



February 9, 2023

Honorable Chair Helm and Members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Statement from Wildlands Network in support of HB 2999

Dear Chair Helm and Members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water:

My name is Colin Reynolds, and I am the Oregon Project Manager for Wildlands Network. As an organization invested in this effort to improve habitat connectivity since the first wildlife corridor bill was passed in 2019, we are pleased to support HB 2999. The bill would strengthen the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) wildlife-vehicle collision (WVC) reduction program and invest \$5 million in the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife's (ODFW) efforts to support wildlife mobility and habitat connectivity through an appropriation to the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund (OCRF).

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. Within Oregon, our organization was active in developing and advocating for the 2019 passage of HB 2834, which gave rise to Oregon's Wildlife Corridor Action Plan. More recently, in 2022, Wildlands Network advocated for the Oregon legislature to set aside \$7,000,000 into the Oregon Transportation Infrastructure Fund to fund projects that reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and improve habitat connectivity for wildlife.

In this current legislative session, we are advocating for passage of HB 2999, which would provide \$5 million for ODFW to carry out needed projects identified in its Oregon Connectivity Assessment and Mapping Project (OCAMP). These projects will decrease habitat fragmentation for iconic Oregon species and, in some cases, simultaneously reduce WVCs. Additionally, the bill would clarify ODOT's reporting requirements to the legislature for its WVC reduction program, which will ensure that Oregon has a clear implementation timeline and strategy for reducing WVCs and improving public safety on our roadways. Lastly, the funding made available by this bill could help leverage available federal grant dollars and empower agencies and organizations to submit proposals to the OCRF to carry out projects supporting wildlife mobility and habitat connectivity. HB 2999 builds upon years of collaborative, bipartisan, and public and private efforts to increase public safety on our roadways and restore habitat for wildlife. We ask that our lawmakers continue to support these efforts by passing HB 2999.

Now, more than ever, we need to rethink how our infrastructure can better serve people and wildlife. The U.S. Department of Transportation has estimated that motorists collide with over 1 million large animals each year, and for wildlife, the figures are much bleaker.ⁱ Each year in the U.S., roughly 365 million vertebrates (the equivalent of the entire U.S. human population) die from vehicle strikes.ⁱⁱ Beyond these deadly collisions, linear infrastructure like roads and fencing



fragment the landscape and create barriers to wildlife movement, threatening the long-term viability of many species by endangering their ability to maintain robust and genetically diverse populations and reducing their ability to adapt to climate change. The Oregon Conservation Strategy also identifies barriers to animal movement as a large-scale threat to many species, habitats, and people.ⁱⁱⁱ For example, habitat fragmentation in Oregon has contributed to mule deer population declines across most of the state's Wildlife Management Units and in some cases, the declines were over 50%.^{iv}

HB 2999 would directly address barriers to wildlife movement by giving ODFW the resources to pursue projects within the priority wildlife connectivity areas identified in OCAMP. Projects that encourage wildlife-friendly fencing, repair or expand culverts, and construct wildlife crossing infrastructure can help mitigate these barriers. In Oregon, we have already seen the beneficial results of properly-sited wildlife crossings. At an existing mule deer crossing under Hwy 97 at Lava Butte and South Century Drive, ODFW observed 29 other species using the crossing.^v Mule deer are one of the strategy species included in OCAMP,^{vi} so the projects that ODFW carries out with this funding have the potential to benefit Oregon's large, iconic game mammals and a whole host of other species that will simultaneously benefit from crossings and corridors for those larger mammals.

The projects also have the potential to reduce WVCs. In addition to the ecological benefits that wildlife crossing infrastructure and habitat connectivity projects provide, crossings are equally important for increasing public safety and reducing WVCs and their associated costs. Oregon drivers face the highest likelihood of colliding with wildlife on the road when compared to other west coast states.^{vii} Between 2014 and 2018, ODOT reported that WVCs caused an average of 453 injuries and 2.2 deaths annually.^{viii} In 2022, ODOT reported 4,874 WVCs involving deer, elk, antelope, bear, and cougar.^{ix} Unfortunately, this figure is likely much higher in reality, as multiple studies conclude that half or two-thirds of large mammal WVCs go unreported.^x Some of the newest research shows that WVC-related vehicle damage, medical expenses, and the lost hunting value of the deceased animal involved brings the average cost of a deer collision to \$16,967, and an elk collision is \$56,782.^{xi} After multiplying those costs by the total number of deer and elk collisions each year in Oregon, the total expense of WVCs with those two animals is **\$91.7 million**, and considering the actual figures are likely two to three times higher, the WVC issue within the state requires urgent attention.^{xii}

