

NEW MEXICO WILDLIFE SAFE PASSAGE COALITION CHARTER

MISSION: The mission of the New Mexico Wildlife Safe Passage Coalition (Coalition) is to provide safe passage for wildlife and motorists in New Mexico by creating an inclusive agency and stakeholder forum to help advance the wildlife-vehicle collision mitigation projects identified in the 2022 New Mexico Wildlife Corridors Action Plan ([NMWCAP](#)), and additional projects that will help fulfill the spirit and intent of the 2019 [New Mexico Wildlife Corridors Act](#).

VISION: Initiate a collaborative effort to improve human safety while fully integrating wildlife movements into New Mexico's transportation system. This will include measures that:

- Institutionalize wildlife considerations into transportation projects;
- Build partnerships and awareness to protect wildlife movements across the landscape;
- Promote highway permeability, reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions, and improve habitat connectivity to enhance wildlife populations.

WHO WE ARE: The Coalition is an inclusive group of stakeholders dedicated to providing safe passage for wildlife and motorists. It is also a forum for coordination and collaboration on issues regarding wildlife and transportation and does not act in any official capacity for decision-making.

BACKGROUND: With increasing vehicle traffic throughout the state, conflicts between motorists and wildlife are causing both safety and ecological impacts. According to the most recent New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) [Traffic Crash Annual Report](#), law enforcement received roughly 2,300 wildlife-vehicle collision reports in 2020. These crashes resulted in thousands of wildlife mortalities, at least 2 human deaths, 160 human injuries, and additional economic impact from property damage, emergency response, and medical expenses. Wildlife-vehicle collisions may have significant adverse effects to local wildlife populations in New Mexico. Nationally, unreported collisions are estimated to be two or more times the number of reported collisions.

Fully implementing and constructing the 11 priority safe passage projects identified in the NMWCAP will require substantial continuing coordination between NMDOT, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF), local communities, Tribes, federal land management agencies, and other stakeholders. Collaboration will be essential to build support for these projects, secure necessary funding, identify and conduct additional research, and communicate successes to decision makers and the public.

The Coalition will include a Steering Committee whose key activities will include:

- Leading the Coalition;
- Facilitating partnerships and collaborations among stakeholders; and,
- Providing statewide direction and coordination.

PARTNERS/STEERING COMMITTEE:

- New Mexico Department of Transportation (primary)
- New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (primary)
- New Mexico Wildlife Federation
- New Mexico Wilderness Alliance
- The Pew Charitable Trusts
- Wildlands Network
- Defenders of Wildlife
- Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
- National Wildlife Federation
- Pueblo of Santa Ana

PARTNERS TO INVITE:

- Jicarilla Apache
- Mescalero Apache
- [Northern Pueblos Agency](#)
- [Eight Northern Indian Pueblos Council](#)
- [All Pueblo Council of Governors](#)
- [Indian Nations Conservation Alliance](#)
- Engineering (Jacobs Engineering Group)
- ARC Solutions
- Center for Large Landscape Conservation
- Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
- Mule Deer Foundation

FOCAL PROJECT FOR THE COMING YEAR:

After a first Coalition meeting in June 2022, there was general agreement to focus efforts and resources on the priority project along US 550 North of Cuba identified in the 2022 NMWCAP as a wildlife-vehicle collision hotspot. Successful implementation of the project will include construction of overpasses, bridges, and a culvert. In the coming year, our partners will help build momentum to raise additional funding (\$2M for crossings was approved by the State of New Mexico in 2022) necessary to complete a full or partial engineering design for this project. A full design is estimated to cost between \$5.5 and \$6 million. Moving this project through the design phase would put New Mexico that much closer to constructing its first overpass(es) for wildlife and provide a huge success story necessary to continue advocating for full implementation of the 11 projects identified in the NMWCAP.

