

Submitter: Shadrach Wood

On Behalf Of:

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 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 vulnerable wildlife species are killed in vehicle collisions every year on our roadways. This includes charismatic species like Pacific marten and wolves, but they are not the only ones affected. Small animals and insects are also killed in volume by vehicles traversing our highways. You may recall growing up and going on road trips with your family; think about how long it's been since the front end of your vehicle was splattered with dead bugs. Not to be glib, but they have not gotten smarter or better able to avoid vehicle traffic. Wildlife crossings would provide a way for them to survive our highway system. Important game species such as the mule deer are also impacted; mule deer are the most commonly hit animal in Oregon and its population has declined by over 50% in recent years.

Wildlife-vehicle collisions also take a costly 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. Data confirm that wildlife crossings work. The Lava Butte underpass on HWY 97 in central Oregon has reduced deer collisions by over 90% since construction.

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. That said, there are other states such as Montana that do not provide regular funding but still have wildlife crossing programs that are effective. There is federal support for the project as well - the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law of 2021 includes the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program (WCPP) which provides funding

for projects such as this.

I urge you to strongly consider this request. We owe ourselves and our descendants the natural beauty for which Oregon is well known but it will not survive without human help. Preserving wildlife is integral to preserving our wild spaces. Please help protect our wildlife from harmful human activity.