



March 28, 2022

Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer-Kahan  
Chair, Committee on Water, Parks, and Wildlife  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: AB 2344 Safe Roads & Wildlife Protection Act – SUPPORT**

Dear Chair Bauer-Kahan,

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to express our support for the Safe Roads & Wildlife Protection Act (AB 2344, Friedman & Kalra), which seeks to improve safety for people and wildlife by protecting and enhancing wildlife connectivity across California's highway system. We believe the Act is a necessary step towards improved travel for both motorists and wildlife because it would (1) direct California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and Caltrans to develop a Wildlife Connectivity Action Plan to inform the strategic implementation of wildlife crossings; (2) establish a Wildlife Connectivity Project List that identifies priority wildlife crossing projects statewide; and (3) require Caltrans to address and remediate barriers to wildlife in ongoing projects and proactively implement at least 10 wildlife crossing projects every year. This legislation is necessary to protect California's imperiled biodiversity and undo the harms of fragmentation largely caused by the state highway system.

Many of California's most iconic native species, including mountain lions, bobcats, California tiger salamanders, Quino checkerspot butterflies, desert tortoises, and coastal California gnatcatchers, face an existential threat due to their inability to disperse throughout their range. In addition to direct mortalities from collisions with motorists, roads can prevent animals from finding food, shelter and mates; escaping and recovering from severe events like wildfires or floods; or adapting to shifts in resource availability caused by climate change. Such barriers to movement can result in high levels of inbreeding and genetic isolation and increased risk of local extinction.

Lack of connectivity is the primary threat for many imperiled species and populations, including Southern California and Central Coast mountain lion populations, which are provisionally listed as threatened under the state endangered species act. Humans have extended roads and development into mountain lion habitat with little regard to their movement needs, which has resulted in dangerously isolated populations with poor genetic health and high levels of human-caused mortalities, including car strikes, depredation kills, rodenticide poisonings, poaching, and disease. The Santa Ana and Santa Monica cougar populations are facing an "extinction vortex," and scientists predict that these populations could become extinct within decades if nothing is done to preserve remaining intact habitat and enhance connectivity. Other populations including those in the Santa Cruz, San Gabriel, and San Bernardino mountains, are showing similar patterns.

Wildlife-vehicle collisions can occur when animals are forced to cross roads and highways that lack wildlife crossing infrastructure. These collisions often result in property damage, injury, and death. Wildlife-vehicle collisions reported in 2018 alone caused 314 instances of injury, an estimated 5 deaths, and over \$230 million in economic and social costs in California. This is likely a low estimate because many wildlife-vehicle collisions go unreported and animals may survive the crash only to die from their injuries away from the road. One study in Virginia found deer roadkill to be up to 8.5 times higher than what was documented in police crash reports, and State Farm Insurance estimates deer collision claims in California to be 3 times higher than the numbers recorded by the California Highway Patrol and community scientists. Fortunately, removing wildlife connectivity barriers by installing wildlife passage features, such as underpasses, overpasses, and directional fencing, have proven to be cost-effective means of reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions and facilitating wildlife movement.

However, California's existing policies addressing barriers to wildlife movement lack coordination, and the available bond funds are not enough to adequately address the threats to motorists and wildlife statewide. Current law only includes a policy to promote the "voluntary protection" of wildlife connectivity. Caltrans' Advance Mitigation Program is rarely utilized to fund and implement wildlife passage features. The California Environmental Quality Act, as applied and interpreted, has not resulted in adequate consideration and mitigation of the impacts of roads and highways on wildlife connectivity. The failure to incorporate features that allow wildlife to safely cross state highways has led to increasing imperilment of California's rich biodiversity.

We believe this legislation proactively addresses the gaps in coordination, information, and implementation necessary to protect California's wildlife in several ways. First, the Act creates a Wildlife Connectivity Action Plan that builds off existing resources, such as the California Essential Habitat Connectivity Project, to identify roads or portions of roads that impede important wildlife movement and have a high rate of wildlife-vehicle collisions. This plan also requires Caltrans and CDFW to develop needed protocols to monitor roadkill and wildlife movement, compile wildlife-vehicle collision data from multiple sources, assess opportunities to work with Native American tribes, and identify areas requiring additional monitoring or research.

