

May 5, 2020

The Honorable Peter A DeFazio
Chair
House Transportation & Infrastructure
Committee
2251 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Sam Graves
Ranking Member
House Transportation & Infrastructure
Committee
2164 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves:

We understand the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure is preparing legislation to address national infrastructure issues and reauthorization of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act. The undersigned sportsmen, professional societies and other conservation organizations—representing millions of hunters, anglers and other outdoor recreationists across the country—encourage you to include funding authorization for wildlife crossings and policy direction for state transportation plans to prioritize wildlife habitat connectivity.

Providing wildlife safe passage over or under highways mutually benefits public safety and wildlife populations. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, nearly 200 Americans died from vehicle collisions with animals in 2018, reflecting a general upward trend since 1975. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, the costs associated with wildlife-vehicle collisions is upwards of \$8 billion annually. The Oregon Department of Transportation reports 7,000 wildlife-vehicle collisions every year while State Farm Insurance ranked Missouri 12th in the nation for vehicle collisions with deer—with more than 38,000 crashes in 2018. A recent poll of Oregon voters indicated 86 percent voters in that state believe protecting wildlife migration routes is important.

Thousands of animals, including many sensitive species, are killed each year in these accidents. Highways often prevent wildlife from safely moving between important habitats. This is especially critical for migrating animals like mule deer, elk and pronghorn antelope. The U.S. Department of the Interior and 11 western states are currently implementing Secretarial Order 3362—issued in 2018 to improve habitat quality and western big game winter range and migration corridors for antelope, elk and mule deer. Including funding and policy programs for wildlife crossings and habitat connectivity in our nation's transportation system is vital to the success of S.O. 3362 and the long-term viability of many wildlife species.

The good news is many wildlife-vehicle collisions are preventable. Transportation engineers have realized success in reducing vehicle-wildlife collisions with strategically placed bridges, overpasses, tunnels, viaducts, culverts, fencing, signage and detection/warning systems. Studies by the Arizona Department of Transportation demonstrated significant wildlife use of underpass crossings and associated reductions in wildlife-vehicle collisions. The Federal Highway Administration's Wildlife-Vehicle Collision Reduction Study: 2008 Report to Congress analyzed 34 mitigation measures to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and determined their implementation increased human and animal safety and provided economic benefits to society.

The great number of locations where roads and waters intersect can also be a source of accidents and create an impediment to fish and other wildlife. The blockage and failure of culverts designed to allow water to flow under roads can undermine roadbeds and lead to traffic delays and accidents.

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Culverts that are clogged or simply too small can also block access by fish and other wildlife to necessary habitat such as spawning grounds. Fortunately, road engineers and wildlife biologists have learned how to design and retrofit culverts to ensure highway safety and to allow for the safe passage of not only fish and aquatic life but also mammals.

Wildlife crossing and habitat connectivity provisions were included in S. 2302, America's Transportation Infrastructure Act, which passed unanimously out of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. We ask the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee to adopt the Senate bill's wildlife crossing and habitat connectivity language in its draft infrastructure legislation.

The critical measures of S. 2302 include, among others:

- a competitive Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program to provide \$250 million over five years in competitive grants to states, tribes, and local governments for wildlife infrastructure projects that reduce the number of wildlife-vehicle collisions and improve habitat connectivity;
- updated language in existing funding streams, including the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program and the Nationally Significant Freight and Highway Projects, to ensure wildlife crossing projects are eligible for funding;
- commission of an updated study and report to Congress on wildlife-vehicle collision reduction and habitat connectivity improvement;
- standardization of wildlife collision and carcass data;
- guidance to states on mitigation measures and wildlife crossing standards to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and increase habitat connectivity;
- inclusion of wildlife habitat connectivity in national bridge and tunnel inventory and inspection standards;
- inclusion of wildlife habitat loss considerations in freight plans; and
- prioritization of wildlife habitat considerations in the Forest Service Legacy Roads and Trails Remediation Program.

We look forward to working with you on addressing wildlife-vehicle collisions in the House surface transportation reauthorization legislation.

Sincerely,

American Woodcock Society
Archery Trade Association
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Boone and Crockett Club
California Waterfowl
Campfire Club of America
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Conservation Force
Council to Advance Hunting and
the Shooting Sports

Dallas Safari Club
Delta Waterfowl Foundation
Ducks Unlimited
Houston Safari Club
Izaak Walton League of America
Masters of Foxhounds Association
Mule Deer Foundation
National Association of Forest Service Retirees
National Shooting Sports Foundation
National Wildlife Federation

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National Wild Turkey Federation
North American Falconers Association
North American Grouse Partnership
Orion – The Hunter’s Institute
Pheasants Forever, Inc.
Pope & Young Club
Professional Outfitters and Guides of America
Quail Forever
Quality Deer Management Association
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Ruffed Grouse Society
Safari Club International
Sportsmen’s Alliance
The Wildlife Society
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Whitetails Unlimited
Wild Sheep Foundation
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute
Wildlife Mississippi