

Arica Andreatta, Chairman
Karl Sporleder, Commissioner
Mitchell Wardell, Commissioner



Board of County Commissioners

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
US Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

August 13, 2024

RE: Support for Raton Pass Wildlife Reconnection and Protection (WRAP) Project discretionary grant application

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

Huerfano County supports the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) and the Raton Pass Wildlife Reconnection and Protection (WRAP) Project (“the Project”). The Project will construct a wildlife underpass along Interstate 25 (I-25) at Milepost 1.6, in conjunction with game fencing from MP 0 to Exit 2. The fencing will integrate with existing infrastructure between both Colorado and New Mexico to direct wildlife to the safe crossing location in order to promote habitat connectivity and tourism to the nearby Fishers Peak State Park (FPSP), while reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions.

The Project is located directly east of Raton Creek and along the FPSP, the state’s newest state park. FPSP serves as a protected connection point between two habitats - grasslands to the east and foothills and mountains to the west. The park provides habitats for large native mammal species including elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, mountain lion and black bears. The park also supports other species including raptors and the endangered New Mexico meadow jumping mouse. CDOT is also investing time in an ongoing wildlife movement and habitat connectivity study that will reveal more insights about wildlife connectivity across I-25.

McBride Creek, which runs perpendicular to the highway, serves as a common travel route for elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, black bear, and mountain lion, particularly during seasonal migrations between the eastern plains and the Sangre de Cristo mountain range to access breeding and wintering habitats.

The Project will reduce wildlife vehicle collisions (WVC) at the Colorado / New Mexico state line. WVCs are associated with costs of \$66.3 million annually in medical

expenses in the state of Colorado (Colorado Wildlife and Transportation Alliance, 2023). The crossing's location targets a high WVC location along I-25, which has seen high collision rates with elk due to a nearby calving destination near the Colorado and New-Mexico border. The Project will tie-in to recently installed wildlife fencing in New Mexico to ensure that rerouted wildlife crosses the interstate at designed and intentional crossings.

We whole-heartedly support this project and request USDOT to prioritize Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program grant funding for this worthy proposal.

Sincerely,

HUERFANO COUNTY
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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