

MONTANA WILDLIFE & TRANSPORTATION PARTNERSHIP PROJECT PROGRAM

PROJECT APPLICATION GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

September 2023

BACKGROUND and OVERVIEW

I. SUMMIT

The Montana Wildlife and Transportation Summit (Summit) was held on December 4 and 5, 2018 in Helena, Montana. The Summit was co-convened by the Montana Governor's office, Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), Western Transportation Institute (WTI), and Montanans for Safe Wildlife Passage (MSWP). The purpose of the Summit was to bring stakeholders together to strengthen working relationships, share information, develop strategies to plan and implement wildlife accommodations, reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions, and protect wildlife and their movement across state highways. The emphasis of the gathering was to build common ground around wildlife and transportation issues to enable robust engagement of interested stakeholders into the future. More than 160 people attended the Summit, including leadership and staff from state and federal agencies, Tribal nations, non-governmental organizations, and local governments.

II. MONTANA WILDLIFE & TRANSPORTATION PARTNERSHIP

Following the Summit, MDT, FWP, and MSWP formed the [Montana Wildlife & Transportation Partnership](#) (MWTP or Partnership) to address wildlife and transportation issues in Montana. The Partnership's Steering Committee (Committee) seeks to provide strategic direction and a foundation of resources, information, and knowledge for broad stakeholder engagement to address wildlife and transportation challenges across the state. Visit the ["Background"](#) button on the Partnership website for more information on the inception, structure, and work of the Montana Wildlife and Transportation Partnership.

The Committee formed a Data and Information Work Group (DI Group) as part of the effort to establish a statewide vision for collaborative stand-alone wildlife accommodation projects within the state's highway infrastructure. The DI Group consists of appointed representatives from MDT, FWP, and MSWP with expertise in relevant data production and management, research and analysis, and geographic information systems (GIS). The DI Group developed the Montana Wildlife & Transportation Partnership Planning Tool

(MWTP PT or Planning Tool). The Planning Tool is a web-based statewide mapping application and resource for evaluating highway segments of interest for planning wildlife accommodation projects based on wildlife-vehicle conflicts and important areas for wildlife movement and conservation. Visit the [“Planning Tool”](#) button on the Partnership website for further details about the Planning Tool, the development methodology, and to view and use the Planning Tool.

III. MONTANA WILDLIFE & TRANSPORTATION PARTNERSHIP PROJECT PROGRAM

The Committee developed the MWTP Project Program (Program) as a standardized and collaborative approach to receive and evaluate project proposals and select “stand-alone” wildlife accommodation projects to reduce wildlife-vehicle conflicts and improve safe wildlife passage across Montana highways. The project selection process integrates information from the Planning Tool with other evaluation criteria and considerations (e.g., community support, surrounding land use, engineering feasibility) to rate project proposals.

The Program establishes an avenue for public-private partnerships to propose wildlife accommodation projects. The Program addresses the need for transportation projects specifically dedicated to accommodating wildlife with the collaborative engagement of stakeholders, including the leveraging of capacity and capital investment. These projects are expected to be proposed by interested parties. The projects may be implemented by MDT and/or other governmental entities with stakeholder involvement or implemented by the stakeholder depending on the scope and scale of the proposed project. On a limited basis, MDT funding could be available to perform a feasibility analysis of the proposed project, but applicants are expected to identify a combination of funding sources to develop and construct a proposed project. Less complex projects will not likely require a feasibility study. More complex projects will likely require a feasibility study, which will be implemented by the Partnership after a project is selected for implementation.

This Program differs from MDT’s internal [Wildlife Accommodations Process \(WAP\)](#), which evaluates the opportunity for inclusion of wildlife accommodations within transportation projects under development early in MDT’s design process. Using the WAP, MDT may include wildlife accommodations in highway projects identified within the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) to meet highway condition, operation, or capacity needs. For more information about planned highway projects, please review the [STIP](#) or [Active Projects Map](#). MDT will continue to include wildlife accommodations into highway projects through the WAP, which is separate from the new Program put forth by the Montana Wildlife and Transportation Partnership and described herein. Wildlife accommodations included in MDT’s WAP are not eligible for inclusion in the Program but

may seek and/or accept the leveraging of capacity, resources, or funding from private entities through third party contributions.

