

February 9, 2023

Committee Chair Ken Helm
Vice-Chairs Mark Owens and Annessa Hartman
House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: HB 2999

Dear Chairman Helm and Vice Chairs Owens and Hartman:

I am writing in support of HB 2999, relating to wildlife connectivity. Simply stated, HB 2999 is a WIN-WIN for both wildlife and people. It builds upon a \$7 million investment in wildlife crossings made by the legislature in 2022, allocating \$5 million to ODFW through the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund. As Facilitator of the Legislature Task Force that developed the concept of the Conservation and Recreation Fund, I can attest that investment in wildlife crossings perfectly meets the Fund's goals. The bill would strengthen the Oregon Department of Transportation's (ODOT) wildlife-vehicle collision program and invest \$5 million dollars in the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) work to improve wildlife connectivity across the state, making our roads safer for people and wildlife while enhancing habitat for our state's native species. HB 2999 would also help the state compete for federal funds available through a wildlife crossings grant program included in the national infrastructure law enacted in 2021, a WIN-WIN for Oregon taxpayers.

Oregon is behind the curve. As noted in other testimony, despite a higher rate of wildlife-vehicle collisions than other west coast states, Oregon has fallen behind other western states in the construction of wildlife crossings. Oregon has five such structures, while Washington state has more than 30, Colorado has 69, Nevada has 23 for large mammals alone, Wyoming has 20, and Utah has 50. With almost 5,000 recorded wildlife-vehicle collisions in 2022 in Oregon and studies showing that the actual number of wildlife-vehicle collisions is nearly three times the reported number, the time to act to expand the state's wildlife crossing program is now.

We have a growing number of success stories here in Oregon, including along highway 97 near Lava Butte and on highway 97 at Gilchrist. We also have a list of 12 high-priority projects around the state, totaling approximately \$25 million, identified last year by the Oregon Action Team on Ungulate Migration — a statewide coalition comprised of sportsmen and women, conservation groups, and Tribal representatives. Now is the time to move forward with state support for those projects.

I strongly urge your support of HB 2999.

Sincerely,

Jim Owens

Retired; Former Facilitator of the Joint Interim Task Force on Funding Fish, Wildlife,
Outdoor Recreation and Education

2233 NE Schuyler Street

Portland, OR 97212

503-201-4205

jim@jgowens.com