

October 6, 2022

Dear Governor Spencer Cox, Speaker Brad Wilson, Senate President Stuart Adams,

To ensure Utah continues its leadership in protecting and maintaining wildlife connectivity, we, the undersigned organizations, write to *respectfully request funding of \$15 million dollars in the 2023 state of Utah budget to address wildlife-vehicle collisions*. This investment will match federal funds apportioned in the Investment in Infrastructure & Jobs Act of 2021 to benefit Utah's wildlife, economy, and help keep our families safe.

In 2021, the Utah Department of Transportation documented nearly 5,000 deer killed in vehicle collisions. Collisions with deer and other species including elk, moose and black bears result in damage, injuries, and even fatalities to the people driving, and they significantly impact Utah's iconic wildlife populations. This is compounded by financial impacts, such as vehicle damage, medical expenses, and lost hunting opportunities. Accounting for such factors, wildlife-vehicle collisions are estimated to cost Utah taxpayers nearly \$100 million every year.

Utah has a long history of leadership in addressing this issue. Utah made history in 1975 when it completed the first wildlife overpass in the United States on Interstate 15 near Beaver. Since then, over 60 wildlife crossings have been built throughout the state. These projects have been highly successful, resulting in significant reductions in wildlife-vehicle collisions. Studies have demonstrated up to 90 percent fewer wildlife-vehicle collisions where there is a crossing structure and fencing to funnel animals to safe passage either over or under a roadway.

In 2020, the legislature unanimously passed HCR13. This legislation urged continued state investment in wildlife connectivity and urged local governments to adopt policies to protect and restore migration routes and promote road safety. This year, the legislature passed HB 427, which added efforts around "wildlife mitigation" to be included in UDOT's annual report to the legislature, which will create additional transparency around the agency's plans to mitigate wildlife-vehicle conflicts. Additionally, the legislature appropriated \$1 million to serve as match for federal funds to complete crossing infrastructure on I-84 between Mountain Green and Croydon.

While Utah has consistently demonstrated leadership in this field, other western states continue to raise the bar:

**California** – In 2021, *California allocated \$105 million for wildlife crossings*, including \$58 million for the Liberty Canyon crossing, which will be the largest wildlife crossing project in the world.

**Colorado** – SB22-151 [Safe Crossings For Colorado Wildlife And Motorists](#) (2022) created a dedicated fund to support wildlife crossings, including design, planning, conservation easements and staff. As introduced, the bill requested \$25 million, which represented 20 percent of the funding needed to implement the Colorado Department of Transportation's priority project list. The final bill included an *initial investment of \$5 million into the fund*.

**New Mexico** – SB 228 [Wildlife Corridors Act](#) (2019) directed New Mexico Department of Transportation and New Mexico Department of Game and Fish to develop a Wildlife Corridors Action Plan, which includes a list of priority safe passage projects. These projects are based on wildlife-vehicle collision hotspots and habitat connectivity needs. In 2022, *New Mexico's legislature appropriated \$2 million to implement priority safe passage projects*.

**Oregon** – Oregon’s [Wildlife Corridor and Safe Road Crossing Act](#) (2019) required the development of a Wildlife Corridors Action Plan. This plan includes opportunities to mitigate wildlife-vehicle collisions, and a list of areas for which land acquisitions or designations of wildlife corridors will protect wildlife movement or habitat connectivity. In 2022, *Oregon spent \$7 million for the construction of wildlife crossings.*

**Wyoming** – In 2019 Wyoming began issuing a Wildlife Conservation license plate. The specialty plate costs \$180 and has generated more than \$500,000 in revenue over its first 2.5 years. In 2022, Wyoming invested an additional \$75 million in the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resources Trust Fund, which supports wildlife crossing projects. Additionally, in 2022, *Wyoming’s legislature appropriated \$10 million to leverage federal funding available for wildlife crossings.*

Now more than ever, it is important that Utah continues its strong leadership on this issue. The Investment in Infrastructure & Jobs Act, signed into law last November, created a \$350 million Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program. This competitive grant program requires a 20 percent match, which means *a \$15 million investment could leverage an additional \$60 million in federal transportation funding.* With other western states already dedicating millions of dollars available for matching funds, Utah needs to act swiftly to ensure it is competitive when applying for this federal funding.

Thank you for considering this request.

Backcountry Hunters and Anglers  
Boone and Crockett Club  
Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation  
Fur Takers of America  
Grand Staircase Escalante Partners  
Mule Deer Foundation  
Muley Fanatic Foundation  
National Deer Association  
National Wildlife Federation  
Navajo Nation Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Pew Charitable Trusts  
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation  
Safari Club International  
Save People Save Wildlife  
Save Our Canyons  
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership  
Trout Unlimited  
Utah Audubon Council  
Utah Chapter of National Wild Turkey Federation  
Utah Wildlife Federation  
Utah Wild Sheep Foundation  
Western Wildlife Conservancy  
Wildlands Network  
Wild Sheep Foundation