Luckily WVCs and the cost associated with them can be reduced through properly-sited wildlife crossing infrastructure with associated fencing. For example, the highway 97 crossings reduced WVCs in the area by more than 90%.^{xiii} Decreased collisions equate to decreased costs, and ODFW expects these crossings to pay for themselves in just 10 to 12 years.^{xiv} With the lifespan of a crossing estimated at 50 to 75 years, the project should continue to pay dividends well into the future.^{xv} Due to all these factors, ODFW called the crossing "an obvious win for both wildlife and the traveling public," and Wildlands Network could not agree more, which is why we are excited about HB 2999's \$5 million investment in the ODFW efforts to support wildlife mobility and habitat connectivity.^{xvi}

Providing state funds for this work is also incredibly timely, given the influx of federal dollars available for wildlife crossing and habitat connectivity projects that require non-federal matching



dollars. For example, the first year of grantees under the America the Beautiful grant challenge collectively received \$91 million to carry out habitat restoration projects,^{xvii} which included projects that reconnect wildlife corridors and large landscapes. ODFW was successful in securing one of these grants, leveraging an additional 2,787,700 in federal dollars for habitat restoration work in Jackson County, Oregon.^{xviii} This grant program is just one of at least 15 other federal grant programs stemming from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act that can help pay for habitat connectivity and wildlife crossing infrastructure projects.^{xix} Passing HB 2999 and providing an additional \$5 million for ODFW could allow the agency to apply to these grant programs and bring more federal dollars to Oregon.

Wildlands Network commends the legislature for its previous work addressing habitat fragmentation and WVCs, and we ask that it continue to support this work by passing HB 2999.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Colin Reynolds".

Colin Reynolds
Oregon Project Manager

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Erin Sito".

Erin Sito
U.S. Public Policy Director

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- ⁱ *Wildlife-Vehicle Collision Reduction Study: Report To Congress*, U.S. DEP'T OF TRANSP. (Aug. 2008), <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/research/safety/08034/08034.pdf> at 1 (“Based on the results of this study, there are an estimated one to two million collisions between cars and large animals every year in the United States.”).
- ⁱⁱ Joseph Stromberg, *6 things scientists have learned from studying roadkill*, VOX (Mar. 23, 2015), <https://www.vox.com/2015/3/23/8266571/roadkill-science> (“No researchers have done a thorough nationwide count, but very rough estimates are that around 365 million vertebrates are killed per year”).
- ⁱⁱⁱ See OREGON DEP’ART OF FISH & WILDLIFE, THE OREGON CONSERVATION STRATEGY: CHAPTER 2: KEY CONSERVATION ISSUES (57–67), <https://oregonconservationstrategy.org/media/2-Key-Conservation-Issues-12.30.16.pdf>.
- ^{iv} *Oregon Mule Deer Initiative: Five Year Summary 2015-2019*, OREGON DEP’ART OF FISH & WILDLIFE, https://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/hunting/big_game/mule_deer/docs/Oregon%20Mule%20Deer%20Initiative%2015-19%20July%202021.pdf at 18 (“Mule deer populations declined from 4% to 54% in 12 of 14 WMUs”).
- ^v *Strategy Spotlight: U.S. 97 Wildlife Crossing*, OREGON DEP’ART OF FISH & WILDLIFE, <https://oregonconservationstrategy.org/success-story/us-97-wildlife-crossing/> (last visited Jan. 31, 2023).
- ^{vi} See Species Selected for OCAMP. *The Oregon Connectivity Assessment & Mapping Project*, OREGON DEP’ART OF FISH & WILDLIFE, <https://oregonconservationstrategy.org/success-story/the-oregon-connectivity-assessment-and-mapping-project-ocamp/> (last visited Feb. 3, 2023).
- ^{vii} For 2022-2023 data estimating the likelihood of animal involved claim see *Simple Insights: How likely are you to have an animal collision?*, STATE FARM, <https://www.statefarm.com/simple-insights/auto-and-vehicles/how-likely-are-you-to-have-an-animal-collision#:~:text=New%20data%20shows%20U.S.%20drivers,State%20Farm%20AE%20annual%20analysis> (last visited Jan. 31, 2023) (California: 1 in 363; Washington 1 in 250; Oregon 1 in 165).
- ^{viii} SOUTHERN OREGON WILDLIFE CROSSING COALITION, <https://www.myowf.org/sowcc> (last visited Jan. 31, 2023); *Migration Season: What you need to know about deer and elk on Oregon roads*, THE CHRONICLE (Oct. 22, 2020), https://www.thechronicleonline.com/news/migration-season-what-you-need-to-know-about-deer-and-elk-on-oregon-roads/article_04f44fc0-03f2-11eb-abf7-3371a330919f.html.
- ^{ix} See OREGON DEP’ART OF TRANSP. 2022 WILDLIFE VEHICULAR COLLISION DATA.
- ^x For a snapshot of ODOT WVC data that includes a more animals see *Wildlife Corridors Background Brief*, LEGIS. POL’Y & RESH. OFFICE (July 16, 2021), <https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/lpro/Publications/Background-Brief-Wildlife-Corridor.pdf> (Table 1). For literature on unreported data see Tracy S. Lee, Kimberly Rondeau, Rob Schaufele, Anthony P. Cleavenger & Danah Duke, *Developing a correction factor to apply to animal-vehicle collision data for improved road mitigation measures*, 48 WILDLIFE RESH., <https://www.publish.csiro.au/wr/pdf/WR20090> at 506 (“Our study demonstrated that AVCs involving large mammals are underestimated; more animal carcasses were reported during walking surveys off the road than were reported during road surveys. These animal carcasses represent error sources in traditional AVC datasets generated by road surveys, because of injury bias. In our region of the Rocky Mountains, we suggest that a correction factor of 2.8 can be applied to road survey datasets to account for undetected road-kills.”); Marcel P. Huijser, & James S. Begley. *Large mammal-vehicle collision hot spot analyses, California, USA*. WESTERN TRANSPORTATION INSTITUTE (2019), https://westerntransportationinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/4W6693_Huijser-and-Begley-FINAL-Report-Caltrans-Statewide-20190913-reduced-image-size.pdf at 14 (“Furthermore, crash data typically represent only a fraction (14-50%) of the carcass data, even if both data sets relate to large mammals only... Finally, the carcass data are far from complete as well; animals that are not very visible from the road in the right-of-way may not be

