

HB 731_Favorable.pdf

Uploaded by: Anna Griffith

Position: FAV



House Bill 731 - Wildlife - Protections and Highway Crossings

Position: FAVORABLE

Date: February 19, 2025

Contact: Anna Mudd, Potomac Conservancy

Dear Chairman Korman and Members of the Committee:

As the Potomac region's leading clean water advocacy group, Potomac Conservancy urges a favorable report for the Wildlife Connectivity and Crossings Act because it directly supports our mission of clean water, healthy land, and vibrant communities for all.

Wildlife crossings don't just protect wildlife - they also help reduce erosion, filter pollutants, and protect the forests and streams that are so vital to the health of the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay. Additionally, the Wildlife Connectivity and Crossings Act promotes sustainable growth by requiring counties and municipalities to consider habitat connectivity in land-use planning.

For these reasons, **Potomac Conservancy requests a FAVORABLE report for House Bill 731- Wildlife - Protections and Highway Crossings.**

Sincerely,

Anna Mudd
Senior Policy Director
Potomac Conservancy

HB 731_MAMIC_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Bryson Popham

Position: FAV

Bryson F. Popham, P.A.

Bryson F. Popham, Esq.

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February 17, 2025

The Honorable Marc Korman
Chair, House Environment and Transportation Committee
250 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: House Bill 731 Wildlife - Protections and Highway Crossings – FAVORABLE

Dear Chairman Korman and Members of the Committee,

I'm writing today on behalf of the Maryland Association of Mutual Insurance Companies (MAMIC) in support of House Bill 731.

MAMIC is comprised of 12 mutual insurance companies that are headquartered in Maryland and neighboring states. Approximately one-half of its members are domiciled in Maryland, and are key contributors and employers in our local communities. Together, MAMIC members offer a wide variety of insurance products and services and provide coverage for thousands of Maryland citizens.

MAMIC members who offer automobile insurance in the State often adjudicate claims resulting from collisions with wild animals. The considerable majority of such collisions involve deer; in fact, a recent study by the Maryland Insurance Administration noted that such collisions are both common and costly, with over 30,000 wildlife collisions each year.

MAMIC members believe that the time has come to examine this phenomenon more closely, and that such examination should include State and federal agencies, nongovernmental organizations and other stakeholders, all as set forth in House Bill 731.

The stakes are high, both in reducing future losses from wildlife collisions and enhancing traffic safety in areas of the State where such collisions are likely to occur. For these reasons, we respectfully request a favorable report on House Bill 731.

Very truly yours,



Bryson Popham

HB 731 Wildlife - Protections and Highway Crossing

Uploaded by: Cait Kerr

Position: FAV

Wednesday, February 19, 2025

TO: Marc Korman, Chair of the House Environment and Transportation Committee, and Committee Members
FROM: Cait Kerr, The Nature Conservancy, State Policy Manager; Michelle Dietz, The Nature Conservancy, Director of Government Relations
POSITION: Support HB 731 Wildlife - Protections and Highway Crossings

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports HB 731 offered by Delegates Ruth and Lehman. HB 731 seeks to formalize the Maryland Connectivity Coalition to collaborate with the State Highway Administration (SHA) and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to identify and advance priority wildlife crossing projects. The intent is to reduce road impacts on imperiled species and reduce wildlife vehicle collision risks for motorists.

The bill also creates a Wildlife Highway Crossings Fund to support wildlife crossing projects and the research needed to determine the most strategic locations for crossings. HB 731 aims to incorporate wildlife movement and habitat connectivity into counties and municipalities' comprehensive land use plans and provide local governments with updated information on state connectivity plans. It also places emphasis on education and outreach regarding wildlife collisions and the importance of habitat connectivity. By addressing the high number of animal-vehicle collisions, HB 731 moves Maryland toward a safer future for both people and wildlife.

