

Vail Daily

'Wildways for Wildlife' in Vail

Vail Symposium panel discussion on Thursday focuses on making I-70 safer for animals and humans alike

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Wildlife, like people, must move in order to meet their daily needs. Yet oftentimes our transportation systems stand in the way of wildlife. Colorado's Interstate 70 (I-70) between Golden and Glenwood Springs presents the biggest obstacle to wildlife movement in our region. More than 67,000 cars travel the I-70 mountain corridor each day and this number is expected to double within the next decade.

"When migrating animals and human drivers collide, we all suffer tragic losses," said Kat Haber, board member for the WILD Foundation.

The Vail Symposium and Rocky Mountain Wild present a panel discussion on making travel on I-70 safer for wildlife and humans alike tonight at Vail Mountain School in Vail.

Wildlife killed in collisions along the interstate include mountain lion, moose, deer, bear, elk, four of Colorado's reintroduced Canada lynx, and the first recorded wolf in Colorado since 1936. According to Haber, animals like wolves and wolverines are trying to return to Colorado, but their efforts are often halted when they make it here and then have to cross the fast-moving traffic of I-70.

For more than a decade, the Colorado Department of Transportation has been working on plans to relieve congestion along I-70. This planning effort has provided a unique opportunity to find ways to restore connections between wildlife habitat on the north and south side of the highway. One innovative tool to move wildlife safely throughout their territory is an elevated wildlife bridge over the interstate.

"Colorado is not an island, it needs to be ecologically connected to the Rocky Mountains further north," Haber said. "We know I-70 cuts Colorado's mountain habitat in two and we need to heal that wound with highway crossing structures for wildlife to dramatically decrease wild animals from being crushed in traffic collisions. It is also a road safety issue for humans driving I-70."

Panel experts

In this panel discussion, Theodore P. Zoli, Nina-Marie Lister and Harvey Locke will share their respective expertise on the importance of wildlife movement to ecosystem health and innovations that can affordably and beautifully redesign public infrastructure to accommodate both wildlife and growing human communities

Zoli is a structural engineer who is leading the design of elegant and enduring bridges around the world and making major technological advances to protect transportation infrastructure in the event of natural and man-made disasters. An expert in long-span, cable-supported bridges, he's played a key role in the creation of a number of bold contemporary structures, from the Leonard P. Zakim Bunker Hill Bridge in Boston to the Blennerhassett Island Bridge over the Ohio River.

Lister is a visiting associate professor of landscape architecture and urban planning at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design. She was the professional advisor to the ARC International Design Competition, which developed innovative designs for a wildlife crossing structure in Colorado. A registered professional planner (MCIP, RPP) with a background in resource management, field ecology, and environmental science, Lister is the founding principal of Plandform, a creative studio practice exploring the relationship between landscape, ecology and urbanism. Her research, teaching and practice focus on the confluence of landscape infrastructure and ecological processes within

contemporary metropolitan regions.

Locke is a conservationist, writer and photographer. He is a recognized global leader in the field of parks, wilderness and large landscape conservation. He is a founder of the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, with the goal to create a continuous corridor for wildlife from Yellowstone National Park to the Yukon in Northern Canada. Locke was named one of Canada's leaders for the 21st century by Time Magazine Canada.

Locke has served as both president and vice president of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society for many years and is now its senior advisor on conservation. He is currently the vice president for Conservation Strategy at the WILD Foundation in Boulder.

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