

To Chairman Brad Witt
House Natural Resources Committee

Cc: Ken Helm
Greg Baretto (on committee, my former rep. when living in La Grande)
Cheri Helt (my current representative, Bend)

Subject: Support HB 2834, Wildlife Corridors

Thank you for including my written testimony as part of the upcoming 3/14 hearing on this very important Wildlife Corridors bill.

I strongly support House Bill 2834 with proposed amendments from Rep. Ken Helm. The amendment in section one is of great significance, since it requires science to be employed to plan for the longtime connectivity of wildlife corridors—and specifically for ODFW to “collect, analyze, and develop the best available science and data regarding the connectivity of wildlife habitat areas.”

Please enter into the record the accompanying science paper, entitled [“Identifying Migration Corridors of Mule Deer Threatened by Highway Development,”](#) published in the Wildlife Society Bulletin in 2015. (PDF attached).

I reached out to the lead author of the research paper, and Pricilla Coe confirmed: **“Our work on the mule deer migration corridors showed that migration was by far the strongest predictor of where road kill hotspots are, and identified a traffic threshold where they stopped using a crossing.”**

The paper –by a team of ODFW biologists--points to staggering numbers of collisions between mule deer and cars on migration routes that are close to where I live in Bend, Oregon—on Highways 97 and 31. Those numbers exceeded 3,000 over six years—or 500 per year. At a certain level of high traffic, the deer would stop using a migration crossing altogether, which is harmful to the future of our deer that depend on traditional movements between summer and winter ranges and back.

I’ve personally witnessed deer attempting to cross and dead deer on Highway 97 and know people involved in deer-car collisions resulting in damage to their car, to themselves, and death to deer. Years ago, on Highway 26 near Prairie City, I’ hit a mule deer that ran in front of my car in the dark—I went off the road into the ditch. **To assure the safety of mule deer passage is to assure the safety of motorists.**

To be efficient, financially accountable, and successful, it's critical to use scientific data to both identify the important migration crossings of roads, and then to put in place the most effective crossings for mule deer.

The ODFW researchers recommended several ways to solve the mule deer migration crisis. They support prior research recommending wildlife passage structures to be placed at migration corridor areas, with the notation that passage structures may be spaced more irregularly than the one-mile apart recommended to be cost-effective and still successful.

As our society upgrades highways and railroads for faster and higher traffic volumes, it's more important than ever to include wildlife passage structures for new and existing highways, and to identify lost migration corridors to reestablish them.

I strongly support all Rep Ken Helm's other amendments as well—recognizing that mule deer are one of many species that need to migrate to survive, or move even short distances that can put them in harm's way of either car collisions or blockage of passage altogether. The importance of factoring in climate change is critical as species need to move to find suitable habitat.

As a prior resident of La Grande, I know from personal experience and research as a writer the high value of northeastern Oregon for wildlife migration as a key connector in an era of climate change. The opportunities for connecting corridors, and reducing wildlife mortality are outstanding compared to other places that are more developed. The key will be taking action soon enough to protect wildlife corridors—for wildlife, for people, and for our future.

I'm appreciative of the statewide inclusiveness of the Wildlife Corridors bill HB 2834 and urge its passage with Helm's amendments. This is also a cost-effective bill that will reduce car collisions with deer, elk, and other animals.

HB 2834 is a time sensitive piece of legislation. As more people live and recreate in Oregon and especially in wildlife migration corridors, the threats to our wildlife and to human safety increase. Our wildlife is at risk, and with it the safety and the future of Oregonians that care about living in a place shared with abundant wildlife.

Thank you for your consideration.

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