

March 4, 2025

Joint Transportation Committee
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Central Oregon LandWatch Testimony on HB 3362 and its -1 amendment – Support

Co-Chairs Gorsek and McLain, Co Vice Chairs Starr and Boshart Davis, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 3362. Central Oregon LandWatch (“LandWatch”) is an Oregon non-profit, public interest organization of more than 950 members. Its offices are located in Bend, Oregon. LandWatch’s mission is to defend and plan for Central Oregon’s livable future, and it has advocated for preserving natural resources in Central Oregon for over 30 years.

LandWatch strongly supports the passage of HB 3362 and its -1 amendment.

Each year, Oregon experiences more than 7,000 wildlife-vehicle collisions, leading to an average of four fatalities and 521 serious injuries. The financial costs are equally staggering. Recent research estimates that the combined vehicle damage, medical expenses, and loss of hunting value from deer collisions average \$18,186, while elk collisions cost an average of \$60,863. In total, deer-related collisions alone cost Oregonians approximately \$114 million annually, with elk collisions adding another \$26 million to that burden.

In Central Oregon, the 35-mile stretch of Highway 20 between Bend and Suttle Lake has the highest density of wildlife-vehicle collisions in the state, with an estimated 350-600 deer and elk killed each year by vehicle strikes. As traffic volumes increase, so do concerns for both public safety and the well-being of our region’s wildlife.

In response to this growing crisis, LandWatch, in partnership with state and federal agencies, tribal partners, private landowners, academic institutions, and nearly a dozen non-profits, launched the **Bend to Suttle Lake Wildlife Passage Initiative (B2S)** in 2022. The initiative aims to improve both motorist safety and wildlife passage along the 35-mile corridor of Highway 20 west of Bend. In the summer of 2024, the B2S coalition completed a feasibility study, identifying eleven potential locations for wildlife crossings. Of these, four sites were prioritized for construction, and the coalition is actively fundraising to make these crossings a reality.



While Oregon has made important strides in supporting wildlife connectivity and crossing projects, there is still a critical gap: the state lacks a dedicated funding source to implement comprehensive programs designed to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions.

In December 2024, Oregon secured \$33 million in federal Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program funding to construct the state's first wildlife overpass on I-5, just south of Ashland. This milestone was made possible by leveraging a little more than \$3 million in state funding allocated by the legislature in 2022. While this is a significant victory, much more support is needed to address the scale of the problem across the state, including on Highway 20 in Central Oregon.

HB 3362, the Tire Pollution Tax, offers a key solution. This funding would:

- Improve the safety of Oregon's roadways by reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions.
- Remove barriers to wildlife movement, allowing for safer passages across roadways.
- Increase Oregon's competitiveness in securing additional federal funding for wildlife crossings.

Moreover, HB 3362 addresses broader environmental concerns, including mitigating toxic runoff from tires that harm fish and wildlife in our rivers and streams. Additionally, it supports the development of rail infrastructure for both freight and passenger transportation, which is essential for Oregon's long-term mobility needs.

By reducing tire pollution, protecting wildlife, and advancing rail alternatives, HB 3362 aligns with Oregon's environmental goals, road safety initiatives, and transportation planning for the future.

For these reasons, LandWatch strongly supports the passage of HB 3362.

Sincerely,



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