STUDY INFORMATION

Who/What

Caltrans District 5 recently completed a study in the Gaviota Pass region of Santa Barbara County within the state highway corridor. ICF Jones and Stokes, Incorporated led the study, which analyzed wildlife movement, roadkill, and habitat connectivity along 6 miles of U.S. Route 101 at Gaviota Pass. The study results identified various potential enhancements to promote the safe passage of wildlife.

The study analyzed the spatial and temporal patterns of wildlife movements and roadkill along U.S. Route 101 through the Gaviota Pass corridor, using systematic camera monitoring and roadkill surveys, along with assessments of existing infrastructure and surrounding land use.

Caltrans District 5 hosted multiple virtual stakeholder meetings between December 2021 and August 2023 to provide study updates and final results to local and regional stakeholders.

Where

The wildlife study was conducted along the U.S. Route 101 corridor at Gaviota Pass, from approximately Nojoqui Summit to Mariposa Reina.

When

The study kicked off in early 2022. Caltrans executed a consultant task order to perform a wildlife connectivity study within the Gaviota Pass corridor. Following coordination with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and Caltrans, the consultant collected seasonal data over 12 months, and provided a final written report with study findings and recommendations. The final report was shared with stakeholders, and summary findings were shared by ICF and Caltrans at a stakeholder meeting in summer 2023. As a first step to follow up on the study recommendations, Caltrans applied for federal infrastructure grant funding to implement wildlife connectivity improvements at a priority location where the highway runs between state park lands. Results from the competitive grant process are expected in early 2024.

STUDY INFORMATION

Why

- The study goal was to provide a wildlife habitat connectivity assessment within the Gaviota Pass Corridor
- This is an area with observed higher roadkill occurrences that include mountain lion, black bear, and other native species, and that wildlife habitat connectivity models identify as a priority landscape linkage area.
- ICF Jones and Stokes conducted a study utilizing systematic passage assessments, camera monitoring, and roadkill surveys, along with assessment of existing infrastructure and surrounding land use and constraints. This provided a comprehensive and objective perspective. Field evaluations and passage assessment analyses were conducted in January/February 2022 and camera monitoring and roadkill surveys were conducted between March 2022 and March 2023.
- The final study report by ICF Jones and Stokes includes recommendations for approaches to enhance safe wildlife passage in the corridor and reduce the risk of wildlife -vehicle collisions.
- The approach is consistent with other wildlife habitat connectivity studies to help to determine how animals are using the landscape and identify priority locations for wildlife habitat connectivity enhancements.
- This study is an important step in providing a comprehensive and objective perspective needed to guide management decisions in this area.

District 5 and Wildlife Connectivity

Caltrans District 5 has experience developing and building projects on various highways across the district that enhance wildlife habitat connectivity.

These projects have been undertaken in cooperation and partnership with federal, state, and local agencies as well as universities and non-governmental organizations.

Additional wildlife habitat connectivity enhancement projects are currently underway, including a mountain lion undercrossing on State Route 17 that completed construction in late 2022.