



March 11, 2025

Honorable Co-Chairs Sen. Woods and Rep. Gomberg and Members of the Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Transportation and Economic Development
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Wildlands Network supports inclusion of the Oregon Department of Transportation's (ODOT) requested wildlife crossing infrastructure funding in SB 5541.

Dear Co-Chairs Woods and Gomberg and Members of the Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Transportation and Economic Development:

My name is David Ellenberger, and I am the Oregon Project Manager for Wildlands Network. As an organization heavily invested in efforts to improve ecological habitat connectivity since the first wildlife corridor bill was passed in 2019, we are pleased to provide comments for the public record that support the inclusion of a \$5 million annual appropriation for implementation of ODOT's wildlife-vehicle collision reduction program in SB 5541. In their July 2024 [Transportation Funding Needs](#) document, ODOT makes the case that in order to provide a proven solution to high rates of wildlife-vehicle collisions and the resulting injuries, fatalities and economic impacts of these crashes, that "[a]n investment of \$5 million per year would enable the construction of an additional 20 wildlife fencing and structure projects over the next 30 years." Our organization strongly supports this agency vision and firmly believes that this level of annual funding will provide the cornerstone to build upon Oregon's successful efforts in recent years to identify and safeguard wildlife movement corridors, establish life-saving wildlife crossing solutions over and under roads, attract federal dollars and improve road safety for the benefit of motorists and wildlife alike.

For thirty years, Wildlands Network has been a conservation leader specializing in restoring and protecting wildlife's ability to move across connected landscapes through science-based research and innovative policy. Within Oregon, our organization was active in developing and advocating for the 2019 passage of HB 2834, which gave rise to Oregon's Wildlife Corridor Action Plan (WCAP). More recently, in 2022, Wildlands Network advocated for the Oregon legislature to set aside \$7 million into the Oregon Transportation Infrastructure Fund to fund projects that reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and improve habitat connectivity for wildlife. We also supported HB 2999 and, eventually, HB 5030 in 2023, which provided \$5 million for the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund (OCRF) to support wildlife mobility and habitat connectivity within priority corridors identified in the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) Oregon Connectivity Assessment and Mapping Project (OCAMP) tool.

These projects will decrease habitat fragmentation for iconic Oregon species and, in many cases, simultaneously reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions (WVCs). The funding directed through both of the previous funding bills can also help leverage available federal grant dollars and empower agencies and organizations to submit proposals to carry out projects supporting wildlife mobility and habitat connectivity. To date, the Oregon Department of Transportation has already used a portion of the \$7 million appropriation from 2022, and will soon spend out the remainder in order to leverage \$33 million in federal grant funding to build Oregon’s first wildlife overpass on I-5 connecting the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument in Southern Oregon.

WVCs are a significant safety and economic issue in our state. More than 7,000 WVCs are reported annually in Oregon, causing an average of 4 deaths and 521 serious injuries. Because many collisions go unreported, scientific studies indicate that the actual annual crash average can be as much as nine times greater for medium to large size wildlife species. With these high rates of WVCs, which insurer [State Farm](#)¹ has found to be the highest on the west coast, the state incurs an economic impact of well-over \$100 million annually in property damage, medical bills, emergency response and other costs.

ODOT has made significant strides in recent years implementing a WVC reduction program with one-time funding measures passed in 2022 and 2023. However, the program has yet to secure robust or permanent annual funding making it fall behind most other states in the West in deploying life-saving wildlife crossing infrastructure. This led ODOT to feature its unfunded wildlife work in its July 2024 [Transportation Funding Needs](#)² document, stating that “[a]n investment of \$5 million per year would enable the construction of an additional 20 wildlife fencing and structure projects over the next 30 years.” These prospective wildlife crossing projects with associated fencing systems could reduce collisions by as much as 95%. This high-rate of accident prevention means that this infrastructure always pays for itself over time. For example, the upfront costs of Oregon’s crossing projects on U.S. 97 “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.”³

Along these lines, one recent study concluded that “although costly, properly sited wildlife crossings can pay for themselves where situated along highways that experience 1) an average of five or more collisions between motorists and deer per mile per year, 2) an average of two or more collisions with elk per mile per year, or 3) an average of one or more collisions with moose per mile per year. In those cases, in which the total economic costs associated with wildlife-vehicle collisions along a given highway segment exceed the

¹ <https://www.statefarm.com/simple-insights/auto-and-vehicles/how-likely-are-you-to-have-an-animal-collision>

² <https://www.oregon.gov/odot/About/Documents/Transportation%20Funding%20Needs.pdf>

³ Strategy Spotlight: U.S. 97 Wildlife Crossing, <https://oregonconservationstrategy.org/success-story/us-97-wildlife-crossing/>.

expense of building a structure that allows animals to safely cross the road, it **actually costs society less to solve the problem of WVCs than it costs to do nothing.**"⁴

For decades, the vast majority of Oregon's network of 79,045 miles of roadways (and 4,295 miles of national highways) were constructed with little, if any, thought given to wildlife needs or concerns. Including an annual funding appropriation within ODOT's biennial agency budget would turn the page on this unfortunate history by providing ODOT with sustainable annual funding to implement wildlife crossing solutions where they are needed most in the coming decades.

In the 2025 Legislative Session, lawmakers, led by Rep. Ken Helm, are advancing novel funding measures that could provide the "pay-for" backing for the inclusion of this key line-item in SB 5541. Our organization will continue to whole-heartedly support these measures as they advance through the session.

Wildlands Network commends the legislature for its previous work addressing wildlife conservation, habitat fragmentation and WVCs, and we ask that it continue moving this important work forward by including vital funding to support ODOT's wildlife-vehicle collision reduction program within the agency's budget in SB 5541.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,



David Ellenberger
Wildlands Network
Oregon Project Manager