



## **RELEASE**

**For immediate release**

**May 22, 2026**

### **Regional support grows for desert wildlife crossings with new funding injection**

PALM DESERT – A \$512,000 grant from Coachella Valley Mountain Conservancy brings new strategic support to a project to advance two wildlife crossings over State Route 62 in the California desert.

The Board approved the Proposition 4 Local Assistance Planning Grant to the Mojave Desert Land Trust, which is leading the planning project for the crossings in an important wildlife corridor that connects Joshua Tree National Park to Sand to Snow National Monument, San Geronio Wilderness, and San Bernardino National Forest.

The crossings would be sited at critical points along the highway where wildlife face barriers and numerous animal deaths have been documented. The funds will support the planning, coordination, and technical analysis needed to prepare the crossings for construction.

“Protecting wildlife movement corridors is essential to maintaining healthy desert ecosystems,” said Elizabeth King, Executive Director of the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy. “This planning effort represents an important step toward improving both ecological connectivity and public safety along a heavily traveled transportation corridor. For those of us in the Valley, it is particularly critical for protecting our mountain lions and bighorn sheep.”

In unanimously approving the grant on May 11, the Conservancy Board expressed strong support for the project’s regional conservation benefits and its alignment with statewide wildlife crossing initiatives. The Conservancy is a state agency established 35 years ago for the purpose of protecting the natural and cultural resources of the greater Coachella Valley.

“Desert communities exist at the intersection of people, wildlife, and wide-open landscapes. This significant investment by the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy provides much needed support for the effort to develop long-term solutions that support safer roads, more resilient communities, and habitat connectivity in this region. We are proud to work alongside our regional and state partners to complete the planning of these wildlife crossings,” said Kelly Herbinson, Executive Director of the Mojave Desert Land Trust.”

**Benefiting desert communities**

SR-62 runs from Coachella Valley to the Arizona border. Over the last decade, traffic on the highway has increased in line with population growth in the Morongo Basin and a three-fold rise in visitation to Joshua Tree National Park.

The crossings will benefit desert communities by reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions. Wildlife-vehicle collisions kill or injure tens of thousands of people nationally each year and millions of animals are killed. Wildlife crossings have shown that directing megafauna away from roads reduces the danger posed to people. In some instances, crossings have reduced wildlife-vehicle collisions by up to 90%.

In April 2026, in the latest collision in this area, a 18-month-old mountain lion died after being struck by a vehicle while moving from the San Bernardino Mountains side of the highway towards Joshua Tree National Park. The lion was part of the San Gabriel-San Bernardino Mountains population that was listed in February under the California Endangered Species Act.

Before SR-62 was built, there was seamless 95-mile-long habitat connectivity between the San Bernardino and Little San Bernardino mountain ranges. A 2021 Morongo Pass Wildlife Connectivity Study by Dudek and the UC Davis Road Ecology Center recommended the construction of two SR-62 overpasses at the Morongo Grade and the Yucca Grade where concrete center dividers hinder wildlife movement. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife has also identified this stretch of the highway as a priority for removing barriers to wildlife movement.

In February 2026, California's Wildlife Conservation Board awarded the Mojave Desert Land Trust with \$5.5 million in grant funding for the planning phase of the wildlife crossings. The Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy's grant of \$512,000 in matching funds provides the balance of the funds needed to fully fund the project. The combined grants, along with \$100,000 previously provided by Caltrans District 8, will bring the two proposed crossing projects to 65% design completion, setting the stage for implementation. They will also support the development of a plan to monitor wildlife use of the crossings.

The proposed crossings will have an earthen base and be vegetated with native plants found in the adjacent natural areas. Their gentle slopes will blend into the natural terrain, making them appear like natural habitat, which encourages wildlife to cross. Directional wildlife fencing will be placed adjacent to the crossings on each side of the highway as well as measures to address light and noise from the highway.

The crossings align with a new statewide initiative to prioritize habitat connectivity. Under the 2024 Room to Roam Act, cities and counties must identify wildlife connectivity in land use plans and promote safe passage across fragmented habitat. This legislation complements the 2022 Safe Roads and Wildlife Protection Act which requires state agencies to remediate barriers to wildlife movement and prioritize crossings in transportation projects.