MONTANA WILDLIFE & TRANSPORTATION PARTNERSHIP PROJECT PROGRAM

PROJECT APPLICATION GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

January 2025

BACKGROUND and OVERVIEW

I. SUMMIT

The Montana Wildlife and Transportation Summit (Summit) was held on December 4 and 5, 2018 in Helena, Montana. The Summit was co-convened by the Montana Governor's office, Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), Western Transportation Institute (WTI), and Montanans for Safe Wildlife Passage (MSWP). The purpose of the Summit was to bring stakeholders together to strengthen working relationships, share information, develop strategies to plan and implement wildlife accommodations, reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions, and protect wildlife and their movement across state highways. The emphasis of the gathering was to build common ground around wildlife and transportation issues to enable robust engagement of interested stakeholders into the future. More than 160 people attended the Summit, including leadership and staff from state and federal agencies, Tribal nations, non-governmental organizations, and local governments.

II. MONTANA WILDLIFE & TRANSPORTATION PARTNERSHIP

Following the Summit, MDT, FWP, and MSWP formed the Montana Wildlife & Transportation Partnership (MWTP or Partnership) to address wildlife and transportation issues in Montana. The Partnership's Steering Committee (Committee) seeks to provide strategic direction and a foundation of resources, information, and knowledge for broad stakeholder engagement to address wildlife and transportation challenges across the state. The scope of the Partnership/Committee is all highways under MDT's jurisdiction and all species of terrestrial wildlife. The authority of the Committee is defined by USC Title 23 and MCA Title 60 for MDT, MCA Titles 23 and 87 for FWP, and endorsement by the MSWP Steering Committee. The Partnership/Committee does not have authority to work on highways outside the jurisdiction of MDT. Visit the Background button on the Partnership website for more information on the inceptions, structure, and work of the Montana Wildlife and Transportation Partnership.

The Committee formed a Data and Information Work Group (DI Group) as part of the effort to establish a statewide vision for collaborative stand-alone wildlife accommodation

projects within the state's highway infrastructure. The DI Group consists of appointed representatives from MDT, FWP, and MSWP with expertise in relevant data production and management, research and analysis, and geographic information systems (GIS). The DI Group developed the Montana Wildlife & Transportation Partnership Planning Tool (MWTP PT or Planning Tool). The Planning Tool is a web-based statewide mapping application and resource for evaluating highway segments of interest for planning wildlife accommodation projects based on wildlife-vehicle conflicts and important areas for wildlife movement and conservation. Generally, the highways highlighted within the Planning Tool are the highways under jurisdiction of the Partnership. Visit the Planning Tool button on the Partnership website for further details about the Planning Tool, the development methodology, and to view and use the Planning Tool. Visit MDT's Interactive Map Gallery for more information on state highways under MDT jurisdiction.

III. MONTANA WILDLIFE & TRANSPORTATION PARTNERSHIP PROJECT PROGRAM

The Committee developed the MWTP Project Program (Program) as a standardized and collaborative approach to receive and evaluate project proposals and select "stand-alone" wildlife accommodation projects to reduce wildlife-vehicle conflicts and improve safe wildlife passage across Montana highways. The project selection process integrates information from the Planning Tool with other evaluation criteria and considerations (e.g., community support, surrounding land use, engineering feasibility) to rate project proposals.

The Program establishes an avenue for public-private partnerships to propose wildlife accommodation projects. The Program addresses the need for transportation projects specifically dedicated to accommodating wildlife with the collaborative engagement of stakeholders, including the leveraging of capacity and capital investment. These projects are expected to be proposed by interested parties. The projects may be implemented by MDT and/or other governmental entities with stakeholder involvement or implemented by the stakeholder depending on the scope and scale of the proposed project. On a limited basis, MDT funding could be available to perform a feasibility analysis of the proposed project, but applicants are expected to identify a combination of funding sources to develop and construct a proposed project.

This Program differs from MDT's internal Wildlife Accommodations Process (WAP), which evaluates the opportunity for inclusion of wildlife accommodations within transportation projects under development early in MDT's design process. Using the WAP, MDT may include wildlife accommodations in highway projects identified within the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) to meet highway condition, operation, or capacity needs. For more information about planned highway projects, please review the

STIP or Active Projects Map. MDT will continue to include wildlife accommodations into highway projects through the WAP, which is separate from the new Program put forth by the Montana Wildlife and Transportation Partnership and described herein. Wildlife accommodations included in MDT's WAP are not eligible for inclusion in the Program, but may seek the leveraging of capacity, resources, or funding from private entities through third party contributions.