

February 9th, 2023

Re: Support for HB 2999

Chair Representative Helm, Vice Chairs Hartman and Owens, and members of the Committee,

The undersigned members of the Oregon Sportsmen's Conservation Partnership strongly support [HB 2999](#). This bill would strengthen the language within the Oregon Department of Transportation's existing program to fund, study, and/or construct wildlife crossings in the state. Additionally the bill would provide funding in the amount of \$5 million dollars from the General Fund to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to improve wildlife habitat connectivity within priority corridors identified within the recently completed [Oregon Connectivity Assessment and Mapping Project](#).

Oregon contains abundant fish and wildlife that live and move across diverse landscapes. Fisher, salmon, and mule deer alike rely on movement and require connectivity to seasonal habitats that can be hundreds of miles apart. Our organizations believe this committee can lead the way as we find solutions for ensuring resilient and connected habitats are maintained as our state grows and that our transportation systems provide for the movement and connectivity wildlife and aquatic species need.

Unfortunately, Oregon mule deer populations have been steadily declining for decades. Protecting their migration corridors is one example of the many species that rely on seasonal movement essential to their health and resilience, particularly as a changing climate may require these populations to travel outside their traditional corridors. While the reality of human development, habitat loss, and poaching negatively impacts deer populations, Oregonians can have a proven and measurable impact by reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions through the installation of wildlife safe passage crossings on our highways and by providing funding to restore and conserve connectivity of key corridors throughout the state.

This bill is an important building block and funding source to continue Oregon's investment to maintain and restore wildlife connectivity for a variety of species within our state. In addition to supporting statewide wildlife crossing structures and restoring habitat within priority corridors, the funding in HB 2999 will be critical as a state match when state agencies apply for new federal grants such as the Wildlife Crossing Grant Program in the 2021 federal infrastructure bill or the America the Beautiful grant program through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. We want to bring this money home to Oregon to help protect motorists, create safe wildlife passages on our highways, and maintain the connections to corridors that wildlife have relied upon for generations to survive and thrive.

Our groups have spent the past several years working together with a bi-partisan coalition to advance important funding needs and policies that improve wildlife road crossings and safe passage for people and wildlife alike. However, great opportunity remains ahead. After championing [House Bill 2834](#) to unanimous passage in 2019 to create a Wildlife Corridor Action Plan, we worked closely with this committee to support [House Bill 4130](#) during the 2022 session of the Oregon Legislature, which was successful in providing the first ever dedicated funds to ODOT for wildlife crossings. Building on these past investments that focused on the roadway safety hotspots, Representative Helm has introduced House Bill 2999 to fill additional gaps in key areas of wildlife connectivity.

In conclusion, House Bill 2999 would invest in critical projects in the near-term, as well as help move the state toward a longer-term investment strategy. Sportsmen and women stand in strong support of the funding this bill would provide. Thank you for your consideration, please reach out anytime with questions. We hope you will join in support!

Sincerely,

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