removed and do not get recorded. Wounded animals that make it beyond the right-of-way fence before they die are also usually not recorded at all.”).

^{xi} To arrive at these numbers, Wildlands Network took data from the Huijser et al. study listed at the end of this endnote, adjusted for inflation the 2020 figures to Dec. 2022 using a Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index Inflation Calculator and then added in the penalty for the unlawful take of both a deer and an elk per the Oregon Revised Statutes. Marcel Huijser, et al. *Cost–Benefit Analyses of Mitigation Measures Along Highways for Large Animal Species: An Update and an Expansion of the 2009 Model* (Sept. 30, 2022), <https://scholarworks.montana.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1/17509/WTI-cost-benefit-2022.pdf?sequence=5> (Table 5).

^{xii} Per Wildlands Network calculations.

^{xiii} *Strategy Spotlight: U.S. 97 Wildlife Crossing*, OREGON DEP’T OF FISH & WILDLIFE, <https://oregonconservationstrategy.org/success-story/us-97-wildlife-crossing/> (last visited Jan. 31, 2023).

^{xiv} *Strategy Spotlight: U.S. 97 Wildlife Crossing*, OREGON DEP’T OF FISH & WILDLIFE, <https://oregonconservationstrategy.org/success-story/us-97-wildlife-crossing/> (last visited Jan. 31, 2023).

^{xv} *Strategy Spotlight: U.S. 97 Wildlife Crossing*, OREGON DEP’T OF FISH & WILDLIFE, <https://oregonconservationstrategy.org/success-story/us-97-wildlife-crossing/> (last visited Jan. 31, 2023).

^{xvi} *Strategy Spotlight: U.S. 97 Wildlife Crossing*, OREGON DEP’T OF FISH & WILDLIFE, <https://oregonconservationstrategy.org/success-story/us-97-wildlife-crossing/> (last visited Jan. 31, 2023).

^{xvii} *NFWF, Federal Agencies and Private Partners Announce \$91 Million in Grants from America the Beautiful Challenge*, NATIONAL FISH & WILDLIFE FOUND., <https://www.nfwf.org/media-center/press-releases/nfwf-federal-agencies-and-private-partners-announce-91-million-grants-america-beautiful-challenge> (last visited Feb. 3, 2023).

^{xviii} See Grant Amount “Reducing Threats to Imperiled Oak Savannah and Woodland Ecosystems in the Upper Rogue Watershed (OR).” *America the Beautiful Challenge: 2022 Grant Slate*, NATIONAL FISH & WILDLIFE FOUND., <https://www.nfwf.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/NFWF-ATBC-20221108-GS.pdf>.

^{xix} *Wildlife Infrastructure Funding Opportunities within the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act*, ARC SOLUTIONS, https://arc-solutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/IIJA-Wildlife-Infrastructure-Funding-Guide_FINAL.pdf (last visited Feb 3, 2023).