

Submitter: Sheri Smith
On Behalf Of: HB 2025 Sections 111
Committee: Joint Committee On Transportation Reinvestment
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2025
Co-Chairs Gorsek and McLain, Co-Vice Chairs Starr and Boshart Davis, and
Members of the Committee,

Please please please support HB 2025 Sections 111 and 117, which establish the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) Wildlife-Vehicle Collision Reduction Fund at an annual rate of \$10 million per biennium.

Habitat loss and fragmentation are making it harder for wildlife to migrate and disperse to where they need to go to survive. For many species in Oregon, our highways are one of the biggest challenges to their survival. Many of our roads block wildlife from accessing fresh water. As the seasons get hotter and hotter it's cruel to make it so hard for wildlife to access water. Many vulnerable wildlife species are killed in vehicle collisions every year on our roadways. This includes charismatic, vulnerable species like Pacific marten and wolves. I've even seen bobcats and fox killed on highways. Important game species such as the mule deer and elk are at risk. In fact mule deer are the most commonly hit animal in Oregon and its population has declined by over 50% in recent years. As a teen my friend hit a mother mule deer. He called me crying and asking for me to come help. When I arrived we could see the beautiful and terrified baby faun and tried to help them but they ran off into the brush alone. I'm still haunted by the image.

Wildlife-vehicle collisions also take a costly sometime fatal toll on people. According to ODOT, there are over 7,000 collisions per year resulting in over 500 serious human injuries and four fatalities. This is the highest rate among West Coast states. Millions of dollars of damage are incurred every year from such collisions. The good news is that we know that wildlife crossings work. The Lava Butte underpass on HWY 97 in central Oregon has reduced deer collisions by over 90% since construction. That's incredible!! It will save millions of dollars over the coming years and so many lives, humans and animals alike.

HB 2025 Sections 111 and 117 build upon past efforts of the Legislature to address the problem of the loss of wildlife connectivity and the high rate of wildlife-vehicle collisions by establishing and sustainably funding the "Wildlife-Vehicle Collision Reduction Fund." This would be a significant step in addressing the safety and environmental consequences of habitat fragmentation caused by roadways and would position Oregon alongside Utah as the only state with annual funding for wildlife crossings.

Oregon is famous for its wilderness and wildlife. Please strongly consider supporting this and set a precedent for many more states to follow.

Sincerely,

Sheri Smith