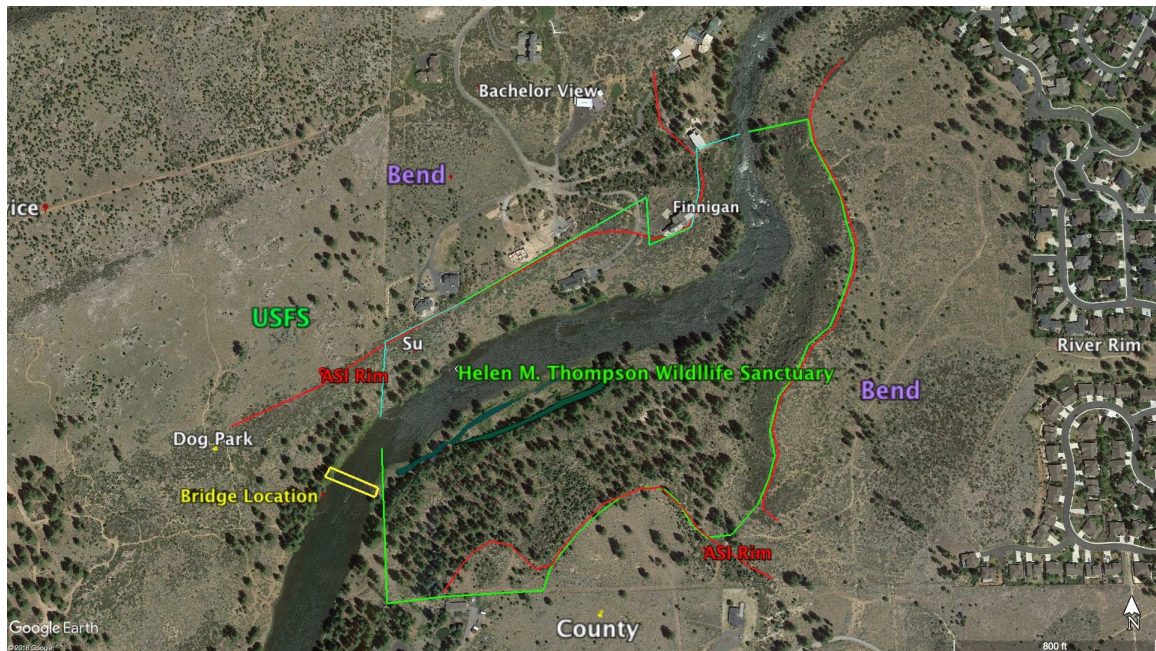


Testimony of Stephen E. Thompson, PhD, with Photos
Helen M. Thompson Wildlife Sanctuary, Bend, OR

Dear Chairman Clem, Vice-Chairs McLain and Sprenger and members of the Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources,

My name is Stephen Thompson and I am the manager of the Helen M. Thompson Wildlife Sanctuary in Bend, Deschutes County, Oregon. I have a PhD in Animal Behavior and Ecology with an emphasis in Wildlife Management and served for eight years on the Deschutes County Planning Commission. I am writing in support of HB 4029. The Sanctuary is immediately downstream from the site of a proposed bridge by the Bend Parks and Recreation District.



The Thompson Wildlife Sanctuary was established in 1972, spearheaded by my mother, Helen M. Thompson, one of Oregon's leading conservationists. It includes 45 acres of prime wildlife habitat on both sides of the Deschutes River and coincides with the City's Area of Special Interest, where the primary goal is identified as wildlife habitat. It received the endorsement of the State Department of Fish and Wildlife, Deschutes County, and the City of Bend during its formation. In the absence of our ownership, there would have been as many as fifty houses up and down both sides of the river here.

The Sanctuary contains wetlands and soft banks on both sides of the river with islands in the middle, ideal habitat for many target species. The following photos were all taken on the Sanctuary, except the last one.



View from bridge site downstream

The river is wide and shallow and is entirely covered year round with a moderate water flow. The Sanctuary and adjoining properties represent one of the only stretches of river from Sunriver through Bend without a heavily traveled public trail along the river and its resulting disruption of wildlife.



Thompson Wildlife Sanctuary view

Since it includes both sides of the river, the Sanctuary provides a rare opportunity for riparian species to follow their natural rhythms and activities.

