

# #SaveLACougars Campaign

## Liberty Canyon Wildlife Crossing Initiative

# FAQ



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### About the campaign

#### What is the #SaveLACougars campaign?

Founded by the National Wildlife Federation and our partner the Santa Monica Mountains Fund, the campaign works in collaboration with many stakeholders to protect Southern California's mountain lions, and to advocate for the critical habitat linkages they require to ensure a healthy future for people, mountain lions and other wildlife in this highly urbanized landscape.

**One of our initiatives is to support the building of what potentially could be the largest wildlife crossing in the world and the first of its kind in California** to help save a population of mountain lions from extinction—and to reconnect the Santa Monica Mountains ecosystem for all wildlife.

### About the Liberty Canyon Wildlife Crossing

#### Why is the crossing needed?

Mountain lions are at risk of disappearing from the Santa Monica Mountains and are running out of time.



PHOTO BY NPS



PHOTO BY LEIGH WYMAN

Since 2002 the National Park Service (NPS) has been **conducting a study** in and around Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. Their conclusion? **The biggest threat to lion persistence in the Santa Monica Mountains is the loss and fragmentation of habitat by roads and urban development.**

Studies have shown these lions possess the lowest genetic diversity measured anywhere in the state, or in the country, outside of the endangered Florida panthers. Their long-term survival depends on their ability to move between regions to maintain genetic diversity and overall population health. **Researchers have witnessed the deaths of twelve lions on the roadways in the area since the study began.**

#### Why is it important to save these mountain lions?

Mountain lions are a part of California's natural heritage and having them disappear from the Santa Monica Mountains would be a great loss. Losing a key predator can also be devastating to the entire ecosystem. Although we use mountain lions as the poster child, this is about reconnecting an entire ecosystem for all wildlife—and people!

#### Does this crossing help the environment in other ways?

The crossing will also restore connectivity to the ecosystem, and return some of the natural character

*“These mountain lions live on an urbanized island, a small population isolated because the dangerous freeways do not allow them the room to roam. Let’s get them off an island and give them a future before they die out.”*

—BETH PRATT-BERGSTROM NWF California Director



PHOTO BY JOHANNA TURNER/COUGARMAGIC

and sustainability to a region that was changed by the construction of US-101. It will also help native species adapt to climate change as their environment alters due to shifts in habitat and weather.

## Why is this wildlife corridor so important?

The Santa Monica Mountains to the Sierra Madre Range is one of the few coastal to inland connections remaining in Southern California and multiple research and planning efforts have identified this as a critical corridor:

- **South Coast Missing Linkages Project** identified this linkage “as one of the highest priority linkages to conserve in order to sustain ecological and evolutionary processes” in California’s South Coast Ecoregion, in light of existing land use pressures and in the context of climate change.
- **California Essential Habitat Connectivity Project**, which was commissioned by Caltrans and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife with support from the Federal Highways Administration, also identified this critical linkage.
- The development of a wildlife crossing at Liberty Canyon is also in accordance with federal landscape-scale planning efforts such as the Integrated Eco-Logical Framework (IEF)/Eco-Logical Program, US Fish and Wildlife Service’s Landscape Conservation

Cooperatives, and the Western Governor Association’s Initiative on Wildlife Corridors and Crucial Habitat, as well as the Regional Advance Mitigation Planning (RAMP) in California.

## What will the crossing look like?

At this point in the project development process, the design has not been finalized, but Caltrans released the first **feasibility report** for the crossing project in September 2015 and proposed two alternatives.

The first alternative is a 165-foot wide x 200-foot long bridge constructed across US-101 immediately west of Liberty Canyon Road at mile marker 33.0.

The bridge would be vegetated to resemble natural wildlife habitat and include features such as noise barriers and vegetation on the overcrossing that would mitigate traffic noise, block light, and blend the overcrossing with the surrounding natural landscape.

