

WOOD RIVER LAND TRUST CONVENES LOCAL PARTNERS TO ASSESS MEASURES TO REDUCE WILDLIFE VEHICLE COLLISIONS ON STATE HIGHWAY 75

Hailey, Idaho – November 19, 2024 – As part of the Wildlife Vehicle Collision Subcommittee of the Blaine County Regional Transportation Committee, the Wood River Land Trust is commissioning a road ecology team to assess the site-specific benefits and costs of various measures capable of reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions (WVC) on State Highway 75 (SH75).

While critical migration routes of pronghorn, mule deer and elk in the Smoky-Boise Complex Priority Area bisect US-20 south of Bellevue and SH-75 north of Ketchum, the majority of wildlife-vehicle collisions in Blaine County occur north of Hailey and involve the resident elk herd that has stopped migrating. As the resident elk meander between the river and fodder on the valley floor, they risk their lives and pose a safety hazard for the increasing number of commuters on SH75. Recently, the Blaine County Safety Action Plan found that more than 20% of the crashes on the local stretch of SH75 involve wildlife-vehicle collisions.

The local effort to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions on SH75 is longstanding. Following the first phase of highway widening in 2009, a working group organized by the County launched a citizen science campaign to collect roadkill data and engaged local students to estimate safe driving speeds. The students' estimates align with present-day recommendations: people can drive about 40 miles per hour– at maximum– to avoid a wildlife-vehicle collision at night with medium headlights. As a result of the working group's effort, the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) reduced the nighttime speed limit north of Hailey, between McKercher Boulevard and Buttercup Road, to 45 miles per hour. In addition, ITD improved the design of Hospital Bridge to allow for wildlife passage beneath it, along the riparian corridor, and installed additional wildlife warning signage elsewhere on SH75.

Now, in tandem with the second phase of highway widening, the effectiveness and cost of various measures known to reduce wildlife vehicle collisions will be assessed with consideration of local factors like the geography of the Wood River Valley floor and the location of residential driveway curb cuts along SH75. Blaine County Commissioner, Angenie McCleary states that, "The County is committed to improving roadway safety and living in harmony with our local wildlife. A closer look at treatments that are known to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions, including how well they'll perform on Highway 75, will be useful to pursuing a solution." A generous donation from a long-time supporter of the Land Trust is funding the assessment.

In addition to fielding feedback from the subcommittee and public, partner organizations Blaine County, Idaho Fish & Game, Idaho Transportation Department, and Idaho Conservation League will help steer the scope and completion of the assessment. A Request for Qualifications will be published in December, and public information sessions will be scheduled and held in the new year. The Land Trust aims for the assessment to be completed in Spring 2025.

For more information contact Cece Osborn, Community Planning Director, at the Land Trust with any questions: cece@woodriverlandtrust.org.

