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TO: HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

SUBJECT: SUPPORT OF HB 2834

THE WILDLIFE CORRIDOR AND SAFE ROAD CROSSING ACT

March 12, 2019

Dear Chair Witt and committee members,

I am writing to express strong support for HB 2834. It is critical that we address the need to strategically maintain and enhance connectivity across the landscape to promote and preserve the long-term viability of Oregon's wildlife and protect drivers from dangerous wildlife-vehicle collisions.

I have spent the last 12 years conducting research and monitoring of road impacts and effective mitigation for wildlife connectivity, working on the Lava Butte Wildlife Crossings Project in Bend as well as the Boeckman Road Wildlife Crossings Project in Wilsonville. I am a member of the Oregon Habitat Connectivity Consortium (including members from ODFW, ODOT, Defenders of Wildlife, USFS, USFWS, Burns Paiute Tribe, and Portland State University, among others), the Regional Connectivity Working Group (including members from Metro, Clean Water Services, Portland Parks and Recreation, Portland State University, ODOT, among others), and partner on the Oregon Connectivity Assessment and Mapping Project initiated by ODFW. I have presented at professional conferences and given guest lectures at over 40 events, including the International Conference on Ecology and Transportation, and the ODOT Environmental Conference.



With my experience on the topic of wildlife connectivity and, in particular, the issue of how roads and wildlife interact I would like to share a few key points that lend support to the effort and spirit put forth in HB 2834:

Road Impacts on Wildlife and Human Safety

- Roads can be a barrier to wildlife movement in multiple ways including:
 - A source of mortality through collisions and also
 - Behavioral responses as some wildlife will not even attempt to cross roads, particularly when traffic volumes are high.

- As noted on the HB 2834 fact sheet, wildlife-vehicle collisions cost over \$8 billion dollars in damages and result in over 200 deaths annually in the U.S. While these statistics are stark, they are likely an underestimation of the true cost for the following reasons:
 - Cases where a motorist swerved to miss an animal, resulting in human death, is not likely to be reported as an animal-vehicle collision.
 - Most animals that are hit but do not die immediately will die later, away from the road where they are not seen, increasing the cost resulting from reduced hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities.

Effectiveness of Wildlife Crossing Structures & Fencing

- Wildlife crossing structures, associated fencing to funnel wildlife to the structures, and the protection of habitats on either side of the road can increase safety of drivers and connect wildlife by:
 - Reducing human & wildlife mortality – The first two years monitoring of the Lava Butte wildlife crossings project demonstrated an 86% reduction in collisions in the first year and studies on elk crossings in Arizona resulted in 80% reduction. Studies over and over again, across the U.S. find greater than 55% reduction in collisions when crossings and supporting infrastructure are installed.



- Providing a safe passage option for wildlife, and over time, even promoting use by species with behavioral avoidance of roads
- Connecting wildlife populations, genetic and monitoring activities have demonstrated that wildlife populations can be connected through the construction and subsequent use of crossing structures.

HB2834 Supports Connectivity in Important Ways by:

- Providing guidance for collaboration for all state agencies to work together to protect and enhance connectivity and reduce conflicts such as collisions
- Generating the Wildlife Corridor and Safe Road Crossing Action Plan and associated content to also support collaboration and ensure updates of the best available information for Oregon connectivity
- Promote the implementation of mitigation strategies along road barriers by ODOT

While there are nuances that are important to consider when deciding where wildlife crossing structures and other collision mitigation techniques should be implemented, HB2834 is an important first step in state-wide consideration for wildlife movement and motorist safety.

Thank you sincerely for your time and consideration in this matter and please do not hesitate to contact me with questions or to engage further discussion.

Respectfully,

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