

ARGUS OBSERVER

From the mailbag: Wildlife crossings benefit hunters, motorists

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Letter to the Editor by Karl Findling

I was delighted to read Antonio Sunseri's article about the state legislature passing a bill that would make it easier to build wildlife crossings. As a hunter and small business owner, the health of our wildlife populations has a direct impact on my business.

While HB 2978 is a critical step forward in preserving our wildlife populations, what our state needs now more than ever is more wildlife crossings. And the only way to add more crossings is to ensure that we have the necessary funds to build them.

That is why I was even more delighted to learn that the Transportation Reinvestment Package or TRIP allocates funding toward building these critical structures. Oregon lags behind all western states like Alaska, Washington, Nevada and Utah that have dozens, while Colorado has added dozens in just the last decade.

Wildlife-vehicle collisions significantly impact the state's big game, such as mule deer, elk, and pronghorn antelope. In fact, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife estimates that 14.5 million animals are killed on Oregon's

roads each year. Specifically, since 2016, Oregon has lost 63,000 mule deer, or nearly a 30% reduction statewide.

As every hunter knows, migratory wildlife move seasonally, and highways are a significant barrier restricting these essential movements. Without wildlife crossing solutions, Oregon's 79,045 miles of roadways will continue to affect wildlife populations due to wildlife-vehicle collisions.

Thankfully, wildlife crossings are an effective proven solution and they pay for themselves over a relatively short period of time. Take for example Oregon's Lava Butte underpass near Bend: It reduced wildlife-vehicle collisions by more than 85 percent.

I urge our state representatives and senators to allocate funding to build wildlife crossings. Future generations of Oregonians, and hunters will thank you for it.

Karl J. Findling

Owner, Oregon Pack Works, Bend.

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