The report also proposes a second alternative that adds an extension over Agoura Road to the first alternative. Because this maximizes the benefits to conservation by allowing for use by the greatest number of species, **this is the preferred alternative for the #SaveLACougars campaign and the one we are fundraising to complete.**

*“This is a vital crossing in one of the last undeveloped areas on the 101, and building a safe passage gives us a chance to ensure the future of the mountain lions in the Santa Monica Mountains and Los Angeles area.”*

—DR. SETH RILEY National Park Service



PHOTO BY STEVE WINTER/  
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC



## What about a tunnel instead of an overpass?

### Wouldn't that be cheaper?

Both large and small tunnels under the 101 were considered as part of the Caltrans feasibility study but neither would accommodate as wide a range of species as the overcrossing. Construction of a large tunnel would require the closure of US-101, one of the busiest freeways in the region, and estimates indicated it would be more costly than an overcrossing.

## Will people be able to use the crossing as well?

Yes. At this time in the process, the intent is to include a multi-use trail on the bridge.

## When will the crossing be built?

If #SaveLACougars reaches our fundraising targets, Caltrans estimates the crossing could be complete by November 2021.

## Who supports the idea of the Liberty Canyon Crossing?

The call for a Liberty Canyon Wildlife Crossing enjoys widespread support, which includes declarations passed by surrounding cities, and a resolution of support by the Southern California Association of Governments, the nation's largest metropolitan planning organization, representing six counties, 191 cities and more than 18 million residents. For a complete list please visit <http://www.nwf.org/Save-LA-Cougars/About-The-Campaign/Supporters.aspx>

Support for this wildlife crossing extends around the world—people across the country and across the globe have made donations to the project and taken action to urge for its completion. Media outlets such as *BBC World News*, *Wall Street Journal*, *NPR*, *Marketplace*, *The Guardian*, *National Geographic*, *The New Yorker*, *CBS This Morning*, *Los Angeles Times* and many more have featured the story of the crossing.



One of the proposed alternatives for the crossing from the Caltrans feasibility study. Design by Clark Stevens, Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains.

## Who are the main agencies or municipalities involved in the project?

The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC) has preserved and manages much of the land needed with the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA). The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) oversees the 101 Freeway. The crossing site is located in the City of Agoura Hills.

In addition to the above, the current stakeholders participating in the Caltrans planning process include the National Park Service, the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains and the State Coastal Conservancy, with support and partnership by Senator Fran Pavley, Assemblymember Richard Bloom, LA County Supervisor Sheila Kuehl, the National Wildlife Federation, U.S. Congressman Ted Lieu, Ventura County Supervisor Linda Parks, and the City of Thousand Oaks. Previous Agoura Hills Mayor Illece Buckley Weber and Agoura Hills City Engineer Ramiro Adeva have also been an integral part of the discussion and development of the project.

*“It’s critically important to provide a safe crossing over the busy 101 Freeway for wildlife.”*

—CA State Senator FRAN PAVLEY (Agoura Hills)

## How do we know the wildlife will use these crossings?

Biologists with the NPS have collected thousands of data points over the past decade to determine the best location for the crossing. In addition, part of the project includes many proven techniques for facilitating use by wildlife, such as strategically placed fencing and vegetation.

And as we have seen with other crossings around the world, the old adage “build it and they will come” applies. We can look at the success of other crossings, such as the ones in **Montana** and **Banff, Canada**. For example in Banff, eleven species of large mammals have been recorded using wildlife crossings more than 120,000 times since 1996.

## What are some other benefits of the crossing?

The crossing will also allow for improvement of recreation activities and opportunities for local hikers, bikers, and equestrians who could use the trail on the overcrossing.