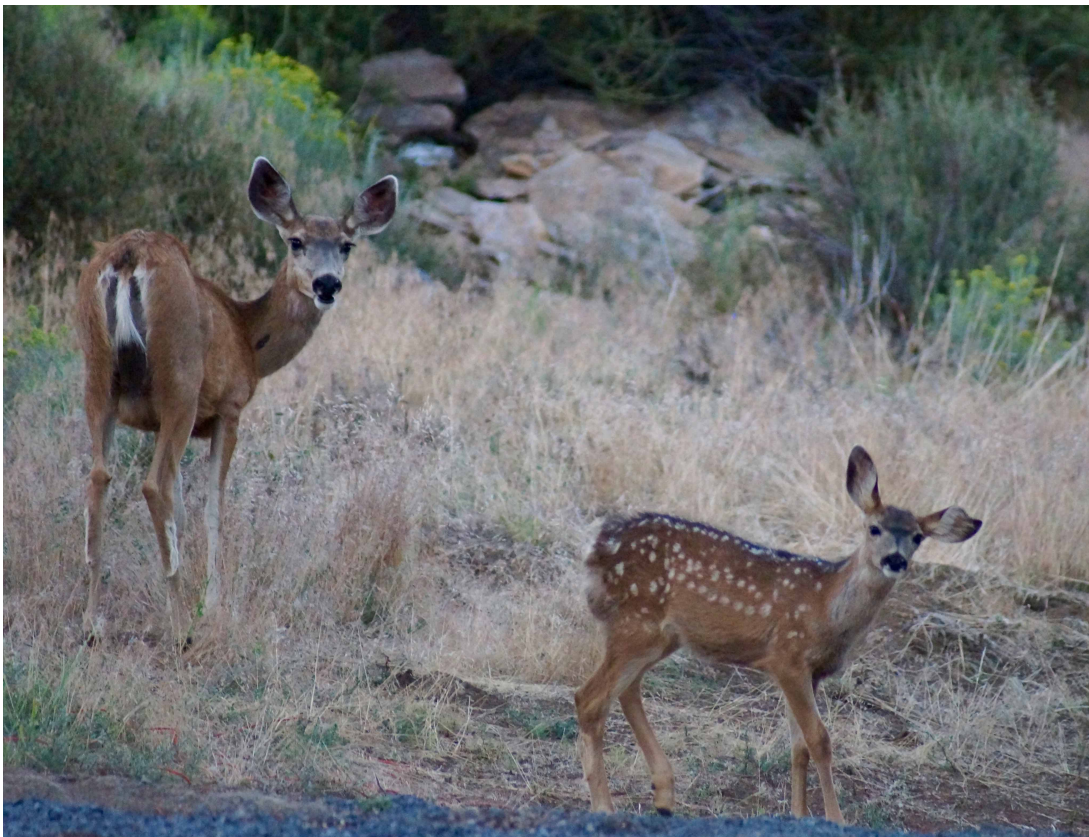


Buck in summer velvet

Deer find winter refuge here and follow the natural cycle of reproduction, undisturbed, year round.



Buck in Fall rut crossing river



Doe and fawn in Summer

Wintering bald eagles perch low in trees by the river, ready to swoop on a duck or a fish at the surface of the water, or actually fish at the water's edge.



Eagle attacking Goldeneye in winter



Eagle eating duck.



Eagle hunting at river's edge.

Hérons fish from the islands, undisturbed by river bank activity.



River otters fish all along the river and haul out on the islands.



Beavers are active during the daytime as well as at night.



Nest platforms provide breeding sites for osprey. Nest boxes for a variety of cavity nesters are scattered throughout the Sanctuary. Quail find ample habitat in the open shrub land above the rim.

One of the most important aspects of the Sanctuary is that it is the main, year-round, river-crossing corridor in the Upper Middle Deschutes for deer. The crossing here maintains the critical connectivity for the herd from the east Cascades to the High Desert. A bridge, and especially a trail associated with it, would interrupt seasonal deer migration and significantly reduce the effective home range of many individuals.



Winter Crossing



Spring Crossing



Summer Crossing



Fall Crossing

Other target species include elk, waterfowl, owls, woodpeckers, a wide variety of songbirds with an emphasis on marsh birds and cavity nesters, and especially the Oregon spotted frog, which has been documented here. A number of other species of interest thrive here such as coyotes, bobcats, marmots, a variety of squirrels and rabbits, and others too numerous to mention.

