

# Support **SB 455** to create the Wildlife Corridor Grant Fund

Collisions with wildlife have serious consequences for both human and wildlife in Virginia. **SB 455 establishes the Wildlife Corridor Grant Fund**, which will provide grants for projects to conserve and restore wildlife corridors and allow Virginia to leverage federal funding to support safe passage for wildlife and motorists by building wildlife crossing infrastructure. An associated \$2 million budget amendment is expected to provide seed money for the fund.

## SB 455 Overview

**What does the bill do?** Creates a Wildlife Corridor Grant Fund, which can receive appropriations, gifts, donations, grants, bequests, and other funds. The fund can also gain interest!

**How can funds be used?** Funds will support wildlife corridor and wildlife crossing infrastructure projects that conserve or enhance wildlife movement corridors in Virginia. The Departments of Conservation and Recreation, Forestry, Transportation, and Wildlife Resources would create the grant program and scoring system to determine project competitiveness, though some of those factors are predetermined by the bill, including the proposed project's relevance to the Wildlife Corridor Action Plan, and its ability to attract federal matching grant dollars, reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions, benefit endangered species, or extend the lifetime of road-related infrastructure.

**Who can apply?** State agencies, metropolitan planning organizations, localities, regional transportation authorities, Indian tribes, nonprofit entities, academic institutions, and combinations thereof can apply for grants from the Fund.

**How will the results be measured?** DWR must submit a biennial report including information on funding opportunities, public funding received, awards from the Fund, and progress data on funded projects, including wildlife infrastructure usage.

## Wildlife-vehicle Collisions are Dangerous and Expensive

- Virginia drivers crashed into wild creatures crossing roadways 81,694 times in 2022. Virginia is the ninth highest-risk state for animal-vehicle collisions in the US.
- Four people died, and over 500 were injured colliding with deer in Virginia in 2022. There were 6,100 deer-vehicle collisions in 2022, and each deer collision costs an estimated \$41,000. Deer-vehicle collisions in Virginia alone cost at least \$250 million a year.
- Black bear collisions are on the rise. It is estimated that 1,100 – 1,300 bear collisions occur yearly in the Commonwealth.
- Elk vehicle collisions are also an increasing concern in Virginia, with each elk collision estimated to cost upward of \$80,000.



Elk on the roadway in Buchanan, VA ©Brayden Quinlan

## Unprecedented Federal Funding Now Available for Crossings

- Almost 20 USDOT grant programs are now available to fund wildlife crossing infrastructure projects.
- Designated state funding is critical to leveraging federal dollars. Most of these federal grants require state agencies to contribute a non-federal share of the funding (usually around 20 percent of the project cost).

## When Planned Correctly, Wildlife Crossings Can Pay for Themselves

Many species in Virginia can benefit from less expensive wildlife crossing underpasses, often built using existing structures like culverts and bridges. Virginia has already seen the benefits of underpasses. By monitoring wildlife-vehicle collisions before and after erecting directional fencing to funnel deer to culverts along I-64, deer-vehicle collisions in the area fell by an average of 92% after the fencing was installed. In just 1.8 years, the benefits of these culverts with exclusionary fencing exceeded the costs of fencing, with an average savings of \$2.3 million per site.



Upgrading culverts can additionally extend the lifetime and reduce the maintenance costs of road-related infrastructure. For more information on all the advantages of improved connectivity and Virginia connectivity research ready for funding, see Virginia's Habitat Connectivity Hub.

## Building on Virginia's Success

SB 455 builds on existing efforts to identify and prioritize wildlife crossing needs and positions Virginia to take advantage of federal funding to get crossing projects underway.

- **2020** - SB1004 passed directing state agencies to create a Wildlife Corridor Action Plan (WCAP) to identify barriers to wildlife movement, prioritize and recommend crossing projects, and create a public-facing map showing high-priority areas for wildlife corridor infrastructure.
- **2021** - SB 1274 directed state agencies to incorporate wildlife corridors and recommendations made in the WCAP; and directs DWR to incorporate wildlife corridors when developing any strategic plan, map, or action.
- **2023** – The first version of VA's Wildlife Corridor Action Plan completed.
- **2023** – VDOT wins one of the first federal Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program grants to fine-tune the next WCAP priorities.



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