

Mallory Abel
Northwest Environmental Defense Center
malloryeabel@lclark.edu

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Representative Brad Witt, Chair
Representative Chris Gorsek, Vice Chair
Representative Cherrie Sprenger, Vice Chair
House Committee on Natural Resources
hnr.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov

Support for H.B. No. 2834, Relating to Wildlife Corridors

The Northwest Environmental Defense Center at Lewis and Clark Law School in Portland, Oregon is an independent non-profit that is committed to working with other private and non-profit organizations to protect the environment and natural resources of the Pacific Northwest. As a member of this organization, and as someone with a background in wildlife biology, I strongly support H.B. No. 2834 relating to wildlife corridors, which would require the Department of Fish and Wildlife to begin studying and developing methods for implementing wildlife corridors.

Wildlife conservation and restoration efforts are increasingly faced with the predicament of managing limited and isolated spaces. While protected areas such as national and state parks can serve as critical safe havens for wildlife, the connectivity of these areas is often strained or nonexistent, causing various complications for the protection of these species. When this occurs, protected spaces begin to serve as islands containing separate, increasingly vulnerable populations.

For example, the isolation of populations of species often weakens an individual population's genetic resilience to adverse events and environmental stressors. When this occurs, conservation efforts focusing on other factors are potentially futile for populations that are struggling as a direct result of isolation. I encountered this on my first job after receiving my bachelor's degree in Animal Behavior, Ecology, and Conservation from Canisius College. I worked for the U.S. Forest Service in California on a project studying Pacific fisher populations, and learned that the isolation of the two remaining populations was a primary issue. The population I studied in Sierra Nevada region of California was once connected to a second population that resides in Oregon and Northern California. After 15 years of data collection, my boss felt as if the populations would only grow weaker unless they were able to somehow reconnect.

Additionally, my colleagues conducting wildlife research have discovered additional concerns for migratory species. For example, migrating populations of elk have been shown to largely inherit the migration patterns of their mothers. Because of this, the destruction of migration pathways has much more permanent consequences than was previously thought. As someone who was raised on the East Coast, where there are no wild elk, Oregon's elk populations are truly special to me. In order to preserve these populations, their migratory paths will need to be considered, as well. I have also been exposed to a great deal of research on the detrimental effects of obstructions to salmon migrations on entire ecosystems.

The merits of this bill span beyond advancing wildlife conservation, however. The economic value of H.B. No. 2834, and its implications to the safety of motorists, are arguably equally significant. In my native state of (Upstate) New York, accidents involving deer are an almost constant occurrence. I personally cannot remember a time that I have driven on a New York State highway without seeing a deer carcass on the side of the road, and I know many people who have been involved in collisions with deer. These accidents are costly, and extremely dangerous to the motorists involved in them. The implementation of wildlife crossings in some areas of Canada and the United States have been shown to reduce these safety risks and associated costs.

In conclusion, connectivity of wildlife populations is crucial to the management and conservation of ecosystems. The scope of this issue is global. As other states in the United States develop a framework for implementing wildlife corridors, Oregon has an opportunity to serve as another innovator in this area, as well as in the area of highway motorist safety.

I ultimately chose to leave the field of wildlife research and attend law school with the hope of supporting legislation such as H.B. No. 2834. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mallory Abel". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Mallory Abel