Many species in Maryland can benefit from less expensive wildlife crossing solutions, such as underpasses that can often be built using existing structures like culverts and bridges. Virginia has already seen the benefits of underpasses – by monitoring wildlife-vehicle collisions before and after erecting directional fencing to funnel deer to culverts along I-64, deer-vehicle collisions in the area fell by an average of 92% after the fencing was installed. In just under 2 years, the benefits of these culverts with exclusionary fencing exceeded the costs of fencing, with an average savings of \$2.3 million per site.

The section of the Appalachians running through West Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania is a critical corridor for species migrating in response to climate change. This section, known as the Allegheny Front, is a priority landscape to preserve the rich biodiversity of the larger Appalachian range as climate change drives species to move and adapt. Serving as a habitat bridge between vast conservation lands in the southern and northern Appalachians, the Allegheny Front plays a critical role in keeping this continental ecosystem connected. By providing safe passage across roadways, we can better protect migratory species traveling through this important corridor.

The precipitous decline in biodiversity is a global challenge, it is jeopardizing food and water supplies – we must all do our part to find solutions that safeguard biodiversity. TNC commends Delegates Ruth and Lehman on introducing this bill, which aims to protect Maryland's rich biodiversity, while also reducing wildlife collisions' safety and economic impacts on our roadways.

Therefore, we urge a favorable report on HB 731.

HB731_DNR_FWA

Uploaded by: Emily Wilson

Position: FAV



Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Josh Kurtz, Secretary
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

February 19, 2025

BILL NUMBER: House Bill 731 - First Reader

SHORT TITLE: Wildlife - Protections and Highway Crossings

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: SUPPORT - REVISED TESTIMONY

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT'S POSITION

This bill would formalize work being coordinated under what's been known as a wildlife crossing coalition. We are aware of the Maryland Department of Transportation's amendment requesting to be named as Chair of the Maryland Connectivity Coalition established in this bill and are supportive of that amendment request. As currently written the bill requires the Coalition to meet quarterly regarding the various tasks outlined in the bill. Given the current fiscal uncertainty the Department would respectfully request consideration be given to language that would account for this so that the Coalition would meet and implement actions when practicable, provided there is funding to support such actions. The Department has been in discussions with the sponsor about this and is happy to continue working to a mutually agreeable resolution.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Wildlife collisions with automobiles - particularly deer collisions - can have serious consequences for Maryland drivers and passengers. This bill proposes to use engineering solutions to solve these issues. It also seeks to provide funding for road crossing structures for rare animal species.

BILL EXPLANATION

This bill prescribes numerous activities related to investigating and addressing places where there is contact between Wildlife and State highways. It establishes a fund for this work. It establishes and prescribes the conduct of a committee to oversee this work and a fund source. It establishes a requirement that highway interaction with Wildlife be incorporated into county comprehensive plans.

Contact: Emily Wilson, Director, Legislative and Constituent Services (Acting)
emilyh.wilson@maryland.gov ♦ 410-260-8426 (office) ♦ 443-223-1176 (cell)

MOS HB0731 Wildlife Crossings Feb 025.pdf

Uploaded by: Kurt Schwarz

Position: FAV



MARYLAND ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

February 17, 2025

Bill: <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2025RS/bills/hb/hb0731F.pdf>

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on HB0731 Wildlife—Protections and Highway Crossings

Position: Favorable


The Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS) supports HB0731. HB0731 will establish a Maryland Connectivity Coalition, which will be tasked with fostering collaboration between State and Federal agencies, as well as non-governmental organization to combat habitat fragmentation and reduce collisions between vehicles and wildlife.

Highways and roads fragment habitat, so that wildlife often cannot cross between fragments, or if it does, does so at risk of death. We have all seen the numerous road-killed white-tailed deer, raccoons, red foxes, opossums, and cottontail rabbits that are frequently killed along our highways. I personally have seen at least four road-killed Barred Owls, and one Eastern Screech-Owl.

Habitat fragmentation is a serious threat to our declining Forest-Interior Dwelling bird Species (FIDS) such as Ovenbird, Kentucky Warbler, and Hooded Warbler. These species are very hesitant to cross a gap in forest, such as a road or highway would create. All three species are considered by Maryland as Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN).¹ A properly-made wildlife crossing would allow these species to move between forest fragments separated by a highway or road. Fragmentation also reduces the number of safe nesting areas, and increases exposure to predators.

The promotion of wildlife crossings, which will be the Maryland Connectivity Coalition's goal, will also create wildlife corridors, which are vital to establishing resilience to climate change. Populations with safe crossings can freely move to a new location, when old locations become unsuitable due to climate change.

Overall, North America has lost almost 30% of its birds since 1970². Habitat fragmentation is responsible for a large proportion of that loss. Wildlife crossings and corridors will help stem those losses. HB0741 will promote crossings and corridors, indeed, connectivity. For those reasons, we urge the Committee to issue a favorable report for HB0731.



Kurt R. Schwarz
Conservation Chair Emeritus
Maryland Ornithological Society
www.mdbirds.org

¹Maryland State Wildlife Action Plan, 2015, Appendix 1a. page 5,

https://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/Documents/SWAP/SWAP_AppendicesChapter1.pdf

² Rosenberg, Kenneth V. et al, Decline of the North American avifauna, Science, VOL 366, NO. 6451, 19 September 2019,

https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aaw1313?adobe_mc=MCORGID%3D242B6472541199F70A4C98A6%2540AdobeOrg%7CTS%3D1707754028

Wildlife – Protections and Highway Crossings - HB

Uploaded by: Lisa Radov

Position: FAV



MARYLAND VOTES FOR ANIMALS

PO Box 10411
BALTIMORE, MD 21209

February 19, 2025

To: House Environment and Transportation Committee
From: Lisa Radov, President and Chair, Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc.
Re: Wildlife – Protections and Highway Crossings– HB 731 – Support

Chair Korman, Vice - Chair Boyce, members of the Environment and Transportation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Lisa Radov. I am the President and Chairman of Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc. We champion humane legislation to improve the lives of animals in Maryland. Speaking for Maryland Votes for Animals, our Board of Directors, and our members across the State of Maryland, I respectfully ask that the House Environment & Transportation Committee vote favorably Wildlife – Protections and Highway Crossings – HB 731.

HB 731 Establishes the Wildlife Connectivity Fund: Lays the groundwork for efforts to design and build wildlife crossings, map habitats, and reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions. The Fund can receive money from gifts, donations, grants, and, when available, state budget appropriations.

Leverages Federal Funding: Aligns state efforts with federal programs to secure funding and maximize state investment impact.

Promotes Sustainable Growth: Requires counties and municipalities to consider wildlife movement and habitat connectivity when developing comprehensive land use plans and provides them with up-to-date information on state connectivity plans.

Ensures Effective Outcomes: Requires performance metrics and measurable outcomes to evaluate the effectiveness of wildlife crossing infrastructure.

Enhances Public Awareness: Prioritizes education and outreach about wildlife collisions and the importance of habitat connectivity.

In Maryland, nearly 33,000 deer- vehicle collisions occur annually. Animals are moving and shifting their migration patterns as they adapt to climate change. Research and technology have made it possible to target the best places for wildlife crossings so that they can most effectively benefit wildlife and motorists. The Wildlife Connectivity and Crossings Act creates a mechanism to coordinate efforts between the Maryland State Highway Administration, the Department of Natural Resources, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders to protect Maryland's wildlife and drivers.

Maryland's wildlife and motorists are depending on us!

In closing, I would like to thank Delegate Ruth for her sponsorship of HB 731 and ask the committee for a favorable report.

Testimony of Dr Mark Southerland for HB 731 and SB

Uploaded by: Mark Southerland

Position: FAV



HB 731 and SB 635 Wildlife Connectivity and Crossings Act

TESTIMONY of DR. MARK SOUTHERLAND for VERNAL POOL PARTNERS -- Favorable

I received a Ph.D. and Smithsonian Fellowship in freshwater ecology and have consulted for federal, state, and local agencies on water resource issues for 30 years. I am the founder of **Vernal Pool Partners** and have served with the Maryland Academy of Sciences' Science Council, Maryland Water Monitoring Council, Howard County Environmental Sustainability Board, Howard County Conservancy, Patapsco Heritage Greenway, and Safe Skies Maryland.

