Wildlife Vehicle Collisions, A Rising Trend

San Juan Corridors Coalition (www.sanjuancorridors.org) is continuing its monthly series on wildlife with *Wildlife On the Move* presented by Monique DiGiorgio, Director of Communications for the Southern Rockies Ecosystem Project (SREP), and Greg Stacy, CDOT Senior Foreman at Ridgway, Thursday, October 11, 7 p.m., Ridgway Community Center.

One of the surest signs of fall and snow in the high country is the migration of large numbers of deer and elk down into the valley for winter range. There are approximately 50,000 deer and 15,000 elk that winter in the area, but when wildlife are on the move, the danger of collisions on the roads greatly increases. Since 1999, the Colorado State Patrol (CSP) has reported 15 wildlife-vehicle collisions (WVCs) statewide resulting in human fatalities, the majority of which involved deer. According to CDOT, over the past thirteen years AVCs have steadily risen from 1,263 in 1993 to 2,237 in 1999 to 4,074 in 2004, an increase of almost 300%. These figures almost certainly under estimate the actual numbers since many AVCs are unreported by drivers.

To address this problem, SREP, in collaboration with CDOT, The Federal Highway Administration, The Nature Conservancy, and Colorado State University, identified key areas on Colorado highways in need of wildlife mitigation to reduce the hazard of AVCs. The SREP study, entitled “Linking Colorado’s Landscapes” (available at www.restoretherockies.org/linkages.htm) was completed in 2006 and identified the Montrose to Ridgway section of SH550 as one of 12 high priority locations in Colorado for mitigation. “Linking Colorado's Landscapes” received the 2006 Exemplary Ecosystem Award from the Federal Highway Administration.

Monique DiGiorgio will review the SREP study and discuss the issues related to AVCs in general and to US550 in particular. Greg Stacy will review CDOT’s role in addressing the problem of AVCs on Colorado highways, especially in this area.

Monique earned a B.S. in Biology from the University of Notre Dame and has been working for 12 years in the field of conservation biology and ecology. For the first six years of her career, Monique worked as a field ornithologist spending much of her time nest searching and conducting behavioral observations. More recently, she has been developing the financial and programmatic capacity of small conservation non-profits. Currently, Monique is the Director of Development and Communications for the Southern Rockies Ecosystem Project and is located in Durango, Colorado. Monique has been instrumental in developing programs in wildlife linkage research and implementing wildlife crossings as well as raising over a million dollars in funds to make this work a reality. Monique also serves on the Living With Wildlife Advisory Board for La Plata County.

Greg Stacy is the CDOT LTC OPS I (Senior Foreman) in charge of Maintenance for the Mary Area in the Durango Section. Maintenance is not only responsible for maintenance of the pavement, but they take care of fences, gates and cattleguards, ditches and culverts (drainage), signs and delineation, shoulders, removal of road kill, installation and maintenance of guardrails, mudslide cleanup, mowing, rock removal, snow removal, avalanche mitigation, Public Relations, traffic control and the safety of the traveling
public. Greg brings a great deal of knowledge and experience to his position, having been with CDOT for approximately 26 years, beginning with three winters on Coal Bank and Molas passes, before moving on to Hesperus, Durango, and his current position as Senior Foreman at Ridgway.

Doors for this presentation will open at 6:30. Selected titles on deer, pumas, and bears from our earlier presentations, will be available for sale.

Refreshments will include homemade cookies, coffee generously provided by Mountain Market, and herbal tea generously provided by Garden Goddess Creations.

Living with Wildlife is offered regularly the second Thursday of each month at 7 p.m. in the Ridgway Community Center. Subsequent sessions will feature the collaborative efforts to preserve the Gunnison Sage Grouse, ranchers and farmers as wildlife stewards, beavers as water conservation partners, birds, and other topics of interest to the community.

For further information and to offer suggestions for this series, please contact Sara Coulter (626-4496 or scoulter@towson.edu) or Shirley Jentsch (240-1319, sjentsch@montrose.net).