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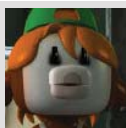


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West Vail Pass wildlife bridge: Will design contest help save endangered animals?

By Alan Prendergast, Wed., Sep. 8 2010 @ 3:52PM

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An international competition to design a special wildlife bridge for West Vail Pass has announced five finalists for the \$40,000 grand prize -- two teams from New York and one each from Toronto, Philadelphia and Amsterdam.



But local bridge builders shouldn't call foul. Each team is required to have on board at least one engineering firm licensed in Colorado, in the hope that the site-specific bridge might actually get built -- for the sake of motorists as well as all sorts of road-crossing beasts.

As explained in my 2009 feature "The 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.

Sponsored by a coalition of federal agencies, private foundations, and the Western Transportation Institute at Montana State University, the design competition is geared to help advance studies by the Colorado Department of Transportation that call for placing a vegetative bridge on the west side of Vail Pass, a site identified as one of the state's deadliest areas for wildlife crossings. Although Canada has erected a few bridges dedicated entirely to wildlife, this project would be the first of its kind in the United States.

The finalists were culled from 36 submissions representing nine countries; the jury stressed cost as well as innovation in the proposals. Each of the five teams receives \$15,000, with the \$40,000 grand prize for the winner to be announced in January, after another round of more detailed designs and a required site visit.

A bridge for the four-legged can cost upwards of \$10-\$15 million, but the finalists are being urged to come up with something thriftier yet functional. Backers contend that the project would be worth the investment over time by preserving a vital migratory corridor and keeping the shiny grills of high-county motorists intact.

For more on the competition and the finalists, go [here](#).

Tags: **Alan Prendergast, Colorado Department of Transportation, Western**

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