



## Soda Mountain Wilderness Council

P.O. Box 512 • Ashland, Oregon 97520

January 30, 2023

**Re: SUPPORT FOR HB 2999**

Dear Chair Representative Helm,

As a charter member of the Southern Oregon Wildlife Crossings Coalition (SOWCC), the Soda Mountain Wilderness Council (SMWC) strongly supports HB 2999, which funds wildlife crossing planning and construction in Oregon.

A [broad coalition of bipartisan supporters](#) have spurred important progress in recent years on wildlife road crossings and safe passage for people and wildlife. However, great opportunity remains ahead. Wildlife crossings have shown the ability to reduce collisions by as much as 90%, and a recent [study from Washington State University](#) estimated that each wildlife crossing can result in \$235,000 – \$443,000 in annual savings, when the substantial damages to people and their vehicles are considered.

SOWCC is currently working with Oregon Department of Transportation's Region 3 staff on engineering design for two wildlife crossing overpasses on Interstate I-5 between Ashland and the California border. This stretch of freeway bisects the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument and cuts a wide path through the Siskiyou Crest. This is a critical linkage area where wildlife migrate east-to-west between Oregon and California's coastal mountains and the volcanic peaks of the Cascade Range. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Oregon Connectivity Assessment and Mapping (OCAMP) has identified this area as a Priority Wildlife Connectivity Area. Interstate 5 is a major impediment to wildlife in this area and the site of many ODOT-reported roadkills. Oregonians and others will all benefit from a safer I-5.

In November 2022, SOWCC completed a Conceptual Design Report that identifies two wildlife crossing overpass sites and six upgrades to existing culvert and bridge under-crossings on I-5 between mileposts 0 and 14. SOWCC's engineering consultants worked closely with ODOT Region 3 staff to assure our recommended sites and designs matched ODOT's capabilities and expectations. ODOT has amended the State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) to include this project and has allocated \$1.5 million to engineering design in 2023.

SOWCC and ODOT will continue to partner to apply to state and federal grants and raise private money to complete this project. We were unsuccessful in winning an America the Beautiful grant but will apply this year to the new IJA Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program for final planning and construction funding. SOWCC has also applied for an OWEB TA2 grant and has \$65,000 committed in private funding. This is in addition to the \$125,000 raised in 2021 for the Conceptual Design Study.

In addition to supporting statewide wildlife crossing planning and construction, the funding in HB 2999 will be critical as a state match when ODOT applies to the new federal Wildlife Crossing Grant Program in the IJA infrastructure bill. We want to bring this money home to Oregon to help protect motorists and create safe wildlife passages on our highways.

Thank you for your work toward successfully moving HB 2999 in this session of the Oregon Legislature.

Sincerely,

Dave Willis, Chair  
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