



May 13th, 2019

Members of the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, OR 97301

**Re: HB 2834 — Oregon Wildlife Corridor Bill**

Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Olsen and Members of the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

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 why 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.

Policies such as HB 2834 can help Oregon perform the delicate balancing act between meeting socio-economic and development demands while conserving the state's natural resources. Habitat fragmentation due to infrastructure development and land use changes is a major challenge in the recovery of populations of vulnerable species and so contributes to increase in human-wildlife conflicts — as movements of populations get restricted, they tend to compete for resources due to limited accessibility to these resources. Restoring dispersal corridors would allow species to spread and alleviate the pressure off one region in the state. Developing and restoring habitat connectivity is, therefore, a critical tool to offset the impacts on wildlife from threats such as habitat loss, fragmentation and climate change.

Wildlife habitat connectivity is also as much about wildlife conservation as it is about public safety. 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.

As a member of the Oregon Habitat Connectivity Consortium (which also 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.

I urge you today to support this bill so Oregon can have better land use planning — one that considers wildlife needs. Affirming policies such as HB 2834 will also set benchmarks for across-agency collaborations land-use issues and the benefits of data sharing and collaborative planning.

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](mailto:skamal@defenders.org).

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

Sristi Kamal, PhD.  
Senior Representative, Defenders of Wildlife  
Portland, Oregon