



01.31.2021

To,

Chair Witt, Vice Chair Breese Iverson, Vice Chair Hudson and Members of House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

On behalf of Defenders of Wildlife's, Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), Oregon Wild and Humane Voters Oregon, we submit the following comments **in support of HB 2548**. Our organizations work to protect native and imperiled species and their habitat across the state. Establishing habitat connectivity for the protection of wildlife and ecosystems is one of our highest priorities. As such, we support HB 2548, which directs the Legislative Policy and Research Office to study issues related to funding of wildlife connectivity and movement structures.

As socio-economic and demographic pressures grow in Oregon, the state must balance development with conserving the natural resources. This includes ensuring there is sufficient connectivity of habitats by way of wildlife corridors and safe crossing areas. Wildlife species must move around to find food, water, shelter, adapt to changing environments and the effects of climate change, and reach breeding or overwintering areas.

In addition to habitat fragmentation and degradation, highways and other roadways that cross natural migration routes and habitats pose a serious safety risk to both humans and wildlife. It is estimated that wildlife-vehicle collisions are one of the largest direct impacts to wildlife, when the extent and number of wildlife species impacted by roads is considered. According to U.S. Department of Transportation's most recently published Highway Statistics, Oregon has over 79,000 miles of roads crisscrossing the state and Oregonians travel nearly 36 billion miles on those roads every year.

Washington, our neighboring state, estimated that on a 12.5 mile stretch of highway in the state, wildlife collisions cost \$2.5 million (or \$6,500 per collision) annually due to costs attributed to injury, vehicle repairs, etc.

The other impact, though more challenging to economically quantify, is the loss of the individual animal and the ripple effect it causes on the population of a species and their ecosystem. For example, the wolf population in Oregon is very much in recovery and yet, in 2019, five of the seven wolf mortalities were confirmed vehicle collisions. That, in a population of 137-158 wolves is a significant number. Each year, dozens of cougars are also killed in vehicle collisions in Oregon. All told, between 2007-2017 Oregon Department of Transportation documented 12,540 animal-vehicle collisions, a significant number of which was deer and elk. Meanwhile, the state's mule deer population has been below the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) management goals for at least 30 years. There is a direct relationship between the health of the population of a species and its ability to move, find new food sources, find mates and keep their genetic pool healthy.

We, therefore, cannot stress enough the importance of such a study to identify and ultimately invest in solutions to help reduce the number of wildlife-vehicle collisions. We need state-level solutions and a deeper understanding of trends and patterns (such as seasonality and geographic locations) in order to improve human safety and safe wildlife passage. The analysis as directed by the HB 2548 could also highlight what could be accomplished with the funding as we believe the analysis will show benefits far exceed the costs.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these issues. We would be happy to answer any questions.

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