



National Headquarters

1130 17th Street, N.W. | Washington, D.C. 20036-4604 | tel 202.682.9400 | fax 202.682.1331
www.defenders.org

February 6, 2024

House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re. Testimony in support of H.B. 4148 (Wildlife Package)

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

My name is Colin Reynolds. I am the Senior Advisor to the Northwest Program at Defenders of Wildlife (“Defenders”) and a resident of Oregon. Defenders is a national conservation organization dedicated to the protection of all native animals and plants in their natural communities, with over 48,000 members and supporters in Oregon. On behalf of Defenders, I am submitting the following comments in support of H.B. 4148. This bill would:

- 1) Expand Oregon’s capacity to combat wildlife disease.
- 2) Improve Oregon’s the Oregon Invasive Species Council’s ability to respond to invasive species.
- 3) Establish a program to promote wildlife stewardship and coexistence (“wildlife coexistence”).
- 4) Clarify existing statutory language and update relevant agency reports to ensure the safe passage of people and wildlife (“wildlife corridors”).

All four portions of the bill are important, and I would like to explain our support for the Wildlife Coexistence and Wildlife Corridors portion in greater detail.

Coexisting with wildlife is integral to Defenders’ mission to protect all native animals and plants in their natural communities, and we have been at the forefront of coexistence efforts for decades across the United States. This experience has taught us that properly designed, funded, and implemented community-based coexistence programs can work to reduce instances of human-wildlife conflict. Overall, we are excited at the prospect of the establishment of a Wildlife Coexistence Program at the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife and thank the bill drafters and sponsors for including this section in H.B. 4148.

An issue related to wildlife coexistence is efforts towards reducing the instances of wildlife-vehicle collisions on Oregon highways by constricting properly sited wildlife crossings and associated fencing. These measures are a cost-effective solution¹ that improves the safety of drivers and passengers on Oregon’s roads while also protecting Oregon’s wildlife. Defenders advocated for the passage of H.B. 2834 in 2019, which gave rise to the Wildlife Corridor Action Plan and the Oregon Department of Transportation (“ODOT”) wildlife-vehicle reduction program, and we support the passage of H.B. 4148. This bill would clarify ODOT’s reporting requirements and bolster the technical guidance available to planners and engineers integrating wildlife crossing features in highway projects. H.B. 4148’s language would improve an already impressive program, and we thank the bill drafters and sponsors for including this portion of the bill.

Defenders commends the legislature for its previous work addressing issues of wildlife coexistence, and we ask you to continue supporting this work by passing H.B. 4148.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

Colin Reynolds

Senior Advisor, Northwest Program
Defenders of Wildlife



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ⁱ Within the first year of the U.S. 97 wildlife crossing between Lava Butte and South Century drive south of Bend monitors observed a “more than 90 percent” reduction in deer vehicle collisions and ODOT expects “the upfront costs are expected to be recouped in 10 to 12 years, and from that point on, the project will continue in the green for decades to come.” *Strategy Spotlight: U.S. 97 Wildlife Crossing*, THE OREGON CONSERVATION STRATEGY, <https://oregonconservationstrategy.org/success-story/us-97-wildlife-crossing/>.