This bill will:

- Promote collaboration between the State Highway Administration and Department of Natural Resources to identify and advance needed wildlife crossing projects
- Establish a Wildlife Connectivity Fund and leverage federal funding
- Promote sustainable growth in comprehensive land use plans
- Ensure effective outcomes through performance metrics and measurable outcomes
- Enhance public awareness of wildlife collisions and the need for habitat connectivity

Vernal pools are especially valuable local ecosystems that provide stepping stones for mammals, bird, reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates across urban, suburban, rural, and wildland areas. Breeding amphibians, such as wood frogs and mole salamanders (including the endangered tiger salamander), can only exist where they can migrate from their upland foraging habitats to breeding pools each year. Mortality on roads during breeding migrations can be catastrophic to these amphibian populations.

I urge you to pass the Wildlife Connectivity and Crossings Act to help reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and support habitat connectivity for wildlife across the state.

Testimony in Support of HB073 - Environment and T

Uploaded by: Misty boos

Position: FAV

Testimony in Support of HB0731 – The Maryland Connectivity and Crossings Act Environment and Transportation Committee 2/19/2025

Dear Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

I am submitting this testimony on behalf of 30 organizations in strong support of HB0731, the Maryland Connectivity and Crossings Act. This legislation represents a critical step forward in addressing the mounting challenges of wildlife-vehicle collisions, habitat fragmentation, and transportation safety.

Enhancing Public Safety and Reducing Costs

Each year, Maryland experiences nearly [33,000 reported deer-vehicle collisions](#), resulting in substantial economic and human costs. Between 2012 and 2021, [14 Marylanders lost their lives](#) due to wildlife-related crashes, and the financial burden of these incidents exceeds [\\$100 million annually](#). Insurance companies have incurred more than [\\$500 million in losses](#) since 2021 from such collisions, and a [recently released study](#) on the effects of wild animal collisions on premium increases for insurance, shows the ways in which those losses can be passed on to Maryland drivers. Proactively investing in wildlife crossings will reduce accidents, protect motorists, and ease the financial burden on taxpayers and insurers.

Demonstrated Success of Wildlife Crossings

The effectiveness of wildlife crossings is well-documented. In Virginia, the installation of fencing and culverts resulted in a [92% reduction in deer-vehicle collisions](#) at select sites, generating [\\$2.3 million in savings per site](#) within just two years. Similar success stories across the country underscore the cost-effectiveness of these measures. By integrating performance metrics and measurable outcomes into HB0731, Maryland can ensure that wildlife crossings are implemented in a way that delivers proven results.

Laying the Groundwork for Future Investment

The passage of this bill is critical to ensuring Maryland is prepared to address wildlife-vehicle collisions and habitat connectivity in a strategic, coordinated way. By establishing the Wildlife Connectivity Fund, HB0731 creates a dedicated mechanism for supporting wildlife-friendly infrastructure, allowing the state to proactively invest in solutions rather than reacting to costly collisions and habitat fragmentation. This fund provides flexibility—whether through state investment, partnerships, or future funding opportunities—to advance priority projects as resources become available.

Additionally, this bill formalizes collaboration between state agencies, local governments, and conservation experts, ensuring that Maryland has a clear roadmap for identifying and implementing effective wildlife crossings. With growing development pressures and increasing

road expansion, HB0731 lays the foundation for long-term, cost-effective infrastructure solutions that enhance both public safety and ecological connectivity.

Advancing Ecological Connectivity and Sustainable Development

Wildlife habitat fragmentation is a growing concern as Maryland's population expands and pressures from land development increase. Studies have shown that species such as the wood turtle—a Species of Greatest Conservation Need—are facing [severe declines due to road mortality](#). This bill will help counteract these threats by requiring counties and municipalities to incorporate wildlife movement and connectivity considerations into their comprehensive land use planning efforts. Providing local governments with up-to-date data and best practices will lead to smarter, more sustainable development decisions that balance growth with conservation.

