MWTP FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

GENERAL Questions

Why should we care about this?

There are multiple reasons to care about wildlife conflicts on roadways, including: 1) human safety concerns, 2) preventing wildlife-vehicle conflicts, 3) wildlife conservation opportunities, 4) economic impacts, and 5) changing landscapes.

Human Safety: Collisions with wildlife lead to human injury, and fatality, and can also take an emotional toll. Each year, wildlife-vehicle collisions (WVCs) across the U.S. kill more than one million large mammals and cause hundreds of human fatalities and over 26,000 injuries—all at a cost to Americans of nearly $11B annually. Montana has the second-highest incidence of WVCs per capita in the nation. Each year, MDT maintenance crews collect and record 6,000 to 7,000 wildlife animal carcasses across Montana. This is very likely an underestimate of the number of incidences.

Wildlife-vehicle Conflict is Preventable: Tools that successfully mitigate the impacts of roads on wildlife and human safety have been implemented in many locations across the United States (and the world). A large and growing body of research is proving the efficacy of these tools. There are resources available to address wildlife-vehicle conflict, and a lot of collaboration and coordination around the issue is underway in Montana. Recent federal funding sources have expanded and created new funding opportunities to build WVC mitigation infrastructure. Montana can work to secure these new investments to reduce the impact on Montana drivers and wildlife.

Wildlife Conservation Opportunities: Montanans care about wildlife for many reasons - and roads can negatively impact wildlife. Collisions with wildlife lead to loss of valued Montana wildlife – many game animals, species that attract tourism, and rare species die on Montana roads. Some wildlife is deterred from crossing roads and traffic levels can make it impossible to safely cross. Roads may cut wildlife off from important habitat, resources, and other members of the population that can impact the health of wildlife individuals and the health of the population.

Economic Impact: Economic impacts from collisions are costly and include associated impacts from loss of means of transportation, absence from work, increased insurance costs and a direct impact on local livelihoods. Research indicates that the average collision costs for deer, elk, and moose are $14,014, $45,445, and $82,646 respectively (Huijser et al. 2022), without even considering the conservation value of the animal itself. The livelihoods of Montanans can be financially impacted in the wake of an animal collision. Safer highways support local and statewide commerce and reduce the negative financial impacts associated with WVCs. Reduced WVCs result in safer roadways, improved health, and sustainable livelihoods.

Changing Landscapes: Montana's human population is increasing, traffic is increasing, WVC rates are increasing, and development is increasing in important wildlife habitats. Because of these increases, opportunities for straightforward or successful implementation of wildlife accommodations to improve human safety and conserve wildlife will become more challenging. There is a time urgency to this work.

Have priority areas for these types of projects been identified across the state?

The Partnership has not developed priority areas for advancing wildlife accommodation projects. We have identified highway stretches of greatest need for improving human safety and wildlife movement/conservation, via the Planning Tool. Identifying specific project locations and types will require finer scale analysis in partnership with key stakeholders. There are many other factors (e.g., adjacent land conservation, engineering feasibility) that could dictate the viability of a project. Therefore, the intention is to collaborate and pool resources in the planning and implementation of wildlife accommodation projects in areas of need across the state, while not ruling out project opportunities in areas that may be important but don't clearly emerge as an area of greatest need based on the criteria in the Planning Tool.

What are/have been the greatest challenges to increasing the number of wildlife accommodations in Montana?

The greatest limitation preventing most states from increasing the number of wildlife accommodations on highways is insufficient financial resources to address the multitude of needs throughout the state. Given that states rely heavily on federal funding for highway improvements, including Montana, where federal dollars provide 87% of infrastructure improvement funding, the new funding eligibilities for wildlife-collision reduction and wildlife connectivity permitted through the current federal infrastructure law have potential to help fund wildlife accommodation projects.

The Partnership developed this Project Program based on a recognition of the need to create a process to identify and implement collaborative solutions, provide a stronger suite of tools and resources to interested stakeholders, and catalyze strategic partnerships. The Planning Tool and Project Program establish an avenue for a strategic investment of resources into on-the-ground wildlife accommodation projects around the state.

Do these mitigation techniques work?

Wildlife crossing structures include overpasses, underpasses, bridges, culverts, and tunnels that allow wildlife to move across roads. Wildlife exclusionary fencing guides wildlife to the structures and keeps them from otherwise crossing the road at-grade nearby. A growing body of research proves that wildlife crossing structures - paired with wildlife fencing - significantly reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions (WVCs) while also improving wildlife connectivity across roadways. Research shows that crossing structures, combined with fencing that guides animals to them, can reduce WVCs by 86-97%. If strategically located, crossing structures can pay for themselves over time by reducing costly collisions.

MDT defines wildlife accommodations as “features or strategies designed and implemented into a transportation facility to moderate the effects of the infrastructure on wildlife and their habitat. The objective of these features is to minimize or eliminate barriers to wildlife movement, protect important habitat components within the landscape, and reduce or eliminate the potential for wildlife-vehicle collisions.” Other than structures which physically separate animal movements from the roadway environment, other wildlife accommodations may include animal detection systems with real-time driver warning seasonal variable message or static signage, vegetative management, and others. It is important to have access to all the tools in the toolbox and employ the features or strategies that provide the best solution to the specific wildlife conflict challenge being addressed, in the appropriate location, and deemed to be feasible for implementation.

PROJECT PROGRAM Questions

How did the Montana Wildlife and Transportation Partnership come about?

The Montana Wildlife and Transportation Summit, held in December 2018, brought together Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), Western Transportation Institute (WTI), Montanans for Safe Wildlife Passage (MSWP), and other key partners to build common ground around wildlife and transportation issues in Montana. The purpose of the Summit was to bring stakeholders together to strengthen working relationships, share information, and develop strategies to plan and implement wildlife accommodations across state highways.

Following the Summit, the Montana Wildlife and Transportation Partnership (MWTP) was formed 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.

How did the Project Program come about? What is the purpose?

The Partnership developed this Project Program based on a recognition of the need to create a process to identify and implement collaborative solutions, provide a stronger suite of tools and resources to interested stakeholders, and catalyze strategic partnerships. The Planning Tool and Project Program establish an avenue for a strategic investment of resources into on-the-ground, partnership-based wildlife accommodation projects around the state.

The Project Program is a standardized and collaborative approach to receive and evaluate project proposals and select “stand-alone” wildlife accommodation projects to reduce wildlife-vehicle conflicts and provide safe wildlife passage across Montana highways. 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.

How does this program change the state’s process for addressing wildlife and transportation issues?

This Project Program does not affect MDT’s internal Wildlife Accommodation Process, but areas of greatest need for wildlife accommodations don’t always coincide with highway improvement projects planned through MDT’s 5-year plan. This program provides a new pathway for advancing stand-alone wildlife accommodation projects, through collaborative vision and public/private partnerships.

Can nonprofits work as an agency sponsor?

An applicant can be a member of the public, non-profit and non-governmental organizations, public agencies, local governments, community groups, or Tribal governments. Projects that have a strong purpose and need and demonstrated collaboration and/or partnership are more likely to advance. Ideally projects are proposed through the collaboration between multiple entities supporting the project - a mix of private, public, citizen advocates, academics, tribes, agency staff, etc. The agencies of MDT and FWP are not eligible to apply through this process, but our staff can work within these collaborations to support them.

Are fish or aquatic organism passage projects included in this Project Program?

No, not specifically. This Project Program is focused on terrestrial animals, with an overall vision for the improvement of wildlife connectivity and wildlife-vehicle collision reduction. The Planning Tool is based on terrestrial factors, as well. However, there may be an opportunity to tie fish passage improvements with terrestrial wildlife improvements into a single project, if a stream or river occurs within a prospective crossing structure. Often, retrofitting or replacing an undersized or perched structure can be a very economical and efficient approach to benefit the stream form and function, aquatic organism passage, and incorporate wildlife accommodations with the upgrade to benefit terrestrial wildlife as well.

PROJECT Questions

Who can apply for projects?

Any federal, tribal, state, or local government agency or entity, non-governmental organization, or individual may submit a project proposal. Project proposals stemming from robust collaborative partnerships will be more competitive.

Does every project in Montana that includes wildlife accommodations need to go through this process?

No. MDT has an internal business process called the Wildlife Accommodations Process for evaluating the need for and determining the feasibility of including wildlife accommodations within highway projects addressing condition, operation, safety, or capacity. These accommodations may be included as a component of a highway project programmed for highway maintenance, preservation, or capital investment and are not stand-alone wildlife-accommodation projects. MDT has a robust public engagement process incorporated into the project development and can incorporate funding contributions from partner agencies, stakeholders, or private entities and philanthropists for the inclusion of wildlife accommodations in highway projects through agreements.

The MWTP Project Program establishes an avenue for public-private partnerships to propose stand-alone 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 outside of the agencies. 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. Visit the MWTP Project Program website for an overview of expectations detailed guidance on requirements for project proposal.

What types and scales of projects are eligible for consideration in this program?

An applicant can apply for projects that are of various scales and stages of development. Applications proposing complex projects may need to include more information than applications proposing less complex projects. Less complex projects may include minor fencing or wing-fencing, signing, or vegetation management within the Right-of-Way. More complex projects may include additions or modifications to existing infrastructure with system impact, longer stretches of directional wildlife fencing with jump-outs, and installation of new wildlife crossings or modifications to existing infrastructure. Detailed project application guidance, project requirements, and the project selection process are

provided in the MWTP Project Program Application Guidance Document, which is available at the MWTP Project Program website

When determining locations, does this program prioritize projects addressing wildlife conservation or human safety? Regarding wildlife conservation, is the focus primarily on large mammals or does it include other wildlife?

The application and criteria evaluation considers both human safety and wildlife conservation, as well as many other components of project need and opportunity. 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. Projects that support both connectivity for wildlife and improve public safety will likely have a better chance of selection. However, we expect there may be some smaller scale projects that address only one or the other in a specific location. Conservation projects may specifically target smaller, non-game species if road mortality or barrier effect is an identified issue (e.g., turtle crossings during breeding season).

The overall goal of wildlife accommodation projects is to not only protect motorists and reduce wildlife mortalities on the roadways, but also support the viability and connectivity of healthy wildlife populations and ecological processes in Montana. Designing wildlife crossing structures to meet the movement and habitat needs of multiple species creates the most benefit for biodiversity. Different species respond differently to wildlife crossing structure placement, design, and size.

Will projects that potentially benefit threatened and endangered species receive higher priority than those that do not?

Benefits to federally listed species are not specifically focused on within the application. This Project Program is about looking at the overall benefits of a wildlife accommodation project in improving safety and connectivity for Montana motorists and wildlife. Struggling and at risk species is one of the 5 criterions comprising the Planning Tool scoring for each 1.0-mile highway segment at a course scale. Most often, the injuries that have occurred to humans through WVC are not caused by federally listed species, because they are rarer on the landscape.

We expect to see projects specifically addressing safety related to WVC associated with larger and more ubiquitous ungulates. Some projects are expected to have less of a public safety impact but may have strong benefits for wildlife connectivity, including or maybe specifically addressing federally listed and rarer species in Montana. While it is generally

preferred that projects provide both safety and connectivity benefits, projects that predominantly address one or the other will be considered as well.

Why does land need to be protected on either side of a project especially if we're talking about a major infrastructure investment?

Wildlife crossing structures, especially larger structures, are expensive to develop, build, and maintain. It is critical to consider the long-term viability and value for these investments on the landscape. Habitat security, wildlife movement paths, access to daily, seasonal, and life-cycle resources is critical to providing for the longevity and vitality of wildlife on the landscape and in specific areas that could be benefitted by a wildlife accommodation. Land protections (e.g., public ownership, private ownership under perpetual conservation easement) are crucial to providing this habitat security and ensuring the planning of and investment in a wildlife accommodation over a specific segment(s) of highway are viable over the long-term. The lands on both sides of a structure outside of the highway corridor should be protected and should not be at risk of development counter to these goals in the foreseeable future.

There are some locations in Montana where the data may point to an important area for wildlife movement or conflict reduction, but the private lands on either side are not protected and susceptible to subdivision and development in the foreseeable future. These lands will likely need to be protected through a protective instrument so that the wildlife habitat and movement patterns will remain largely unchanged over time. Alternatively, the project location or parameters may need to be adjusted so that it can reasonably be expected to provide the expected benefits over time. Only then would investment in a large scale wildlife accommodation project be responsible and considered viable over the long-term. Potential applicants may want to consider engaging with an appropriate land trust entity to assist in these conversations with adjacent landowners.

Who will be responsible for NEPA or MEPA documentation, threatened and endangered species review, impacts and permitting, mitigation, for the project selected into the Program?

For projects funded entirely by the applicant and no state or federal funding is part of the applicant's funding package, the applicant will be responsible for such documentation and permitting. The applicant will complete an environmental document as part of the closing agreement that will be reviewed and approved by MDT as required by MEPA.

For projects funded entirely by the applicant and state funds or federal aid are being used as part of the applicant's funding package, such as a federal grant, MDT will assist the

applicant in completing the necessary environmental documentation and permitting. This may require NEPA and/or MEPA documentation.

For MDT-funded projects, either using state funds or federal aid, MDT and/or our consultants will work through and complete those environmental processes. This will require NEPA and/or MEPA documentation.

Who signs the agreements needed for various aspects of project implementation and maintenance?

MDT requires that agreements (e.g., maintenance, operation, funding) for the projects implemented through the MWTP Project Program are between MDT and an entity that exists and persists through statute (i.e., a local, county, state, federal, or tribal agency). Therefore, if your project is going to require agreements, and most will, it is important that you engage with one of these entities while developing your project proposal to ensure you have an appropriate "agency sponsor" for your project.

Is there liability assigned to the applicant if something were to happen during construction or the installation of a project that was performed by a third party, outside of MDT?

If MDT is constructing the project then most likely MDT and/or our Contractor will assume the liability during the construction phase. However, if it is a non-MDT funded project or if it is a smaller less complex project to be constructed by the applicant or their agent, then the applicant or their agent assumes the liability for any accidents or harm during construction. This is a standard clause included in MDT's approval process for projects executed by an entity outside of MDT.

APPLICATION Questions

We have an idea for a project. Where do we start?

If you have an idea for a project, we encourage you to examine the MWTP Project Program Application Guidance Document and Appendices to understand the process, application requirements, and criteria important to the MWTP for advancing a project concept. These documents may provide guidance regarding where to begin collaborating with potential project partners.

Who can help answer our general or process-related questions?

You can submit a question via 'Contact Us' button on the MWTP website. The question will be emailed to the Partnership and will be answered by the most relevant person according to the topic. Prior to submitting a question, please refer to the Application Guidance Document and other resources available on the website.

Who can help us answer parts of an application for a specific project?

Use the Contact Us link on the website and submit your specific question. We will put you in touch with the most appropriate MDT, FWP, or MSWP staff to assist in providing information or guidance helpful to the design of your project.

The application requires connecting with engineering, technical experts, biologists, and transportation ecologists. Some projects may be designed by MDT or a Consultant after project selection into the Project Program and completion of a feasibility study. If you would like a conceptual drawing or to design the project yourself, the links below are provided as an option for applicants. The links below are provided as an option for applicants, but applicants can use any qualified firm(s) they prefer:

- Engineering Consulting Firms: *MDT Design Consulting Pre-Qualification roster*
- Environmental and general Consulting Firms: *DOA Contract Term Consultant List*
- Montana Wildlife & Transportation Partnership: *Contact Us*

MDT, FWP, and MSWP are ready and willing to assist applicants as needed with prospective applications for stand-alone wildlife accommodation projects.

How do we get the kind of information we need to fill out an application?

Robust project applications should include detail regarding:

- The need at the project site and the benefits of the proposed solution, with supporting data or information
- Landowner and community support
- Land protections and land uses adjacent to the project location
- Complementary projects planned or underway in the vicinity of the project location
- Current partnerships in place to support the project
- Project cost, funding contributions, and potential funding sources
- Engineering/technical feasibility
- Biological/ecological feasibility
- Recommendations for construction, monitoring, and maintenance

Detailed information about the requirements above can be found in the Project Program Application Guidance Document. Applicants are encouraged to build public/private partnerships around project proposals. Potential partners could include NGOs, MDT, FWP, Federal agencies, Tribal entities, local governments, community organizations, or philanthropists. Staff of the entities involved in the Montana Wildlife and Transportation Partnership are available to help direct applicants to appropriate technical experts around questions regarding project costs, feasibility, and implementation. Please submit an inquiry to the Partnership at Contact Us if you are unsure of who to reach out to for assistance with technical questions.

There are several resources available that offer best practices to identify, design, and implement wildlife accommodations. Some can be found at the Wildlife Crossings website, the USDA Wildlife Crossings Toolkit, and the FHWA Wildlife Crossings Handbook.

Connect with relevant experts and MWTP partner entity/agency staff through the Contact Us email. Be sure to ask a very specific question and include a topic area in the subject line that lets us know what you're looking for (e.g., Engineering, GIS support, Biology/Ecology, Data Search).

What is the best way to request data (e.g., carcass, crash) or as-builts, plans, or reports from MDT?

The best way to request data or specific information from MDT is through the Public Information Request on the MDT website. When you make your request, be sure to indicate that:

- You are a partner or stakeholder using the information to prepare a project application for the Montana Wildlife and Transportation Partnership Project Program. This is very important as the request will be vetted for these cases prior to MDT Legal Services providing the information.
- Note the route (e.g., I-90) and the approximate mileposts for which you want the data (e.g., MP 1-20).
- MDT can only provide the most recent 10 years of carcass and wildlife crash data. Requests for this data over a longer period cannot be provided.
- You will need to sign an acknowledgment verifying the crash data is protected under 23 USC 407 and only being used for a MWTP Project Program application.

It is advised that you also submit an email to the MWTP through the Contact Us link on our website to notify us that you have submitted such a request. This is so that we can assist in tracking the request and getting the data to you in a reasonable timeframe.

How long will the application process and approvals take for a simple project, such as signage?

After submitting the application for a small less complex project, the application scoring process will typically take 2-3 months to complete. If the project is selected for implementation, the implementation should take 2-3 months. Comparatively, the application scoring process for a larger more complex project will also typically take 2-3 month to complete. If selected, a feasibility study will be performed and is expected to take approximately 12-18 months. Design and construction of a larger more complex project will typically take another 18-24 months.

Will there be an opportunity during the consensus decision-making process for questions and answers with the applicant?

You are encouraged to have early discussions with FWP, MDT, and/or MSWP as you work conceptualize your project and fill out the application. Good applications will be as clear and concise as possible and have received some vetting by Partnership staff prior to reaching the Steering Committee for review and scoring. If the Steering Committee members or subject matter experts reviewing the application are unclear on some information in the application, they can reach out to the applicant to seek further information or clarification.

What happens next if our project is not selected?

If a project is not selected to move forward, the MWTP Steering Committee will notify the project contact of the reasons why the project was not selected along with suggestions for improvements for future applications, as appropriate.

What happens next after our project gets selected?

The MWTP Steering Committee will communicate the next steps for project feasibility, development, and implementation to the project contact of selected projects. The duration and complexity of the process will depend on the scope and scale of the project. Next steps can include completing project feasibility analysis, securing additional funding, drafting, and executing applicable agreements, engineering survey and design, and ultimately construction. Other activities could include landowner engagement and agreements, right-of-way acquisition, utility relocation, public involvement, and Transportation Commission approval.

FUNDING Questions

Where do applicants get funding for these projects?

There are several possibilities for securing funds for wildlife accommodation projects. Funds do not have to be secured to propose a project to the program, however applications with a clear proposal for securing necessary funds will be more competitive. There are a variety of federal funding programs made available through the federal infrastructure bill (IIJA or BIL). For more information on federal funding programs visit the Animal Road Crossings (ARC) Solutions' document Wildlife Infrastructure Funding Opportunities within the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act or the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Guide to Federal-Aid Programs and Projects. MDT, FWP, federal agencies, or local governments may be able to contribute funding as well. Private/philanthropic contributions are another potential funding source. There is no one-size-fits all approach to funding wildlife accommodation projects, and developing a funding plan for your proposal may require creativity and piecing together a variety of different funding sources.

Does this process allow for MDT to engage nonprofits and others to help fund accommodations along with highway projects?

MDT is always open to third party contributions towards the of our highway projects, including the wildlife accommodations MDT biologists have recommended for implementation with these projects. This Project Program is designed as a public-private partnership to build relationships and inform the conversation across the state for planning and implementing stand-alone wildlife accommodation projects, outside of MDT's 5-year transportation plan. Wildlife accommodations proposed in association with projects included in our 5-year plan is a different, internal avenue whereby private contributions can be applied to funding wildlife accommodations along with highway capital investment projects.

If MDT has not identified wildlife accommodation needs on a project, or recommendations were deemed infeasible due to the scope or funding limitations on the project, another entity is welcome to fund and recommend expanding the scope to include wildlife accommodations. In that case, the outside entity would need to fully fund the expanded scope portion of the project. This scenario must play out very early in the project development. MDT is unable to make a change of this magnitude late in project development as it can drastically affect a project's schedule and jeopardize the entire project funding plan.

What is Montana doing to take advantage of new funding opportunities for wildlife crossings in the federal infrastructure law?

MDT has identified several projects within the 5-year transportation plan that include wildlife accommodations within the scope of projects implemented for other highway improvements. These projects will be evaluated for compatibility with the criteria within the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO). The project(s) in need of additional funding support meeting the majority of criteria may be submitted for discretionary grants.

The MWTP Project Program provides a new pathway for public-private collaborations to advance stand-alone wildlife accommodation projects in Montana, without those projects needing to be part of a planned highway improvement project by MDT. Over a dozen programs under the current federal infrastructure law provide potential funding sources for states, tribes, and local governments and their partners to build or modify infrastructure to allow wildlife passage and remove barriers to fish passage under roads.

Why isn't MDT or FWP just funding these types of projects?

The intent of this program is to build public-private partnerships with non-governmental organizations, community groups, and other private and governmental entities. MDT and FWP have limited resources and the needs under our purview continue to outpace funding allocations. Through public and private partnerships, we can work together to leverage information, capacity, and resources, accomplishing more good work through collaboration than any of us could do on our own.

Can the projects forwarded through the Project Program be matched with the current FHWA grants available to help fully fund a project, recognizing that a 20% match is required?

Yes, this is one option. The Project Program is designed as a public-private partnership where funding is expected to come from a variety of sources. It is not advised to rely solely on a grant award in the future as they are not a "sure thing". If you have a substantial funding amount relying on a future grant award in your application, the Funding section will not be scored very highly. It is expected that the applicant will be able to bring funding from a variety of public and private entities, and that section of the application will be scored better if most of the funding is secured, a smaller portion is committed but still pending, and very little remains possible or unidentified.

Is there MDT/State funding available for these projects?

MDT's state funding sources for matching federal grants could be part of the funding package for a proposed project. Applicants will need to work in partnership with MDT, FWP, and others to develop a plan for funding their proposed project.

Larger, more complex projects selected into the Program require a feasibility study to assess engineering and construction feasibility, optimize the design parameters, and potentially build a prospectus to enable the applicant to garner additional philanthropic and other fund raising support. If selected, these types of projects may be eligible for MDT funding for engineering/cost feasibility analysis, to accelerate the development of high quality project concepts requiring further engineering or technical analysis. Roughly $100,000-$500,000 a year could be allocated to project feasibility analysis through this program. Allocation of state funding for feasibility analysis will depend on the number and scope of projects selected and identification of other funding sources.

Is the collection and analysis of biological data part of a feasibility study?

Most data gathering activities, including fine scale biological data (e.g., wildlife movement patterns, habitat evaluations, wildlife-vehicle conflict) should occur pre-application and should inform the purpose and need of the project, the proposed solution, and expected benefits. The data and analysis should be included in Section III.B. If additional biological information is required through the feasibility study, then that would be included and funded through the study.

At what point in the project development process would MDT decide whether they would provide funding or a letter of support for federal grant applications?

Most of the projects that may be appropriate for a grant application are going to be larger, more complex projects. If an applicant is expecting to use MDT funding or federally funded grants, the projects must be selected through the Project Program, and go through a feasibility study. Once the feasibility study is complete and the project is ready for implementation, that would be the time that MDT would determine the appropriateness of applying for a grant and/or providing a letter of support. If the applicant is expecting to use federal grants for funding supplementation, it is recommended to engage with local, county, or tribal governments to be the grant applicant with MDT support, rather than identify MDT as the grant applicant.

MAINTENANCE Questions

Are maintenance and operation agreements durations expected to be for the design life, 50-75 years for a structure, if an underpass or overpass is proposed?

The agreement would be for reasonable day-to-day maintenance and operation activities (e.g., fence inspection and repair, vegetation management) and operations of devices (e.g., cellular or power service). MDT is assuming the maintenance and operation of the infrastructure including structure inspection, repair, and replacement. The agreement is for the expected life span of the appurtenance (e.g., detection system, fencing, vegetation management) associated with the infrastructure.

If a sign or fence or other simple structure is damaged, who is responsible for fixing it?

Typically, an insurance company or driver will be responsible for paying to repair broken or damaged signs or fencing in a highway crash. If there is a maintenance agreement in place for the project, the agreement will identify who is responsible for fixing signage and/or fencing, or other items, including damage caused through acts of god. MDT will be responsible for structure (bridge, culvert) repair and replacement.

PLANNING TOOL Questions

What if my project idea is not in an "area of greatest need" identified in the Planning Tool?

Your project does not necessarily have to be within an area of greatest need as identified by the Planning Tool, as long as you are able to demonstrate a strong purpose and need, appropriate solutions, and expected benefits. The Planning Tool is not a prioritization tool. The score from the Planning Tool is only one component of evaluating and scoring projects, along with many other important considerations.

Does the Steering Committee use the statewide score, or the District score relative to other highway segments in the District?

The Planning Tool provides coarse-scale data to assist the formation and leveraging of partnerships over areas of need at a high-level. These groups can then drill down into finer analysis from there, with the goal of identifying challenges, benefits, specific locations, and scopes for projects proposed through the Project Program application process. The Planning Tool is not a prioritization tool. The score from the Planning Tool is only one component of evaluating and scoring projects, along with many other important considerations.

The Final Analysis Map in the Planning Tool displays the roll-up of values from all five criteria to give a final overall score for each 1.0-mile highway segment. There is also an individual score for each of the 5 criterions provided for each segment so that users can determine what the "driver" (i.e., criterion most notably influencing the score) is for that segment or segments of interest. Refer to the Application Guidance Document for instructions on how to identify the Planning Tool score for your project over one or multiple 1.0-mile highway segments.

From the Application Guidance Document, "Use the Planning Tool to identify the score of each of the project highway segments within the project area and the average score over all the segments in the project area. Described how the Planning Tool informed the selection of the general project area." Different parts of the state have different needs but there is value in implementing wildlife accommodations across all districts in Montana. The District score is scaled relative to the highest score value in each of the five MDT Districts and is intended to inform the evaluation and proposal of projects from across the entire state in an inclusive way.

What did you do if one of the input datasets was not available in a particular area?

It depends on why the specific data set wasn't available. Some of this is outlined in the Planning Tool Summary Report. In the case of grizzly bear connectivity and distribution, for example, the dataset is considered a part of Needs Assessment Criterion 3. Grizzly bears occur in western Montana and therefore the assessment of this species results in a higher score for this layer in this part of the state. It's considered a layer for western Montana and contributes to the score there. It doesn't occur in eastern Montana, so it contributes no score in that part of the state.

When you add together all the input datasets, all areas are considered to have the same potential for the highest value, while no one area will have values for every input layer. There are exceptions where we decreased the potential value because of a lack of data, for instance in National Parks and Indian Reservations. Each dataset is noted in Appendix 3 of the Summary Report as to if they were a full map layer and complete for the state.

How are the lower traffic volumes and open space of eastern Montana weighted to balance against the megafauna of western Montana?

We didn't necessarily weight any data inputs differently than any other. If data existed in an area, the raw values were used which were then weighted as described in the Planning Tool Summary Report. We didn't necessarily make accommodation for values that were higher or lower on the scale in each data set. For example, if a species is present in an area then it receives a score. If a species is not present in an area then it receives no score. A section of roadway with a lower traffic volume or lower diversity of species present would receive a lower score for those criteria than an area with a higher traffic volume or higher species diversity.

Your project does not necessarily have to be within an area of greatest need as identified by the Planning Tool, if you are able to demonstrate a strong purpose and need, appropriate solutions, and expected benefits. The Planning Tool is not a prioritization tool. The score from the Planning Tool is only one component of evaluating and scoring projects, along with many other important considerations. Different parts of the state have different needs but there is value in implementing wildlife accommodations across all districts in Montana. The District score is scaled relative to the highest score value in each of the five MDT Districts and is intended to inform the evaluation and proposal of projects from across the entire state in an inclusive way.

Was data for big game wildlife broken into migratory routes?

No, the information for big game distribution was simply presence and absence. If there were certain species that had migratory information available, such as pronghorn, those were included.

Would it be possible for GIS staff to add the criteria, GIS service layers, that power the Planning Tool into other agency- specific planning tools?

The service layers are available, either through the Planning Tool application if they are public, or if you refer to the Datasets section of the Planning Tool Summary Report.

Can you search in the Planning Tool by longitude and latitude?

Yes, you can type coordinates into the search bar.

Can you demonstrate how to export data from a couple segments of road?

Yes. Go to the Planning Tool webinar recording and scroll to about 1:14:00 for walk-through on how to export data from road segments.

How do you plan to update the Planning Tool with new data layers and where can data used to create the Planning Tool be found?

Appropriate datasets will be updated and maintained annually within the current version of the MWTP Planning Tool. For example, carcass, collision, and wildlife survey data are updated annually or at regular intervals, and the most current data will be incorporated into the MWTP PT. This will be handled by MDT and MFWP GIS and technical staff on an annual schedule. The version of the Planning Tool accessible online should always be considered the most recent version.

We anticipate exploring needed revisions to content or criterion within the Planning Tool at 5-year intervals or potentially earlier on a determined basis with approval of the MWTP Steering Committee. The full description of maintenance of the application can be found on page 25 of the Planning Tool Summary Report. Datasets comprising the tool and their sources can also be found in the Planning Tool Summary report.