

## Support Funding for Wildlife Crossings

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*Letter to the Editor by Malcom Costello*

After years of driving between Portland and Bend, I've seen firsthand the dangers people and wildlife face on our roads — dead deer along the highway, sudden animal crossings in low light and long delays caused by animal-vehicle collisions. These incidents aren't just inconvenient; they're dangerous and tragic for both people and wildlife. There are over 7,000 documented deer or elk collisions a year, costing an estimated \$140 million. By contrast, the wildlife underpasses along Highway 97 south of Lava Butte have reduced such collisions by 90%. The lesson is simple: Wildlife crossings work. The problem isn't that deer cross our roads— it's that our roads cross their forests. It's our responsibility to build safe passage where highways cut through critical habitats.

And yet Oregon only has five such crossings statewide, far less than our neighbors — Idaho has 17 structures while both Washington and Nevada each have more than 20. Highway 20 from Bend to Suttle Lake, a road many of us drive during dusk, has been identified as a key wildlife corridor that would benefit from such crossings. The state legislature is considering how to secure dedicated funding for wildlife crossings in Oregon. Please urge Rep. Levy, Rep. Kropf, and Sen. Broadman, or your local representative/senator, to make this a priority for improving road safety and removing barriers for wildlife.

*- Malcom Costello*

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