Humane World for Animals

Formerly called the Humane Society of the United States and Humane Society International

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Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
SB 635 Wildlife - Protections and Highway Crossings
FAVORABLE

On behalf of our Maryland members and supporters, Humane World for Animals offers its enthusiastic support for SB 635 to establish and administer a program for the implementation of wildlife crossings of highways in our state.

Habitat loss and fragmentation pose an immediate and long-term threat to countless species. The U.S. human population is expected to grow to nearly 400 million by 2050, meaning more development, more deforestation and fewer wild and open spaces. Even lands remaining undeveloped will become increasingly fragmented by infrastructure developments. Roads, in particular, are a major mortality factor for wildlife populations residing in fragmented habitat.[1] Diminished habitats can also reduce food availability and increase conflicts with humans, pets and livestock.[2]

Developing safe wildlife road crossings as well as restoring and conserving critical habitat and wildlife corridors are essential to ensure wildlife are protected from increased human development and climate change. Road development and vehicle collisions with wildlife can be quite damaging to populations, especially those that are already small and fragile.[3]

While most (87%) animal-vehicle collisions in the United States involve deer, many other species are struck on roadways.[4] Vehicle strikes are expensive to society. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation (2008), the estimated average cost of a single animal-vehicle collision is $6,126 per incident; that includes property damage, human injuries, or, more rarely, fatalities.[5] The cost in today's dollars is likely much higher. For the years 2001-2002, an estimated 26,647 injuries occurred as a result of animal-vehicle collisions.[6] But those are not the only costs. Other losses include:

- The suffering and distress of injured animals
- The costs to rehabilitate animals, including X-rays and veterinary care by nonprofit organizations
- The loss of expenditures involved in conservation efforts for threatened or endangered species by governments and organizations
- The costs to municipalities of cleanup and disposal of tens of thousands of animal carcasses

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- The loss to businesses from loss of transportation, lodging and meal costs that would have been spent by wildlife recreationists of all types
- The emotional distress of people involved in accidents
- The cultural losses to Native Americans and groups such as wildlife watchers and advocates[7]

The mitigated costs from reduced vehicle collisions and the subsequent reduction in injury to humans and wildlife should also be a factor when cost is considered. Wildlife crossing structures, such as road overpasses and underpasses, including drainage culverts, can reduce the injury and death of wildlife as well as human drivers and vehicle passengers.[8] Additionally, while highway overpasses and underpasses can be expensive, building their creation into the design of new roads can save significant future costs. Using existing structures, such as culverts and tunnels, can reduce costs to the development of safe passages.[9]

For the reasons stated above, we urge a favorable vote on SB 635 and efforts to research and develop critical wildlife crossings that could save countless lives in Maryland.

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[1] Maehr, D. S., M. J. Kelly, C. Bolgiano, T. Lester, and H. McGinnis. 2003. Eastern cougar recovery is linked to the Florida panther: Cardoza and Langlois revisited. Wildlife Society Bulletin 31:849-853.

[2] Vickers, T. W., J. N. Sanchez, C. K. Johnson, S. A. Morrison, R. Botta, T. Smith, B. S. Cohen, P. R. Huber, H. B. Ernest, and W. M. Boyce. 2015. Survival and mortality of pumas (puma concolor) in a fragmented, urbanizing landscape. PLOS One 10.

[3] Negri, S., and H. B. Quigley. 2010. Cougar Conservation. Pages 221-234 in M. C. Hornocker and S. Negri, editors. Cougar: Ecology and Conservation. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London. [4] U.S. Department of Transportation. 2008. Wildlife-Vehicle Reduction Study: Report to Congress. https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/research/safety/08034/08034.pdf.

[5] U.S. Department of Transportation. 2008.

[6] U.S. Department of Transportation. 2008. [7] U.S. Department of Transportation. 2008.

[8] Clevenger, A. P., B. Chruszcz, and K. Gunson. 2001. Drainage culverts as habitat linkages and factors affecting passage by mammals. Journal of Applied Ecology 38:1340-1349; Ng, S. J., J. W. Dole, R. M. Sauvajot, S. P. D. Riley, and T. J. Valone. 2004. Use of highway undercrossings by wildlife in southern California. Biological Conservation 115:499-507.

[9] See e.g., Ng, S. J., J. W. Dole, R. M. Sauvajot, S. P. D. Riley, and T. J. Valone. 2004. Use of highway undercrossings by wildlife in southern California. Biological Conservation 115:499-507.