

Banff overpasses lead the way for change

By Kevin Penny
Banff Crag & Canyon

The wildlife overpasses and underpasses on Highway 1 in the Banff National Park are helping to lead the way in reducing wildlife mortalities on major roadways.

Wildlife biologist Dr. Tony Clevenger said the efforts in Banff have caused a standard practice to be brought in to certain areas in controlling animal migration.

“Just about anywhere in North America you talk about wildlife overpasses with someone and they’ll talk about Banff,” said Clevenger.

“Banff has really been a leader in this because they’ve been at it since the 80’s.”

Clevenger calls Banff a “poster child” in terms of how fencing combined with crossings have been shown to reduce wildlife mortalities by up to 80 per cent. Places such as Colorado and Nevada have begun

to build overpasses on their highways, and are working with the wildlife researchers in Banff to determine the best way to go ahead with their projects.

“We’ve sent them photographs of animals using the crossings,” said Clevenger as an example.

For most places that direct wildlife across roads, a combination of fencing and underpasses are used to keep the animals off the road. But Clevenger said overpasses are also a crucial part in allowing wildlife to cross the road freely.

“You really need to have a mix of different crossing structure types to meet the needs of the animals,” said Clevenger.

Clevenger’s study of the Banff passes show cougars and black bears prefer the underpasses, but almost every other animal chooses to use the overpasses. He said this is probably because animals such as deer and elk prefer to have good peripheral vision when moving from place to place.

“They need to have a wild field of view to avoid predators,” said Clevenger.

While the study has done a good job in terms of looking at how bear and deer populations migrates, Clevenger said some animal behaviors still need to be researched.

Lynx and wolverine populations are still a mystery in terms of how the crossings affect their migratory behaviors. Wolverines are a high priority for studying, as they have highly sensitive populations that are easily be disturbed by humans.

“Currently there’s very little information about how highways affect wolverines,” said Clevenger.

Parks Canada is currently in partnership with the Western Transportation Institute at Montana State University, the Woodcock Foundation, and the Miistakis Institute to make this project possible. Clevenger is grateful to have so many people interested in contributing to keep his research going.

“It’s always been a partnership,” said Clevenger. “Nobody’s really been able to fund these project themselves.”

There has been over 200,000 detections of 11 different large mammal species recorded at the Banff crossing structures since monitoring began in 1996.

kevin.penny@sunmedia.ca



Highwaywildlife.org

A wildlife monitoring camera catches a bear using one of the overpasses along the Trans Canada Highway on July 4, 2011.