US 550 North of Cuba Project¹

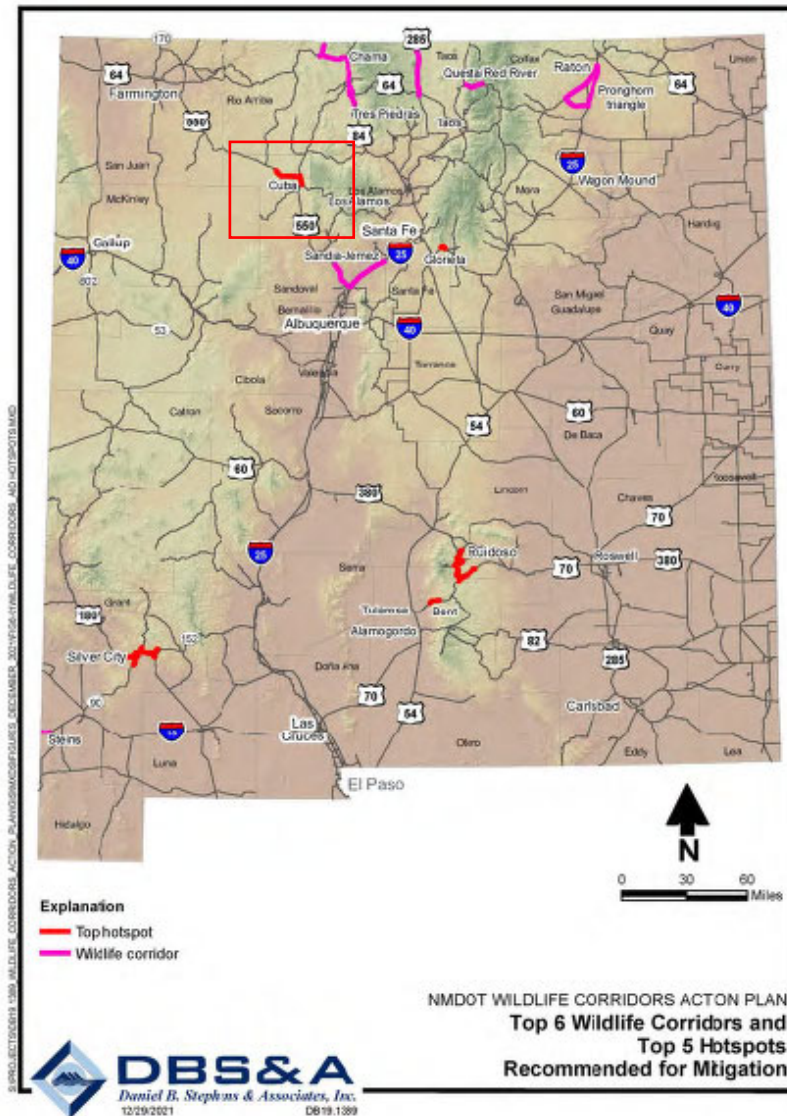


Figure 6-1. The 5 top-priority WVC hotspots and 6 top-priority wildlife corridors.

require effective collaboration with the U.S. Forest Service, the Jicarilla Apache Nation, the Bureau of Land Management, private landowners, and the local community.

The US 550 North of Cuba Wildlife-Vehicle Collision hotspot is located within NMDOT District 6 on US 550 from milepost (MP) 64 to MP 80. The hotspot is 17 miles long with 14 miles of recommended project mitigation. From 2009 to 2018, an average of 1.21 wildlife-vehicle crashes were reported annually per mile involving four of the six focal species (deer, elk, black bear, and cougar) for the NMWCAP. Elk represented the majority (58 percent) of those crashes. The hotspot is of prime importance for wildlife-vehicle collision mitigation in New Mexico. Public lands are present in the project area and NMDGF, Jicarilla Apache, and members of the public have all voiced support for infrastructure that would help wildlife cross over and beneath US 550 to avoid vehicle collisions, thereby maintaining or enhancing wildlife habitat connectivity.

Specific project recommendations include four overpasses, four single span bridges, and one arch culvert. These structures would be tied together with 14 miles of wildlife exclusion fence, intended to keep animals from crossing between structures. Because elk are hesitant to use any culverts or small bridge structures, only span bridges and overpasses would work to keep them moving below and above the highway in large numbers. If all recommended infrastructure is constructed, the cost is estimated at \$45 million. Project success will

¹ Based on NM Wildlife Corridors Action Plan, 2022. Available on-line at: <https://wildlifeactionplan.nmdotprojects.org>