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### NEW WEST FEATURE

## Five Better Ways To Help Bears, Bobcats And Lynx Cross A Colorado Highway

**Innovative and colorful strategies for protecting wildlife on a treacherous mountain pass near Vail.**

By Brad Turner, 11-30-10

Last weekend, hosts of a competition to design a wildlife overpass on West Vail Pass in Colorado's High Country unveiled proposals from the project's five finalists. Design teams from around the world took a stab at designing the bridge after planners selected Vail Pass as the site for a crossing that will use modern design standards to safely guide bears, elk, coyotes and other animals across a steep stretch of Interstate 70.



An artist's rendering of a proposed wildlife crossing over Interstate 70 on Vail Pass by Janet Rosenberg and Associates, one of five teams competing to design the project. Image courtesy ARC International. [Wildlife Crossing Infrastructure Design Competition.](#)

A good wildlife crossing results in fewer car crashes and less roadkill. As Allen Best wrote in October, the ARC International Wildlife Crossing Infrastructure Design Competition selected West Vail Pass in part because it's the site of many animal-vehicle collisions, and it's known as a Berlin Wall for wildlife. More than 100 firms from around the world participated in the design competition.

The finalists' proposals use a number of inventive concepts that make the famous wildlife crossings in Canada's Banff National Park look like, well, a bunch of grass-covered highway bridges. Wildlife crossings are typically built from steel and concrete, but the competitors who submitted plans for Vail Pass worked to use lighter, more sustainable designs that will be more appealing to animals. A few of their 21st-century innovations:

#### Slideshow

- [View design concepts from the finalists' proposals](#)

- **Different terrain for different species**  
 Several designs call for a variety of vegetation on the 180-foot bridge, which will be long enough to cross six highway lanes, a bike path and a possible commuter rail line. Moose and coyotes can cross in a meadow, lynx and bears can travel through shrubs, and mule deer and marmots can cross in the trees, according to the design from HNTB Engineering and Michael Van Valkenburgh & Associates of New York. Several designs also call for a small "wet meadow" halfway across the bridge.

- **A happy valley**  
 Most finalists introduced a scooped shape to the wildlife crossing designed to improve safety for both animals and motorists. A visitor looking across the highway from one end of the bridge would see a U-shaped deck whose slope nudges animals toward the flatter middle section and away from the steeper edges. The shape also helps to muffle traffic noise while the animals cross and allows more daylight to shine on the roadway beneath the crossing.

- **You can stand out, and the animals won't mind.**  
 One finalist, Janet Rosenberg and Associates of Toronto, pulled off a neat trick with their proposal: They designed a crossing that would stand out to every human who sees it while

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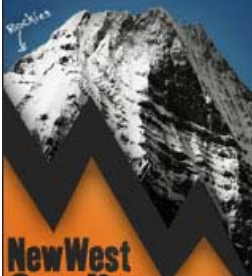
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appearing normal to the animals who encounter it. Most mammals are colorblind, so they'd be unfazed by JRA's proposed sloping red bridge. But it would pique the interest of humans and remind us "that we do not walk alone." (The firm got waxed poetic in their proposal while explaining why the bridge will grab the attention of motorists: "Red is the color often associated with beauty, and certainly as the emblematic color of life as color of blood, and associations of love and compassion ..."

• Out with concrete, in with wood
If instead of using concrete and steel, several designs made use of a wooden arch design. The strategy uses sustainable materials and eliminates the need for pillars beneath the crossing, making the road safer for drivers.

• Keep an eye on the critters.
If an animal uses the crossing, a human will see it or know about it. Most plans call for the use of small cameras, motion sensors and smart phone reports from the public to keep track of how many animals use their new corridor. Many finalists also included sketches of a wildlife viewing area on the side of I-70 so motorists and bicyclists can pull over and look for bears, bobcats, mountain goats and other species.

Design innovations aside, the five finalists showed impressive attention to detail in their bids to win over the judges. They crafted lush, green landscapes in which elk and bears outnumber the cars on the highway. They quoted animal welfare expert Temple Grandin and, less predictably, avant-garde composer John Cage. They drew a lynx about to cross a snow-covered bridge, looking so pleased you can practically hear him purr.

The five final teams each received a \$15,000 honorarium. A jury will select the winner and announce their choice on Jan. 23. The winning team will receive \$40,000.

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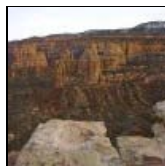
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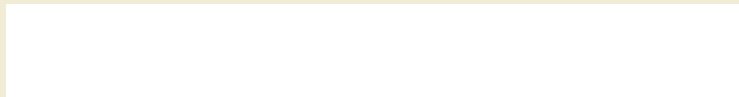


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