Washington State Department of Transportation

I-90 Snoqualmie Pass East Hyak to Easton Corridor Project

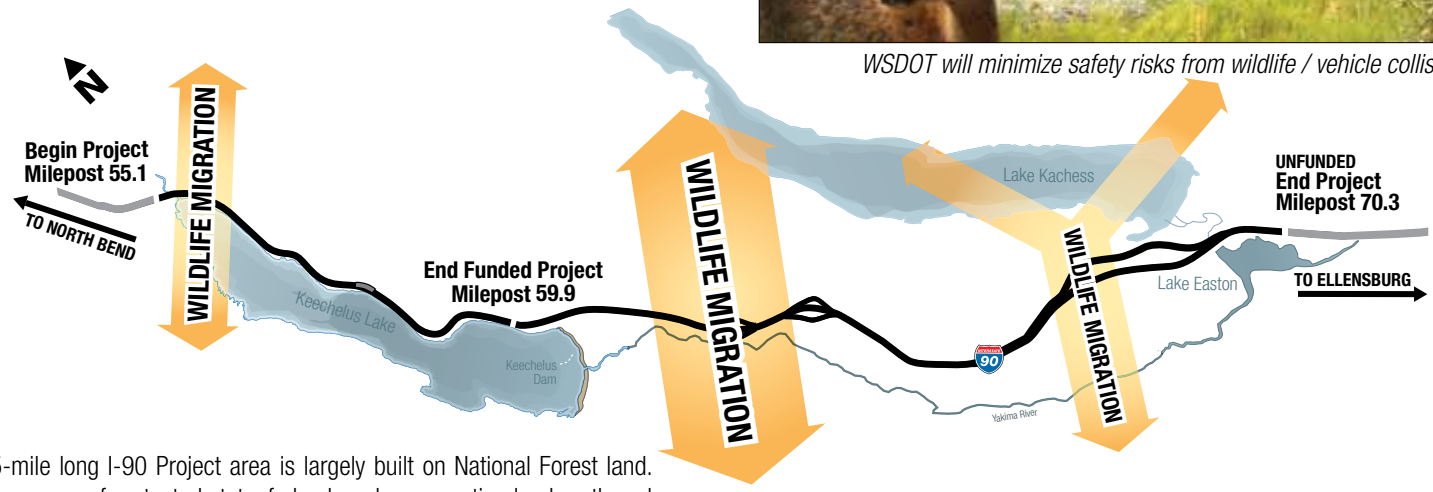
January 2011

Environmental Stewardship on Snoqualmie Pass

What is the purpose of the I-90 Snoqualmie Pass East Project?

WSDOT will meet projected traffic demands and improve public safety on Interstate 90 (I-90) between Hyak and Easton by reducing avalanche delays, stabilizing rock slopes, replacing deteriorated pavement, adding capacity, and improving bridges and culverts across I-90 to connect fish and wildlife.

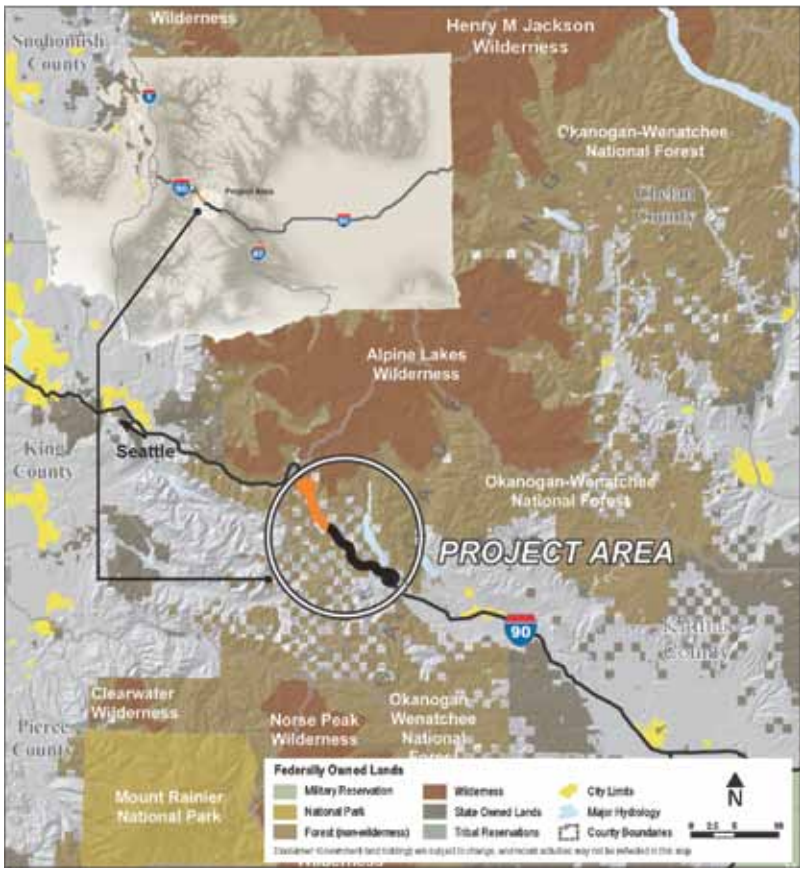
WSDOT will minimize safety risks from wildlife / vehicle collisions



The 15-mile long I-90 Project area is largely built on National Forest land. The large areas of protected state, federal, and conservation land north and south of I-90 supports a broad range of habitats and a diverse array of plants and wildlife.

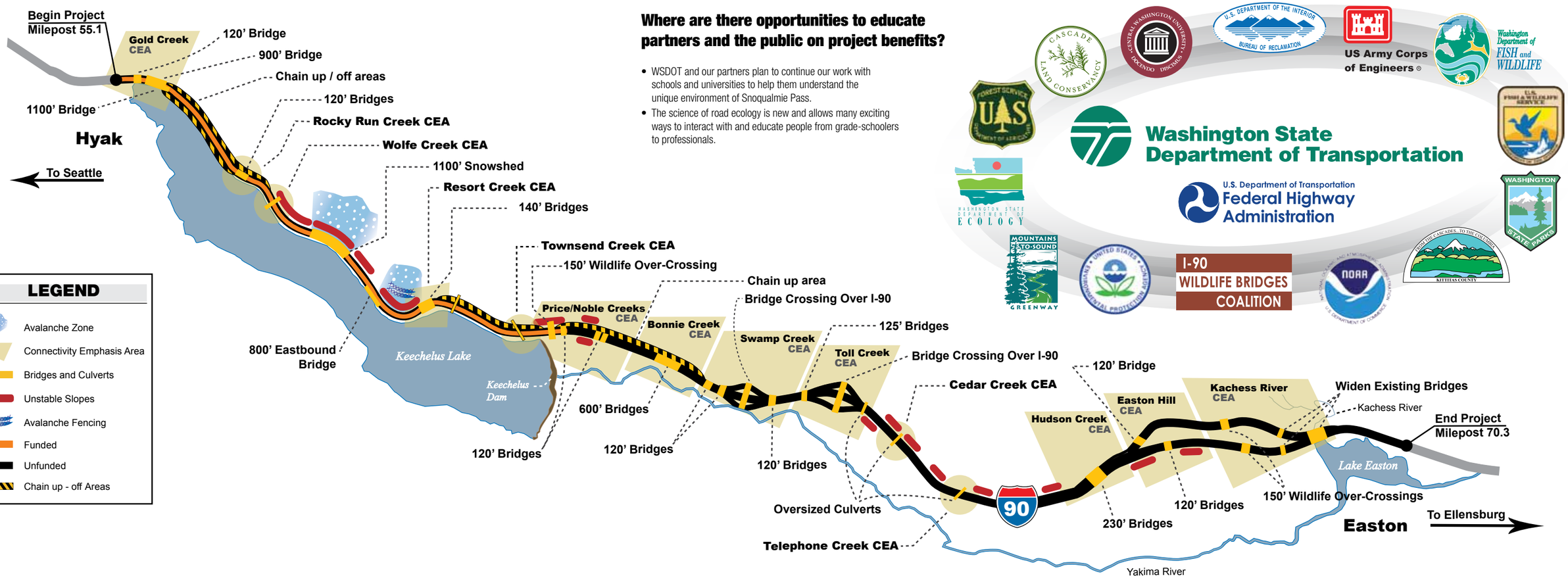
Since the late 1990s, the area has been managed according to the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Snoqualmie Pass Adaptive Management Area Plan. This plan requires protection of old-growth habitat, removal of portions of existing U.S. Forest Service roads, and management of recreation to facilitate wildlife movement. In recent years, through the acquisition of private land, there have been substantial private and public land conservation efforts to protect old-growth forest, provide larger contiguous blocks of forested habitat, and facilitate habitat connectivity across the I-90 corridor. Over the last 15 years, the Cascades Conservation Partnership, the Mountains-to-Sound Greenway Trust, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and USFS have invested over $100 million in these efforts. The combination of land purchases and exchanges has added 75,000 acres (approximately 117 square miles) of conservation land and additional National Forest land within the I-90 Snoqualmie Pass East Project area. USFS management plans and conservation group land management activities give WSDOT confidence that our ecological connectivity investments are protected.

