

# DENVER Westword

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## Wildlife bridge contest: Winning West Vail Pass entry "elegant" yet practical

By Alan Prendergast, Mon., Jan. 24 2011 @ 2:50PM  
Categories: Fashion & Design, Follow That Story, Videos

1  0

A New York team has won a unique international competition to design a special bridge for wildlife crossing I-70 west of Vail Pass, the first structure of its kind ever proposed for the United States. The winners, HNTB with Michael Van Valkenburgh and Associates, will take home a prize of \$40,000. Whether the bridge will ever get built is another question.



The winner

As detailed in my 2009 feature "[A Bridge to Somewhere](#)," Colorado environmental activists have long considered the I-70 mountain corridor to be "the Berlin wall of wildlife," a barrier that interferes with migration of a wide variety of species, claims lives of endangered animals like lynx -- and poses huge potential for deadly human-wildlife collisions. The Vail Pass area, a critical migration corridor, was chosen from 25 sites in sixteen states for this first-ever competition, in an effort to promote fresh ideas for feasible crossings.

Formally known as the [ARC International Wildlife Crossing Infrastructure Design Competition](#) and sponsored by various government and nonprofit interests, the contest drew submissions from 36 teams in nine countries. [Five finalists](#) were unveiled in Denver last month, with estimated construction costs ranging from \$7 million to \$12 million.

Although some of the other designs were visually more striking, the HNTB-Van Valkenburgh entry wowed the jury on several counts, including its reliance on simple precast materials for a lightweight "hypervault" and its wide span, which has many different landscape features (meadow, forest, shrubs) to accommodate the preferences of a diverse range of traveling wildlife. The design "marries well a simple elegance with a brute force," the jury proclaimed in its [report](#).

Van Velkinburgh's design for Brooklyn Bridge Park has recently won raves in New York, including the 2010 Brendan Gill Prize. The ARC consortium hopes the contest generates more interest among lawmakers in finding the money to build a new generation of wildlife crossings -- if not on Vail Pass, then with many of the same principles applied in other key migration corridors.

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For a video featuring the five finalists, look below. The winning entry makes its debut around the seven-minute mark.

[ARC: International Wildlife Crossing Infrastructure Design Competition](#) from [ARC](#) on [Vimeo](#).

More from our [News archive](#): "[Ken Salazar: Frustration riding high over his wild horse plan](#)."

**Tags:** [HBNT](#), [Michael Van Velkinburgh](#), [West Vail Pass](#), [wildlife crossing](#)

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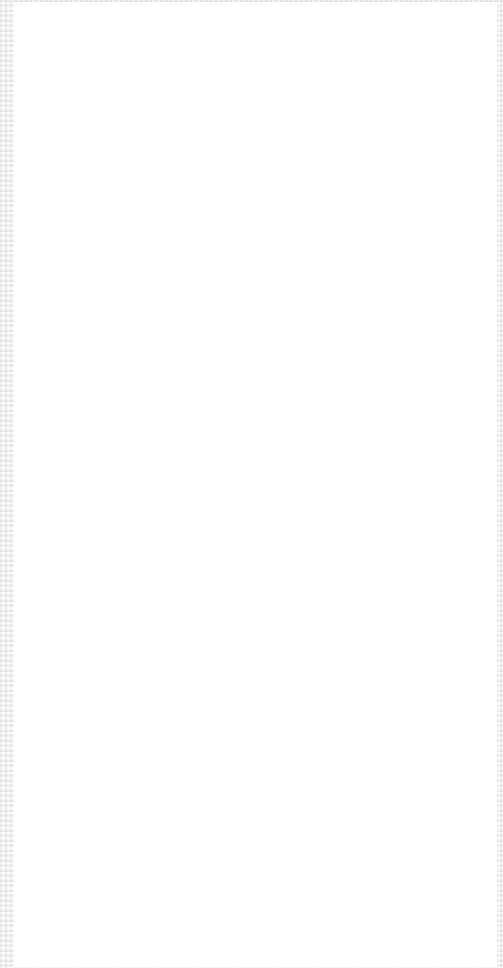
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