

# Successes **in** Stewardship

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## FHWA 2010 Exemplary Initiatives: A Showcase for Conservation and Restoration Projects

In October 2010, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) recognized seven Exemplary Ecosystem Initiatives (EEl)s that contribute to improving livability by promoting sustainable ecosystems. The EEl)s recognize ecosystem conservation and habitat restoration projects that are unique or unusual in scale, use innovative science or technology, incorporate high-level environmental standards, achieve high-quality results, and serve as a valuable resource for environmental agencies and public interest groups. Further information about each of the EEl)s is available on the [2010 EEl\) website](#). Most projects are based on partnerships with local stakeholders and State and Federal agencies. In addition to the EEl) awards, the FHWA Office of Human Environment recognized ten Exemplary Human Environment Initiatives (EHEI)s, which are listed later in the newsletter.

### Awards Criteria

The EEl)s address a range of ecosystem improvements that enhance the sustainability of transportation projects. They improve existing conditions or provide mitigation for new projects with the goal of promoting ecosystem and habitat health. The awards are based on the following criteria, which are addressed in more detail on the [Exemplary Ecosystem Initiatives website](#):

- Sustain or restore natural systems to protect diverse biological resources and support local communities.
- Address surrounding landscape and ecosystem resources.
- Capitalize on partnering and collaborative approaches to advance common goals and engage partner agencies.
- Utilize the best available science in ecosystem and habitat conservation in the decisionmaking process.
- Provide clear examples of innovative environmental solutions by transportation agencies.
- Achieve high-quality results with well-defined goals and management systems.
- Demonstrate wide support by environmental agencies and public interest groups.

### 2010 EEl) Award Recipients

The 2010 EEl)s highlight valuable wetland-mitigation and habitat-restoration efforts that feature multiagency collaboration and the application of conservation and restoration principles. The seven award recipients are described below.

#### Illinois: North Chicago Wetland Joint Mitigation Effort

The Illinois State Toll Highway Authority (ISTHA) and the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) partnered in 2006 to rehabilitate 150 acres of native landscape in North Chicago. With the cooperation of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, ISTHA and IDOT were able to rehabilitate the rare prairie and wetland landscape. As of September 2010, 91 percent of the site had been cleared of exotic shrub species. Ongoing site efforts will include the use of prescribed fires and herbicides to prevent spread of the exotic plants.

### 2010 EEl) Recipients

- Illinois: North Chicago Wetland Joint Mitigation Effort
- Michigan: Protected Areas Program
- Michigan: Southwest Region High Quality Wetland Preservation
- Ohio: PER-93 Wetland Mitigation Area
- Utah: US 6, Wildlife Coordination Committee
- Washington: Washington State Department of Transportation (DOT) Fish Passage Program
- Wyoming: Nugget Canyon Deer Fence and Underpasses



Mile-point 203 is the location of a road-widening and bridge-construction project along US 6 in Utah. The project is part of the Wildlife Coordination Committee's efforts to develop wildlife mitigation measures. (Courtesy of Wildlife Coordinating Committee)

### **Michigan: Protected Areas Program**

The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) initiated the Protected Areas (PA) Program to improve environmental stewardship within the State. The PA Program enhances natural habitat and assists in the recovery of threatened and endangered species while meeting the State's transportation needs. Manuals called Redbooks are used to organize and communicate species and community information, location, and management recommendations to all MDOT staff. MDOT's implementation of the PA Program has decreased natural habitat impacts within the agency's right-of-way.

### **Michigan: Southwest Region High Quality Wetland Preservation**

In 2003, MDOT partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment, and The Nature Conservancy to restore Blue Creek Fen in Berrien County and Paw Paw Prairie Fen in Van Buren County. (A fen is a type of wetland habitat). Together with local landowners, MDOT and partners worked on preservation planning and implementation of management goals.



PER-93 wetland mitigation area, Perry County, Ohio. (Courtesy of ODOT)

### **Ohio: PER-93 Wetland Mitigation**

The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) is responsible for the construction of nearly one acre of wetland mitigation in Perry County. Three years after the construction, ODOT biologists surveyed the site's vegetation cover and diversity and designated the wetland as a Category 3: Superior Wetland Habitat, which is the highest rating given by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency. Wetland mitigation projects often take years to achieve the level of vegetation cover and plant diversity that corresponds to a Category 3 designation. The project sets an example for future wetland mitigation efforts.