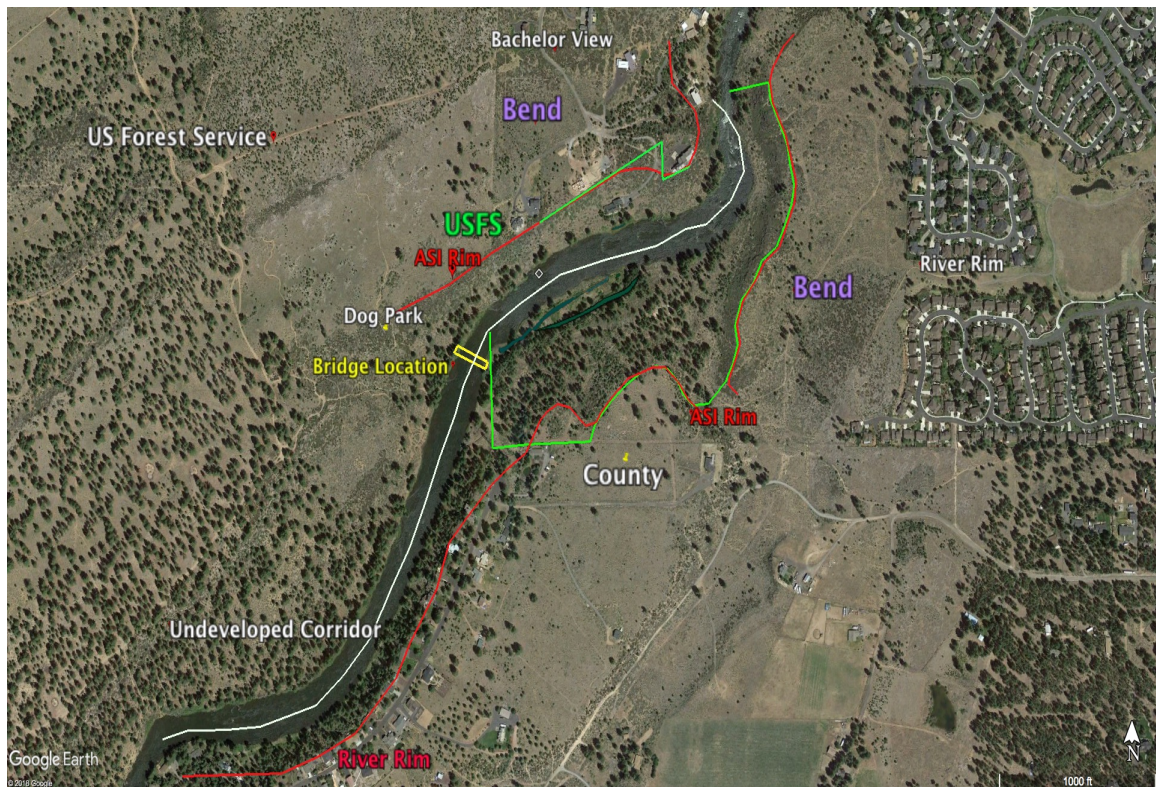


Coyote catching gopher

The Sanctuary provides various habitat manipulations and enhancements to increase the number and diversity of target species, such as bird boxes, nesting platforms, hunting and resting perches, feeding stations, quail and small mammal refuges, rock, log and plant placement, wetland enhancement, pond and slough maintenance and native wildlife food plantings. No dogs are allowed on the refuge and activity by people is kept to a minimum. A busy bridge at the site BPRD is proposing would eliminate much of the natural wildlife movements and activities that I have described.

The only houses in the area of the bridge are located high on rims outside of the corridor, the one exception being the headquarters of the Sanctuary,

which has been in place since the 1950's. There is more than a half-mile of river extending upriver from the proposed bridge site with no houses on the river, and extending a half mile downriver from the bridge site with only the HQ of the Sanctuary, which sits 100' back and up from the river and is well screened. This does not necessarily show up in aerial photos. A labeled map can be useful in interpreting the aerial view.



If left in its present undisturbed condition, this area of the river and the Thompson Wildlife Sanctuary in particular, will be an important educational asset for school groups that want to learn more about what a natural stretch of their river is like. Beaver lodges, otter signs, animal tracks, bird activity, small mammal movements, waterfowl, and usually, deer, osprey, or an eagle will be visible. The habitats of a number of important species including the Oregon spotted frog can be studied close-up. The Sanctuary will be available for scientists and students from our institutions of higher education as well.

Houses up on the rim have minimal effect on wildlife in the riparian corridor.



The claims that development along the river has already occurred here or that this is a NIMBY issue are misleading. It is actually an IMBY issue: In my back yard, please! The main opponents of the conservation bill are residents of nearby subdivisions, including the editor of the local newspaper, who has been blanketing the media with articles and editorials promoting a bridge. It is a matter of convenience for them, not of the greater good. The proposed parking area would not be convenient for people in south and east Bend and the long walk to the bridge would discourage many people from using it. There are better alternatives for access to the river for them, such as the Benham Falls bridge or the Mill District.

The environmental community and those who love and want to protect the river and its wildlife are the chief proponents of HB 4029. While there is no shortage of public recreation on the 25 miles of river trails from Sunriver to Tumalo, there is a serious shortage of protected year-round riparian habitat managed specifically for wildlife.

HB 4029 extends and strengthens the protections afforded by the State Scenic Waterways Program in the river corridor where the Sanctuary is located. Together with the Sanctuary, it represents a significant level of protection for Central Oregon's beleaguered wildlife. The alternative is unthinkable.

