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January 31, 2022

House Committee On Environment and Natural Resources
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Testimony: HB 4130

Chair Marsh, Vice Chairs Hudson and Smith, 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 responsible, sustainable approach to planning and fostering thriving communities.

LandWatch strongly supports HB 4130 and its -1 amendment. Bill proposes appropriation from the General Fund to ODOT, to fund projects promoting safe road crossings and connectivity for wildlife.

Are road crossing structures that provide safe passage for wildlife, like highway underpasses and overpasses, (“wildlife crossings”) warranted?

There are thousands of wildlife-vehicle collisions (WVCs) in Oregon every year; more mule deer are killed by vehicles than legal hunting. Each collision with a mule deer or elk results in thousands of dollars of property damage, adding up to many millions of dollars cumulatively each year in Oregon alone. More important than property damages are human injury or loss of life, as well as death of individual animals and significant impacts to wildlife populations.

Are wildlife crossings effective?

Data from ODFW tracking herd numbers and migration show that many of Oregon’s precious mule deer herds have experienced significantly declining numbers in recent years, much of that due to barriers to seasonal movement and associated mortality. Data from ODOT shows where there are “hotspots” with higher incidents of WVCs. Using this information, the underpasses and funneling fencing recently completed on the stretch of Highway 97 south of Bend have reduced WVCs 85-90%. Similar percent reductions in collisions have been documented with wildlife crossing projects in other western states; Oregon is far behind other states, Canadian provinces, and other countries in constructing these projects. Video recordings document a wide variety of wildlife that make use of underpasses and overpasses.



Are wildlife crossings affordable?

The costs of wildlife crossing projects vary by location, design, and other factors. Even significant costs of construction, however, are relatively rapidly recouped in savings from dramatic drops in the number of WVCs. Dedicated public funding for crossing projects is key. State funding is essential to be competitive for leveraging newly available federal infrastructure money.

Is there public support for wildlife crossings?

Recent polling data reflect strong, broad support for wildlife crossings from voters across the state, *crossing* (!) both partisan and rural/urban divides.

LandWatch thanks the committee for its consideration of this important bill, requests its support, and is especially grateful to its forward-thinking sponsors, herewith copied.

Respectfully submitted,
Nathan Hovekamp, PhD
Naturalist & Legislative Liaison
Central Oregon LandWatch

cc: Chief Sponsors Representatives Helm, Gorsek, Hudson, and Lively, and Senators Prozanski and Manning Jr.

