



## ROGUE VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

February 6, 2023

### **Re: Support for HB 2999**

Chair Representative Helm,

The Rogue Valley Audubon Society (RVAS) is a chapter of the National Audubon Society, with over 600 members in Jackson County. RVAS is a member of the Southern Oregon Wildlife Crossing Coalition (SOWCC), a diverse group of organizations advocating for wildlife crossings over and under Interstate 5 between Ashland and the California border.

RVAS and SOWCC strongly support HB 2999, which would fund wildlife crossing planning and construction in Oregon. Wildlife crossings have shown the ability to reduce collisions by as much as 90%, and a recent study from Washington State University estimated that each wildlife crossing can result in \$235,000 – \$443,000 in annual savings, when the substantial damages to people and their vehicles are considered. Strong bipartisan support in Oregon has produced important recent progress on wildlife road crossings and safe passage for people and wildlife. However, much remains to be done, and HB 2999 is an important step forward.

SOWCC is currently working with Oregon Department of Transportation's Region 3 staff on engineering design for two wildlife crossing overpasses on Interstate I-5 between Ashland and the California border. This stretch of freeway bisects the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument and cuts a wide path through the Siskiyou Crest. This is a critical linkage area where wildlife migrate east-to-west between Oregon and California's coastal mountains to the volcanic peaks of the Cascade mountain range. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Oregon Connectivity Assessment and Mapping (OCAMP) has identified this area as a Priority Wildlife Connectivity Area. Interstate 5 is a major impediment to wildlife in this area and the site of many ODOT-reported roadkills. Oregonians and others will all benefit from a safer I-5.

In November 2022, SOWCC completed a Conceptual Design Report that identifies two wildlife crossing overpass sites and 6 upgrades to existing culvert and bridge under-crossings on I-5 between mileposts 0 and 14. Our consultants and SOWCC worked closely with ODOT Region 3 staff to assure our recommended sites and designs matched ODOT's capabilities and expectations. ODOT has amended the State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) to include this project and has allocated \$1.5 million to engineering design in 2023.

In addition to supporting statewide wildlife crossing planning and construction, the funding in HB 2999 will be critical as a state match when ODOT applies to the new federal Wildlife Crossing Grant Program in the IJA infrastructure bill. We want to bring this money home to Oregon to help protect motorists and create safe wildlife passages on our highways.

Please move HB 2999 in this session of the Oregon Legislature.

Thank you,

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