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NEWS RELEASE

NEW BILLBOARD NEAR RADIUM REMINDS DRIVERS TO WATCH FOR WILDLIFE

KAMLOOPS, B.C. (Oct. 14, 2005) – The Wildlife-Vehicle Accident Prevention Program (WVAPP) is proud to announce an expansion of its campaign to educate the driving public about the dangers of wildlife-vehicle collisions and how they can be prevented. A billboard with a safety message has been located along Highway 95 between Radium Hot Springs and the Invermere Cross Roads, where an estimated 2,555 vehicles will view the billboard every day. The billboard says, “Watch for Wildlife – Use Caution!” and is intended to remind drivers to pay attention to traditional wildlife warning signs, and actively watch out for wildlife on the road.

The sign location was chosen due to the extremely high number of bighorn sheep that are killed on the Mile Hill near Radium in particular. So far this year, 8 bighorn sheep have been hit and killed by vehicles on this stretch of highway south of the Village. BC Ministry of Transportation estimates are that for each animal recorded as killed, three more are not recorded as they move away from the road to die. This could mean that close to 24 bighorns have been killed at this location since January.

“This is a very complex area to manage,” says Bill Swan, Coordinator, Bighorn In Our Backyard. “The combination of increasing speed by uphill and downhill traffic and concentration of bighorn due to terrain and habitat features makes this a high risk area for collisions with wildlife.”

This billboard project is a partnership between the Wildlife-Vehicle Accident Prevention Program, the Ministry of Environment, Bighorn In Our Backyard Project, and the Friends of Kootenay National Park. It is one component of the Mile Hill Wildlife Mortality Mitigation Project, which also recommends ecosystem restoration, speed zone changes and over the long term, structural changes to the highway to further address this issue.

Drivers should be aware that bighorn sheep are most active in the day. Unlike other large ungulates like elk and deer, few collisions occur at night because bighorn for the most part are not active at this time preferring instead to bed down. “An exception to this is the breeding period that is beginning now through early December, says Swan. Drivers must be extra alert during this period of the year, especially during the low light periods at the beginning and end of the day. Poor visibility for drivers, erratic bighorn behaviour during the rut and climatic conditions like fog and icy conditions have all played a part in high collision rates with bighorn during the fall.”

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 forage higher up in the mountains is depleted. Many road corridors are also built in valley bottoms, and when motorists and wildlife use the same travel corridors, it leads to increased collisions. In the winter, wildlife is attracted to roadsides because of roadside salt deposits and ease of movement.

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

- Slow Down and Obey all Posted Signs – collision avoidance and driver response time are improved at lower speeds.
- Drive Defensively – actively watch for wildlife in the ditch, on the road shoulder, and in the right of way, particularly 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, and wear your seatbelt.

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