

Colorado Department of Transportation Final Report – HB 1238 Wildlife Crossing Zones

BACKGROUND

Pursuant to Section 42-4-118(7), C.R.S., the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) is required to prepare a report for submission to the House Committee on Transportation and Senate Committee on Transportation regarding the implementation of the provisions of House Bill 10-1238.

The report must contain the following data and information:

- the location and length of each wildlife crossing zone that CDOT has established;
- the total number of public highway miles that CDOT established as wildlife crossing zones;
- the total number and identification of wildlife crossing zones within the state for which CDOT has established a lower speed limit;
- the effect, if any, that the establishment of each wildlife crossing zone has had in reducing the frequency of traffic accidents within the area of the public highway that has been established as a wildlife crossing zone; and
- a recommendation by CDOT on whether the General Assembly should discontinue, continue, or expand the establishment of wildlife zones.

House Bill 10-1238 directed CDOT to establish roadways with doubled fines for speeding in designated wildlife crossing zones, with certain corridors also posted with lowered nighttime speed limits.

INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION As required by House Bill 10-1238, CDOT identified nearly 100 miles of wildlife crossing zones in which reduced nighttime speed enforcement was feasible. The Department did this in cooperation with the Colorado State Patrol and Division of Parks and Wildlife by using several comprehensive data sources to identify the zones' locations. In each of the zones, the highway has been marked with "WILDLIFE CORRIDOR" signs. Nighttime speeds were reduced to 55 miles per hour (mph) only where current speeds are posted at 60 or 65 mph. Where nighttime speeds remained the same, fines are still doubled for speeding. To inform the traveling public of the new wildlife crossing zones, CDOT provided information to the media, towns, cities, and counties. Information, maps and charts were also posted on CDOT's new *Wildlife on the Move* web page at: <http://www.coloradodot.info/programs/environmental/wildlife/wildlifeonthemove>. Along with partners at the Colorado State Patrol, CDOT collected raw data on wildlife hits and enforcement efforts (citations written) in these zones.

INITIAL STUDY FINDINGS: The data over the study period, which has included two full migration seasons between April 2010 and May 2012, show a slight decrease in Wildlife-Vehicle Collisions (WVC) overall (among all signed Wildlife Zones) in the two-year period the signs were posted, as compared with the two-year period before signs were posted. Specifically, a 9 percent decrease in WVCs is noted overall. However, there are many variations among these data when looking at each individual Wildlife Zone.

There was an overall increase in citations written for speeding in Wildlife Zones (as compared with the previous two years) in these highway segments; though it is difficult to conclude without a speed study that an overall drop in WVCs was a result of a drop in drivers' speeds. It is unclear if a wildlife population decline may have occurred during this study period that could have effected a decline in WVC's. The noted decline in WVC's is promising but cannot be substantiated that it was due primarily to the legislation implementation.

INITIAL REPORT, SEPT. 2012: The required report, pursuant to Section 42-4-118(7), was due on March 1, 2012. Recognizing that a full report of findings was unavailable at that time of the year, due to a partial wildlife migration season, CDOT submitted a preliminary report to comply with the March 1, 2012, statutory deadline. All data was collected, aggregated and analyzed, and CDOT provided a full report on September 1, 2012, on the implementation of House Bill 10-1238. In that report, CDOT recommended this Wildlife Zones study be continued over two more migration seasons to gather additional data that could lend to a more conclusive study. In addition, the Department supplemented these WVC and citation data with day- and nighttime speed studies on select Wildlife Zone corridors. The series of speed studies was completed to help determine whether there is an actual change in driver behavior. Finally, after reviewing the crash data, CDOT traffic engineers determined it would be more beneficial—and credible—to change the enforcement period and signage to October 1 through June 1.

FINAL REPORT, OCT. 2014: Colorado Department of Transportation traffic engineers, in coordination with the Colorado State Patrol (CSP), compiled data (attached) in August 2014 on WVCs before and after legislation, as well as on CSP ticketing and speed studies conducted on several signed Wildlife Zone corridors.

Overall, CDOT data show an overall decrease of 9 percent in the Wildlife Zones.

1. Zones with no speed reduction, only "fines double," showed a reduction of 20%.
2. Zones with a speed reduction and fines doubled showed a reduction of 3%.
3. The best performing study segment showed an average reduction of 71%.
4. The worst performing segment showed an increase of 59%.
5. For the spring season, the overall reduction was 22%.
6. For the fall season, there was an increase of 3%
7. Law enforcement citations increased 43% following implementation of the wildlife zones.
8. Of the 14 study segments, 8 segments exhibited an improvement in wild animal hits, while 6 segments exhibited increase wild animal accidents in the after period.
9. Nighttime Speed Limit Reductions were ineffective. Based upon two years of speed study data, CDOT found that drivers tended to exceed the nighttime speed limit reduction by an average of 7 MPH.

RECOMMENDATION: While data do show a minor improvement on average in accident history, the fact that six of the 14 segments (43%) exhibited worse accident history following implementation of the wildlife zones indicates this program cannot be expected to reliably reduce wildlife vehicle collisions on any given corridor. Based on the inconclusive data, it is CDOT's recommendation that the signs be removed. Per the data, changing driver behavior was found to be ineffective with this signing program. An alternative to consider is to develop a funding mechanism for implementation of wildlife barriers and passageways to separate wildlife movements from vehicle corridors.