BILLBOARD CAMPAIGN REMINDS DRIVERS TO WATCH FOR WILDLIFE

KAMLOOPS, B.C. (Nov.1, 2004) – The Wildlife-Vehicle Accident Prevention Program (WVAPP) is proud to introduce the newest initiative in its campaign to educate the driving public about the dangers of wildlife-vehicle accidents and how they can be prevented. Billboards with a safety message have been located beside the highway near Dawson Creek, Grand Forks, and Fernie. The message is: Pay attention to wildlife warning signs on the highway. Actively watch for wildlife, in the ditch, on the road shoulder, and in the right of way. Slow down to the posted speed. Collision avoidance and driver response time are improved at slower speeds.

High-risk areas in the province determined the location of the billboards. “WVAPP used the Ministry of Transportation (MoT) Wildlife Accident Reporting System (WARS) data to determine highways that traditionally have the highest rates of wildlife-vehicle collisions,” says Darren Bennett, WVAPP Advisor, “and these road sections stood out right away”.

Figures calculated from 1991 to 2000 show that Highway 97 between Dawson Creek and Fort St. John has the highest rate of moose-vehicle accidents in BC; about 18 recorded moose deaths per year, as well as about 30 deer deaths per year. Moose accidents are particularly dangerous as the size of the animal increases the likelihood that a collision will result in a human fatality.

The Kootenays experience more than a third of the wildlife-vehicle collisions in the province. Data from 1991 to 2000 show that Highway 3, from Osoyoos to Cascade, has the highest rate of deer-vehicle accidents in the province with more than 245 deer killed per year. The east Kootenays, from Cranbrook to the Alberta border, show up in the top accident rankings for deer, elk, big horn sheep, and bear with more than 200 large mammals recorded as killed each year.

WARS data only records animals found dead beside the road. What is not recorded is the number of animals that are hit and die away from the roadside. “Our best estimate,” says Len Sielecki, MoT, “is that for every animal recorded as killed due to a wildlife-vehicle collision, three more are not recorded by our data collection system”. In BC, this means that collisions with vehicles result in a staggering 17,000 animal deaths per year.

The Wildlife-Vehicle Accident Prevention Program reminds drivers that fall and winter are high-risk times for wildlife-vehicle collisions. Food, water, and habitat are more accessible in the valley bottoms, and wildlife tends to move toward these areas in the fall and winter when supplies higher up in the mountains are depleted. Unfortunately, many road corridors are also built in valley bottoms, and when motorists and wildlife use the same travel corridors, it leads to increased collisions. Also in the fall, animal movement during mating season results in more animals near the road, and in the winter, wildlife are attracted to roadsides because of roadside salt deposits and ease of movement.

WVAPP “Hints for the Highway” while driving this fall and winter are:

- Slow Down and Obey all Posted Signs – collision avoidance is improved at lower speeds.
- Drive Defensively – watch out between dusk and dawn.
- Be Alert – animals are unpredictable, often travel in groups, and may bolt unexpectedly.
- Use Your Vehicle – clean your headlights, use your high beams when safe to do so, and always wear your seatbelt.

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