



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

February 5, 2025

Re: HB 2978 (Improvements to the Wildlife-Vehicle Collision Reduction Program)

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

This testimony is submitted by the Oregon Wildlife Coalition in support of HB 2978. Members of the Oregon Wildlife Coalition include Bird Alliance of Oregon, Cascadia Wildlands, Defenders of Wildlife, Humane Society of the United States, Humane Voters Oregon, Think Wild, Oregon Wild, Western Environmental Law Center, and Willamette Riverkeeper.

HB 2978 would improve Oregon's existing connectivity law by:

- 1) Requiring the Oregon Department of Transportation ("ODOT") to update its wildlife guidance materials and standards.
- 2) Establishing an ODOT training program, developed in coordination with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife ("ODFW"), on the efficacy of transportation solutions for wildlife and human safety.
- 3) Requiring ODOT to consult with ODFW to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts to wildlife corridors from the construction, improvement, operation and maintenance of transportation infrastructure.
- 4) Developing a list of priority projects to reduce collisions between wildlife and vehicles.
- 5) Requiring ODOT and ODFW to enter into a joint memorandum of understanding establishing an advisory group to spur collaboration and resource sharing amongst participants from federal, state and local governments, nonprofit organizations, and other community partners.

Habitat loss and fragmentation – and the resulting connectivity loss – are one of the main threats to many species' ability to disperse, reproduce, and find food. For many species in Oregon, our highways are one of the biggest challenges to their survival. Climate change impacts are further exacerbating the problem – our changing climate is impacting habitats and changing the availability and seasonality of food sources, which makes it even more important for wildlife to be able to travel to find what they need.

As development and demographic pressures grow in Oregon, the state must balance development with conserving natural resources. This balance includes ensuring there is sufficient habitat connectivity by way of wildlife corridors and safe crossing areas. Wildlife species must be able to move around to find food, water, and shelter, to adapt to changing environments and the effects of climate change and reach breeding or overwintering areas. In Oregon, WVC kill threatened [Pacific marten](#), [gray wolves](#), and [mule deer](#) (the most commonly hit animal in the state), which have seen population declines of up to 54% in recent years

In addition to the loss of an animal and the cost of species recovery, instances of wildlife-vehicle collisions (WVC) and their financial costs are significant. According to [ODOT](#), there are over 7,000 WVC collisions each year, resulting in over 500 “serious” human injuries and four human fatalities, [the highest among West Coast states](#). Unfortunately, the instances of WVC are likely much higher than reported, as multiple studies have shown that nearly three times more collisions are likely to go unreported.

Efforts to reduce instances of WVC and improve connectivity are very successful; [for example](#), in its first year, the Lava Butte wildlife underpass on Hwy 97 in Central Oregon was used by 29 different species, and instances of WVC involving deer were reduced by over 90%. Because of these successes, programs to improve wildlife connectivity and reduce instances of WVC are widely supported amongst diverse stakeholders and the public – a [2020 poll](#) commissioned by the Pew Charitable Trusts found that 86% of Oregon voters favor constructing more wildlife crossings.

HB 2978 builds upon past efforts of the legislature to address the problem of the loss of wildlife connectivity and the high rate of WVC and would improve Oregon’s existing WVC reduction program. We urge you to support HB 2978 and improve wildlife connectivity while making our roadways safer for drivers and wildlife.

*Bird Alliance of Oregon*

*Think Wild*

*Cascadia Wildlands*

*Oregon Wild*

*Defenders of Wildlife*

*Western Environmental Law Center*

*Humane Society of the United States*

*Willamette Riverkeeper*

*Humane Voters Oregon*