



Committee: Education, Energy, and Environment

Testimony on: SB0635—Wildlife Connectivity and Crossings Act of 2025

Position: Support

Hearing Date: March 4, 2025

The Audubon Society of Central Maryland (ASCM) is a 501C3 nonprofit with a mission to protect birds, other wildlife, and their habitats. As owner and manager of two wildlife sanctuaries in Frederick County, we understand the crucial need for wildlife habitat interconnectivity to support abundant and diverse populations. With our community's dedication to conserving and restoring biodiversity, ASCM strongly supports SB0635, the Wildlife Connectivity and Crossings Act of 2025.

In his award-winning book *Crossings: How Road Ecology is Shaping the Future of Our Planet*, Ben Goldfarb asserts, "To us, roads signify connection and escape; to other life forms, they spell death and division." (Goldfarb, 2023) In Maryland, an estimated 33,000 deer plus countless foxes, raccoons, turtles, cats, frogs, dogs, Monarch butterflies, and other creatures are killed annually on our roadways. Further, roads and other infrastructure block seasonal migration and movement to breed, feed, disperse, and find shelter. If prevented from travel by roads and other barriers, wildlife become isolated in small patches of habitat that may lack sufficient resources for procreation or survival. And because wildlife are major agents in seed dispersal, plant populations can also shrink due to habitat isolation by roads.

Since the 1960s, ecologists have understood that the size of habitat islands tends to be directly proportional to their ecological abundance and diversity. (MacArthur and Wilson, 1967) Research has also confirmed that connecting fragmented habitat islands, such as small parks and private sanctuaries, with tunnels, bridges, and other crossings, can help formerly isolated habitats reconnect and begin functioning like larger protected landscapes. (Tewkesbury, et al., 2002) When designed with organisms' ecology and behavior in mind, these structures can reconnect wildlife populations to enhance survival and foster genetic health, while supporting natural plant dispersal and avoiding life and property losses from vehicle collisions.

In Florida, wildlife crossings are being used effectively to extend the habitat availability for the critically endangered Florida panther. Similarly, Idaho is developing a network of

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bridges, tunnels, culverts, and fencing to protect drivers and reconnect habitat torn apart by expanding road systems. Understanding of the importance of habitat connectivity is growing locally, nationally, and globally. This year, Maryland can begin fostering our own biodiversity, abundance, and public safety by establishing a Wildlife Connectivity Fund and beginning the overdue process of reducing barriers to wildlife and plant dispersal through much-needed crossing infrastructure.

ASCM's members throughout Howard, Carroll, and Frederick counties care about wildlife diversity and abundance throughout the state. We also know that the rich ecological communities in our wildlife sanctuaries, enjoyed by visitors from around the state every day, depend on the health of plants and animals in surrounding farms, woodlands, parks, and neighborhoods. We urge you to pass the vitally important Wildlife Connectivity and Crossings Act of 2025 to begin funding and planning infrastructure improvements that will help wild animals, plants, and people reach their destinations and thrive.

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