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Author

Van-Riper, Robert

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WILDLIFE/MOTORIST VEHICLE COLLISIONS IN MAINE: CURRENT STATUS AND MITIGATION OPPORTUNITIES

Robert Van-Riper, Biologist, Environmental Office, Maine Department of Transportation, State House Station 16, Augusta, Maine 04333. Email: robert.vanriper@state.maine.us

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Abstract

In 1998, an interagency work group was formed to address the issue of crashes between wildlife and motor vehicles. Members represent the Maine departments of Transportation, Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, Public Safety, the Office of the Secretary of State, and the Maine Turnpike Authority. While the number of all other types of crashes are dropping, those with large wildlife species are increasing; over 14,900 have occurred from 1996 to 1998. This total is a low reflection of the actual number of crashes since data used were from official accident records only. Costs of vehicle/wildlife crashes were over \$97 million and resulted in nine human fatalities during 1996 through 1998. In order to focus its efforts on workable mitigation methods, the group performed a literature search on crashes and existing mitigative technologies. Results of the search showed that a range of methods have been implemented. Most have had limited success, and there was an overall lack of statistically rigorous monitoring to evaluate the efficiency of the method(s). All records of collisions between animals and vehicles were mapped statewide in relation to location and number. The 30 sites where 'high' numbers of crashes with moose occurred were visited. The visits were undertaken to determine if there were any evident similarities which could be addressed to reduce the number of crashes. Sites were evaluated in regard to potential solutions for specific sites, and for shared generalities between sites. No simple solutions were apparent. While most sites possessed wetland characteristics at or near the crash locations, no other similarities were noted. The group developed an extensive program of public education which included curricula for driver education, posters detailing information about and locations of moose and deer collisions throughout the state, newspaper articles, and is in the design stages of producing a brochure. Using funds provided by an Outdoor Heritage Fund Grant, the group partnered with Ursis, Inc., of Waterville, Maine, in creating a safety video entitled *Hidden Dangers*. Several public service announcements were also developed. Future efforts of the group include: compare high accident locations with proposed biennial and six-year Transportation Improvement plans; developing, implementing, and monitoring demonstration projects of selected mitigating methods; developing cost-benefit models for justification to implement mitigating techniques; collating and reviewing information on deer and bear accidents; monitoring location changes in high accident locations; and continuing to refine and expand the education/awareness program. Sites selected for installing and monitoring mitigative technologies will be discussed.