

# Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

Focal Areas



## Connectivity and Wildlife Passage

### Background

Wildlife connectivity is significantly reduced by roadways as a result of habitat loss and fragmentation, injury and mortality as a result of animal-vehicle collisions, and behavioral avoidance. The cumulative impacts of roads can greatly decrease the ability of wildlife to move among habitat patches in order to successfully find food, water, shelter, and mates, impacting genetic diversity, population size and structure, and species diversity.

Wildlife crossing structures and associated directional fencing significantly reduce the impacts of roads on wildlife populations. For example, in its first year the Lava Butte wildlife underpass on US Highway 97 in Central Oregon was used by 29 different species and reduced deer-vehicle collisions by over 85 percent. However, Oregon lags far behind other western states in wildlife-transportation mitigation. The state currently only has five crossing structures built for the explicit use of wildlife. In comparison, Washington has nearly 40 and California has more than 50.



The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) recently developed a map of priority wildlife connectivity areas across the state. This effort, the Oregon Connectivity Assessment and Mapping Project, identified sites where key movement corridors intersect with proposed or existing roadways, which will help prioritize areas most in need of wildlife crossings. Sites that would benefit from wildlife passage projects can also be identified at local or regional levels when concerned organizations and/or citizens recognize a need and advocate for mitigation.

### ODFW Implementation Strategies

Implementation of wildlife passage projects require numerous complex evaluations and significant financial investment. Site assessments, feasibility studies, engineering, design, and government permitting are required before construction can proceed. Monitoring, habitat restoration, and long-term maintenance are required to ensure continued wildlife use.

In order to maximize the amount of IIJA funds allocated to Oregon for the assessment, design, and construction of wildlife passage structures, ODFW is working to coordinate with ODOT and other partners to:

- 1) advocate for flexible funds apportioned to ODOT to be applied toward priority wildlife passage projects,
- 2) promote partners to apply for competitive grant programs for wildlife passage projects, and
- 3) implement funds to assess, design, construct, and monitor wildlife crossings in priority locations.



Examples of current wildlife passage projects in need of funding:



- The Harborton Shuttle Effort is a community science effort advocating for construction of a frog passage culvert to reduce the high mortality of northern red-legged frogs crossing Highway 30 near Linnton, OR.
- The Southern Oregon Wildlife Crossing Coalition is fundraising for a series of wildlife passage structures on Interstate 5 between Ashland and the California border to help reconnect the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument, an area of high biodiversity and important linkage between three geologically distinct mountain ranges.
- The Burns Paiute Tribe is promoting the need for retrofits to existing bridges and installation of an overpass on Highway 20 between Harper and Juntura, an area of cultural significance to the tribe that sees some of the highest densities of deer-vehicle collisions in the state.
- ODFW, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Forest Service are exploring options for improving passage of Pacific marten across U.S. Highway 101 between the Siuslaw River and Coos Bay. The coastal population of Pacific marten is listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, with population declines partially attributable to mortalities caused by vehicles.

### Potential IIJA Funding Opportunities

The IIJA identifies several grant programs and funds administered by the Federal Highway Administration that can be applied to wildlife passage projects. With few exceptions, eligible entities for grant applications are restricted to state transportation agencies, tribes, and federal land management agencies. These grant programs include the:

- *FHWA Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program*, providing \$350 million in competitive grants over five years to projects seeking to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and improve habitat connectivity for terrestrial and aquatic species.
- *FHWA Surface Transportation Block Grant Program*, which designates \$72 billion for projects designed to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions, including project-related planning, design, construction, monitoring, and preventative maintenance.
- *FHWA Federal Lands Transportation Program* identifies \$2.2 billion that can be applied on federally-managed lands to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and maintain habitat connectivity, including costs of construction, maintenance, replacement, or removal of bridges and culverts.
- *NFWF American the Beautiful Challenge* includes IIJA funds from the DOI, USFS, and USDOD totaling approximately \$85 million a year for projects that connect and restore lands, waters, and wildlife.

Keep checking ODFW's IIJA website for updated information (<https://dfw.state.or.us/IIJA/>)

