

January 14, 2019

The Honorable Congressman Peter DeFazio
Chairman, Transportation and Infrastructure
United States House of Representatives
2134 Rayburn Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman;

We the undersigned Oregon based organizations and those with Oregon members or offices write to convey our full support for the \$250 million in funding for the Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program included in the Senate version of the American Transportation Infrastructure Act (ATIA). We request that the House version include this pilot program at the same level of funding or more in any transportation or infrastructure bill being drafted or influenced by the Committee.

Across the nation, the number of wildlife-vehicle collisions continues to increase, impacting economically important big game species and resulting in economic damage, physical harm and even loss-of-life to travelers throughout the country. The number of *reported* wildlife-vehicle collisions nationally reached 1,000,000 a decade ago according to a 2009 report¹ by the Western Transportation Institute based in part on data collected by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration; the same organization now estimates that this number has risen to close to 2,000,000 wildlife-vehicle collisions per year.

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. The need for connectivity and movement is predicted to become even more important due to the effects of climate change. Our organizations believe this Committee has the opportunity to lead the way to find solutions for our transportation systems to better provide for the movement and connectivity wildlife and aquatic species need.

Wildlife and roadways are both important resources to our state's economy and heritage, yet they often come into conflict. The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) records an average of 7,000 wildlife-vehicle collisions per year, resulting in 700 people injured and two fatalities². These collisions are dangerous to motorists and result in loss of economically valuable big game. Wildlife-vehicle collisions in Oregon cost nearly \$44 million annually in damages to vehicles, human injury expenses, and loss of wildlife. Roads are also a major obstacle for animals to cross, hindering their ability to access critical habitat.

In part, these alarming statistics led to Oregon's legislature, state agencies, and non-profits to work collaboratively to identify opportunities that reduce the conflict between roads and wildlife. In 2019,

¹ <https://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol14/iss2/art15/>

² <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=28482c80c9cc49a1aa2310adb3289e89>

the Oregon Legislature passed a new bill titled HB 2834³ or the 'Wildlife Corridor and Safe Road Crossing Act'. The bill directs the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and ODOT to work together to develop an action plan that will provide guidance to state agencies to designate and protect known migration corridors. Additionally, the action plan will include a list of priority hot spots on roadways where ODOT will adopt a program to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions. The directives in this Oregon bill would also allow the state to be prepared for a much needed competitive grant pilot program on wildlife crossings at the federal level. Currently, ODOT's wildlife program is an unfunded program within the agency. Any money they receive for wildlife is pieced together and takes away funds from other competing projects for already limited funds.

Oregon's two wildlife crossing structures on Highway 97 near Sunriver have been examples of success: they have reduced collisions by 80-90% and created more connected habitat for the animals. The success of these investments in reducing collisions without interference to ranching or other private or commercial operations along our roadways deserves recognition. However, there is more to do to build on the past successes of Oregon's four existing crossing structures and to address problems in other places.

In conclusion, identifying and mitigating transportation related barriers to fish and wildlife corridors by installing more transportation crossing structures and investing in culvert and tide-gate replacements and upgrades are essential for maintaining ecological processes and to offset the effects of environmental stressors, including those imposed by climate change. A transportation bill for 2020 should assess ways for fish and wildlife to best adapt to a changing climate. A well cited study from 2009 by Heller and Zaveleta⁴ confirm that one of the most effective climate adaptation responses for fish and wildlife is to increase landscape connectivity and corridors by removing barriers that get in the way of dispersal and migration.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our input on this important issue. We the undersigned, support efforts by the Committee to increase wildlife crossing investments in any forthcoming transportation or infrastructure bill or appropriate legislative effort.

Thankfully,

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Oregon Chapter of The Wildlife Society

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Oregon State Director
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³ <https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2019R1/Measures/Overview/HB2834>

⁴ <http://lagunafoundation.com/knowledgebase/sites/default/files/Heller%20and%20Zaveleta%202009.pdf>

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