

April 14, 2025

Chair Jeff Golden
Vice-Chair Todd Nash
Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Statement of The Pew Charitable Trusts in support of HB 2978-A

Dear Chair Golden and Vice-Chair Nash:

The Pew Charitable Trusts' (Pew) U.S. Conservation Program is pleased to support HB 2978-A, which would conserve wildlife and reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions. This bill will strengthen the Oregon Department of Transportation's (ODOT) wildlife-vehicle collision program while increasing critical coordination with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW).

Pew's U.S. Conservation program advances commonsense solutions that address the impacts of a changing environment on nature and communities, in collaboration with policymakers, Tribes, and stakeholders. The identification and protection of wildlife migration corridors is a key component of our work.

Emerging science and new technologies provide considerable opportunity for states to integrate wildlife conservation into transportation policy. With advances in research technology, such as GPS-enabled collars, we now have detailed information on how and where these animals travel between summer and winter habitats, how barriers such as highways and development can negatively affect wildlife populations, and where infrastructure interventions can have the greatest benefit for both wildlife and people.

According to ODOT, each year there are more than 7,000 wildlife-vehicle collisions in Oregon, resulting in human injury and fatalities and significantly impacting migrating populations of ungulates.¹ Research finds that vehicle damage, medical expenses, and lost hunting value bring the average cost of a deer collision to \$16,967 and an elk

¹ Transportation Funding Needs. Oregon Department of Transportation. July 2024. Available at "<https://www.oregon.gov/odot/About/Documents/Transportation%20Funding%20Needs.pdf>."

collision is \$56,782.² The cumulative cost of collisions with those two species alone on Oregon's roads totaled \$91.7 million in 2022.³ Reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions is a win for motorists, wildlife, and local communities, making roads safer for people and allowing animals to safely traverse their migratory habitat.

HB 2978 will build on the state legislature's previous investments in wildlife crossings in 2022 and 2023 through bolstering technical guidance for integrating wildlife crossing features into highway projects, increasing expertise of agency staff regarding wildlife crossings through creation of a training program, identifying priority wildlife crossing projects, and increasing collaboration between ODOT, ODFW, and interested stakeholders through the creation of an advisory group.

Oregon has a growing number of success stories already, such as several wildlife crossing underpasses that were constructed along Highway 97 between Mile Posts 149 and 155 near Lava Butte, which have significantly reduced wildlife-vehicle collisions and increased safe passage. The wildlife crossing on Highway 97 at Gilchrist—a project that Pew helped finance and that benefited from the legislature's previous allocation—is showing similar positive results. The investments by the 2022 and 2023 legislature have yielded important outcomes, bringing a crossing project on Highway 97 to completion and advancing projects on Interstate 5 near Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument and Highway 20 on the Burns Paiute Tribe's land in Malheur County. Along with these existing success stories, numerous additional projects are underway.

Despite a higher rate of wildlife-vehicle collisions than nearby states, based on an analysis by State Farm Insurance,⁴ Oregon has fallen behind other western states in the construction of wildlife crossings. As of 2022, Oregon has five such structures, while Washington state has more than 30, Colorado has 69, Nevada has 23 for large mammals alone, Wyoming has 20, and Utah has 50. The investments by the 2022 and 2023 legislature have yielded important and cost-effective results, yet more remains to be done.

These solutions are gaining attention at the national level and in state departments of transportation across the country. For the first time, dedicated federal funds for a

² Huijser, M.P., J.W. Duffield, C. Neher, A.P. Clevenger & T. McGuire. 2022. Cost-benefit analyses of migration measures along highways for large animal species: An update and an expansion of the 2009 model: https://www.mphetc.com/files/ugd/9d46fb_b9852393a44d4148bd92feac37fc034e.pdf

³ ODOT Wildlife Collision Data 2022

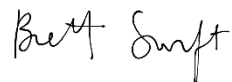
⁴ State Farm Insurance. September 24, 2024. Available at: <https://www.statefarm.com/simple-insights/auto-and-vehicles/how-likely-are-you-to-have-an-animal-collision>

Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program—\$350 million over five years—were included in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021. Moreover, there is broad bipartisan support for wildlife crossings from voters across Oregon. A 2020 Pew- commissioned poll indicated that 86% of Oregonians favor the construction of more wildlife crossings on roads and highways; 75% of Oregon voters from across the political and geographic spectrum supported increased funding to build more wildlife crossings on roads and highways.⁵

If enacted, the requirements in HB 2978 represent a significant step toward the reduction of wildlife-vehicle collisions and improved wildlife habitat connectivity.

Thank you for your consideration of Pew's support for HB 2978-A. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me at bswift@pewtrusts.org, or 971-344-5510, should you need additional information.

Sincerely,



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CC: Members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire
Senator Fred Girod
Senator Floyd Prozanski
Senator Kathleen Taylor

⁵ Migration Routes, New Poll Finds. The Pew Charitable Trusts. April 16, 2020. Available at <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/about/news-room/press-releases-and-statements/2020/04/16/pew-oregonians-support-protecting-wildlife-migration-routes-new-poll-finds>.