

Wildlife Car Crashes Increase in Oregon This Winter

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife reports this winter a higher than usual number of deer and other wildlife on or near roadways as they move further down away from heavy mountain snow and into valley areas in search of food.

Animals foraging for food tend to follow the easiest path that will use the least amount of energy, which may lead them onto sections of highways or other transportation routes. Banks of snow along road shoulders may cause deer looking for a place to escape to panic and run into the path of vehicles

Wildlife Warning Signs Fail to Reduce Number of Crashes

Wildlife-vehicle crashes occur everywhere in the state, in both rural and urban settings. In 2014, ODOT reported Klamath, Lane and Jackson counties with the highest number of reported vehicle-wildlife crashes, followed by Clackamas and Deschutes counties.

To stimulate driver awareness, last year the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife installed wildlife warning signs, some with flashing lights, along U.S. 20 between Vale and Juntura. However, drivers tend to ignore them or forget about them if they don't see wildlife in the area.

ODOT and ODFW Install Designated Wildlife Crossings

Using a more comprehensive approach to preventing animal vehicle crashes by managing wildlife, the Oregon Department and Transportation (ODOT) and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) joined forces in 2012 to construct two sets of wildlife undercrossing structures on Highway 97, approximately fifteen miles south of Bend. The same year the project received the Exemplary Environmental Initiative award from the Federal Highway Administration, naming it as an example of an interagency collaborative approach using applied solutions and best available science in creative ways.

Four miles of 8-foot high fences along that stretch of Highway 97 channel 25 species of animals into using the underpasses, with four wildlife escape ramps on the northern and southern ends of the fence that allow animals trapped on the road the opportunity to jump over the top of the fence into open forest habitat. Six ElectroBraid™ mats also prevent wildlife from entering the road right of way at intersections. ODOT has also installed rocks, logs, and native plantings in the under-crossings to encourage small animal use. In 2014, ODFW reported a 90 percent reduction in roadkill in that area as a result of the improvements.

Be Watchful to Prevent Wildlife Vehicle Collisions

Wildlife vehicle crashes can be fatal to both animals and humans. To avoid collision with deer, elk or other animals, the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) advises drivers to slow down, stay alert, watch the road, and be prepared, particularly during the hours between sunset and sunrise, when animals tend to be on the move. Be extra careful in areas with a lot of vegetation next to the road or while going around curves, when animals may not be visible. When you see an animal near or on the roadway, reduce your speed and try to stay in your lane. Many serious crashes are the result of drivers swerving to avoid wildlife as they crash into another vehicle or lose control of their vehicle. And remember to always wear your safety belt, as even the slightest collision could result in serious injuries.

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