As we have observed in Banff, Canada and other places where these crossings are built, it also has the potential to increase tourism. Paul Edelman, chief of natural resources and planning for the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority said, **“It might even become the type of thing where people come from miles around to look at it and spend money in the local economy, it’ll be that cool.”**

Building the crossing will also establish Los Angeles as a leader and model for urban wildlife conservation worldwide, and show that southern Californians, even in

one of the largest cities in the country, really care about maintaining wild places, wild populations, and natural ecosystems.

*“Science militates that we construct the highest functioning wildlife crossing to ensure the survival of our native species, including mountain lions, in the local mountains.”*

—JOSEPH EDMISTON  
Executive director of the  
Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy

## Mountain Lions in the Santa Monica Mountains

### How many mountain lions are in the Santa Monica Mountains?

Although the exact number isn’t known, researchers think the area can support 10–15 adult mountain lions at any one time.

### Will the crossing bring more mountain lions to the area?

No. The crossing is to ensure the population does not go extinct, not to increase the number of lions in the area. Mountain lions require enormous home ranges (up to 250



square miles) and are very territorial. The Santa Monica Mountains will only hold so many mountain lions because of their prey and territory requirements, which is why connecting to other natural areas is so critical.

The crossing may actually decrease human encounters with mountain lions because they will be able to keep in the wilder areas without having to enter populated spaces. The vast majority of cases where mountain lions visit developed areas involve young animals, likely trying to disperse, that are being thwarted by development and freeways.

## Isn't it dangerous to live in the same area as mountain lions?

Attacks by mountain lions on people are very rare. In California, mountain lions have attacked less than twenty people and killed just three since 1986 according to the [California Department of Fish and Wildlife](#). For comparison, in Los Angeles County alone, automobiles cause on average about 750 deaths and 85,000 injuries each year. These statistics don't diminish the tragedy when a person is killed or injured by a lion, but it puts the risk in perspective. **In the NPS study, they have tracked 45 animals over 13 years, and never had any evidence of aggressive behavior towards people.**

## What about the safety of my pets and livestock?

The research in the area to date has demonstrated that the mountain lions prefer their traditional diet of deer and other wild animals and largely leave domestic animals alone. But problems can occur, many of which can be prevented by implementing predator-proof practices.

Many groups offer educational resources on living with mountain lions such as the [California Department of Fish and Wildlife](#) and the [Mountain Lion Foundation](#). You can also contact the [#SaveLACougars](#) campaign for assistance.



## Who is P-22?

The famous Hollywood lion, P-22, serves as the poster child of our campaign.

P-22 is an adult male cougar who likely crossed two major Los Angeles freeways as he struck out to find new territory. That he found his way is nothing short of miraculous. Now he is essentially trapped

*“These are large carnivores capable of attacking people, and they deserve a healthy respect. But clearly mountain lions don't think of people as prey, and this is good news for both people and lions.”*

—JEFF SIKICH National Park Service Biologist

within the confines of Griffith Park by surrounding freeways and urbanized areas. While we celebrate that P-22 is surviving, his situation is less than ideal. Building a wildlife crossing will help other mountain lions avoid P-22's fate.

Our thanks to National Geographic wildlife photographer [Steve Winter](#) for his generous use of his photos of P-22 to help support this campaign.

## Funding

### What is the funding need?

**The cost of the project is currently estimated at \$55 million based on the initial reports released by Caltrans in 2015.** While the majority of this will be used for design, engineering and construction, this amount includes funding to continue the vital research on mountain lions and wildlife in the area by the National Park Service and other scientists, along with the necessary education, outreach, fundraising and advocacy costs for the campaign.

### Isn't this a lot of money just to save some mountain lions?

Mountain lions are an indicator of the health of an ecosystem and their survival is linked to the greater resilience of the entire Santa Monica Mountains. **We have spent hundreds of millions of dollars preserving land in the Santa Monica Mountains and surrounding areas—this is another critical step.**

When evaluating the price tag, it's also helpful to consider the size and scope of the project—this crossing will extend over ten lanes of pavement on a major freeway.



