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Conservation Notes

Current topics and issues affecting hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation in our North Dakota.
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Wildlife Highway Crossings

According to the Federal Highway Administration, drivers across the country hit an estimated 1.5 million big game animals each year, resulting in upwards of \$8 billion in costs associated with property damage/insurance claims, human injuries and fatalities, and loss of wildlife. Animal-vehicle collisions (AVC's) are a negative impact to the traveling public's safety with on average of approximately 200 deaths and 30,000 injuries annually in the United States. North Dakota ranks 11th and is considered a high-risk state for AVC's.

Elk, deer, pronghorn, bighorn sheep, and moose are prominent big game species on North Dakota's landscape, and their presence and abundance are highly valued by hunters and wildlife enthusiasts. Wildlife habitats and traditional travel routes are fractured by expanding transportation infrastructure, and increased traffic related to economic growth/energy development. An increase in AVC's has reduced safety for the traveling public and has contributed to the loss of the states valued wildlife.

Appropriately, the North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT) and North Dakota Game & Fish Department (NDGFD) have ramped up their efforts to reduce wildlife collisions. One such project, the Highway 85 wildlife crossing (underpass), was constructed to let bighorn sheep safely move across the highway. According to the NDGFD, and verified by their trail camera photos, big horn sheep have taken to using the underpass to safely move across the busy highway near the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park. Bighorns aren't the only animals that have benefitted from this safe passage route, mule deer, turkeys, and coyotes have also taken full advantage of the crossing.

Wildlife crossings are effectively used nationally to conserve wildlife and protect people by significantly reducing wildlife collisions. In North Dakota, we need to greatly reduce the number of collisions and we can do that with strategically located wildlife crossings. Therefore, the Legislature should include funds in the budgets of the ND Department of Transportation and ND Game and Fish Department to identify key locations for big game wildlife crossings and take full advantage of federal highway funds to construct crossings.

For more information on this message or other conservation topics, contact: John Bradley, Executive Director, North Dakota Wildlife Federation, (jbradley.ndwf@gmail.com), Mike McEnroe, Past President, North Dakota Wildlife Federation(memcenroe@midco.net) or Rick Nelson, Past President, North Dakota Chapter, The Wildlife Society, (bluebill@bis.midco.net). **For a complete list** of Conservation Notes visit (www.ndctws.wordpress.com)-articles.