

Wildlife Crossings Protect Humans, Too

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Letter to the Editor by Marshal Moser

As a “professional” outdoorsman, hunter, fisherman, mushroomer, etc., I have been blessed to mix my love of the land with work over five decades alongside private landowners, conservation organizations, cities, counties, up to and including Tribes, state and federal natural resource agencies.

That included working on a huge variety of plants and animals such as mule deer, sage grouse, to beaver and fish in our rivers and lakes.

Oregon has a beautiful abundance of many creatures. That’s why I moved here some 17 years before I “retired.” I’ve seen first-hand how healthy ecosystems are vital to our way of life in Klamath County. That’s why I urge the Oregon Legislature to prioritize funding for wildlife crossings in its upcoming transportation package, as covered in your March 4, 2025 article.

Our region’s highways — including Highway 97 between Chiloquin and Klamath Falls — are not just busy corridors for vehicles, but they also cut through critical wildlife movement areas and habitats. Every year, collisions between vehicles and animals like mule deer, elk, and pronghorn pose serious risks to drivers and take a toll on our wildlife populations.

In fact, in 2022 alone, the Oregon Department of Transportation recorded 4,874 wildlife-vehicle collisions, which cost human as well as animal lives and money. Other research has found that vehicle damage, medical expenses, and lost hunting value impose an average cost of \$16,967 for a deer collision and \$56,782 for an elk collision. The cumulative cost for those two species alone on Oregon’s roads totaled \$91.7 million in 2022.

Investing in wildlife crossings is a practical solution that

would reduce these accidents, protect our natural beauty, and save Oregonian lives and money.

Speaking more technically, but hopefully understandably, wildlife crossings help reduce “habitat fragmentation” of wildlife populations and provide safer “connectivity” so that populations do not become inbred and genetically weakened (as even notoriously happens in human populations such as hemophilia in the royalty of Europe). Even easier to understand is the enhancement of animal movements, including migrations, and repopulation after forest fires, diseases, etc.

Wildlife crossings have proven highly effective in Oregon, drastically reducing collisions and improving public safety. Oregon’s Lava Butte underpass near Bend reduced wildlife-vehicle collisions by more than 85%. These structures also help animals safely migrate to access food, water, and habitats, ensuring healthier populations. For those of us who enjoy and rely on healthy fish runs and thriving wildlife, these crossings are an investment in Oregon’s outdoor economy, cultural traditions, and our rural way of life.

This month, members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means will be in Klamath Falls hearing from us about how we want our elected officials, like Rep. E. Werner Reschke and Sen. Diane Linthicum, to allocate our hard-earned tax dollars. I plan to encourage them to put annual funding toward building wildlife crossings, and I hope you will join me. Drivers and wildlife alike need meaningful funding to make these crossings a reality. It’s a win-win for people, wildlife, and Oregon’s economy.

*Marshal Moser,
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Chiloquin*