



March 13th, 2019

Members of the House Natural Resource Committee
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 9730

Re: House Bill 2834 — Oregon Wildlife Corridor Bill

Chair Witt, Vice-Chair Gorsek Vice-Chair Sprenger and Honorable Members of the House Natural Resources Committee

On behalf of Defenders of Wildlife's 33,000 members and supporters across Oregon, we submit the following comments on HB 2834. Defenders of Wildlife works to protect native and imperiled species and their habitat across the country. Protecting habitats and establishing habitat connectivity is one of our priorities which is we would like to take this opportunity today to express our support for HB 2834, the Oregon Wildlife Corridor Bill, which mandates Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and Oregon Department of Transport (ODOT) to work collaboratively and develop a Wildlife Corridor and Safe Road Crossing Action Plan.

As socio-economic and demographic pressures grow in Oregon, the state must balance development with conserving the state's natural resources. Policies such as HB 2834 can help us perform this delicate balancing act. Developing and restoring habitat connectivity is a critical tool to offset the impacts on wildlife from threats such as habitat loss, fragmentation and climate change. Also, lack of habitat connectivity in case of some ungulate and predator species has limited their movements and dispersal, restricting them to certain areas or regions of the state and sometimes resulting in conflicts with human land use due to higher density of the species. Restoring dispersal corridors would allow species to spread and alleviate the pressure off one region in the state.

As a member of the Oregon Habitat Connectivity Consortium (which includes both ODFW and ODOT), I am aware that ODFW has an ongoing state-wide habitat connectivity mapping and assessment and this bill will help further expedite the process. This bill establishes formal collaboration between ODFW and ODOT for wildlife conservation which has been informal and erratic at best. We, therefore, view this collaboration as an important step that will help make the transition from research by ODFW to planning to execution by ODOT. The amendment to the bill has directives for ODOT to mitigate for wildlife passage rather than just providing for design options for such passages. We regard the provisions outlined in the bill and the subsequent amendment as a step in the right direction.

Wildlife habitat connectivity is also as much about wildlife conservation as it is about public safety as we. Road collisions with wildlife not only result in harm or death of an animal but has resulted in fatal human injuries, considerable harm to human life and safety, as well as significant cost incurred in damages to vehicle, emergency services and road infrastructure (the average cost of a single deer/vehicle collision in the U.S. was estimated at \$6,633 in 2012). ODOT's improvements of wildlife passage and crossing structures on US 97 (between Lava Butte and South Century Drive, a few miles south of Bend in Central Oregon) and its direct and visible impact on reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions is a direct proof that such efforts are necessary and effective.

Finally, while Defenders supports this bill, we do have some concerns around its implementation. Habitat connectivity didn't feature as a priority in their Policy Option Packages and it would be a shame to have a good policy such as HB 2834 but without adequate resources to see it through. For ODFW to expedite the process and for ODOT to take any step toward moving from design and planning to implementation stage, both agencies will require additional funds. It is a factor that needs to be considered, if the bill is to realize its full intent. Finally, wildlife connectivity issues unfortunately go beyond only road and transport infrastructure and encompasses other land uses too so as such efforts develop and expand. It would be wise to involve other agencies such as Department of Land Conservation and Development to incorporate connectivity data into their everyday work as well.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these issues. We would be happy to answer any questions. Please contact Sristi Kamal, Senior Representative, at skamal@defenders.org.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sristi Kamal". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sristi Kamal
Senior Representative, Defenders of Wildlife
Portland, Oregon