

Washington Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

The Sportsmen's voice for our wild public lands, waters and wildlife.

April 11, 2019



Dear Senator,

On behalf of the Washington Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, I am writing to express our support for a 2019 Transportation Budget that includes a minimum of \$1.5 million for the Safe Passage 97 project; a very important and exciting public safety and wildlife project in Okanogan County.

Okanogan County is home to Washington's largest migratory mule deer population. These deer have long been valued by hunters from across the west who flock to the area each fall to hunt bringing revenue to local communities. Clearly, Okanogan mule deer are an important resource both to hunters and the local economy.

Unfortunately, each year more than 350 deer are hit and killed by vehicles in the Okanogan on a stretch of Highway 97 between Riverside and Tonasket where deer crossings are particularly concentrated. Not only do these collisions negatively impact the mule deer population, they present a significant public safety concern. The Safe Passage 97 project will install wildlife undercrossings on this dangerous stretch of highway that will reduce vehicle collisions with deer by as much as 50 percent and save Washingtonians \$2.5 million per year.

The Safe Passage 97 project has wide local support from both citizens and local leaders including the Okanogan County Commissioners, the Colville Confederated Tribes, the City of Omak, Conservation Northwest, the Okanogan Chapter of the Mule Deer Foundation, Central Washington Latino Community Fund, Okanogan Tourism Council, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, trucking and freight associations, and more. \$200,000 have already been raised by private donors to pay for the first crossing, but more money is needed to complete the project.

With such strong public support for a project that is a win-win for people and wildlife, it's time for the state to act to prevent deadly accidents on Highway 97.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to the concerns of your constituents and considering the inclusion of \$1.5 million for the Safe Passage Highway 97 project in the 2019 Transportation Budget.

Sincerely,

Bart George, Co-Chair
Washington State Chapter
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

Max Cole, Co-Chair
Washington State Chapter
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

Carmen Vanbianchi, Conservation Committee
Washington State Chapter
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers