



August 15, 2024

The Honorable Shailen Bhatt, Administrator
Federal Highway Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

Re: Support for North US Highway 89 Wildlife Crossings, between the Town of Jackson and Grand Teton National Park.

Dear Administrator Bhatt:

On behalf of the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce, I would like to convey our support of Teton County's application to the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program (WCPP) to complete the North US Highway 89 wildlife crossings project, adjacent to the National Elk Refuge (Refuge). The Infrastructure and Jobs Act of 2021 established the WCPP to provide federal funding to projects that reduce wildlife vehicle collisions and enhance human safety while improving habitat connectivity and conservation for terrestrial and aquatic species. This project aligns strongly with these objectives.

North US Highway 89 is a vital corridor for our community with an average daily traffic volume of 9,800 vehicles and 40% of all crashes reported in this stretch involve wildlife. This portion of the highway is a highly utilized primary route for visitors driving to and from Jackson, Wyoming, to popular visitor destinations and access to the Refuge, Grand Teton National Park, Yellowstone National Park, and the Bridger Teton National Forest.

The Refuge lies in the southern portion of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and is well known for harboring up to 9,000 elk from the Jackson Elk Herd that migrate to the Refuge each winter as well as numerous mule deer, bighorn sheep, moose, and other wildlife species. Annually, the Refuge hosts over 495,000 visitors who come to the area for wildlife viewing and other wildlife based recreational opportunities. Visitors of the Refuge and the adjacent Grand Teton National Park and Bridger Teton National Forest significantly contribute to the economy of the Jackson Hole area and Teton County, Wyoming. Recent studies regarding the economic benefits of visitors to the Teton County area found that tourism generated more than \$1.65 billion in economic output. Wildlife viewing and hunting account for a substantial portion of these economic benefits.

The proposed construction project would provide for safe passage of wildlife and people in this landscape, with crossing locations over and under the highway to facilitate wildlife and habitat connectivity. The project would also replace an aging existing fence, with a modern design to better facilitate movement of wildlife onto the Refuge. This project has been planned in close cooperation with the Refuge, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Wyoming Transportation Department, and other local stakeholders.

This project would include the first wildlife overpass constructed in Teton County and would serve as a gateway to the Town of Jackson and for visitors to the National Park system in the southern portion of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. These locations would be a flagship example for wildlife crossings and the importance of the WCPP to wildlife conservation and highway safety.

We urge your strong consideration of this project under the WCPP.

Sincerely,



Rick Howe
President / CEO
Jackson Hole Chamber of Commere