

Chris West
Director
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

August 31, 2017

Dear Mr. West,

I write to you today to voice The Nature Conservancy's support of the proposal submitted by Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) and Idaho Department of Transportation (ITD) to secure funding to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and to maintain or improve wildlife connectivity as part of a highway improvement project on Targhee Pass (US highway 20). US highway 20 from Island Park, Idaho to the Montana state line has been identified as a barrier for wildlife with high rates of wildlife collisions creating a safety hazard to motorists. In addition to wildlife barriers, two culverts have been identified that impede fish passage.

The mission of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. For 60 years we have worked with landowners throughout Idaho to conserve lands and waters for the benefit of people and nature. During the last 25 years the Idaho Chapter has actively engaged local communities and partners to conserve lands and waters in the Henry's Fork Region, an area identified by TNC and many others as critically important to sustaining the biodiversity of the entire Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE).

The project area is comprised of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest and private lands. The GYE is home to multiple species of wildlife including mule deer, elk, moose, pronghorn, black bear, grizzly bear and wolverine. The proposed crossing structures incorporated into the project by IDFG and ITD along the highway going over Targhee Pass would improve wildlife connectivity and driver safety. This stretch of highway ranks as one of the worst in Idaho for wildlife/vehicle collisions and the situation gets worse as the number of visitors to Yellowstone Park and the surrounding region continues to grow. Additionally, by replacing existing culverts in Howard Creek, a key tributary to Henry's Lake, with fish passage structures yellowstone cutthroat trout will have restored access to quality spawning and juvenile rearing habitat. This builds on work done earlier in lower Howard Creek to improve fish passage.

The Nature Conservancy recognizes the importance of connectivity for wildlife, and fisheries in the GYE as well as the safety to motorists traveling along this route. We fully support this partnership approach with IDFG, ITD and private landowners to improve this wildlife corridor.

Thank you for giving IDFG and ITD full consideration as it presents a unique opportunity to improve wildlife connectivity and increase motorist safety along US highway 20.

Sincerely,



Lou Lunte
Deputy State Director

Cc: Renee Seidler, Transportation Specialist, Idaho Department of Fish and Game
Greg Servheen, Wildlife Program Coordinator, Idaho Department of Fish and Game
Tim Cramer, Environmental Planner, District Six, Idaho Department of Transportation