



Living Smart With Wildlife



Where the wildlife roam

Finding safe passageway through the Bow Valley is no easy task for wildlife.

Encumbered by treacherous cliffs, arduous climbs and difficult terrain, elk, bears, cougars and other species struggle to survive – and that’s before the perils of highways and rail cars are considered.

Several wildlife corridors run through the Bow Valley, theoretically allowing for safe passage for species, without risk of human interaction.

The corridors are designed to allow animals to move to habitat patches as efficiently as possible, allowing them to spend more time in protected parks, such as Banff National Park, Bow Valley Wildland Park and Kananaskis Country.

“In order to be effective, they must connect the north/south and east/west movements,” said Melanie Percy, park ecologist with Kananaskis Country.

Several methods are used to decide locations of wildlife corridors. Biologists use radio telemetry and GPS collar data, snow tracking, remote cameras and transect data to determine how animals are using the landscape.

Currently, wildlife movement data is being collected in between Dead Man’s Flats and Exshaw to determine movement corridors in the eastern Bow Valley.

For example, the Three Sisters Wildlife Corridor helps animals move from Banff National Park to the Wind Valley.

It was originally designated in 1992 by an Alberta Natural Resource Conservation Board decision. Guidelines for the corridor were outlined by the Bow Corridor Environmental Advisory Group and the scientific community is tasked with working out the exact boundaries of the passageways.

“They should have straight edges, be short as possible and as wide as possible,” said wildlife tracker Pat Kamenka, who has worked on wildlife corridors in the valley. “Wildlife work on efficiencies. They move in a straight line.”

The corridors must accommodate several species, which tend to travel at different elevations, ensuring safe passage for predator and prey.

Generally, corridors should measure 350 metres wide, and connect with habitat patches.

The main obstacle when creating a wildlife corridor is fragmentation, caused by natural features such as cliffs, canyons and mountains, and man-made structures, such as highways, railways, towns and other human infrastructure Percy said.



PHOTO, Alberta Parks

While corridors are often described as highways for wildlife, Percy sees them differently. Animals still stop to feed, sleep and hunt in the corridors, however the amount of time they spend there is much shorter than in habitat patches. Habitat patches must offer security and an abundant food supply to be effective - and be more attractive than downtown Canmore.

Other actions such as buffaloberry removal and other attractant removal programs keep bears moving through the corridor, deterring them from stopping in town.

Percy said wildlife corridors are needed to provide secure movement opportunities for wildlife. As human pressures increase, predators such as wolves and grizzly bears have no choice but to move higher up the valley. While some species such as cougars have adapted to hunting at higher

elevations, others are squeezed against steep cliffs and human encroachment.

By sticking to lower elevation, the animals use less energy, however human encroachment affects these movement patterns.

However if there is easy passage, animals will find it. No one knows the wilderness better than the creatures that live there.



Report bear, cougar or aggressive elk to 403-591-7755

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