The Maryland Connectivity and Crossings Act is a practical, science-backed solution to a pressing public safety and conservation issue. By passing this legislation, Maryland will protect motorists, reduce economic losses, conserve imperiled wildlife, and secure federal funding that will yield long-term benefits for our communities and natural heritage. I urge you to support HB0731 and ensure that Maryland remains a leader in innovative and effective transportation infrastructure solutions.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Misty Boos
U.S. Conservation Policy Manager
434-906-9861
www.wildlandsnetwork.org

Organizations signed on in support of the Maryland Connectivity and Crossings Act

American Rivers
Association of Forest Industries, Inc.
Audubon Mid-Atlantic
Audubon Society of Central Maryland
Baltimore Green Space
Calico Fields Environmental Education
Catoctin Land Trust
Center for Large Landscape Conservation
Climate Change Working Group of
Frederick County
Climate Communications Coalition
Eastern Shore Land Conservancy
Endangered Species Coalition
Forever Maryland
Harford Land Trust
Hunters of Maryland, LLC

Indivisible HoCoMD
Maryland Ornithological Society
Maryland State Grange
Maryland Votes for Animals
National Aquarium
National Parks Conservation Association
National Wildlife Federation
Potomac Conservancy
Queen Anne's Conservation Association
Scenic Rivers Land Trust
Sierra Club
Susquehannock Wildlife Society
Vernal Pool Partners
Wild Potomac
Wildlands Network

HB 731 - National Aquarium - Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Ryan Fredriksson

Position: FAV



Date: February 19, 2025

Bill: HB 731- Wildlife - Protections and Highway Crossings

Position: Support

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the Committee:

The National Aquarium respectfully requests a favorable report for HB 731. If enacted, this bill would create a Maryland Connectivity Coalition to identify and advance priority wildlife crossing projects that, among other benefits, will reduce habitat fragmentation for threatened and endangered species. The bill establishes a Wildlife Connectivity Fund to help leverage non-state support and to ensure future funding supports projects aligned with the goals of the bill.

Saving wildlife and habitats is one of the National Aquarium's three overarching conservation goals. Increasing habitat connectivity is one key solution to address the ongoing biodiversity crisis, especially when policies include special consideration for threatened and endangered species as this bill does. Roads and other paved surfaces create habitat fragmentation, hindering many animals' ability to feed and reproduce. Maryland's 69,000 miles of paved roads are no exception. Many species, including reptiles and amphibians, face the risk of mortality from road crossings during their overland migrations. Examples include wood turtles, semi-aquatic rainbow snakes, and the Eastern tiger salamander which migrates from woodlands in early spring and often travels over roads to reach breeding ponds. In addition to promoting sustainable improvements to Maryland's transportation infrastructure, this bill will ultimately assist species conservation efforts that help wildlife most in need.

This legislation also directs Maryland DNR to establish the Wildlife Connectivity Fund to invest in wildlife crossing infrastructure along with research needed to help determine the best locations for crossing locations. Such a fund will also allow the state to maximize investments in wildlife connectivity. Additionally, this fund would further advance the impacts of a recent grant SHA received to develop a comprehensive plan to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions by accepting private donations to the Fund through the MVA Vehicle Registration Portal and directly through a Fund website. In doing so, this bill would leverage growing public support for protecting wildlife and create another opportunity for citizens to directly contribute to wildlife conservation efforts in Maryland.

Strategically addressing habitat connectivity throughout the state will benefit several threatened, endangered, and other imperiled species. **We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 731.**

Contact:

Ryan Fredriksson

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Maggie Ost Dahl

Sr. Conservation Policy Manager
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HB0731 - Ruth - Sponsor Testimony - FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: S Ruth

Position: FAV



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SPONSOR TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB0731
(WILDLIFE - PROTECTIONS AND HIGHWAY CROSSINGS)

Delegate Sheila Ruth
February 19, 2025

Our roads are important to us. They connect us to each other, our jobs, the necessities we need to live our lives, and enable us to travel more efficiently. However, they also unfortunately create a significant and dangerous barrier for Maryland's wildlife. Roads separate animals from their habitats and force them to make life-threatening crossings in search of food, shelter, and mates. As Maryland's human population continues to increase and roadways are expanded, natural habitats are being irreparably altered. Native wildlife is being isolated which puts their ability to survive at risk. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) identifies 526 native species as endangered, many of which face additional stress due to habitat fragmentation caused by our growing road network.

