

6/26/04(13)

THE STATE OF ARIZONA  
**GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT**

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Other: 10/1/05

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June 23, 2004

The Honorable John McCain  
241 Russell Senate Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: Transportation Reauthorization Bill

Dear Senator McCain:

The Arizona Game and Fish Department (Department) is aware that Congress is currently working through the conference committee process to reconcile differences between the Senate and House versions of the Transportation Reauthorization Bill. The Department would like to express our strong support for several wildlife-related provisions included in Senate Bill 1072 (or SAFETEA). Specifically, these key provisions include the planning of highway projects through early consultation with the state fish and wildlife agencies, and the resolution of highway-wildlife conflicts with the goal of making highways safer for the motoring public and wildlife resources.

As one of America's fastest growing states, the Department continues to work harder to balance human growth with wildlife conservation. We firmly believe that early planning and coordination with the state wildlife agencies, as identified in SB 1072, is essential to ensuring that highway projects result in decreased wildlife-vehicle collisions and minimize the fragmentation of valuable wildlife habitats.

As you know, vehicle-wildlife collisions have caused many serious human injuries, loss of life and millions of dollars in property damage and litigation annually. The growing awareness of these conflicts has been heightened by the Arizona Court of Appeals' recent affirmation of *Booth v. State of Arizona* where \$3.1 million was awarded for injuries resulting from a collision with an elk on Interstate 40. Wildlife will continue to use our highways; therefore, it is imperative that we work closely with the transportation and land management agencies to develop new strategies for incorporating safe and effective wildlife crossings into highway projects.

For several years, the Department has been involved in several issues related to highway construction projects and wildlife conservation. We are, however, placing a greater emphasis and commitment of resources to address a growing concern for the long-term impacts that highways can have on wildlife populations. As a result, the State of Arizona is rapidly becoming a leader in issues relating to highways and wildlife interactions. For example, the Department is currently engaged in research and construction activities resulting from the cooperation of the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) and the Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) on the

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State Route 260 project in central Arizona. This project incorporated 11 bridges along 17 miles designed specifically to allow for the movement of elk under the highway with the intent to reduce the potential for vehicle-wildlife collisions and maintain wildlife habitat connectivity. FHWA recently recognized this project's proactive planning, implementation and adaptive management research with the prestigious "Exemplary Ecological Initiative" award, which is one of only 3 awards presented in the nation in 2003. This national recognition of Arizona's efforts led to further funding for the Department to work collaboratively with ADOT, FHWA and the land management agencies to proactively address bighorn sheep connectivity and highway safety associated with Highway 93 and the Hoover Dam By-Pass project.

In recognizing the need to work more cooperatively on these issues, the Department, ADOT, FHWA, and many other agencies, Universities, and organizations sponsored and participated in the *Arizona Missing Linkages Workshop* to identify important wildlife habitat linkages throughout Arizona. Identification of such linkages will not only allow highway planners to proactively incorporate wildlife needs into future highway planning, but will result in safer highways for motorists. However, we believe there is much to learn regarding the impacts of highways on wildlife populations and the effectiveness of crossing structures with regard to wildlife permeability.

The Department supports the provisions in Section 1501-1505 regarding the proactive use of conservation data and coordination with the state wildlife agencies early in the transportation planning process. We believe these provisions will further streamline the planning process and serve to alleviate costly delays associated with environmental issues that would typically arise later in the planning process. This approach will also allow the agencies to cooperatively identify and address wildlife issues early in the planning stages, and encourage maintaining viable wildlife habitat through avoidance, rather than through mitigation. These provisions further address the consideration of appropriate wildlife crossing structures to maintain habitat connectivity and linkages while promoting highway safety.

We also support the provisions in Section 1401 (*Highway Safety Improvement*) related to the addition or retrofitting of structures and other measures to reduce or eliminate wildlife-vehicle collisions. These are important provisions that we believe will yield short and long-term benefits to motorists and wildlife populations in areas where past planning was insufficient.

Lastly, we support the provisions in Section 1601 (*Environment*) relating to the use of native plant species in highway projects to help control the spread of invasive plants and maintain ecosystem integrity. This is an important aspect of highway planning since newly constructed highways typically result in better foraging opportunities for elk and deer within the right-of-way. Using native vegetation along roadsides will help minimize the attractiveness of these highway corridors to wildlife.

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We respectfully request your support in ensuring that these important provisions remain in the final transportation reauthorization bill. The Department believes that Congress has a tremendous opportunity to not only make substantive and progressive enhancements to the transportation planning process, but can also foster highway construction that is safer for Arizona's motorists and wildlife resources. Thank you, in advance, for your support of these important provisions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Duane L. Shroufe". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping tail.

Duane L. Shroufe  
Director

cc: Victor Mendez, Director, Arizona Department of Transportation  
Robert Hollis, Arizona Division Administrator, Federal Highways Administration  
Gary Taylor, International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies  
John Baughman, Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies