June 12, 2025

Honorable Co-Chairs Sen. Gorsek and Rep. McLain and Members of the Joint Committee On Transportation Reinvestment.
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Support for Wildlife Crossing funding in House Bill 2025.

Honorable Co-Chairs Sen. Gorsek and Rep. McLain and Members of the Joint Committee On Transportation:

Wildlands Network submits this testimony in support of the $10 million biennially included in House Bill 2025 for the Oregon Department of Transportation to carry out its wildlife-vehicle collision reduction program. Our organization has been heavily invested in legislative efforts to improve ecological habitat connectivity since Oregon's first wildlife corridor bill was passed in 2019. We now applaud this committee's decision to include funding for wildlife crossing infrastructure in HB 2025, and urge you to ensure that the Wildlife-Vehicle Collision Reduction Fund and associated $10 million biennial appropriation remains in the final version of the bill.

This funding is sorely needed to improve public safety in Oregon. In their July 2024 Transportation Funding Needs document, ODOT determined that "[a]n investment of $5 million per year would enable the construction of an additional 20 wildlife fencing and structure projects over the next 30 years."[1] This investment would fund a proven solution to high rates of wildlife-vehicle collisions and mitigate the resulting injuries, fatalities, and economic impacts of these crashes. Our organization strongly supports this agency vision and firmly believes that this funding will provide the cornerstone to build upon Oregon's successful efforts to identify and safeguard wildlife movement corridors, establish life-saving wildlife crossing solutions over and under roads, attract federal dollars, and improve road safety for the benefit of motorists and wildlife alike.

For thirty years, Wildlands Network has been a conservation leader specializing in restoring and protecting wildlife's ability to move across connected landscapes through science-based research and innovative policy. Within Oregon, our organization was active in developing and advocating for the 2019 passage of HB 2834, which gave rise to Oregon's Wildlife Corridor Action Plan (WCAP). More recently, in 2022, Wildlands Network advocated for the Oregon legislature to set aside $7 million into the Oregon Transportation Infrastructure Fund to fund projects that reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and improve habitat connectivity for wildlife.

[1] Or. Dep't of Transp., *Transportation Funding Needs*, Or. 13 (July 2024), https://www.oregon.gov/odot/About/Documents/Transportation%20Funding%20Needs.pdf.

We also supported HB 2999 and, eventually, HB 5030 in 2023, which provided $5 million for the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund (OCRF) to support wildlife mobility and habitat connectivity within priority corridors identified in the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) Oregon Connectivity Assessment and Mapping Project (OCAMP) tool. These projects will decrease habitat fragmentation for iconic Oregon species and, in many cases, simultaneously reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions (WVCs).

WVCs are a significant safety and economic issue in Oregon. More than 7,000 WVCs are reported annually in the state, causing an average of 4 deaths and 521 serious injuries.[2] Scientific studies indicate that because many collisions go unreported, the actual number of annual crashes may be as many as nine-times greater for medium to large size wildlife species. Insurer State Farm has found that Oregon's rates of WVCs are the highest on the West Coast.[3] This causes the state to incur an estimated cost of over $132 million annually in property damage, medical bills, emergency response, lost wildlife value, and other costs.[4]

ODOT has been able to achieve some wildlife crossing successes in recent years with the one-time funding measures previously passed in 2022 and 2023. Most notably, in 2024, it was able to receive the largest federal Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program grant awarded to date ($33 million), utilizing some of that one-time funding as required state matching dollars. However, the program has yet to secure permanent annual funding needed to advance wildlife crossing construction, causing Oregon to fall behind most other Western States in deploying life-saving wildlife crossing infrastructure. ODOT has confirmed as much, highlighting the lack of consistent funding for wildlife crossing infrastructure in its July 2024 Transportation Funding Needs document.[5] They determined that 20 additional wildlife crossing infrastructure projects could be constructed over the next 30 years with a $5 million per year investment.

These identified projects could reduce WVCs by over 90%, and pay for themselves over time due to their high rate of accident prevention. For example, the upfront costs of Oregon's crossing projects on U.S. 97 "are expected to be recouped in 10 to 12 years, and from that point on, the project will continue in the green for decades to come."[6] Along these lines, one recent study concluded that "although costly, properly sited wildlife crossings can pay for themselves where situated along highways that experience 1) an average of five or more collisions between motorists and deer per mile per year, 2) an average of two or more collisions with elk per mile

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[2] *Id.*
[3] State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co., *How Likely Are You to Have an Animal Collision?*, State Farm (Sept. 24, 2024), https://www.statefarm.com/simple-insights/auto-and-vehicles/how-likely-are-you-to-have-an-animal-collision.
[4] Kylie Paul et al., *West-Wide Study to Identify Important Highway Locations for Wildlife Crossings*, Ctr. for Large Landscape Conservation 33 (June 2, 2023), https://largelandscapes.org/wp-content/uploads/West-Wide-Study-to-Identify-Important-Highway-Locations-for-Wildlife-Crossings_web.pdf. (Economic impact adjusted to 2025 U.S. dollars).
[5] Or. Dep't of Transp., *supra* note 1.
[6] Or. Dep't. Of Fish and Wildlife, *Strategy Spotlight: U.S. 97 Wildlife Crossing*, Or. Conservation Strategy, https://oregonconservationstrategy.org/success-story/us-97-wildlife-crossing/ (last visited June 11, 2025).

per year, or 3) an average of one or more collisions with moose per mile per year. In those cases, in which the total economic costs associated with wildlife-vehicle collisions along a given highway segment exceed the expense of building a structure that allows animals to safely cross the road, **it actually costs society less to solve the problem of WVCs than it costs to do nothing**."[7]

Wildlands Network commends the legislature for its previous work addressing wildlife conservation, habitat fragmentation, and WVCs. For decades, the vast majority of Oregon's 79,045 mile network of roadways and 4,295 miles of national highways were constructed with little, if any, thought given to wildlife needs or concerns. Establishing the Wildlife-Vehicle Collision Reduction Fund and including an annual $10 million biennial appropriation to the fund would turn the page on this unfortunate history by providing ODOT with sustainable annual funding to implement wildlife crossing solutions where they are needed most in the coming decades. We also commend the legislature, agencies, and advocates for all of the thought put into considering potential funding mechanisms over the past several years to ensure that this funding does not take away from existing needs within ODOT's budget. Wildlands Network supports the funding mechanism described in this bill for these projects and appreciates that ODOT's existing transportation budget would not be reduced.

We ask that the legislature continue moving this important work forward by passing HB 2025 to create and provide crucial funding for the Wildlife-Vehicle Collision Reduction Fund. Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

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Wildlands Network

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Wildlands Network

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[7] Center for Large Landscape Conservation, *Reducing Wildlife Vehicle Collisions by Building Crossings: 2 General Information, Cost Effectiveness, and Case Studies from the U.S.*, The Pew Charitable Tr. 1, https://www.pew.org/-/media/assets/2020/02/reducing-wildlife-vehicle-collisions-by-building-crossingscllcpew-005.pdf (last visited June 11, 2025).