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House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE, Room 453
Salem, Oregon 97301

Testimony: HB 2548

Chair Witt, Vice Chair Breese-Iverson, Vice Chair Hudson, and Members of the Committee,

Central Oregon LandWatch (“LandWatch”) is a conservation organization which for more than 35 years has protected Central Oregon’s beautiful forests and high desert, rivers and springs, fish and wildlife, and our vibrant communities. We work to conserve the region’s ecosystems, wildlife habitat, and working rural lands balanced with a with a responsible, sustainable approach to planning and fostering thriving communities.

LandWatch is in support of HB 2548. In the modern era we have largely flipped our footprint on much of the landscape from one of discrete human communities connected by transportation corridors across vast expanses of relatively untouched lands to one of isolated patches of intact natural lands connected by wildlife corridors surrounded by a sea of human impacts. Our population growth, development, and land conversion have resulted in pronounced and cumulative wildlife habitat fragmentation and degradation. Evidence has been building that wildlife corridors are critically important linkages providing for wildlife migration and dispersal across the landscape as well as gene flow between, and long-term viability and health of, otherwise isolated wildlife populations.

A primary barrier to wildlife movement along their corridors and across the landscape are roads, especially highways. Vehicular collisions with wildlife, particularly deer and elk, often result in human and wildlife fatality and expensive property damage. ODOT has good data and maps on wildlife-vehicle collision hot spots along Oregon’s highways, and ODFW has good, telemetry-based data on wildlife movement. Overcrossings and undercrossings have demonstrated remarkable success in mitigating these impacts. For example, newly constructed crossings beneath Highway 97 in Central Oregon have reduced wildlife-vehicle collisions 80-90% and saved lives and many thousands of dollars in property damage. Many other western states and Canadian provinces are far ahead of Oregon in constructing these wildlife crossings.

LandWatch strongly supports HB2548 as an important step in studying these wildlife corridor road crossings, including their costs and benefits as well as possible funding mechanisms. Thank you for this opportunity to comment and for your consideration of our support.

Respectfully,
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