



February 6, 2024

Written support of HB 4148 to the Oregon House Agriculture, Lands, Natural Resources and Water Committee

Chair Helm and Committee Members,

As Co-Coordiators of the Southern Oregon Wildlife Crossing Coalition, we write in strong support of HB 4148.

The Oregon and Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (OVDL) plays a vital role in public health, responding to issues of serious concern for people and wildlife, including highly contagious bacterial disease, avian flu, and mosquito born illnesses. Yet, the OVDL remains in need of resources. Consistent with recommendations from the legislative report directed by HB 4128 (2022), HB 4148 allocates \$3.5 million for critical equipment and capacity necessary for the OVDL and the state Wildlife Health Lab to combat threats such as Chronic Wasting Disease and zoonotic diseases.

The Southern Oregon Wildlife Crossing Coalition consists of over 17 organizations and state and federal agencies representing a broad range of interests, including KS Wild, Oregon Hunters Association, The Soda Mountain Wilderness Council, and the Southern Oregon Land Conservancy.

In 2022, our Coalition successfully raised \$125,000 and hired a consultant to develop a Conceptual Design Study that identified two overpass locations and recommended six underpass upgrades for better wildlife crossings along Interstate 5 between Ashland and the California border.

We coordinated closely with ODOT Region 3 to assure our sites matched their requirements and recommendations. The report was finalized in November, 2022 and was submitted to ODOT Region 3 for engineering design. ODOT has added the Mariposa Preserve site, at milepost 1.7 on Interstate 5 to the Oregon Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) and allocated has \$1.5 million to our project from the Oregon Legislature's 2022 Wildlife Crossing \$7 million funding. We are grateful for your past allocations and support HB 4148's wildlife crossing policy changes.

In 2023, ODOT applied for the federal Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program grant for \$18 million for construction funding. Money from Oregon's new wildlife crossing fund was used for the local match, allowing the project to compete well nationally. Although this project was not funded this year, our debrief with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) was extremely positive. We learned our Oregon project was "highly recommended" for funding and FHWA asked that ODOT resubmit to the new 2024 grant expected to be announced in April of this year.

It is critically important that Oregon legislature keep the support for wildlife crossing moving forward. To this end, HB 4148 will further improve connectivity outcomes by bolstering technical guidance available to planners and engineers integrating wildlife crossing features in highway projects. The bill would also update relevant agency reports to ensure we have the information we need on projects, timelines, and funding.

Thank you for your consideration, and please reach out anytime with questions. We hope you will join in support of House Bill 4148.

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