



A few weeks ago, two of our CHANJ project leaders had the opportunity (and real honor) to travel to Tucson, AZ, for a special Wildlife Corridors, Connectivity, and Crossings Conference. In a rare step outside the northeast region, Gretchen Fowles and MacKenzie Hall represented NJ Fish and Wildlife's habitat connectivity efforts in two exciting sessions: one on non-migratory wildlife dispersal projects (ranging from grizzly bears to turtles and amphibians) and another showcasing best practices in state corridor & connectivity planning.

At a time when wildlife movement ecology and habitat connectivity issues are getting their due, the Crossings Conference brought together 270+ experts from across North America to share experience and insight. In addition to gathering up lessons from these colleagues, Gretchen and MacKenzie got to tour Arizona's first wildlife overpass in the Sonoran Desert and a nearby underpass below Highway 77. Since 2016 these structures have enabled the safe crossing of more than 20,000 animals of 40 species, including mule deer, elk, pronghorn, coyotes, javelinas, bobcats, and desert tortoises.





Postcards from Arizona: the CHANJ team, conference, wildlife crossings and desert views.

A few take-home points from the Conference:

- "These maps dare us not to take action," said USDA Undersecretary Robert Bonnie. North Carolina has identified their top 20 priority road-wildlife conflict spots and 100 other important ones. Vermont passed a resolution directing towns to consider the state's connectivity mapping when planning and reviewing developments. New Mexico established a \$5 million wildlife corridor fund.
- Innovative crossing systems are still being developed and tested, like the [Elevated Road Segment](#) for small animals - which someone dubbed "the magic carpets of wildlife crossings."
- USDA Forest Service's [Climate Adaptation Plan](#) explicitly talks about the importance of habitat connectivity. State Wildlife Action Plans and transportation improvement plans are becoming more entwined.
- To get widespread support for habitat connectivity, connecting people to the story is key to "bridging the gap between science and action."
- CHANJ got a mention in Dr. Patricia Cramer's presentation (no big deal 🥰). Patty is founder and Director of the [Wildlife Connectivity Institute](#) and a national leader in the field.





On the overpass: Renee Callahan of ARC Solutions, Gretchen Fowles, Patty Cramer and MacKenzie Hall

The team returned to NJ with some fresh inspiration, new contacts, and a few cactus prickles in their shoes.



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