After years of studying the I-90 Project area, WSDOT and its partners have developed multiple ways to improve ecological connectivity while also meeting transportation objectives and the Snoqualmie Pass Adaptive Management Area Plan goals. For example, as WSDOT removes the bridges and culverts to accommodate the widening of the interstate, it will rebuild them large enough to facilitate the movement of wildlife and aquatic systems. This will also improve safety by helping reduce wildlife / vehicle collisions and re-connecting habitat across I-90. When complete, I-90 Project improvements will create a healthier ecosystem for the plants, wildlife, and aquatic systems of the Central Cascades.



I-90: Integrating Stewardship into the Highway Design

The design shown below has been identified as the selected alternative for the I-90 Snoqualmie Pass East Project



LEGEND

- Avalanche Zone
- Connectivity Emphasis Area
- Bridges and Culverts
- Unstable Slopes
- Avalanche Fencing
- Funded
- Unfunded
- Chain up - off Areas

Where are there opportunities to educate partners and the public on project benefits?

- WSDOT and our partners plan to continue our work with schools and universities to help them understand the unique environment of Snoqualmie Pass.
- The science of road ecology is new and allows many exciting ways to interact with and educate people from grade-schoolers to professionals.

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I-90 WILDLIFE BRIDGES COALITION

How will WSDOT restore streams and wetlands?

- Larger, thoughtfully designed bridges and culverts will connect and allow restoration efforts wetland and stream habitats within and adjacent to identified CEAs.
- Restore stream and wetland habitats temporarily disturbed by construction.
- Improve stream and wetland connections on both sides of the highway.

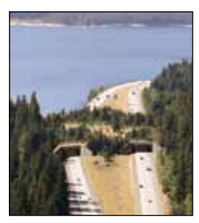
What are CEAs?

Connectivity emphasis areas (CEAs) are stream or upland locations that benefit fish, wildlife, and hydrologic functions through restoring or enhancing a connection to habitat on both sides of the interstate.

Will partnerships in preservation and conservation benefit the project?

- Partnerships allow agencies and conservation groups to work together to acquire land that protects CEA investments.
- Collaboration promotes land management and land use decisions that are consistent with CEA objectives.
- These investments bolster regional efforts to conserve lands in the Central Cascades.

How will the WSDOT get wildlife over or under I-90?



- Wildlife exclusion fencing or other physical obstructions will channel wildlife to a variety of small, medium, and large crossing structures designed to provide safe and effective passage.
- Reduced wildlife access to the roadway will benefit the traveling public by minimizing wildlife / vehicle collisions.

What is a hydrologic connectivity zone?

- Hydrologic connectivity zones (HCZs) are locations where moving water through the highway is important for habitat functions and water quality on both sides of the highway.
- HCZs link wetlands, shallow aquifers or other hydrologic features, and are important to stream and upland habitats.

Will wildlife and restoration efforts be monitored?

- Measuring the performance of CEA investments will occur at the connectivity structures and at a landscape scale.
- This monitoring effort will aid in adaptive management of project designs and land management decisions for monitoring partners.
- Techniques include motion-activated cameras, snowtracking, and many other methods.

Why will the project incorporate a Cascadian theme into the project designs?

- The Cascadian theme will give the project area a uniform look that is consistent with National Scenic Byway and US National Forest Service guidelines.
- This design theme will use stone and wood textures and images matching the mountain environment.
- The guidelines for this design were developed collaboratively with the Mountains to Sound Greenway and the US Forest Service.

How is WSDOT mitigating for impacts from this project?

- The project was thoroughly analyzed and found to have potentially significant adverse environmental effects, as a result the Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS) was completed in August 2008.
- WSDOT is strategically applying our Final EIS commitments to wildlife and hydraulic connectivity, restoration, and roadside re-vegetation as mitigation for the project's effects to the natural environment.
- These strategies are outlined in the information presented below.

PROJECT TIMELINE 1999 – 2018

1999 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) public scoping period

2000 EIS interdisciplinary team formed
Preliminary engineering and environmental analysis and reports 2000-2005

2002 Multi-discipline team formed

2005 Spring - Transportation Partnership Account (TPA) legislation funds Hyak to Keechelus Dam - Phase 1
Summer - Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) public hearings comment period

2006 June - Preferred alternative identified
July - Continue preliminary engineering and environmental analysis for the preferred alternative crossing at Price/Noble CEA

2008 Summer - Publish Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Issue Record of Decision (ROD)

2009 Spring - Scheduled construction start - PHASE 1A
Fall - Finish construction - PHASE 1A

2010 Spring - Scheduled construction start - PHASE 1B
Hyak to Keechelus Dam project

2011 Spring - Scheduled construction start - PHASE 1C
Hyak to Keechelus Dam project

2015 Summer - Scheduled construction completion
Hyak to Keechelus Dam project

2018 Wildlife Monitoring continues

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