

HB 2978 A STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Senate Committee On Natural Resources and Wildfire

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Meeting Dates: 4/15, 4/17

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

The measure modifies the Department of Transportation's (ODOT) Wildlife-Vehicle Collision Program. It directs ODOT and the Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to establish an advisory group and modifies ODOT's reporting requirements.

Fiscal impact: Has minimal fiscal impact.

Revenue impact: Has minimal revenue impact.

HOUSE VOTE: Ayes, 53; Nays, 3; Excused, 4.

Detailed Summary:

Modifications to the Wildlife-Vehicle Collision Program:

Modifies the Wildlife-Vehicle Collision Program (Program) to promote public safety in priority areas where roads intersect with wildlife corridors identified in ODFW's Wildlife Corridor Action Plan. Adds that the program must include the following:

- Feasibility studies,
- Updates to highway design standards to incorporate wildlife-friendly features,
- A training program developed with ODFW for educating staff and stakeholders.
- A publicly available list of priority projects aimed at reducing collisions.

Requires ODOT to consider and incorporate measures to protect wildlife corridor connectivity during all stages of transportation infrastructure development. For projects impacting threatened or sensitive species, mitigation efforts and crossing infrastructure must be included.

Establishment of Program Advisory Group:

Requires ODOT and ODFW to develop a joint memorandum of understanding to form an advisory group to collaborate on program goals, coordinate resources and fundraising, share scientific data, engage in community outreach, and help identify priority areas and projects to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and enhance habitat connectivity. The memorandum may also appoint a willing nongovernmental entity to act as a neutral facilitator. Specifies advisory group membership and meeting requirements and directs ODOT to publish meeting materials and recommendations on ODOT's website. Sunsets January 2, 2035.

Reporting Requirements:

Adds requirements to ODOT's biannual report regarding the status of the program, including:

- Information concerning the number and types of wildlife corridor infrastructure projects studied and a description of a timeline for implementing the proposed and prioritized projects.
- An estimate of costs and funding sources, and a description of actions the department has taken to secure funding.
- A strategy for ongoing funding, including department plans to ensure the existence of one or more dedicated funding sources that meet program needs, and secure federal grants.
- A description of efforts and successes of the advisory group.

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Becomes operative January 2, 2035.

Requires ODFW to, subject to available funding, carry out projects to support wildlife mobility and habitat connectivity within priority areas identified in the Oregon Connectivity Assessment and Mapping Project, and consider opportunities to secure competitive federal grants and other matching funds.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Wildlife-Vehicle Collision Program Funding
- Fencing around wildlife crossings

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

Wildlife corridors are structures designed and managed by the Department of Transportation to allow animals to safely cross roads, helping them move between habitats that have been divided by transportation infrastructure. These corridors support animal migration, particularly during breeding seasons, and aim to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions. Oregon's first wildlife corridor was built in 2012.

In 2019, House Bill 2834 directed the Department of Fish and Wildlife to create a Wildlife Corridor Action Plan, guiding the development of additional corridor projects. Since then, several corridors have been completed, and ongoing research continues to inform the best locations and practices for future projects.