

February 2, 2022

Chairman Marsh

House Interim Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

Rep. Zach Hudson, Rep. David Brock Smith, Rep. Christine Goodwin, Rep. Ken Helm, Rep. Raquel Moore-Green, Rep. Mark Owens, Rep. Khan Pham, Rep. Andrea Valderrama, Rep. Marty Wilde

Submitted electronically via Committee website

Re: Statement of The Pew Charitable Trusts in support of HB 4130-1, the Wildlife Crossings Investment Act

Dear Chairman Marsh and Members of the Committee:

The Pew Charitable Trusts' U.S. Public Lands and Rivers Conservation program is pleased to support HB 4130-1, the Wildlife Crossings Investment Act. The bill will appropriate \$7 million dollars to the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) for wildlife crossing projects that will make our roads safer for people and wildlife.

Pew's public lands and rivers initiative seeks to conserve ecologically and culturally significant public landscapes by collaborating with local communities, businesses, elected officials, and other stakeholders to achieve balanced, commonsense policy at the federal and state level. The identification and protection of wildlife migration corridors is a key component of our work. Emerging science and new technologies provide considerable opportunity for states to integrate wildlife conservation into transportation policy. With advances in research technology such as GPS-enabled collars, we now have detailed information on how and where these animals travel between summer and winter habitats, how barriers such as highways and development can negatively affect wildlife populations, and where infrastructure interventions can have the greatest benefit for both wildlife and people.

In 2019, the ODOT recorded over 6,100 wildlife-vehicle collisions, resulting in human injury and fatalities and significantly impacting migrating populations of ungulates. Researchers believe the actual number of wildlife-vehicle collisions in Oregon are at least two times the reported number. The average cost of a vehicle collision with a mule deer—the most common collision type—is \$9,086, and collisions with elk cost an estimated \$24,006.¹ The cumulative cost of collisions in Oregon with those two species totaled \$56.9 million in 2020². Reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions is a win for motorists, wildlife, and local communities, making roads safer for people and allowing animals to safely traverse their migratory habitat.

HB 4130 will allocate funding to ODOT to construct wildlife crossing structures and other interventions, such as directional funnel fencing, which have proven to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions by 80-90% or more. Oregon has a growing number of success stories already, such as a wildlife crossing underpass that was constructed along highway 97 near Lava Butte which has reduced wildlife-vehicle collisions by 85%. The recently completed wildlife crossing on highway 97 at Gilchrist—a project that Pew helped finance—is expected to result in similarly good results.

¹ These cost estimates are limited to property damage, injury or fatality related costs, and the value of a lost hunting license. The actual and full costs are significantly higher.

² <https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/lpro/Publications/Background-Brief-Wildlife-Corridor.pdf>

Despite these success stories, Oregon has fallen behind other western states in the construction of wildlife crossings. While Oregon has five such structures, Washington state has more than 30, Colorado has 69, Nevada has 23 for large mammals alone, Wyoming has 20, and Utah has 50. Yet Oregon has a higher rate of wildlife-vehicle collisions than all of these states, with the exception of Wyoming (based on an analysis by State Farm Insurance³).

The costs of building wildlife crossings vary by site and other factors, with a range of \$250,000-600,000 for a large mammal underpass to \$7 million for a double span overpass. But with an 80-90% or more reduction in wildlife-vehicle collisions, case studies from Colorado and Wyoming show that the structures can pay for themselves over a short time.

These solutions are gaining attention at the national level and in departments of transportation across the country. For the first time, dedicated funds for a wildlife crossings program—\$350 million over five years—were included in the national infrastructure package signed into law last year. However, to successfully compete for these federal resources, state matching dollars are critical. HB 4130-1 will help ensure that Oregon has the necessary state resources to leverage federal funds, providing an even greater return on investment for Oregon taxpayers.

There is broad bipartisan support for wildlife crossings from voters across Oregon. In a 2020 Pew-commissioned poll conducted by the firm GBAO, 86% of Oregonians favor constructing more wildlife crossings on roads and highways; 75% of voters from across the political and geographic spectrum support increased funding to build more wildlife crossings on roads and highways.⁴

If enacted, the legislation's \$7 million for wildlife crossings would represent a significant step toward increased state investment in the reduction of wildlife vehicle collisions. However, it will not address all of the identified wildlife-vehicle collision hot spots. The Oregon Action Team on Ungulate Migration (a statewide coalition comprised of sportsmen and women, other conservation groups, and Tribal representatives), used ODOT and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife data to develop a list of 12 project needs around the state, totaling approximately \$25 million. Projects include the completion of directional fencing at Gilchrist on highway 97, implementation of wildlife safe passage solutions on highway 20 between Juntura and Harper, construction of directional fencing near Dayville, fencing near Meacham on I-84, and wildlife crossings along I-5 between Ashland and the Oregon-California border. In addition to urging lawmakers to support HB 4130-1, Pew is urging lawmakers and ODOT to work together to direct a robust portion of the \$1.2 billion—allocated to Oregon under the national infrastructure act—toward wildlife crossing projects.

Thank you for your consideration of Pew's recommendations as the committee hears HB 4130-1. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me at llwilliams3@pewtrusts.org, or 503-765-1141, should I be able to provide additional information.

Sincerely,

Laurel Williams
Officer, U.S. Public Lands and Rivers Conservation
The Pew Charitable Trusts (Portland, OR Office)
111 SW Columbia Street, Suite 200
Portland, OR 97201

³ <https://www.statefarm.com/simple-insights/auto-and-vehicles/how-likely-are-you-to-have-an-animal-collision>

⁴ [Pew: Oregonians Support Protecting Wildlife Migration Routes, New Poll Finds](#)