



February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022

Honorable Chair Marsh and Members of the House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources  
900 Court St. NE  
Salem, OR 97301

**Re: House Bill 4130—Wildlife Road Crossing Infrastructure**

Dear Chair Marsh and Members of the House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources:

On behalf of Wildlands Network, we are grateful for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB 4130, the Wildlife Road Crossing Infrastructure Act. For thirty years, Wildlands Network has been a conservation leader specializing in restoring and protecting wildlife's ability to move across connected landscapes through science-based research and innovative policy. In 2019, our organization was active in developing and advocating for the passage of HB 2834, the Wildlife Corridor and Safe Road Crossing Act, which created the Oregon Wildlife Corridor Action Plan. Now, we are advocating for the passage of HB 4130, which will provide needed funding to implement that Oregon Wildlife Corridor Action Plan.

Funding the construction of wildlife crossings in Oregon is crucial to protecting both wildlife and Oregonians. Oregon drivers face the highest likelihood of experiencing a collision with wildlife of any of the west coast states. In 2020 alone, nearly 6,000 wildlife-vehicle collisions (WVCs) were reported by the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT), and it is estimated that this number is likely two times greater, given the number of collisions that go unreported.

In 2020, the cost of WVCs for Oregonians was estimated to be \$56.9 million. Those costs did not include the public resource value of an animal to the state, which can be as high as \$50,000 per animal for some species. In short, these collisions are traumatic, costly, and often dangerous, with ODOT reporting that between 2014 and 2018, wildlife collisions caused an average of 453 injuries and 2.2 deaths annually.

All that said, WVC prevention clearly results in both safety and savings. In many cases, these wildlife crossings eventually end up paying for themselves. For example, prior to the Lava Butte crossings being installed in Oregon, ODOT and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife estimated that an average of 1,000 collisions were reported annually in this area of Highway 97. Since installed, collisions in the area were reduced by 85%. With the average cost \$9,086 per deer collision, this wildlife crossing infrastructure potentially saves up to \$7,723,100 annually by preventing WVCs. The total cost of the project was \$18.9 million dollars, so the project paid for itself within three years. After paying for itself, the project will continue to save money for the entire expected lifespan of the crossing.

The time is now for Oregon to increase its investment in wildlife crossing infrastructure. With only five wildlife crossings, Oregon significantly lags behind other states in the region, but there



are many projects, such as those identified by the Oregon Action Team on Ungulate Migration, that are currently ready and in need of this funding. The robust investment that HB 4130 will provide will not only set Oregon on a path to catch up with our neighbors, it will also allow the state to take advantage of the \$350 million in matching federal dollars available through the new Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program created by the recently passed Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Additionally, Oregonians strongly support funding wildlife crossing infrastructure. Polling in 2020 found that 86% of Oregonians support additional crossing infrastructure and 75% support increased funding for such infrastructure. There is public support and momentum for increasing wildlife crossings, and HB 4130 will put Oregon in a position to become a leader in wildlife crossing development.

In addition to the human safety and economic benefits that additional wildlife crossing infrastructure will provide, these crossings are equally important for supporting Oregon's abundant wildlife and diverse ecosystems. Roads create significant barriers for wildlife, hampering the ability to locate water, food, shelter, and the ability to maintain genetically diverse wildlife populations. The inability for wildlife to travel to find mates can undermine long-term population viability. As the climate changes, wildlife will also require connected landscapes as they search for suitable habitat. Expanding bridges and culverts to accommodate aquatic and terrestrial passage also makes the state's infrastructure more resilient to extreme weather events, such as flooding, which will become a more common occurrence with climate change.

For a multitude of reasons, Oregon's mule deer population has declined up to 54% in recent years, with vehicle collisions certainly contributing to that decline. More wildlife crossings will help alleviate pressures that our mule deer populations are facing. Furthermore, wildlife crossings can help prevent threatened species such as the Pacific marten, found throughout coastal Oregon, from experiencing further losses, triggering an Endangered Species Act listing and placing increased regulatory burdens on landowners.

Finally, Wildlands Network strongly supports this \$5 million investment in wildlife crossings, but we acknowledge that more investments like this will be needed in the future to fully implement Oregon's Wildlife Corridor Action plan. As a result, we also support an increase in the general fund allocation provided by this bill, and hope that this bill is only the first step towards a fully-funding the Oregon Wildlife Corridor Action Plan.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue. Please feel free to reach out with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Zach Schwartz  
Oregon Program Manager  
Wildlands Network  
307-413-6481  
zachary@wildlandsnetwork.org