

Senate Committee On Natural Resources and Wildfire

Oregon State Capitol

900 Court St. NE

Salem, OR 97301

Re: Support of HB 2978A

Chair Golden, Vice-Chair Nash, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Tristan Henry, and I serve as the Oregon Field Representative for the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (TRCP). On behalf of our members; hunters, anglers, and conservationists across Oregon, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in strong support of House Bill 2978A. This forward-looking, science-based legislation will improve habitat connectivity and reduce wildlife–vehicle collisions, ensuring safe passage for both people and wildlife.

The TRCP is a nonprofit organization dedicated to guaranteeing all Americans quality places to hunt and fish. We work closely with hunters, anglers, Tribes, private landowners, and local communities to conserve Oregon’s natural heritage, particularly those critical habitats, migration corridors, and winter ranges that our wildlife depend upon. Our mission is rooted in the belief that healthy wildlife populations, connected habitats, and accessible outdoor recreation opportunities go hand in hand.

Habitat Fragmentation and Wildlife Collisions: Oregon’s iconic big-game species; elk, deer, pronghorn, and others, make seasonal migrations between winter range and summer habitat. Naturally, roads, highways, and development impinge upon these corridors, removing access between preferred ranges. The result is a high incidence of wildlife–vehicle collisions, diminished habitat quality, and unnecessary danger for motorists. Each year, the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) records roughly 7,000 wildlife–vehicle collisions in our state, causing around 700 injuries and tens of millions of dollars in property damage. These accidents are not only costly but also pose a serious public safety risk – they even result in a few human fatalities in Oregon every year. Nationwide, the scale of this problem is enormous: wildlife–vehicle collisions injure about 26,000 people annually and cost Americans over \$8 billion in medical and vehicle costs. As development and traffic increase, these conflicts will only worsen unless we take proactive steps to reconnect habitats.

HB 2978 addresses these challenges head-on by directing ODOT and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to identify, protect, and restore key wildlife corridors. It ensures our transportation and wildlife agencies work together to map out where animals are most at risk and to incorporate wildlife-friendly infrastructure including overpasses, underpasses, and strategic fencing in transportation infrastructure. By prioritizing known migration routes and winter ranges, this bill will help reconnect critical habitats while keeping motorists safe.

Investing in wildlife crossings is not just a conservation measure, it is an extremely cost-effective public safety strategy. Decades of experience from Western states show that well-placed wildlife crossing structures yield a strong return on investment through crash reduction and cost savings. For example, in Wyoming, a series of wildlife overpasses and underpasses on US 191 reduced wildlife–vehicle collisions by 81% within three years, effectively eliminating pronghorn collisions in that area. Similarly, here in Oregon, we have proof that these solutions work: after ODOT installed wildlife underpasses and fencing along U.S. Highway 97 near Bend, deer–vehicle collisions dropped by up to 90% on that section of highway. Trail cameras have documented broad utilization of these structures. These dramatic reductions in collisions translate directly into lives saved, injuries avoided, and significant economic savings for drivers and taxpayers.

These outcomes are not isolated anecdotes, and considering the cost of individual ungulate–vehicle collisions in the Northwest, the savings from crossings add up quickly. Over the typical lifespan of a crossing structure, the benefit-to-cost ratio can easily exceed 2:1 or even higher. Few other infrastructure investments can boast this level of return while also delivering clear ecological benefits.

Beyond the dollars and cents, HB 2978 will help sustain Oregon’s rich wildlife heritage. Protecting migration corridors and seasonal habitats ensures robust wildlife populations, which benefits all Oregonians who value our deer, elk, and other native species. When fewer animals are killed on roads, more remain in the wild to migrate, calve, and reproduce, keeping herds healthy and genetically diverse. For the hunting and fishing community, this is especially important: maintaining abundant game populations and intact habitats means world-class hunting opportunities and healthy fish and wildlife for future generations. Every big-game animal saved from a roadway collision is an animal that can continue to contribute to Oregon’s ecosystems and outdoor economy.

Likewise, safer migration pathways mean less stress on wildlife and better access to the food and habitat they need throughout the year. There is a tangible conservation gain here. As a wildlife biologist with the U.S. Geological Survey noted, when we have good data on

where animals migrate, we can work together to reduce barriers and conserve important migration habitats.

Importantly, the benefits extend to public safety for Oregon's travelers. Fewer collisions mean safer roads for families driving at night or commuters on their daily routes. It also means avoiding costly vehicle repairs and insurance claims. Reducing accidents has a ripple effect: it lowers the strain on emergency services and law enforcement and reduces highway closures due to accident clean-up. In short, investing in wildlife crossings and corridor restoration is a win-win: it makes our highways safer while bolstering the wildlife resources that are integral to our state's identity and recreation-based economy.

Another compelling reason to support HB 2978 is the opportunity to capitalize on new federal funding and build on recent momentum. In the past few years, wildlife connectivity has become a national priority. Congress created a dedicated Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program with \$350 million in the 2021 bipartisan infrastructure law, and multiple new or expanded federal grant programs (at least 15 by recent counts) are now available to states for wildlife corridor projects. Oregon is poised to lead in this arena.

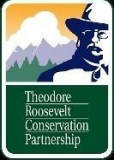
HB 2978 will build on this momentum by solidifying the state policy framework needed to unlock further federal grants and cost-sharing opportunities. Many federal programs require a 20% state funding match or evidence of state prioritization.

It is also worth noting that Oregon's public overwhelmingly supports taking action to prevent wildlife collisions and protect migration routes. In a recent statewide survey conducted by The Pew Charitable Trusts, 86% of Oregon voters said it's important to adopt policies that protect wildlife migration routes, and 86% specifically want to see more wildlife overpasses and underpasses along our roads. In the same poll, 75% of voters supported increasing funding to build these crossings, recognizing that upfront investments will save lives (human and otherwise) and money in the long run.

On behalf of the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership and our members in Oregon, I respectfully urge your support for HB 2978.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration of this important issue. We appreciate your commitment to conserving Oregon's wildlife and maintaining our outdoor way of life. HB 2978 is a forward-looking step that will keep Oregon's people and wildlife moving in the right direction.

Sincerely,



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