

July 15, 2022

Rachel M. Dawson
Program Director, National Programs
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

RE: Letter of Support for Oregon Wildlife Crossing Projects

Dear Ms. Dawson,

The Oregon Action Team on Ungulate Migration (OAT) strongly supports six projects included in America the Beautiful applications being submitted by the Burns Paiute Tribe, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT).

OAT—comprised of non-governmental organizations, Tribal leaders, and local stakeholders, among others—is a collaborative coalition focused on improving ungulate habitat connectivity, ecosystem structure and function, and human/wildlife safety by addressing barriers to migration and restoring degraded and fragmented habitat. The Team engages in education and outreach, advocacy for policy and plan development and revisions, identification and coordination for project implementation, and support in the identification and leveraging of funding sources.

OAT is pleased to support the following wildlife crossing projects as part of the America the Beautiful Challenge grant applications:

- US Highway 20 Wildlife Crossing Project, led by the Burns Paiute Tribe
- The Indian Ford undercrossing on Highway 20 near Sisters, the I-84 Meacham feasibility study in NE Oregon, and the overcrossing at MP 190 on Highway 97 in central Oregon; these interventions are part of the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife’s application “Improving Habitat Connectivity in Oregon: Planning and Implementation of Wildlife Crossing Structures to Reconnect Habitat and Reduce Wildlife-Vehicle Collisions.”
- The Neil Creek Fish and Wildlife Passage Design Project in southern Oregon along I-5, submitted by the Oregon Department of Transportation
- The Minam River Project, led by ODFW and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF)

Barriers to animal movement is one of seven key threats to fish and wildlife in Oregon’s State Wildlife Action Plan, the Oregon Conservation Strategy. Facilitating wildlife movement is critical for species to complete their life history needs and adapt to changing conditions, including climate change. Roadways significantly hamper animal movement for many species throughout our state.

In 2019, the ODOT recorded over 6,100 wildlife-vehicle collisions (WVCs), resulting in human injury and fatalities, and significantly impacting migrating populations of ungulates. Researchers believe the actual number of WVCs 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; collisions with elk cost an estimated \$24,006.¹ The cumulative cost of collisions in Oregon involving these species was estimated to be \$56.9 million in 2020.² Reducing WVCs is a win for motorists, wildlife, and local communities, making roads safer for people and allowing animals to safely traverse their migratory habitat.

While Oregon has demonstrated success in reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions by more than 80 percent at two wildlife crossing structures, the state has fallen behind other western states in the construction of wildlife crossings. Oregon currently has only four structures purposely built to facilitate wildlife passage across public roadways, while 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 these states, with the exception of Wyoming³.

Investment in wildlife passage measures will help sustain healthy wildlife species in Oregon and make our roads safer for drivers. America the Beautiful is a significant opportunity to foster these investments and we appreciate your consideration of the important projects listed above.

Sincerely,

Tim Greseth
Executive Director
Oregon Wildlife Foundation

Mark Salvo
Program Director
Oregon Natural Desert Association

Nathan Hovekamp
Naturalist & Legislative Liaison
Central Oregon LandWatch

Joel Strimling
Communications Director
Oregon Chapter Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

Suzanne Linford
Founder
Protect Animal Migration

Mike Totey
Conservation Director
Oregon Hunters Association

Michael O'Casey
Pacific Northwest Field Manager
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

Laurel Williams
Officer
The Pew Charitable Trusts

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>

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