### **Utah: US 6, Wildlife Coordination Committee**

In 2005, FHWA and the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) approved the Final Environmental Impact Statement for 127 miles of planned roadway improvements along US 6. The corridor has eight implemented project components, including wildlife crossings, fencing, and escape ramps to accommodate habitat linkages and migrations. To keep a broad perspective of the ecosystems of the entire corridor while developing individual project mitigation, and to foster information-sharing and collaboration, FHWA and UDOT established a Wildlife Coordination Committee comprising staff from FHWA, UDOT, USFWS, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, the Bureau of Land Management, Uinta National Forest, and Utah State University.

Mill Creek on SR 2 near Stevens Pass Ski Resort in Washington State. (Courtesy of WSDOT)

### **Washington: State DOT Fish Passage Program**

In 1991, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WSDFW) partnered to create the Fish Passage Program in order to restore aquatic ecosystems by improving stream function at road crossings. Roadway culverts are often an obstacle for fish because of high water velocity, varying water depth, and gradient changes. New roadway designs include a wider stream and a more gradual gradient, which improves fish migration. Since the establishment of the Fish Passage Program, WSDOT and WSDFW have improved access to over 750 lineal miles of stream habitat.

### **Wyoming: Nugget Canyon Deer Fence and Underpasses**

In 2008, the Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT) completed construction of a deer fence and underpass at Nugget Canyon in southwest Wyoming. The purpose of the project was to reduce the number of animal-vehicle collisions along a 14-mile-long stretch of US 30 that corresponds with the biannual migration route of the deer. WYDOT subsequently installed 6.3 miles of new deer fencing and six new concrete underpass structures. A WYDOT study found that, between the fall of 2008 and March 2010, 24,000 deer and 482 elk used the underpass structures. Although there continues to be a low rate of animal-vehicle collisions, WYDOT anticipates a further reduction in crashes.

## Exemplary Human Environment Initiatives

The EHEI program recognizes projects that improve the transportation system for those who use it. The award categories comprise a broad range of initiatives that promote education, physical activity, and passenger-focused system improvements.

The EHEI program recognizes five award categories, which can be found with their descriptions on the [EHEI website](#). The 2010 recipients include:

### Education and Training Programs

- Georgia: The Immortal 600 Teaching Package
- California: WalkBikeMarin

### Enhancing the Environment for Human Activities

- Delaware: Russell W. Peterson Urban Wildlife Refuge
- Illinois: Goodwin Avenue Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Improvements

### Encouraging Nonmotorized Transportation

- California: San José Trail Network
- Massachusetts: Healthy Transportation Compact
- Vermont: Way to Go! Commuter Challenge

### Process Improvements

- Illinois: Project Notification System for Section 106 Tribal Consultation
- South Carolina: US Highway 17 Sweetgrass Corridor

### Product Development

- Florida: Environmental Screening Tool

The FHWA EEI and EHEI programs both reinforce the importance of sustainable transportation initiatives that contribute to livability and ecosystem health. Both programs also recognize high-quality and sustainable projects that serve as examples of future restoration and conservation work to the rest of the country.

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## Look What's New!

- The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials' Center for Environmental Excellence has updated its online [Programmatic Agreements Library](#) in support of FHWA's Every Day Counts initiative to expedite highway-project delivery. The library includes agreements related to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, cultural resources, and endangered species and ecological documents.
- The Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) will host a webinar to demonstrate their Eco-Logical tool, which uses GIS to identify and conserve environmental resources as part of the long-range transportation process. H-GAC received a grant from FHWA's Eco-Logical Grant Program to develop their Eco-Logical tool. The webinar will take place on December 8, 2010, at 1:00 PM CST, and participants should [register](#) in advance.
- The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) has announced the 2011 schedule for its training courses on requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. For more information, see the [Section 106 Training Courses](#) on ACHP's website.

*Successes in Stewardship* is a Federal Highway Administration newsletter highlighting current environmental streamlining and stewardship practices from around the country. To subscribe, visit [http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/sis\\_registration/Register.aspx](http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/sis_registration/Register.aspx) or call 617-494-2273.