



2005 Market Street, Suite 2800 P 215.575.9050
Philadelphia, PA 19103-7077 F 215.575.4939

901 E Street NW, 10th Floor P 202.552.2000
Washington, DC 20004 F 202.552.2299
pewtrusts.org

Dear Chair Witt and members of the Natural Resources Committee:

The Pew Charitable Trusts appreciates the opportunity to submit this written testimony regarding House Bill 2834 “The Wildlife Corridor and Safe Road Crossing Act” as part of its hearing in the Committee on Natural Resources on March 14th, 2019.

The Pew Charitable Trusts is an independent non-profit, non-governmental organization whose mission is to serve the public interest by improving public policy, informing the public, and stimulating civic life. For more than twenty years, Pew’s public lands program has worked to identify and conserve important wildlife habitat and wilderness across the United States, partnering with community leaders, NGOs, and government officials to find balanced solutions to pressing land and wildlife conservation issues.

Recently, we have begun focusing our policy and outreach expertise on the phenomena of wildlife migrations, which is an emerging frontier in science with considerable opportunity for states to effectively link science with wildlife and transportation policy. Our interest at the moment falls mainly on the seasonal movement patterns of large ungulates such as mule deer, elk, and pronghorn. Oregon has robust populations of each of these species. With advances in research technology such as GPS-enabled collars, we are now learning – at a fine scale - how and where these animals travel between their summer and winter habitats, as well as how barriers such as highways and development can negatively affect their migratory corridors and survival.

The bill before you, HB 2834, will create a framework in which science and data can increasingly inform the state’s decisions related to both habitat conservation and transportation infrastructure designed to improve driver safety as well as safe passage for wildlife. Aside from the benefits the state will reap in terms of improved habitat and safer roads, the timing for this bill also coincides with a significant federal effort focused on identifying and conserving big game migration routes. Last year, the Secretary of Interior issued order 3362, “Improving Habitat Quality in Western Big-Game Winter Range and Migration Corridors.” The order directs Interior’s various agencies, such as the Bureau of Land Management, to work in collaboration with western states to identify and conserve migration corridors

and other crucial habitat. Considering that more than half of our state is public land managed by federal agencies, including much of our prime wildlife habitat, HB 2834 would position Oregon to take full advantage of the opportunity to work effectively with the Department of Interior and Federal Department of Transportation, which is currently considering ways that wildlife friendly infrastructure can be better addressed in federally supported transportation projects.

Like many places across the West, Oregon faces habitat fragmentation and loss due to development and road building. In addition, wildlife corridors that intersect roads create dangers to wildlife and motorists, including vehicle damage, injury, and even death. The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) recorded 7,000 wildlife-vehicle collisions per year, resulting in 700 people injured and two fatalities. These crashes caused \$44 million in vehicle damage. Furthermore, since 2000, the number of wildlife-vehicle collisions has been increasing while the overall number of crashes has gone down.

HB 2834 addresses both of these important issues—habitat fragmentation and safe passage for wildlife.

To address habitat fragmentation, the bill directs the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to collect and analyze the best available scientific data and to study habitat connectivity, including identifying which species are at risk from habitat fragmentation or barriers to movement. This type of baseline scientific assessment builds an important foundation for the state's ability to understand the ecological costs and benefits of potential projects that follow.

The bill also directs ODFW and ODOT to work together to develop a "Wildlife Corridor and Safe Road Crossing Action Plan" to provide guidance to state agencies toward designating and protecting wildlife corridors. Among other directives, the plan will include a list of priority wildlife corridors to be designated based on, among other things, the potential for reducing vehicle-wildlife collisions. The designation of these corridors, which can be amended as more data or insights become available, is an important step in clearly delineating the spatial extent of priority habitat and will be especially helpful for the state when it engages in federal land use planning processes.

Furthermore, the bill directs ODOT to adopt a program to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions. The program includes plans to create or modify road infrastructure to promote wildlife migration and dispersal and to increase safety for both wildlife and people. The bill also directs ODOT,

when conducting road projects that threaten wildlife connectivity, to identify wildlife corridors that may be threatened and include a mitigation plan in the environmental impact statement for the road project. We hope this guidance would also inform Oregon's State Transportation Improvement Plan, which is updated on a regular basis. This component of the bill ensures that the science and planning referenced above results in tangible benefits to both wildlife and people through the creation or modification of our transportation infrastructure. It will result in fewer collisions, fewer injuries, and healthier populations of wildlife that can more safely roam between seasonal habitats or disperse in search of new territory.

These measures, if passed and implemented, will increase the knowledge and understating of wildlife movements through scientific study, help address habitat fragmentation, and lead to more wildlife crossing structures, fencing, and underpasses, making Oregon's roads safer for people and wildlife. Maintaining Oregon's wildlife heritage, which this bill helps accomplish, is critical to our quality of life and economy. According to a Pew-commissioned study by Southwick and Associates, there were over 1.8 million hunting, fishing and wildlife-watching visits to Oregon's public land managed by the Bureau of Land Management in 2016. Those visits brought in \$622 million in sales, which translated into \$196 million in salaries and wages, \$27 million in state and local tax revenue, and contributed to 5,511 local jobs. Base our review of this legislation, The Pew Charitable Trusts supports HB 2834.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matt Skroch', with a stylized, cursive script.

Matt Skroch

Officer, The Pew Charitable Trusts

503-288-5044