



JERRY LONGOBARDI / COURTESY PHOTO

A moose calf tries to revive its mother after the mother was hit by a car on Highway 390. Four moose have been killed in the vicinity this year.

Moose's death leaves orphan calf grieving

Wildlife officials remind drivers to slow down.

By Cory Hatch

A heart-wrenching moose-vehicle collision on Highway 390 that left a cow moose dead and her calf orphaned is prompting wildlife officials to urge motorists to slow down.

The incident comes as Jackson Hole's moose population continues to plummet due to a combination of vehicle accidents, disease, predators and loss of habitat.

On Dec. 16, Jerry Longobardi, one of two Jackson game wardens for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, responded to a call about an injured moose near Raven Haven Road on the southern end of Highway 390 to Teton Village.

"It's was just a big, perfectly healthy cow moose, and her right rear leg was shattered," he said.

The calf was nearby while Longobardi and a co-worker shot the mother moose to put it out of its misery.

Even the seasoned game warden had a hard time with what happened next.

"The calf freaks out and is running in circles and is pawing at his mother trying to get her up," Longobardi said. "[We] felt terrible. I lost a little sleep over the deal."

Teton County resident Drew Canada, who lives nearby, witnessed the event and had his own account.

"I let my dog out to go to the bathroom and he started barking," he said. "I saw that little moose was running around."

Canada watched from his dinner table as Longobardi killed the mother moose. When the cow "was in her death throes, the calf started pawing at her and running around my house. I haven't seen the baby since. I don't know where it went.

"It was really emotional for me," Canada continued. "The chances of a calf making it to spring [by itself] are not so great, so it's really a double whammy."

This is the third moose Longobardi has had to put down on that section of road this year.

"A fourth was dead about 200 yards off the road," he said. "It was probably hit by a car, too, and just crawled off and died. I know we've had another hit at Teton Pines at the golf course.

"It's hard to kill anything when it's injured, but it's especially hard with these big, healthy moose," Longobardi continued.

Canada says he's seen at least a dozen moose killed by vehicles near his house since he's lived there.

"They get hit right out in front of my driveway all the time," he said. "On both sides of the road, there is moose habitat."

The moose are attracted to cottonwood and willow communities, said Leigh Work, executive director of the Jackson Hole Wildlife Foundation.

"It provides good cover for ungulates," she said. "They're comfortable hanging out there closer to [populated areas] where they can't be seen. Because it's not a clear meadow, people can't see [the moose] when they enter the roadway. It's this unfortunate combination of prime moose habitat and [Highway] 390."

That stretch of road has been designated a hot spot for collisions between moose and vehicles, Work said.

Canada has written to Wyoming Department of Transportation officials asking them to reduce the speed limit on the road from 45 to 35 miles per hour.

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— Jerry Longobardi

GAME WARDEN WHO PUT DOWN MOOSE

"Dropping the speed limit on this section would make sense," he said. Most drivers reach 50 mph by the time they reach Raven Haven Road, Canada said.

WYDOT officials were responsive and polite when they heard Canada's request, but they said they had no plans to lower the speed limit.

WYDOT has moved flashing message signs to Highway 390 to warn people about wildlife on the road, but the spot near Raven Haven Drive is too narrow.

"Unfortunately, we can't put those signs exactly where we would want them," Work said.

The best thing people can do is slow down, especially at dusk and dawn when wildlife are moving, Work said.

"I think that driving more slowly reduces wildlife vehicle collisions," she said.

Like ice and snow, "the reality is wildlife on the roadways is also a driving condition we need to be aware of," Work said.

Luckily, the calf moose was more than a year old and will probably survive without its mother, Longobardi said.

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