The Act also requires Caltrans and CDFW to develop a Wildlife Connectivity Project List to prioritize projects that address the most dangerous wildlife-vehicle collision hotspots and enhance important wildlife movement. Identifying specific priority projects will be a critical preliminary step to coordinating and implementing effective crossing infrastructure (through advance mitigation or otherwise) in areas of the state highways that pose a safety risk to wildlife and motorists alike.

Finally, the Act requires Caltrans to incorporate wildlife passage features into the designs of road projects that overlap with areas designated in the Wildlife Connectivity Action Plan as important areas for wildlife connectivity or roadkill hotspots. Caltrans must also implement at least 10

priority projects per year to help remediate existing barriers to wildlife movement caused by the state highway system.

Bold state action to ensure wildlife connectivity is critical for biodiversity resilience and climate change adaptability. Incorporating crossing infrastructure into our state highway system will give California's iconic wildlife, like mountain lions, desert tortoises, and California tiger salamanders, a fighting chance to survive and recover. Wildlife connectivity also is essential to meet the state's goals of conserving at least 30% of California's land and coastal waters by 2030 in a manner that protects and restores biodiversity and builds climate resilience.

We thank you for your attention to this important issue and thank the author and the committee for considering this vital bill.

Sincerely,

Mari Galloway  
California Program Manager  
Wildlands Network

J.P. Rose  
Senior Attorney  
Center for Biological Diversity

Kate Griffin  
Executive Director  
Amah Mutsun Land Trust

Jennifer Hauge  
Legislative Affairs Manager  
Animal Legal Defense Fund

Claudia Naber  
Director  
Animazonia Wildlife Foundation

John Howell  
Chief Executive Officer  
Arroyos & Foothills Conservancy

Julie Kluck  
Programs Associate  
Born Free USA

Wendy-Sue Rosen  
Co-founder  
Brentwood Alliance of Canyons & Hillsides

Richard W. Halsey  
Director  
California Chaparral Institute

Cambria Wells  
President of the Board of Directors  
California Council for Wildlife Rehabilitators

Daniel Gluesenkamp, PhD  
Executive Director  
California Institute for Biodiversity

Dr. Frank Fogarty  
President  
California North Coast Chapter of The Wildlife Society

Rachel Norton  
Executive Director  
California State Parks Foundation

Chris Morrill  
Executive Director  
California Wilderness Coalition

Jennifer Brent  
Executive Director  
California Wildlife Center

Janet Cobb  
Executive Officer  
California Wildlife Foundation

Ken Owen  
Co-founder and Executive Director  
Channel Islands Restoration

Sally Gale  
Founder  
Chileno Valley Newt Brigade

Tony Tucci  
Chair & Co-founder  
Citizens for Los Angeles Wildlife (CLAW)

Doug Campbell  
Executive Director  
Coastal Ranches Conservancy

Pamela Flick  
California Program Director  
Defenders of Wildlife

Alison Eastwood  
Founder  
Eastwood Ranch Foundation

Stacey Hunt  
CEO  
Ecologistics, Inc.

Dan Silver  
Executive Director  
Endangered Habitats League

Charley Mims  
President  
Hillside Federation

Zara McDonald  
President  
Felidae Conservation Fund

Larry Hanson  
Board President  
Forest Unlimited

Scott Culberson  
Executive Director  
Friends of Ballona Wetlands

Gerry Hans  
President  
Friends of Griffith Park

Michael Wellborn  
President  
Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks

Darla DeRuiter, Ph.D.  
Executive Director  
Friends of Plumas Wilderness

Jora Fogg  
Policy Director  
Friends of the Inyo

Alice Kaufman  
Legislative Advocacy Director  
Green Foothills

Zoe Siegel  
Senior Director of Climate Resilience  
Greenbelt Alliance

Claire Schlotterbeck  
Executive Director  
Hills For Everyone

Lisa Levinson  
Campaigns Director  
In Defense of Animals

Kimberly Baker  
Executive Director  
Klamath Forest Alliance

Thomas Wheeler  
Executive Director  
Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC)

Spencer Lennard  
Klamath Siskiyou Connectivity Project &  
Shasta Trinity Wildlife Group

Kim Lamorie  
President  
Las Virgenes Homeowners Federation, Inc.

