US Highway 26 Draft Wildlife Mitigation Strategy & Public Feedback

Public Input Meeting
Tuesday April 27, 2021 at 6pm
Online Meeting Platform

- Use the **Chat Box** to ask questions or give feedback
  - Moderator will address these after the initial presentation
- You will also have the opportunity to provide feedback online following this meeting
  - Online feedback form on project webpage (link will be sent out to meeting participants)
US 26 December Public Meeting

• Shared progress on partnership to develop a mitigation strategy for US 26
  • Review of different types of mitigation and their applications
  • Mitigation concepts under discussion for US 26

• Public feedback, Q&A
  • Public input integrated into Draft Mitigation Strategy
  • Responses to comments in Appendix B of the Draft Mitigation Strategy

https://wgfd.wyo.gov/Regional-Offices/Lander-Region-old/Wildlife-and-Roadways
Today’s Presentation & Discussion

Our goals:

• Present draft mitigation strategy
  • Priority segments for targeted investments where more intensive mitigation will have the greatest benefit and cost-effectiveness
  • Where to invest in higher-cost mitigation

• Lower-cost mitigation options in other segments
• Get public input on the draft strategy
Tonight’s Speakers

Randy Merritt, District Construction Engineer, Basin

Daryl Lutz, Wildlife Management Coordinator, Lander Region

Julia Kintsch, Principal & Senior Ecologist
Interagency Collaboration

US Highway 26

- Identified as a statewide priority
- Public demand to address safety issues
- WGFD and WYDOT partnership to develop a collaborative plan
Dubois Herd Mule Deer Migration
Wildlife-Vehicle Collisions
US 26: Wildlife-Vehicle Collisions (WVC)

- From 2015-2019
  - 187 WVC crashes
  - 714 WVC carcasses

- WVCs = 74% of all reported crashes

- Net benefits of mitigating WVC realized when ≥5.1 WVCs per mile per year
Evaluating and Prioritizing Segments for Mitigation

1. Biological Assessment
   - Wildlife movement and habitat data
   - WVC datasets
   - Other roadway, land use and land ownership data

2. Field Review
   - Potential functionality of existing bridges and culverts for wildlife
   - Roadway context
     - Features that promote or inhibit wildlife movement
     - Features that increase WVC potential
   - Potential mitigation strategies
     - Opportunities and challenges
Evaluating and Prioritizing Segments for Mitigation

3. Recommendations Development
   - Greatest wildlife movement needs
   - Highest WVC rates
   - Cost-effectiveness
   - Implementation feasibility
   - Apply latest research and best practices

4. Prioritize Mitigation Actions
   - Based on greatest need/impact; however, other factors influencing feasibility may shift how priorities get implemented.
Divided Study Area into 8 Segments
Priority Segment

• Segment 6: Longhorn Ranch to Military Vehicle Museum
Priority Segment

- Segment 3: Stony Point to West Town Limits
High Priority
Segment 6: Longhorn Ranch to Military Vehicles Museum

MP 58 – 64.5

• Safety Issue:
  • Very high WVCs: 8.7 per mile per year
  • Highest peak in WVC around MP 61

• Wildlife Concerns
  • Heart of winter range for the Dubois herd
  • Daily movements across US 26 in fall and early winter
Why is this a High Priority?

• Mitigation Investments in this segment can have a major impact on reducing WVC
  • Very high rate of WVC (8.7 per mile per year)

• Multiple opportunities to integrate existing infrastructure into the mitigation system
  • Reduce overall cost
High Priority Segment 6: Mitigation Recommendations

Improve Existing Infrastructure for Wildlife Passage

- Create wildlife pathways under existing bridges
- Optimize existing stock passes to permit wildlife passage
- Connect wildlife fencing between existing bridges and new crossing structures
High Priority
Segment 6: Mitigation Recommendations

Construct New Wildlife Crossing Structures

- 4 new wildlife crossings
- Install wildlife fencing to connect existing bridges, small culverts, and new crossings

- Proposed Crossing Structures:
  - MP 58.6 – underpass
  - MP 59.5 – overpass
  - MP 61.5 – underpass
  - MP 62.9 - underpass
Challenges

- Cost
  - May require constructing in phases
- Multiple driveways requiring access through fencing
  - Requires installing wildlife guards
- Lateral fence barriers near wildlife crossing locations
Wildlife Crossings

Overpasses or underpasses with fencing, wildlife guards, and escape ramps

- Highly effective
  - Reduce WVC 80-90%
  - Safe passages for wildlife
- Examples of successful crossing structures mitigation:
  - US 191, Pinedale
  - US 30, Nugget Canyon
  - Hwy 789, north of Baggs
Each ● represents a WVC carcass

Preconstruction:

- 60% of crashes were due to WVC
- Average 63 WVC carcasses counted each year
Overpasses and Underpasses

2 Overpasses
100’ wide x 66’ long

5 Underpasses
42’ wide x 14’ high x 66’ long
>90% reduction in WVC

- Post construction WVC
  - Continued to occur around the south fence end
  - Greatest between MP 129.2-130.2

