

1970

THE IDAHO CHAPTER OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY
POSITION STATEMENT: RE. RELOCATION OF STATE HIGHWAY 64

The Idaho Chapter of The Wildlife Society wishes to file a statement concerning the proposed relocation of State Highway 64. As the professional wildlife organization in Idaho, we oppose any additional unnecessary destruction of wildlife habitat or natural environments within the State.

We oppose the relocation of State Highway 64 between Kamiah and Nezperce through the Lawyer's Creek drainage via either the Suzie Creek route or the Lawyer's Canyon route. We cannot afford the serious damage to our natural environment that this 12 mile highway relocation would cause. There are several reasons for this position.

Lawyer's Creek Canyon is a scenic area enjoyed as a local retreat by many people in the Kamiah vicinity. The new road would scar the landscape and permanently destroy the solitude and beauty for which the area is now valued.

Lawyer's Creek Canyon is unique for its great variety and quantity of wildlife. The construction of a road through this canyon would seriously damage the habitat of many of these wild creatures, both by the physical removal of the natural vegetation and by the destruction that would result from the impending traffic.

Even though precautions would be taken, road construction would damage the fish habitat in Lawyer's Creek, both by siltation and by stream channel alterations.

The Idaho Chapter of The Wildlife Society recommends that the Idaho Highway Board improve existing Highway 64 rather than relocating it through Lawyer's Creek Canyon.



IDAHO CHAPTER
THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Rt. 2, Box 122B
Moscow, ID 83843
August 26, 1970

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
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3900 WISCONSIN AVE. N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20016

Governor Don Samuelson
Office of the Governor
Boise, ID 83702

Dear Governor Samuelson:

We appreciate your letter of August 4, 1970, explaining the Highway Board's position regarding the relocation of State Highway 64 through Lawyer's Creek Canyon. We have carefully studied the justifications for this proposed road, both in your letter and in the hearing brochure, and yet we feel duty bound to oppose it vigorously. In our position statement we say that we oppose any unnecessary destruction of wildlife habitat or natural environments. We do not believe that this road relocation is necessary.

As you suggested in your letter, we are primarily concerned about the 6.5 mile segment from the junction of State Highway 62 to the Camas prairie. Lower portions of this area have good habitat for pheasants and some valley quail, Hungarian partridges and cottontail rabbits. The upper end of the canyon is more suited for both mule and white-tailed deer, chukars and mountain quail. All of these species, and many lesser ones, would be adversely affected by the new road. Many of the feeding and cover areas would be eliminated by the pavement and by slide and fill materials resulting from construction on a steep hillside. Disturbance from highway noises will effectively keep deer from using even the opposite side of the canyon in its upper two or three miles.

We appreciate the Highway Department's plan to keep channel change to a minimum. However, from observing other highway construction projects we cannot help but feel that water quality and fish habitat will be damaged to some extent.

I am sure the Highway Board is most anxious to make the highway compatible with the surrounding areas. But, how can a 28 ft. wide highway be put through a steep-sided canyon in a compatible way? Granted, certain things can be done to minimize damage, but the fact remains that the highway is there. The value of the area as a place of solitude is gone. The decision has been made to permanently place an unnecessary scar on this area for future generations.

Page 2
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Perhaps this could be justified if the need for the new highway was clear. But is it? The main reason given for the road is that an alternate high quality route between Kamiah and Nezperce is needed to ease the traffic on Highway 12. The figures indicate that only 600 of the 1800 daily trips between Spalding and Kamiah originate from Kamiah or points east. Theoretically then, one-third of the traffic could take the alternate route. In checking with a highway engineer, we found that studies have shown that tourists are very reluctant to take alternate routes. They tend to stay with the main federal highways. It is very likely then, that only a small fraction of that one-third would actually take the alternate. Existing highway 64 is a scenic route and provides some spectacular views of the Clearwater Valley. Is it possible that this road, if properly improved and properly signed to direct tourists, would serve as more of an alternate than a new highway? A tourist has to have a reason for leaving a main thoroughfare. Perhaps a scenic drive up the existing highway could serve as an incentive to some.

Also, let us put this 15.5 mile existing road in its proper perspective. It accounts for only about one-fourth of the distance between Kamiah and Spalding. The new road would cut this distance by only 3.5 miles and certainly would not provide a significantly greater incentive to use this alternate route to Lewiston than would the existing road if it were improved.

As you may be aware, there is much sentiment from various groups and from concerned individuals against the plan to relocate State Highway 64. We are requesting, with all due respect, that you instruct the Idaho Highway Board to reconsider their position on this proposal, and to hold another hearing to ascertain the desires of the people.

Sincerely,



Elwood G. Bizeau, President
Idaho Chapter of The Wildlife Society

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