



Testimony of Oregon Wildlife Coalition on House Bill 4130 (Wildlife Crossings)
House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

February 1, 2022

Chair Marsh, Vice Chairs Hudson and Brock Smith, and Members of the Committee:

The Oregon Wildlife Coalition (OWC) is a coalition of nine wildlife conservation groups working proactively and collaboratively to advocate for policies that are science-based, humane, and reflect the state's conservation values.¹

OWC supports HB 4130, which would provide at least \$5 million to the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) for “projects that promote safe road crossings and connectivity for wildlife.” The requested amount represents a portion of the estimated cost of stakeholder-determined priority projects, which stands at around \$25 million.

Wildlife road crossings – typically in the form of bridges and tunnels from one side of the road to the other – are good for both wildlife and people. They help wildlife by giving animals a way to cross highways safely, without being hit by motor vehicles. They also connect wildlife habitat that might otherwise be disconnected, which promotes migration that is important to the survival of many species.

Wildlife road crossings are good for people because they reduce property damage and injuries resulting from vehicle collisions with large animals such as deer and elk. For example, a collision with a mule deer causes an average of \$9,000 in property damage, and an elk collision costs an average of \$24,000.

Oregon needs more funding for wildlife crossings. Oregon currently has only about five crossings, which is far fewer than several western states, including Colorado (69 crossings), Utah (50), California (50) and Nevada (23.) Meanwhile, according to information ODOT presented to an interim work group on this issue,² from 2016 through 2020, Oregon generally had more than 6,000 *reported* animal-vehicle collisions a year (the *actual* number is believed to be three times that). The vast majority are collisions with deer, but many other species were killed or injured as well, including elk (1,455 in 2020), antelope (47), bears (233), cougars (63) and many small

¹ The nine members of the coalition are Cascadia Wildlands, Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, Humane Voters Oregon, Humane Society of the United States, Oregon Wild, Portland Audubon, Western Environmental Law Center and WildEarth Guardians. Please see our [website](#) for more information.

² Two members of our coalition participated in the work group.

animals. In addition to the obvious impacts on wildlife, these collisions caused an estimated \$56 million in property damage alone each year.

Wildlife road crossings in Oregon and other states have been shown to be highly effective – reducing collisions in the vicinity by approximately 90 percent. They range in cost from \$250,000 to several million dollars each, but their effectiveness at reducing collisions and property damage means they can easily pay for themselves over the life of the project.

Additional funding for wildlife road crossings would also fit nicely with the Oregon Connectivity Assessment and Mapping Project (OCAMP), which is the product of legislation passed in 2019. OCAMP is “a multi-year, collaborative effort to analyze and map statewide wildlife habitat connectivity * * * for up to 60 species.” It will “highlight priority wildlife corridors for all species in Oregon,” which will be useful in part for “identifying areas where wildlife passage structures could best reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions.” ([OCAMP website.](#)) Thus, HB 4130 would be a first step toward meeting the infrastructure gaps and needs that OCAMP will inevitably identify.

Finally, a state funding source like HB 4130 will provide an opportunity for Oregon to access federal funds for the same purpose. The INVEST in America Act recently passed by Congress allocated \$350 million for wildlife connectivity structures to be spent by the states in the next five years. However, this resource, which will be grant-based, will require state matching funds in many instances. HB 4130 would therefore help Oregon access federal funds for constructing more wildlife road crossings.

Thank you for considering our comments.

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On behalf of the Oregon Wildlife Coalition:

