



March 28th 2025

The Honorable Neil Durham
Chair
The Honorable Denise Baum
Vice Chair
The Honorable Zack Wirth
Vice Chair
Transportation Committee
Montana House of Representatives
1301 E 6th Avenue
Helena, MT 59620

Re: Statement of The Pew Charitable Trusts in support of HB855

Dear Chair Durham and Vice Chairs Baum and Wirth,

The Pew Charitable Trusts' (Pew) U.S. Conservation program writes in support of House Bill 855 (HB855), relating to the funding wildlife crossing projects. This bill would establish a highway crossings accommodation account within Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks to support the construction of wildlife crossings in the state. **This account will enable the state to successfully leverage federal funds currently available via competitive grants for transportation projects that reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and improve habitat connectivity.** We urge the Transportation Committee to act on this important legislation for consideration by the full House as soon as possible.

Pew's U.S. Conservation program advances commonsense solutions that address the impacts of a changing environment on nature and communities, in collaboration with policymakers, Tribes, and stakeholders. The identification and protection of wildlife migration corridors is a key component of our work.

Emerging science and new technologies provide considerable opportunity for states to integrate wildlife conservation into transportation policy. With advances in research technology, such as GPS-enabled collars, we now have detailed information on how and where these animals travel between summer and winter habitats, how barriers such as highways and development can negatively affect wildlife populations, and where infrastructure interventions can have the greatest benefit for both wildlife and people.

Montana has the nation's second-highest per capita rate of wildlife-vehicle collisions, which grew by 80 percent from 2011 to 2020, even as overall traffic accidents fell.¹ More than 3,200 collisions are reported each year, with over 6,000 carcasses collected—likely a significant

¹ Montana Department of Transportation (MDT). (2021). Montana Crash Data Analysis, 2011–2020. Helena, MT: MDT.
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undercount. Transportation officials estimate that the actual figure is much higher, and collisions with deer and other species, including elk, moose and bighorn sheep, are widely recognized as underreported, and ²[OBJ]. The average Montanan faces a 1-in-53 chance of hitting an animal annually, compared to 1 in 127 nationwide. Between 2008 and 2020, over 29,000 large-wildlife collisions cost the state an estimated \$212 million per year. In 2022, deer alone accounted for nearly 60 percent of these reported crashes. New research from September 2022 finds that vehicle damage, medical expenses, and lost hunting value bring the average nationwide cost of a deer collision to \$19,089 and an elk collision is \$73,196³[OBJ]. As wildlife and humans increasingly interact in the built environment, investing in wildlife crossings would reduce costs, protect drivers, and conserve Montana's diverse wildlife.

Montana has a track record of proactively addressing this issue, through larger transportation improvement projects and multiple wildlife accommodations currently in place. These wildlife crossing projects have been highly successful, resulting in significant reductions in wildlife-vehicle collisions. Studies have demonstrated up to 90 percent fewer wildlife-vehicle collisions where there is a crossing structure and fencing to funnel animals to safe passage either over or under a roadway.⁴

Despite this success, challenges persist with consistent funding of wildlife friendly transportation infrastructure and the persistence of wildlife-vehicle collisions in the state have demonstrated that demand for these projects far exceeds capacity. First, wildlife crossing projects require substantial up-front costs. State governments often struggle to obtain adequate funding sources for managing and maintaining existing and aging infrastructure, which can hinder the ability to pursue new standalone wildlife-friendly transportation projects. Developing dedicated funding sources at the state level is critical to stimulating successful implementation of new wildlife crossing projects throughout Montana.

The broadly bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 established the Wildlife-Crossing Pilot program under the purview of the Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration⁵ to help fund projects that reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and improve habitat connectivity. The law provides \$350 million over five years for competitive grants to states, communities, and tribes. But this federal investment is not enough, and competitive grant applications require a 20 percent match of state funds, similar to long-established programs such as the Federal Lands Transportation Program, Federal Lands Access Program, Surface Transportation Block Grant Program, and the Rural Surface Transportation Program. Under this scenario, a \$5 million state investment could leverage an additional \$20 million in federal funding to make Montana's roads safer.

² Lee, T. S., K. Rondeau, R. Schaufele, A. P. Clevenger & D. Duke. 2020. Developing a correction factor to apply to animal-vehicle collision data for improved road mitigation measures. Wildlife Research: <https://www.publish.csiro.au/wr/pdf/WR20090>

³ Huijser, M.P., J.W. Duffield, C. Neher, A.P. Clevenger & T. McGuire. 2022. Cost-benefit analyses of mitigation measures along highways for large animal species: An update and an expansion of the 2009 model: https://www.mphetc.com/files/ugd/9d46fb_b9852393a44d4148bd92feac37fc034e.pdf

⁴ M.P. Huijser, P. McGowen, J. Fuller, A. Hardy, A. Kociolek, A.P. Clevenger, D. Smith and R. Ament Wildlife-Vehicle Collision Reduction Study: Report to Congress

⁵ <https://highways.dot.gov/federal-lands/wildlife-crossings/pilot-program>

Taking advantage of this opportunity, in the past three years, state legislatures in Colorado, New Mexico, Oregon, Nevada, Utah and Wyoming have passed new laws creating state wildlife crossing accounts and dedicating state funding for the construction of new wildlife crossings. The state of Utah recently appropriated \$20 million to fund the construction of new wildlife-friendly bridges and underpasses. New Mexico's legislature just passed a \$50 million appropriation for the construction of new wildlife crossings. Most of these new policies passed with strong bipartisan backing, as well as broad support from entities such as sportsmen groups, local businesses, insurers, conservation organizations, and the oil and gas interests. The diversity of this support underscores that reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions is a win for motorists, wildlife, and local communities, making roads safer for people and allowing animals to safely traverse their migratory habitat. Enactment and implementation of HB855 would represent a significant step towards achieving this commonsense objective.

Thank you for your consideration of Pew's support for HB855. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me at ncallero@pewtrusts.org, or 503-977-5467, should you need additional information.

Sincerely,



Nic Callero
Senior Officer, U.S. Conservation
The Pew Charitable Trusts

CC: Members of the Montana House Standing Committee on Transportation

The Honorable Mary Caferro
The Honorable Ed Byrne
The Honorable Shane Klakken
The Honorable Curt Cochran
The Honorable Katie Sullivan
The Honorable Frank Smith
The Honorable Chip Fitzpatrick
The Honorable Ed Stafman
The Honorable Caleb Hinkle
The Honorable Julie Darling
The Honorable Courtenay Sprunger