

Wildlife crossing bill passes Ore. Senate

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SALEM — Wildlife crossings — overpasses and underpasses that allow animals to safely cross roads and highways — have been shown to dramatically reduce dangerous and costly wildlife-vehicle collisions by as much as 90 percent, according to a news release from The Pew Charitable Trusts.

Each year, there are over 7,000 wildlife-vehicle collisions in the state. A recent insurance analysis found that Oregon has the highest likelihood of wildlife crashes among west coast states.

On April 30, [HB 2978](#) passed the Oregon Senate, 24-3. Sen. Mike McLane, R-Powell Butte, voted yes on the bill and Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, was among the regular sponsors.

The bill passed the house 53-3 on March 31.

“These roadway safety projects are a win-win for people and wildlife,” said Sen. Chris Gorsek, D-Gresham, a chief sponsor. “Safe transportation options and integrity of surrounding environments are both essential to a sustainable transportation system.”

According to the news release, the measure will conserve wildlife and reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions by strengthening the Oregon Department of Transportation’s wildlife-vehicle collision program while increasing critical coordination between ODOT and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

HB 2978 establishes a training program to boost agency expertise and identifies priority project areas. It does not provide funding for the structures.

Oregon’s Lava Butte underpass near Bend reduced wildlife-vehicle collisions by more than 85 percent. They

are also an effective and a good investment, yielding annual benefits of \$250,000 to \$443,000 per structure.

“It is critical that we take the next step of adequately funding Oregon’s collision reduction program,” said Rep. Ken Helm, D-Beaverton, a chief sponsor of the bill. “These projects are both popular and effective at preventing harm, while also saving money over time.”

ODFW estimates that 14.5 million animals are killed on Oregon’s roads each year.

“This bill is about possibilities. It opens the door to a visionary approach to protecting our wildlife,” added Rep. Kevin Mannix, R-Keizer.

“HB 2978 is about using common sense and science-based planning to make our roads safer,” said Rep. Bobby Levy, R-Echo. “I’m proud to keep working on solutions that respect both our communities and the wildlife we live alongside.”

“The legislation will build on and improve the Oregon Department of Transportation’s existing wildlife-vehicle collision program, which was adopted in 2019, by identifying priority wildlife crossing projects and creating an advisory group to increase collaboration among state agencies and interested stakeholders. Pew thanks the Oregon Legislature for passing this important measure and looks forward to Gov. Tina Kotek signing the bill into law,” said Brett Swift, senior manager, U.S. Conservation project, The Pew Charitable Trusts.

Wildlife-vehicle collision hotspots have been identified in numerous locations across the state, including along U.S. Highway 20 near Juntura.