Jamie Hall  
President  
Laurel Canyon Association

Jamie Hall  
President  
Laurel Canyon Land Trust

Rick Hopkins, Ph.D  
Senior Conservation Biologist  
Live Oak Associates, Inc.

Dee Swanhuysen  
Senior Advisor  
Living Systems (aka Taking Action for Living Systems)

Bryant Baker, M.S.  
Conservation Director  
Los Padres ForestWatch

Ana M. Ruiz  
General Manager  
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

Kelly Herbinson & Cody Hanford  
Joint Executive Directors  
Mojave Desert Land Trust

Nick Joslin  
Forest and Watershed Watch Program Manager  
Mount Shasta Bioregional Ecology Center



Fred Hull  
Staff Attorney, Advocacy Director  
Mountain Lion Foundation

Meghan Walla-Murphy  
Principle Investigator  
North Bay Bear Collaborative (NBBC)

Damon Nagami  
Senior Attorney, Nature Program  
Director, Southern California Ecosystems Project  
Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)

Amy Gotliffe  
Vice President of Conservation  
Oakland Zoo / Conservation Society of California

Christopher Anacker  
Vice-President & Treasurer, Board Member  
Ojai Valley Green Coalition

Alison Huyett  
Environmental Campaigns & Advocacy  
Patagonia, Inc.

Walter T. Moore  
President  
Peninsula Open Space Trust

Lisa Lange  
Senior Vice President  
People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)

Sofia Rafikova  
Policy & Operations Coordinator  
Planning and Conservation League

Carolyn Trocino  
Director  
Poison Free Agoura

Kian Schulman RN, MSN  
Director  
Poison Free Malibu

Brooks Fahy  
Executive Director  
Predator Defense

Van Collinsworth  
Director  
Preserve Wild Santee

Camilla H. Fox  
Founder & Executive Director  
Project Coyote

Kanyon Sayers-Roods  
President  
Protect San Benito County

Lisa Owens Viani  
Director  
Raptors Are The Solution

Megan Isadore  
Executive Director  
River Otter Ecology Project

Drew Feldmann  
Conservation chair  
San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society

Katherine Emery, PhD  
Executive Director  
Santa Barbara Audubon Society

Shani Kleinhaus  
Environmental Advocate  
Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

Edmund Sullivan  
Executive Officer  
Santa Clara Valley Habitat Agency

Linda Parks  
Board Member  
Save Open Space & Agricultural Resources

Daniel Barad  
Policy Advocate  
Sierra Club California

Jack Eidt  
Co-Founder  
SoCal 350 Climate Action

Nickolaus Sackett  
Director of Legislative Affairs  
Social Compassion in Legislation

Misti Arias  
General Manager  
Sonoma County Ag + Open Space

Ariana Rickard  
Public Policy and Funding Program Manager  
Sonoma Land Trust

Wendi Gladstone  
President  
Santa Susana Mountain Park Association (SSMPA)

Gilbert Dembo  
President  
Temescal Canyon Association

Alayna Van Dervort  
CEO  
The Big Wild

Penelope Maldonado  
Executive Director  
The Cougar Fund

Samantha Hagio  
Director, Wildlife Protection  
The Humane Society of the United States

Landon Peppel  
Resource Conservation Director  
The Wildlands Conservancy

Dr. Quinton Martins  
Managing Partner  
True Wild LLC

Jane Velez-Mitchell  
Founder  
UnchainedTV

Bill Leikam  
President & Co-founder  
Urban Wildlife Research Project

David Jacobs  
President, Board of Directors  
Ventana Wilderness Alliance

Diane Underhill  
President  
Ventura Citizens for Hillside Preservation (VCHP)

Melissa Baffa  
Executive Director  
Ventura Land Trust

Eric Jones  
President and Executive  
Volcan Mountain Foundation

Allie Taylor  
President  
Voters for Animal Rights

Dee Swanhuysen  
Chairwoman  
Western Sonoma County Rural Alliance

Laura Cunningham  
California Director  
Western Watersheds Project

Sharon Negri  
Founder, Director  
WildFutures

Rebecca Dmytryk  
Founder, President and CEO  
Wildlife Emergency Services

Valarie Ianniello  
President and Co-founder  
Women United For Animal Welfare