wildlife connectivity across roadways. Research shows that crossing structures, combined with fencing that guides animals to them, can reduce

WVCs by 86-97%. If strategically located, crossing structures can pay for themselves over time by reducing costly collisions.

MDT defines wildlife accommodations as “features or strategies designed and implemented into a transportation facility to moderate the effects of the infrastructure on wildlife and their habitat. The objective of these features is to minimize or eliminate barriers to wildlife movement, protect important habitat components within the landscape, and reduce or eliminate the potential for wildlife-vehicle collisions.” Other than structures which physically separate animal movements from the roadway environment, other wildlife accommodations may include animal detection systems with real-time driver warning seasonal variable message or static signage, vegetative management, and others. It is important to have access to all the tools in the tool box and employ the features or strategies that provide the best solution to the specific wildlife conflict challenge being addressed, in the appropriate location, and deemed to be feasible for implementation.

