Of Bats and Bridges

By Caroline Kurtz and Paul Hendrickson

Wooden bridges have been the default choice for Montana’s Natural Heritage Program and the Montana Department of Transportation since the 1980s. Unfortunately, bats are not as common in Montana as they once were. A recent survey by researchers from the University of Montana found that bats are more common in rural areas, particularly in the western part of the state. The researchers suggest that more research is needed to understand the factors that contribute to the decline of bats in Montana.

Researchers have identified several factors that contribute to the decline of bats in Montana. One of the most significant factors is habitat loss. As Montana’s natural areas are converted to agricultural land, the bats’ natural habitat is being reduced. Additionally, bats are highly sensitive to human disturbance, and even a single loud noise can drive them away. The researchers also found that the use of pesticides and other chemicals can be harmful to bats.

The researchers recommend several strategies to help bats in Montana. One of the most effective strategies is to protect existing bat habitats and create new ones. This can be done by preserving existing forested areas and establishing new bat roosting sites. Additionally, the use of less toxic pesticides and other chemicals can help protect bats from harm.

The researchers also recommend that Montana’s Natural Heritage Program and the Montana Department of Transportation work together to protect bats. This can be done by incorporating bat-friendly designs into new bridges and other structures and by protecting existing bat habitats.

Overall, the researchers find that bats are important for Montana’s ecosystem and that more research is needed to understand the factors that contribute to their decline. By taking action to protect bats, Montana can help ensure a healthy and diverse ecosystem for generations to come.

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The Montana Natural Heritage Program (www.mtnhp.org) is the state's most comprehensive source for information on native species and habitats, emphasizing those of special conservation concern. MtnHP scientists collect, validate and distribute this information and help natural resource managers and others make effective use of it. Established by the Montana State Legislature in 1983, the program is located in the Montana State Library in Helena. MtnHP is part of an information network of natural heritage programs in all U.S. states and Canadian provinces, plus a number of Latin American and Caribbean nations. For information about plants and animals of North America, go to www.nature.reserve.org/explorer.