PROJECT PROGRAM INFORMATION

I. APPLICATION PROCESS

An applicant can be a member of the public, non-profit and non-governmental organizations, public agencies, local governments, community groups, or Tribal governments. Projects that have a strong purpose and need and demonstrated collaboration and/or partnership are more likely to advance. Applicants can propose projects that are of various scales and stages of development. This application process is suitable for projects that are at the concept level, as well as projects further along in development. However, a project is more likely to be supported if it is well developed, substantiated by compelling data, and has potential funding sources identified or secured.

Funding from MDT could be available for feasibility study to further develop projects that are in early planning phases, or projects that are larger in scope and scale or more complex. Feasibility studies are used to determine the practicability, constructability, and level of impact of proposed projects. Feasibility studies also analyze specific project features based on a variety of factors including transportation, environmental, socioeconomic, infrastructure, government and local agency coordination, and public involvement. These studies typically include a longer-term implementation horizon and a financial decision to proceed with project development.

Completed applications, including required attachments, must be submitted electronically on or before the application submittal deadline. Application cycles will initially occur on a semi-annual basis occurring in November and in May. The application window opens on the first of the month and closes on the last day of the month. The Committee will only evaluate and score project proposals based on the completed and submitted application packet. Items or communications submitted outside of the application packet and applications received outside of the application cycle window will not be considered. See page 5 for detailed application guidance.

II. DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The Committee will review a submitted project application through a standardized process with selection criteria to determine whether the project will advance to the next step in development. There is not a set number of projects that may be selected in any application cycle. The number, types, scale, scope, and locations of projects previously accepted into the Program, agency capacity, and available resources will play a role in determining the suite of projects selected in each cycle.

A. Criteria

The Committee developed criteria to make decisions on what projects to select for implementation through the Program. These criteria can be found in Appendix D. The application structure is based on the selection criteria, and applicants are encouraged to review the criteria to understand elements that will strengthen a project application. The Committee will use application responses to score each criterion through discussion and consensus.

B. Evaluation

Project applications that have demonstrated a compelling benefit and need, and are conceived and developed through collaborative partnerships, will receive the highest ranking. Scoring is important for consistent and transparent decision-making by the Committee, but a high score does not guarantee the project will move forward. Some project proposals or applications may be returned to the applicant for further development or modification. If desired, the applicant will have the opportunity to modify the project proposal or further develop application responses and resubmit during a subsequent application cycle.

The Committee will evaluate project applications using the following 5-step process:

- **Step 1.** The Committee will review all complete applications received in each application cycle.

- **Step 2.** The Committee will determine whether a project application will move to the next stage using a consensus based decision-making process.
 - The project contact will receive notification regarding the Committee's decision. If a project is not advanced, the project contact will receive explanation regarding the Committee's decision. The Committee may provide guidance on how a declined proposal can be improved for a future application submission.

- **Step 3.** If advanced, technical experts from MDT, FWP, and MSWP will further evaluate an application and provide feedback to their Committee representatives. The Committee members will score each response in an application independently. The two Committee members of each entity will discuss and agree on a single score for each response. Each entity will bring a single score forward to Step 4.

- **Step 4.** The Committee will reconvene and discuss all scored applications in that application cycle. Using a consensus based decision-making approach, the

Committee will determine which project proposals will advance to the next step. Each application response will receive a single consensus-based score with explanation from the Committee.

- The project contact will receive notification regarding the Committee's decision. If a project is not advanced, the project contact will receive an explanation regarding the Committee's decision. The Committee may provide guidance on how a declined proposal can be improved for a future application submission.
 - Improved project applications and some projects that were not selected in the current application cycle will be eligible for resubmittal during a future application cycle.
 - A project may be approved for advancement with recommendations and minor modifications that do not necessitate resubmittal during a future application cycle. This will be determined by the Committee on a per project basis.
- **Step 5.** Projects selected by the Committee within each application cycle will advance to the next steps of analysis, design, and implementation. The duration and complexity of the process will depend on the scope and scale of the project. The Committee will communicate the next steps for project development and implementation to the project contact of selected projects.