

April 14, 2023

S.4198 (Comrie)/A.4243 (Carroll)

Summary: Directs the Department of Transportation to identify sites along all highways, thruways, and parkways in the state for wildlife crossings

Statement of Support: According to the Federal Highway Administration, there are an estimated one to two million automobile accidents per year involving wildlife in the United States.¹ A surge in road building has led to a 50% increase in wild animal-vehicle collisions in the last two decades.² This presents a danger to human safety, as well as wildlife survival. Roads can subdivide animal populations and fragment their habitats, making it difficult for them to forage for food and find mates. Habitat fragmentation is a threat to all animals, especially to threatened, endangered, and migratory species. This fragmentation can ultimately reduce biodiversity, which is a key component of a healthy ecosystem.

One strategy to mitigate these dangers has gained momentum and popularity in recent years: human-made highway crossings designed specifically for animals. Wildlife crossings are passages above or beneath roadways that allow animals to cross safely, protecting both wildlife and motorists. Bridges and overpasses, tunnels, viaducts, and culverts are the most common forms of wildlife crossings put in place. They greatly reduce the likelihood of collisions, provide a safe corridor for animal transit, and help reduce the ecological impact of highways by reconnecting animal habitats. Successful wildlife crossings have been implemented in France, the Netherlands, Canada, California, Colorado, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Wyoming, and many other U.S. states. The structures have greatly reduced roadkill, traffic fatalities, and vehicular damage associated with auto collisions and wildlife. According to the Colorado Department of Transportation, since the completion of two overpasses and five underpasses in 2016, wild animal-vehicle collisions in those areas have decreased by 90%.³

In the most recent federal fiscal year, FY23, several million dollars were allocated to implement wildlife crossing structures throughout the United States. This bill would enact the "New York Wildlife Crossing Act," directing a portion of the federal funding to New York for actionable development of wildlife crossing infrastructure. It would direct the Department of Transportation (DOT) to identify sites along all highways, thruways, and parkways in the state where wildlife crossings are most needed to increase public safety and improve habitat connectivity. It would also direct the DOT to create a priority list of wildlife crossing opportunity areas where federal grant monies may be available to implement the top five projects identified. Wildlife crossings in New York would help reduce the number of deadly and costly animal-vehicle accidents, and provide greater protection for both wildlife and motorists.

The Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter Strongly Urges Your Support of S.4198/A.4243.

¹ <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/research/safety/08034/exec.cfm>

² <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/trust/archive/spring-2020/wildlife-crossings-can-protect-migrating-animals>

³ <https://cpw.state.co.us/conservation/Pages/CON-Highway-9.aspx>