



To
House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
900 Court St NE
Salem, Oregon

02.07.2023

Sub: Testimony in support of HB 2999 (wildlife connectivity bill)

Chair Helm, Vice Chairs Hartman and Owens and Members of the Committee

The Oregon Wildlife Coalition submits this testimony in support of HB 2999. The coalition is made of the following wildlife conservation groups: Center for Biological Diversity, Portland Audubon, Oregon Wild, Cascadia Wildlands, Humane Society of the United States, Humane Voters Oregon, Defenders of Wildlife and Western Environmental Law Center.

Habitat loss and fragmentation – and the resulting connectivity loss – is one of the main threats to many species' ability to disperse, reproduce and find food. For many species in Oregon, our highways are one of the biggest challenges to their survival. Climate change impacts are further exacerbating the problem – our changing climate is impacting habitats, and changing the availability and seasonality of food sources, which makes it even more important for wildlife to be able to travel to find what they need.

As development and demographic pressures grow in Oregon, the state must balance development with conserving the natural resources. This includes ensuring there is sufficient connectivity of habitats by way of wildlife corridors and safe crossing areas. Wildlife species must be able to move around to find food, water, and shelter, to adapt to changing environments and the effects

of climate change, and reach breeding or overwintering areas. In Oregon, vehicle collisions kill threatened [Pacific marten](#), [gray wolves](#), and mule deer (the most commonly hit animal in the state) which have seen population declines of [up to 54%](#) in recent years.

In addition to the loss of an animal and the cost to species recovery, the financial cost of vehicle-wildlife collision is significant. Oregon has the [highest risk of wildlife crashes among west coast states](#). In 2022, ODOT recorded 4,874 wildlife-vehicle collisions involving large mammals, and multiple studies show that [nearly three times](#) more collisions likely go unreported. On the other hand, effectiveness of wildlife crossings is already documented in Oregon. In its first year, the Lava Butte wildlife underpass on Hwy 97 in Central Oregon was used by 29 different species and deer-vehicle collisions [were reduced by over 90%](#).

HB 2999 builds on the past efforts of the legislature in a really meaningful way to address the problem of loss of habitat connectivity. In past sessions we have supported and applauded the significant steps taken by the legislature – in 2019, the legislature approved a statewide mapping exercise by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and in last session, the legislature dedicated funds for prioritizing certain connectivity structures. HB 2999 is the next critical step in implementing the ODFW-prepared Oregon Connectivity and Mapping Project (OCAMP). The funding is necessary if we intend to use the information from OCAMP on-ground and effectively. The feasibility studies mentioned in the bill are critical to the Department of Transportation’s project planning and implementation and will also open doors to accessing federal funds.

Wildlife connectivity is an issue that brings a diverse group of stakeholders together, and draws unconventional allies because it is an issue Oregonians care about. The support and testimony for HB 2999 reflects that fact as well. It is a testament of our shared passion and determination to address this critical economic and ecological issue. We hope you share our passion in this.

Thanking you

Cascadia Wildlands

Oregon Wild

Center for Biological Diversity

Western Environmental Law Center

Humane Society of the United States

Humane Voters Oregon

Defenders of Wildlife

Portland Audubon