

**LESSONS ON HIGHWAY MITIGATION PROJECTS TO ADDRESS WILDLIFE AND HUMAN SAFETY CONCERNS
(AUGUST 2008)**



The field trip stopped along I-90 at Gold Creek to discuss development pressures from adjacent lands, managing habitat around crossing structures, and using an underpass to facilitate large-scale hydrologic restoration.

Road Watch local coordinator, Rob Schaufele, attended the Washington Wildlife Crossings Field Course at the beginning of June. This 3 day course was held in Roslyn Washington, near the Snoqualmie pass, on Interstate # I-90, in the Cascade Mountains. It included 2 days of presentations from leading experts on wildlife and highway mitigation and a full day field trip to Interstate 90 near Snoqualmie Pass where a highway upgrade project is currently underway. This case study highlights important lessons that could be applied to Highway 3 in the Crowsnest Pass.

Interstate 90 is a critical transportation corridor, linking Puget Sound to eastern Washington and beyond. A 15-mile stretch of Interstate 90 just east of Snoqualmie Pass is due for an upgrade. Deteriorated pavement, congestion, substandard curves, exposure to avalanches, and collisions with wildlife pose risks to safety and reduce transportation efficiency. The same stretch of highway bisects an area that US Forest Service biologists have long recognized as a critical connective link in the north-south movement of [wildlife] in the Cascade Range. Information on wildlife movement areas and collision zones was assessed and a number of mitigation strategies developed for the highway upgrade, including both overpasses and underpasses. The site provided an exceptional opportunity for course participants to learn about highway mitigation from a project already underway.

A key lesson from the field course was the necessity of cooperation and communication between the local community, non-profit organizations and government agencies including Transportation, Fish and Wildlife and Forestry departments. The effectiveness

of the mitigation project was the ability of the different organizations to bring their knowledge to the table and work together to address wildlife movement and mortality issues. They also stressed the importance of long term monitoring and access to information on the location of wildlife crossings and/or collision areas as essential if mitigation measures are going to be effective.

Here in Alberta and the Crowsnest Pass, we need to keep on gathering as much information as possible with respect to wildlife sightings, and communicate the results openly with our municipal and provincial government departments. The course brought to light the importance of projects like Road Watch for generating a large dataset of wildlife observations to provide information on where wildlife cross Highway 3. But the course also highlighted the importance of community members in pressing wildlife and highway as an important issue with local and provincial governments. Ideally when the time comes for highway expansion in our area we can all work together towards efficient wildlife crossings, improving wildlife connectivity through this valley and increasing human safety.

For more information on the Washington Wildlife Crossing Field Course, please check out <http://cte.ncsu.edu/cte/gateway/WC2008/index.asp>.