However, it is important to remember that the heightened risk of wildlife-vehicle collisions this problem causes does not only harm our wildlife, but our human drivers as well. In Maryland, wildlife-vehicle collisions, specifically with deer, represent a steep economic cost to the state. In 2023, the cost of an insurance claim from a deer collision averaged \$6,183.63, according to a [2024 report from the Maryland Insurance Administration](#) (MIA). Given that more than 31,000 deer-vehicle collisions occur in Maryland per year, this represents a cost to the state's insurance companies of almost \$200 million annually. According to the MIA report, these costs will be passed on to the policy holders in the form of increased premiums.

The Virginia Department of Transportation estimates that the total costs of collision rise to upwards of \$40,000 after adding in medical costs, missed work, and removal of animal carcasses. Unfortunately there can be worse outcomes, not only for the animals but for the humans involved in such collisions: in the ten years from 2012-2022, 14 people were killed in Maryland in crashes with deer. These undue economic and life costs can be significantly reduced with wildlife crossings such as those envisioned in HB731.

Wildlife overpasses, underpasses, and exclusionary fencing reduce the probability of wildlife-vehicle collisions. These infrastructure designs allow animals to cross roads safely. Our neighbors in Virginia found that installing exclusionary fencing to direct wildlife to two existing underpasses [reduced deer-vehicle collisions at those sites by 92%, saving over \\$2.3 million per site over the 25 year lifetime of the fencing.](#)

These crossings can also connect the divided habitats of endangered species - divisions that further imperil their chances of survival - by enabling them to cross in search of food or mates. This habitat connectivity provides both economic and intangible benefits to the state.

In 2024, the State Highway Administration (SHA), working with DNR, submitted an application for the federal Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program. The application was successful and SHA was awarded a grant of \$387,424 to develop a comprehensive plan for reducing wildlife vehicle collisions, including mapping hot spots and high risk areas. Although the grants under this program have been placed on hold pending review by the new presidential administration, we are hopeful that the administration will recognize the cost-saving value of this program and allow the grant funding to continue.

HB731 focuses on laying the groundwork to prepare for progress in developing wildlife crossings and furthering habitat connectivity. The bill would take several steps to do so.

It would direct the creation of:

- a Maryland Connectivity Coalition, established by DNR and SHA, that would foster collaboration and facilitate the sharing of resources, data, and expertise relating to wildlife habitat connectivity. The Coalition will consist of legislators and representatives of federal and state agencies, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders identified by DNR and SHA. The role of the coalition would be advisory and SHA would have final decision-making authority over the placement, funding, and design of wildlife crossings.
- a Wildlife Connectivity Fund to be used for protecting both endangered species whose habitats intersect with highways and motorists and wildlife from wildlife-vehicle collisions.
- a portal established by DNR for donations to the fund, which would collaborate (if feasible) with the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration to provide an option on the vehicle registration portal to donate to the fund.

It would also establish:

- that funds may be transferred from the Wildlife Connectivity Fund to the Transportation Trust Fund.
- transparency and reporting requirements on wildlife crossings planned and in progress, Transportation Trust Fund expenditures, and measurable outcomes.
- land use guidelines by requiring charter counties and local jurisdictions to consider wildlife movement and habitat connectivity when developing their comprehensive plans. The Maryland Department of Planning would work with SHA and DNR to provide information on habitat connectivity concerns and planned wildlife crossings to the counties and local jurisdictions.

HB731 lays a strong foundation that Maryland can build on to protect wildlife and motorists, prevent wildlife-vehicle collisions, and save money for our state and its people. I ask for a favorable report.