- The mitigation has helped to prevent 13 WVC crashes and 56 wildlife mortalities due to WVC each year
Mule Deer Use of the Crossing Structures

- Total of 112,678 mule deer successful passages (at all 7 structures)
- Use by both genders and all age groups
- 96% success rate across all structures
  - Range = 83-99%
High Priority
Segment 3: Stony Point to West Town Limits

MP 48 - 54

• Safety Issue:
  • High WVCs: 5.5 per mile per year

• Wildlife Considerations:
  • Mule deer winter range and migration
  • Right-of-way fencing impedes wildlife movements across the highway
Recorded WVC Crashes & Carcasses

Milepost

Mule Deer
White-tailed Deer
Elk
Pronghorn

Irrigation Ditch
Small Culverts
Vegetation Obstructions

Fence Types
- Other Barrier
- Woven Wire/Barrier Fence
- Wildlife Permeable
- Semi-Permeable
- Mile Markers
High Priority

Segment 3: Mitigation Recommendations

• Identify best opportunities for replacing fences with wildlife permeable fence
• Coordinate with NRCS to address irrigation ditch
  • Remove inactive sections
  • Replace with pipe in berm
• Identify and map locations for targeted vegetation clearing
• Optimize existing stock passes to permit wildlife passage
• Consider dual speed limit signs October through May
Segment 1: Togwotee Pass to Forest Boundary

MP 24 - 41

• Safety Issue:
  • Very low WVC

• Wildlife Considerations:
  • Summer range habitat and migration
Segment 1: Mitigation Recommendations

- WYDOT: ongoing vegetation clearing in right-of-way
- Maintain existing permeability
Segment 2: Forest Boundary to Stony Point

MP 41 – 48

• Safety Issue:
  • Low WVCs: 1.3 per mile per year

• Wildlife Considerations:
  • Mule deer migration
Segment 2: Mitigation Recommendations

Medium Priority:
• Improve wildlife pathways and create fence gaps at existing bridges and culverts
• Coordinate with landowners to replace ROW fencing with wildlife permeable alternatives

Long-Term:
• Install short sections of guide fencing at existing bridges and culverts
Segment 4: Dubois

MP 54 – 56

• Safety Issue:
  • Low WVCs: 1.6 per mile per year

• Wildlife Considerations:
  • Mule deer winter range
  • Urban area with 30mph speed limit
Segment 4: Mitigation Recommendations

- Improve roadway lighting
- Coordinate with the town to continue discouraging feeding of deer.
Segment 5: East Dubois

MP 56 – 58

- **Safety Issue:**
  - Very high WVCs: 9.3 per mile per year

- **Wildlife Considerations:**
  - Heart of winter range for the Dubois herd
  - Daily movements across US 26
  - In 2020, much of the right-of-way fence replaced with wildlife-permeable fence
Segment 5: Mitigation Recommendations

Medium Priority:
• Optimize existing bridge and stock passes to promote wildlife passage

If Feasible:
• Install wildlife fencing to connect between existing bridges and small culverts
Segment 7: Military Vehicles Museum to Little Red Creek

MP 64 - 69

• Safety Issue:
  • High WVCs: 5.5 per mile per year

• Wildlife Considerations:
  • Mule deer winter range and migration
  • Bighorn sheep activity
  • Irrigated fields and river attract wildlife
Segment 7: Mitigation Recommendations

Medium Priority:
• Improve pathways and create fence gaps for wildlife at existing bridge
• Identify opportunities for forage improvements to help reduce wildlife movements across US 26

Long-Term:
• Consider adding a short section of guide fencing at existing bridge
• Consider segment for wildlife detection and driver warning system
Segment 8: Little Red Creek to Dinwoody Creek

MP 69 – 74

- Safety Issue:
  - High WVCs: 4.9 per mile per year

- Wildlife Considerations:
  - Mule deer winter range and migration
  - Bighorn sheep activity around Little Red Creek
  - Wind River corridor attracts wildlife
Segment 8: Mitigation Recommendations

Medium Priority:
- Replace ROW fencing with wildlife permeable fence
- Improve pathways and create fence gaps for wildlife at existing bridges and culverts

Long Term:
- Coordinate with tribes to improve natural water sources on the south side of US 26
- Consider adding a short sections of guide fencing at existing bridges and culverts
Next Steps

• Finalize Mitigation Strategy
  • Incorporate public feedback

• Develop cost estimates
  • Project may be phased to accommodate funding availability

• Fundraising and outreach
  • Create outreach tools
  • State and federal grants, private funding sources
The Road to a Safer US 26

- Completed Mitigation Strategy (Summer 2021)
- Obtain Funding for Design and Environmental Review
- Environmental Review and Design
- Obtain Funding for Construction
- Construction
US 26 Partnership

KNOBLOCH FAMILY FOUNDATION
WATER FOR WILDLIFE FOUNDATION
The Nature Conservancy Wyoming
FOREST SERVICE
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE
Ask Questions and Share your comments on the US 26 Draft Mitigation Strategy

Use the Chat Box

You may also submit feedback following the meeting:

• Online Feedback Form: wgfd.wyo.gov/DuboisRoads
• Comments due: Friday, May 7