## How is funding for this being raised?

Through #SaveLACougars, the **National Wildlife Federation** (NWF) and our partner **Santa Monica Mountains Fund** are committed to partnering with philanthropists, foundations, corporations and public entities to secure the funds needed to complete this project. As one of the oldest and largest conservation groups, the NWF has 6 million supporters across the country and a successful track record of large scale conservation work, such as multi-million dollar projects in the Great Lakes or the Gulf Coast.

## Where will the funds come from?

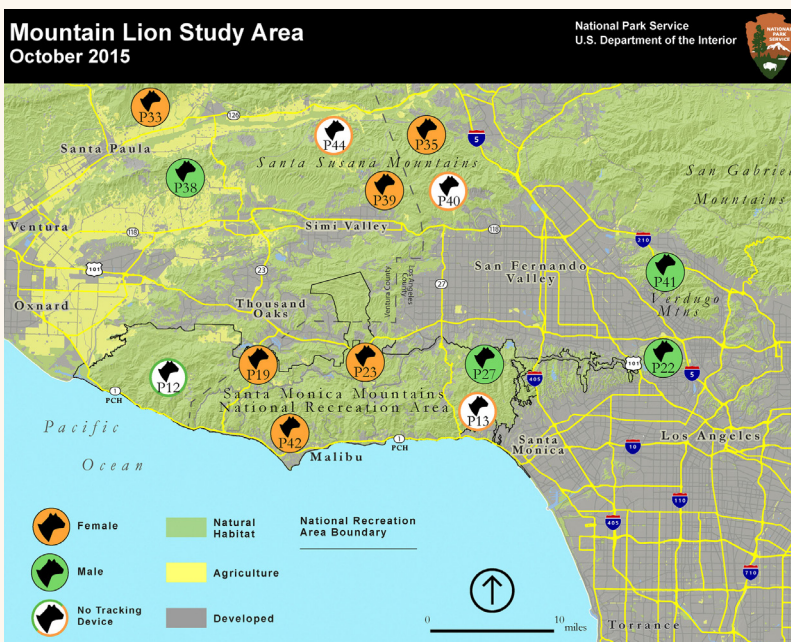
Our fundraising includes a variety of sources, with a primary focus on philanthropic dollars.

## Will this project take away funding in other public segments?

Where we are looking at public dollars, we are focusing on funds already earmarked for conservation—the campaign **is not seeking to divert transportation or other taxpayer funds from things such as schools, hospitals, bridges or road repairs.**

## How much have you raised to date?

In 2015, the NWF successfully secured a \$1 million seed grant from the **California State Coastal Conservancy** for this campaign, and with private donations the total raised as of January of 2015 is over \$1.1 million.



## When do you need to raise the funds by?

**Time is running out for these mountain lions.** Our near-term goal is to secure at least \$10 million by 2017 and the balance by early 2019 in order for the crossing to be completed by 2021.

## How can people donate?

Visit [www.savelacougars.org](http://www.savelacougars.org) to donate online. For those considering a leadership or foundation gift, please contact Molly Judge, [judgetm@nwf.org](mailto:judgetm@nwf.org) and (415) 505-1041.

## How can I help?

For more information on how to get involved, please visit [www.savelacougars.org](http://www.savelacougars.org) and be sure to **sign up for our email updates** on the campaign! You can also contact Beth Pratt-Bergstrom, [prattb@nwf.org](mailto:prattb@nwf.org) or (209) 620-6271.

### #SaveLACougars Campaign Advisory Team

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**Don't let the cougars of Los Angeles and the Santa Monica Mountains disappear.**

**Help build the wildlife crossing at Liberty Canyon.**

**[www.savelacougars.org](http://www.savelacougars.org)**

The **#SaveLACougars** campaign is a partnership of the National Wildlife Federation and the Santa Monica Mountains Fund and is supported by a large coalition and community of organizations, businesses, individuals and elected officials.