



*By Shannon Bauman*

“New beauty meets us at every step in all our wanderings.” Through the words of John Muir, we are reminded about the continual opportunity we have to embrace our surroundings, no matter what path we tread. His message speaks to volumes of people from all different situations, states, and walks of life, including those whose “wanderings” take them across Interstate I-90.

As my AP environmental science teacher announced this wildlife bridge designing scholarship, I made a prompt decision that it was an opportunity I would not soon miss! The concept of a wildlife bridge, entirely new to me, appeared as a glorious “light at the end of the tunnel,” if you will, paving the way for greater environmental awareness and safer road conditions. After some thought, it became clear that a bridge that serves such a proactive and untypical purpose calls for an untypical design. A sketch of a wide arc bridge from the Animal Road Crossing website seemed to point the way.

With the absence of tunnels and linear lines, this broad arc design takes a step away from the conventional. It possesses a pleasing simplicity, yet has a presence of elegant grandeur. It's curved and clean lines flow seamlessly with the environment, yet it still retains architectural interest. One slight query I had with the design was its lack of support beams, but with the utmost confidence in our engineering abilities, I think an unobstructed passageway would eliminate visual and safety hindrances for drivers.

Since it is a crossroads for travelers both human and furry, this bridge shape would ideally hold the greatest benefits for both wildlife and highway drivers. The broad entrance, gradual incline, and familiar habitat atop the bridge ease the transition of wildlife across the area in a natural and inviting way. Perhaps the greatest benefit to wildlife is the slight inward curvature of the bridge. This would act just as the surrounding mountains and valleys already do, guiding the animals to their destination and creating a natural barrier to harsh vehicle light and sound, a preferable alternative to a choppy border of shrubs.

In all honesty, most of the people passing by the bridge will have little knowledge about its function and will be most directly affected by its outward appearance. The focal point of my design is seen mounted across the center of the arc; a metal visual displaying John Muir's quote from above. As this art piece comes into view, travelers will recognize the outline of a

sauntering black bear, a curious marmot perched atop a rock, a salmon wiggling its way up Columbia waters, a regal elk bugling, a swift red-tailed hawk swooping the skies, and a stealthy cougar amongst the grasses! These iconic animals of the Cascade region will serve to educate people about the types of animals the bridge helps to protect.

Being a lover of road trips, one of the things I enjoy along the open road are stopping to read historical information boards. These provide very useful information to visitors, and would be a neat addition to the bridge design. On either side of the road, passer byes are welcome to pull off into a small, set-aside parking lot and read about the benefits of the wildlife bridge, and possibly how it ties into the I-90 Snoqualmie Pass East Project as a whole. Aided with this education, the bridge can become a recognizable symbol of Washington State and its ambition for environmental and human wellbeing.

One more feature to look into is water runoff management. Helping to direct water away from the bridge's edge, the curved surface of the bridge would lead excess water to a small channel along a raised road. This way, drivers are insured protection from water overflow from the roadside or above.

This opportunity to design a wildlife bridge for the Price/Noble Creek area proved to be a cognitive challenge but also a great deal of fun. The possibility that I could be involved in bringing this bridge to life gives me so much excitement about being a part of a meaningful movement. Overall, it is my greatest hope that my design provides the best solution for both wildlife and driver, enhances the inherent beauty of the area, and symbolizes a move towards a brighter future.