**CITIZENS FOR A SAFE HIGHWAY 9 COMMITTEE NEWS RELEASE**

 **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Grand County Pledges $3 Million to Make Highway 9 Safer**

*“Northwest Colorado is one big step closer to a safer Highway 9”*

(HOT SULPHUR SPRINGS, CO) Everyone who travels State Highway 9 (SH9) between Kremmling and Green Mountain Reservoir can thank the Grand County Commissioners for acting to make the road safer. The commissioners have voted to pledge up to $3,073,503 to complete the funding match necessary for the Highway 9 safety improvement project to be considered for fast track RAMP approval by the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT).

RAMP or Responsible Acceleration of Maintenance and Partnerships is a program created by CDOT to move forward with badly needed road projects by combining state funding with local funds. To qualify for consideration under RAMP, local governments must raise 20% of the total cost of the project and submit an application that explains why the project should be put on a fast track for completion.

The contribution by the Grand County Commissioners completes the fund raising effort led by Citizens for a Safe Highway 9 Committee. The committee is a group of Grand County residents who came together to raise the 20% match to qualify for RAMP consideration because they recognized it would take a community-wide effort. The deadline for submitting a RAMP application with a fully funded 20 percent match is

July 1. CDOT will announce which projects receive final RAMP approval on

September 19.

“Northwest Colorado is now one big step closer to a safer SH9,” declares Citizens for a Safe Highway 9 Committee Chairman Mike Ritschard. “The Committee is grateful for all of the contributions and letters of support from local governments, businesses and from citizens who care about making Highway 9 safer. We have received pledges and letters from all over Colorado.”

“Raising $9.2 million in 70 days for the Highway 9 Safety Improvement Project is an example of what citizens can accomplish when they work together for something they value and share in common,” said Perry Handyside, a member of the Citizens for a Safe Highway 9 Committee. “If the Highway 9 safety project is approved by the State Highway Commission it will be because of the passion, ingenuity and hard work of citizens with shared values. That is something we can all be proud of.”

By the time the project is built, the total cost to make these vital safety improvements to SH9 is estimated to be nearly $46 million. Grand County’s contribution completes the drive to raise $9.2 million, or 20% of that $46 million, to qualify for RAMP consideration.

SH9 is a major traffic route between Kremmling and Silverthorne in Summit and Grand counties. Although the highway runs through many other counties, the narrow stretch of highway between mile markers 126 and 137, near the Green Mountain Dam Road and Colorado River Crossing, has long been the site of collisions between motorists and wildlife. It bisects a major winter migration path for wildlife, separating winter range east of the highway from the Blue River, a primary water source on the west side of the road.

The SH9 safety project will improve the 10.6-mile stretch of the highway with overpasses and underpasses designed to allow deer and elk to travel safely from one side of the highway to the other. Fencing will prevent deer and elk from moving across the road and guide them to safe passage over and under the highway.

The proposed project will also widen SH9 and improve road alignment to enhance sightlines. The highway is used by school buses and by visitors traveling to recreation destinations in Summit, Grand, Routt, Jackson and other counties in northwest Colorado. The two-lane highway is frequently congested with heavy traffic, which creates an even higher risk of collision between vehicles and wildlife, particularly at night. The plan also envisions eight-foot-wide paved shoulders for the highway that could accommodate bike paths.

State Highway 9 Safety Project Timeline

March, 2011- Blue Valley Ranch donates $805,000 to Grand County to pay for creation of a plan for a “shovel ready” project that will make SH9 safer. Grand County enters into an Intergovernmental Agreement with CDOT to use the $805,000 to fund the “direct to project” design costs incurred by CDOT. CDOT commits to funding the remainder of the project design, including management, administration and environmental costs.

April 19, 2012-Meeting held in Kremmling to gather public input on the conceptual design of the SH9 project, which was the result of stakeholder collaboration over the past year, including CDOT, Grand County, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, BLM, Blue Valley Ranch and private landowners along the highway corridor.

October, 2012-Blue Valley Ranch commits to a donation of private lands necessary for project right-of-way, with an estimated value of up to $140,000. CDOT’s Northwest Transportation Planning Region (NWTPR) recommends $450,000 be allocated for the balance of right-of way acquisition

December, 2012-The Colorado Transportation Commission approves the $450,000 in funding for the right-of-way acquisition.

April 9, 2013-Grand County Commissioners decide to submit an RAMP Pre-Application for the safety improvements on Highway 9 based on CDOT design.

April 14, 2013-Citizens for a Safer Highway 9 is formed led by lifelong Grand County resident Mike Ritschard and begins fund raising.

April 23, 2013-Blue Valley Ranch pledges $4 million towards RAMP if community can raise $4.3 million to complete necessary RAMP match.

May --, 2013-The Grand Foundation agrees with Grand County to receive and hold monies from donations and grants to be used for the SH9 Project.

June 25, 2013-Grand County Commissioners pledge $------- in county funds to RAMP application.

July 1, 2013-Final RAMP applications due.

September 19, 2013-CDOT will announce which RAMP projects will be built.