

WILDLIFE MONITORING ON HIGHWAY 83

The Seeley Swan Pathfinder – April 28, 2005

Motorists may have seen two-person field crews alongside Highway 83 these past few months. Most likely these crews were from Northwest Connections (NwC) who is part of a team effort conducting wildlife monitoring for the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT).

NwC has been mapping critical wildlife crossing areas along Highway 83 between Seeley Lake and the Seeley-Swan divide to determine which areas have the highest values for wildlife connectivity.

They have conducted parallel snow track surveys – one on each side of the highway -- and documented wildlife species, location, track quality and snow condition. In March crews were fortunate enough to document several lynx crossing the highway during breeding season. They also documented crossings by mountain lion, wolf, coyotes, bobcat, deer, elk and moose.

“It was a challenging winter due to unfavorable snow conditions, but there were windows of decent tracking,” comments Tom Parker, NwC Conservation Director. “Helping MDT pinpoint where Valley wildlife concentrate their Highway 83 crossings is key. The goal of this project is to reduce our number of animal–vehicle collisions while maintaining wildlife connectivity. NwC is happy to be a part of this process.”

Northwest Connections, a non-profit organization based in Condon, integrates science and local knowledge in the conservation of wildlife habitat linkages. NwC employs and involves skilled rural community members in a number of inventory and monitoring efforts to assess the presence and distribution of important species. NwC is involved in efforts to monitor grizzly bears, forest carnivores, streams, amphibians, roads and whitebark pine.