

Developing a Regional Ecosystem Framework for Terrestrial and Aquatic Resources along the I-70 Corridor, Colorado: An Eco-Logical Field Test

Colorado Department of Transportation, Total Cost: \$323,330, FHWA Share: \$152,500

Period of Performance: 36 months, Dates: May 22, 2008 – May 22, 2011

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Project Goals

The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) *Eco-Logical* grant project aims to help CDOT identify mitigation activities and create tailored maintenance practices for the I-70 Corridor. To accomplish this goal, CDOT created a Regional Ecosystem Framework (REF)¹ to test along the I-70 Corridor.

Project Activities

In order to meet the CDOT *Eco-Logical* grant project goals, the project team is collecting terrestrial and aquatic connectivity data using GIS tools and developing criteria to identify and prioritize mitigation measures.

CDOT's project partner is the Center for Native Ecosystems (CNE). The project team has developed a web-based tool to analyze wildlife crossing data for use in the transportation planning process; these data are currently being collected via a reporting website (<http://i-70wildlifewatch.org/>) for the I-70 Corridor. Initial results show that wildlife crossings are more dispersed than predicted. The project team will continue to monitor the crossings for the next year, using the winter months for data refinement and analysis.

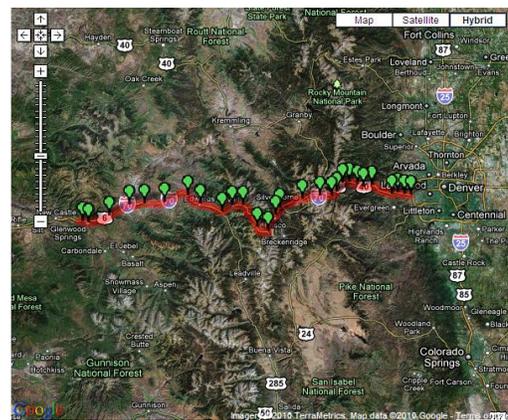


Figure: The visual output of the I-70 Wildlife Watch website.

Key Accomplishments

While CDOT believes the web-based tool will be beneficial to its current and future transportation planning projects, the project team noted that the real value of the grant project has been the improved and strengthened relationships with resource agencies. This *Eco-Logical* project has made CDOT more comfortable in addressing issues with partner organizations, and the project team looks forward to expanding on these relationships in the future. CDOT hopes that the work done on the I-70 Corridor will be applicable to other agencies nationwide.

Challenges

In the initial stages of the *Eco-Logical* project, the CDOT project team expressed a concern that it experienced “a lack of ownership” over the development of the website tool and methodologies for data collection, as the CNE had written and executed the scope for this work.

Future Steps

The CDOT project team members anticipate being more engaged as they take charge of data refinement and analysis in the upcoming stages of the project.

¹*Eco-Logical* recommends that a REF consist of an overlay of maps showing agencies' individual plans, accompanied by descriptions of conservation goals in the defined region(s). A REF can afford agencies a joint understanding of the locations and potential impacts of proposed infrastructure actions. With this understanding, they can more accurately identify the areas most in need of protection and better predict and assess cumulative resource impacts. A REF can also streamline infrastructure development by identifying ecologically significant areas, potentially impacted resources, regions to avoid, and mitigation opportunities before new projects are initiated. Agencies and planning partners should define, case-by-case, the region for which a REF will be created.