HB0731_WildlifeConnectivityCrossingsAct_FAV-Climat

Uploaded by: Sonia Demiray

Position: FAV



HB0731 - SUPPORT

Sonia Demiray
Climate Communications Coalition
sonia@demirayink.com
202-744-2948

HB0731- Wildlife Connectivity and Crossings Act

Environment and Transportation

February 19, 2025

Dear Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

My name is Sonia Demiray, I am the Executive Director of the Climate Communications Coalition, a member of the Mid-Atlantic Justice Coalition and the Maryland Climate Justice Wing. The Climate Communications Coalition strongly supports HB0731.

This bill will help reduce the impact of the growing population pressure on wildlife across Maryland. HB0731 is 100% positive: it promotes collaboration among state agencies and stakeholders, it requires accountability through performance metrics, and leverages federal funds to save the lives of Marylanders and of wildlife. Virginia, after building wildlife crossings saved around \$2.3 million per site in less than two years through avoided collisions.

The amount of roadkill along our roads and highways frankly is frightening and sad. There is a relatively easy solution. Let's make it safer for our animals to cross the deadly corridors that we have drawn across their habitat and provide safe passageways for our imperiled, and some not so imperiled, species.

We urge a favorable report on HB0731.

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HB731_FAV_Humane World.pdf

Uploaded by: Stacey Volodin

Position: FAV



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

1255 23rd St. NW, Suite 450
Washington, DC 20037
202-452-1100
humaneworld.org

February 19, 2025

Environment and Transportation Committee

HB 731

Protections and Highway Crossings

FAVORABLE

Humane World for animals, on behalf of our members and supporters in Maryland, offers our enthusiastic support for HB 731 to establish and administer a program for the implementation of wildlife crossings 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

- 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 advocates⁷

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 request a favorable vote for HB 731 and its efforts to research and develop critical wildlife crossings that could save countless lives in Maryland.

Stacey Volodin Maryland
 State Director
svolodin@humanesociety.org

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

HB0731 - SHA - LOSwA - Wildlife - Protections and

Uploaded by: Patricia Westervelt

Position: FWA

February 19, 2024

The Honorable Marc Korman
Chair, House Environment and Transportation Committee
251 House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Letter of Support with Amendment – House Bill 731 – Wildlife – Protections and Highway Crossings

Dear Chair Korman and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) supports House Bill 731 and offers the following information and amendments for the Committee’s consideration.

HB 731 establishes a new Maryland Connectivity Coalition to foster collaboration among state and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders for the purpose of protecting endangered wildlife from habitat fragmentation. It also requires the State Highway Administration to have final authority regarding decisions on placement, funding, or design of wildlife crossings; requires the Department of Natural Resources to develop a website for accepting donations to the fund; and mandates other requirements related to wildlife crossings in Maryland.

The MDOT and the State Highway Administration (SHA) would like to thank the bill sponsors for bringing this legislation to the General Assembly. The Wildlife Crossing Program, which was established as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 (IIJA), determined there are more than 1,000,000 wildlife vehicle collisions annually in the United States. This poses a significant danger to safety and wildlife survival at a cost of more than \$8 billion and results in tens of thousands of serious injuries and hundreds of fatalities on U.S. roadways.

In response to this issue, SHA applied for and was awarded nearly \$388,000 through the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program. Maryland is one of just 16 states chosen for this pilot program for years 2024 to 2025.

The State Highway Administration plans to use this funding to:

- Identify areas and locations along state highways with high volumes of wildlife - vehicular collisions;
- Create design guidance to reduce wildlife-vehicular collisions on state routes; and

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- Support public engagement and awareness of wildlife-vehicular collisions and habitat connectivity.

Please be advised that, as of the date of this letter, this and certain other grant programs administered through United States Department of Transportation have been frozen in response to certain recently issued federal Executive Orders. SHA is poised to move forward with this grant if the federal funding freeze is lifted.

Currently, SHA is working with the sponsor on several amendments, including one to name SHA as the Chair of the Maryland Connectivity Coalition. Designating SHA to lead the Coalition is appropriate, given the significant role it plays in the operation of the Coalition and its activities

The Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests the Committee consider this information during its deliberation of House Bill 731 and issue a favorable report with the suggested amendments.

Sincerely,

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