

WILDLIFE CONNECTIVITY: HOW TO GET BAMBI ACROSS THE ROAD

Amy Haymond*, Program on the Environment, University of Washington

Site Supervisor: Jen Watkins, Conservation Northwest

Faculty Advisor: Laura Prugh, School of Environmental & Forest Sciences, University of Washington

Wildlife connectivity is an increasing concern around the world. Man-made barriers, primarily highways, force many species to move across busy roadways on the hunt for food, shelter, and mates. This puts animals at risk for collisions with motor vehicles. These wildlife/vehicle collisions are often fatal to the animal and sometimes deadly to the occupants of the vehicle. To address this risk, wildlife bridges over highways (overpasses), or widened spaces underneath roadways (underpasses) are a common mitigation tool. Where to place under/over passes is a critical step in the process to ensure the greatest success for reduction in collisions and use by wildlife. To determine these locations, a focal species is identified and critical habitat areas are located within the region of interest. The purpose of this study was to conduct a field assessment of five river/highway intersections for Conservation Northwest in the Southwestern Washington region with a focus on the Chehalis river basin. I visited five Chehalis river tributaries and conducted a data analysis of carcass data provided by the Washington State Department of Transportation to identify patterns of wildlife/vehicle collisions. Highway 12 had 130 carcasses, the most between 2006-2016. This could likely be mitigated with improved underpasses. Human populations continue to rise, which increases development and vehicles on roadways. Additionally, climate change increases occurrences of flooding, wildfires, and temperature. Subsequently, wildlife connectivity is an important issue that must be addressed for the continued health of multiple species and the safety of our roadways.