

*Susan O'Neill, Chair*

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Testimony in Support of  
Senate Bill 902 – Wildlife – Protections and Highway Crossings  
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee  
February 27, 2024

**The Rural Maryland Council supports with amendment Senate Bill 902 – Wildlife – Protections and Highway Crossings.** This bill establishes various requirements for the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the State Highway Administration (SHA) relating to (1) the identification and prioritization of threatened and endangered species whose habitat or movement corridors intersect with State highways; (2) the completion of a statewide deer population survey and related habitat maps to assist with identifying areas where wildlife crossings or wildlife-vehicle collision mitigation projects will reduce collisions between vehicles and deer; and (3) the design of new bridges, culverts, and State highways and the replacement or renovation of existing bridges and culverts. The bill also establishes the Wildlife Highway Crossings Fund in DNR; among other revenue sources, the bill establishes a \$10 annual wildlife-vehicle collision mitigation fee that must be paid for each insured motor vehicle in the State and remitted to the fund. The bill takes effect July 1, 2024.

According to the State Farm annual deer-vehicle collision 2023-2024 study, across the nation, the growing deer and other animal populations, combined with the displacement of animal habitats, are making it more dangerous on the road, and making driver crashes more likely. The top 5 animal collisions reported by State Farm were: deer (1,288,714), unidentified animals (207,373), rodents (94,805), dogs (55,005), and raccoons (52,054). Maryland is a medium-risk state for animal collisions and 1 in 116 chances of striking a deer or other animal while driving.

Wildlife crossings are structures or pathways designed to facilitate the safe movement of wildlife across roads, highways, or other barriers. Types of crossing include wildlife overpasses, underpasses, ecoducts, culverts, bridges, and amphibian tunnels. Each type of crossing is designed to accommodate the specific needs and behaviors of different species and may vary depending on factors such as terrain, habitat, and the presence of wildlife corridors. These crossings offer numerous benefits for both wildlife and humans. By providing safe passage across roads and other barriers, they reduce the risk of collisions between vehicles and wildlife, which can lead to injuries, fatalities, property damage, and human injuries. Additionally, wildlife crossings help to maintain connectivity between habitat fragments, promote genetic exchange among populations, and support biodiversity conservation.

The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support with amendment of Senate Bill 902. The recommended amendment is to include a pilot program in three different areas across the State to produce a case study on the wildlife crossing's effectiveness.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.