

Title: The Role of Non-traditional Partnerships in Advancing Connectivity Conservation

Abstract Text: Non-traditional partners increasingly have essential roles in supporting wildlife-highway mitigation projects. The conventional casting of transportation agencies as the sole entity responsible for mitigating road impacts on wildlife is no longer the dominant narrative.

Whereas departments of transportation are ultimately responsible for a jurisdiction's transportation infrastructure, implementing mitigation projects that reach beyond these agencies' core mission of safety and operations requires engaging in diverse partnerships to achieve mitigation and landscape connectivity goals. In addition to the growing collaborations among transportation, wildlife, and public land management agencies, community partners are increasingly stepping up to help ensure that wildlife connectivity priorities are identified, and wildlife mitigation needs elevated in local planning and project development.

Community partners, including local agencies and jurisdictions, non-governmental organizations, land trusts, and other community-based organizations, serve important roles in promoting landscape connectivity and the success of wildlife-roadway mitigation projects – i.e., projects that attain wildlife-vehicle collision reduction and wildlife connectivity goals. Partner efforts can facilitate compatible land use and land management (e.g., land protection, conservation easements, wildlife-friendly zoning, recreation management) adjacent to wildlife-highway infrastructure projects in addition to directly supporting the advancement of mitigation infrastructure projects through research and monitoring, planning and prioritization efforts, engaging new partners, public education and outreach, and fundraising from diverse sources that are otherwise inaccessible to transportation agencies. Combined, these efforts strengthen the overall effectiveness of wildlife infrastructure investments and help to ensure long-term connectivity benefits for current and future wildlife populations.

This presentation will showcase four case studies of wildlife-highway mitigation projects led by community partners: 1) US 40 Pigeon River Gorge project, led by established nonprofit organizations; 2) I-70 East Vail Pass wildlife crossings project, led by a newly formed, dedicated nonprofit, 3) Teton County wildlife crossings master plan and implementation, led by the county government, and 4) the Coyote Valley wildlife linkage, led by a land trust. Each presentation will discuss the origins of the community partnership; the research and planning conducted to establish the need for wildlife-highway mitigation; the evolution of a collaborative partnership with the department of transportation; and share lessons learned and a 'roadmap' for supporting the development of effective partnerships in other communities.

Provide a description of the event's structure (e.g., speaker sequence, presentation titles, role of audience participants) (200 words) four 15-minute presentations in the following sequence:

This 90-minute symposium will begin with a short introduction by the session organizer, followed by

1. Chris Colligan: Local solutions to planning and funding of wildlife crossings: A case study from Teton County, Wyoming

2. Julia Kintsch: Advancing wildlife crossings on I-70 East Vail Pass through community-led partnerships

3. Marian Vernon: The role of land trusts in enhancing wildlife connectivity: A case study from Coyote Valley, CA

4. Liz Hillard: NGO-led road ecology research: a catalyst for diverse partners and local support for mitigation on I-40 near Great Smoky Mountains National Park

A short (3 minute) question and answer period will follow each presentation with the final 15 minutes of the session dedicated to audience participation and discussion.