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February 9, 2023

Committee Chair Ken Helm  
Vice-Chairs Mark Owens and Annessa Hartman  
House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water  
900 Court St. NE  
Salem, Oregon 97301

**Re: Statement of The Pew Charitable Trusts in support of HB 2999**

Dear Chairman Helm and Vice Chairs Owens and Hartman:

The Pew Charitable Trusts' U.S. Public Lands and Rivers Conservation program is pleased to support your bill, HB 2999, relating to wildlife connectivity, with chief sponsors Representatives Pam Marsh, Mark Owens, Lisa Reynolds and Senators Chris Gorsek and Floyd Prozanski, with twelve additional co-sponsors. The bill would strengthen the Oregon Department of Transportation's (ODOT) wildlife-vehicle collision program and invest five million dollars in the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) work to improve wildlife connectivity, making our roads safer for people and wildlife while enhancing habitat for our state's native species.

Pew's public lands and rivers initiative seeks to conserve ecologically and culturally significant public landscapes by collaborating with local communities and businesses, Tribes, elected officials, and others to achieve balanced, commonsense solutions. The identification and protection of wildlife migration corridors is a key component of our work.

Emerging science and new technologies provide considerable opportunity for states to integrate wildlife conservation into transportation policy. With advances in research technology such as GPS-enabled collars, we now have detailed information on how and where these animals travel between summer and winter habitats, how barriers such as highways and development can negatively affect wildlife populations, and where infrastructure interventions can have the greatest benefit for both wildlife and people.

In 2022, the ODOT recorded over 4,874 wildlife-vehicle collisions, resulting in human injury and fatalities, and significantly impacting migrating populations of ungulates. Multiple studies show that the actual number of wildlife-vehicle collisions is nearly three times the reported number.<sup>1</sup> New research from September 2022 finds that vehicle damage, medical expenses, and lost hunting value bring the average cost of a deer collision to \$16,967 and an elk collision is \$56,782<sup>2</sup>. The cumulative cost of collisions with those two species alone on Oregon's roads totaled **\$91.7 million** in 2022.<sup>3</sup> Reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions is a win for motorists, wildlife, and local communities, making roads safer for people and allowing animals to safely traverse their migratory habitat.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.publish.csiro.au/wr/pdf/WR20090>

<sup>2</sup> [Huijser, M.P., J.W. Duffield, C. Neher, A.P. Clevenger & T. McGuire. 2022. Cost-benefit analyses of mitigation measures along highways for large animal species: An update and an expansion of the 2009 model: https://www.mphetc.com/files/ugd/9d46fb\\_b9852393a44d4148bd92feac37fc034e.pdf](https://www.mphetc.com/files/ugd/9d46fb_b9852393a44d4148bd92feac37fc034e.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> ODOT Wildlife Collision Data 2022

HB 2999 will build on the state legislature's \$7 million investment in wildlife crossings in 2022, allocating \$5 million to ODFW through the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund and directing ODOT to recommend an ongoing dedicated funding strategy for the construction of wildlife crossings and other interventions; examples include directional funnel fencing, which has reduced wildlife-vehicle collisions by 80-90% or more.

Oregon has a growing number of success stories already, such as a wildlife crossing underpass that was constructed along highway 97 near Lava Butte which has reduced wildlife-vehicle collisions by 85%. The recently completed wildlife crossing on highway 97 at Gilchrist—a project that Pew helped finance and that benefited from the legislature's previous allocation—is showing similar results.

Despite a higher rate of wildlife-vehicle collisions than other west coast states, based on an analysis by State Farm Insurance<sup>4</sup>, Oregon has fallen behind other western states in the construction of wildlife crossings. Oregon has five such structures, while Washington state has more than 30, Colorado has 69, Nevada has 23 for large mammals alone, Wyoming has 20, and Utah has 50. The investments by the 2022 legislature have yielded important results, bringing a crossing project on Hwy 97 to completion and advancing projects on I-5 near Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument and Hwy 20 on the Burns Paiute Tribe's land in Malheur.

In early 2022, The Oregon Action Team on Ungulate Migration—a statewide coalition comprised of sportsmen and women, conservation groups, and Tribal representatives—used ODOT and ODFW data to [develop a list of 12 project needs](#) around the state, totaling approximately \$25 million. HB 2999's investment, informed by state agency data on wildlife-vehicle collision hot spots and priority connectivity areas, will allow additional projects such as Hwy 20 in Deschutes County, I-84 near Meacham, Hwy 140 outside Klamath Falls, and Hwy 26 near Dayville to be advanced.

The costs of building wildlife crossings vary by site and other factors, with a range of \$250,000-\$600,000 for a large mammal underpass to a \$7 million price tag for a double span highway overpass. But with a proven 80-90% or more reduction in wildlife-vehicle collisions, case studies from Colorado and Wyoming show that the structures can pay for themselves over a short time. Furthermore, recent research shows wildlife crossing structures yield annual benefits of \$235,000 to \$443,000 dollars.<sup>5</sup>

These solutions are gaining attention at the national level and in departments of transportation across the country. For the first time, dedicated federal funds for a wildlife crossings grant program—\$350 million over five years—were included in the national infrastructure law enacted in 2021. To successfully compete for these resources, state matching dollars are critical; HB 2999 will help ensure that Oregon has these necessary match amounts to leverage federal funds, providing an even greater return on investment for Oregon taxpayers.

There is broad bipartisan support for wildlife crossings from voters across Oregon. A 2020 Pew-commissioned poll indicated that 86% of Oregonians favor the construction of more wildlife crossings on roads and highways; 75% of Oregon voters from across the political and geographic spectrum supported increased funding to build more wildlife crossings on roads and highways.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.statefarm.com/simple-insights/auto-and-vehicles/how-likely-are-you-to-have-an-animal-collision>

<sup>5</sup> [Impact of Wildlife Crossing Structures on Wildlife-Vehicle Collisions](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Pew: Oregonians Support Protecting Wildlife Migration Routes, New Poll Finds](#)

If enacted, the \$5 million appropriation provided by HB 2999, combined with the legislature's 2022 \$7 million wildlife crossing investment, will be a significant step toward increased state commitment to the reduction of wildlife vehicle collisions and improved wildlife habitat connectivity.

Thank you for your consideration of Pew's support for HB 2999. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me at [lwilliams3@pewtrusts.org](mailto:lwilliams3@pewtrusts.org), or 503-765-1141, should I be able to provide additional information.

Sincerely,

Laurel Williams  
Officer, U.S. Public Lands and Rivers Conservation  
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CC:

Members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water  
Representative Mark Gamba  
Representative Bobby Levy  
Representative Pam Marsh  
Representative Susan McLain  
Representative Anna Scharf