



Re: HB 2978 Wildlife Crossings

Dear Co-Chairs Helm and Owens, Vice Chair Finger McDonald and Members of the Committee,

My name is Sally Compton, and I am the Director of Think Wild, a wildlife center based in Bend, Oregon. I am writing in strong support of HB 2978, a critical piece of legislation designed to improve wildlife connectivity and enhance both animal and human safety on our roads.

At Think Wild, we operate a wildlife hotline that responds to approximately 3,500 calls annually. Many of these calls involve animals that have been hit by vehicles—deer with compound fractures, owls trapped in car grills, and orphaned fox kits whose mothers were struck. These heartbreaking incidents are not isolated; they are daily occurrences that underscore the urgent need for systemic change.

Wildlife are drawn to roadways for various reasons. Deer often cross roads due to migration patterns or in search of food resources. Raptors, such as hawks and owls, have adapted to hunting along highways because roadkill and litter attract rodents, making them easy prey. This creates a positive feedback loop, as animals feeding on roadkill become vulnerable to being struck themselves.

The problem extends beyond the injured wildlife we attempt to save. Think Wild receives countless calls from community members about dead animals, including large deer, on private property—victims of vehicle collisions that managed to stagger away from the roadway before succumbing to their injuries. There is currently no public resource to assist with the removal of these large animals from private property. In response to this gap, my partner obtained a permit through ODFW to provide this service, now receiving around two calls every day solely for dead deer removal. No wonder statewide mule deer populations are in steep decline.

HB 2978 addresses these critical issues by fostering interagency collaboration between ODOT and ODFW, updating wildlife guidance materials, and establishing training programs to educate stakeholders on effective transportation solutions for wildlife connectivity. The bill's requirement for ODOT to consult with ODFW on mitigating wildlife impacts during infrastructure projects is essential for reducing these tragic and preventable incidents.

This is not just about wildlife; it's about public safety. Collisions with large animals like deer pose significant risks to drivers, leading to injuries, fatalities, and substantial property damage. Central Oregon's highways, particularly those cutting through mule deer migration corridors, are hotspots for these dangerous encounters.

I urge you to support HB 2978 to create safer roads for both Oregon's wildlife and its people.

Sally Compton, Executive Director of Think Wild