



November 11, 2021

The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor, State of California  
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173  
Sacramento, CA 9581

*(Submitted via email to recipients)*

**Re: Directing Caltrans to Add Necessary Wildlife Overpasses to Brightline West High-Speed Rail Project**

Governor Newsom:

We write to request that your administration ensures that the proposed Brightline West High-Speed Rail Project (“Project”) includes three wildlife overpasses, which are necessary to avoid the permanent blockage of critical California wildlife corridors resulting from the Project’s concrete barrier walls. Caltrans holds jurisdiction over the Project right-of-way, and has existing authorities to ensure the Project

proponent includes these wildlife overpasses in the Project design, making the Project consistent with your commitment to protect biodiversity including desert bighorn sheep and mountain lions.

Time is of the essence to resolve this matter, as the Project proponent hopes to complete financing on the project within the next six months. We support the findings from your Caltrans and Department of Fish and Wildlife scientists that have identified the three wildlife overpasses as necessary to protect our world-class wildlife in the fragile California desert. Wildlife species of special status whose movements will be inhibited by this Project include the desert bighorn sheep, desert tortoise, Mojave ground squirrel, mountain lion, desert kit fox and Merriam bobcat, just to name a few. Wildlife overpasses preserve the movement of wildlife and provide for genetic diversity, connecting populations and allowing individual species to move between habitats, which will be increasingly essential in the face of climate change. Desert wildlife such as the bighorn sheep are of tremendous cultural significance to the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians and many other desert Native peoples.

Brightline, the Miami-based owner of the Project, is proposing the more than \$8 billion project, requesting hundreds of millions in tax-exempt bonds from California, expected to have an annual operating profit of nearly \$1 billion,<sup>i</sup> and proposing a project that – as currently designed – will have devastating impacts to California’s wildlife. Therefore, requiring Brightline to construct the wildlife overpasses is not only the right thing to do, but is financially reasonable and feasible.

Through the inclusion of the overpasses into the Project design, California can continue to demonstrate its commitment to protecting its rich biodiversity. We ask for your leadership to secure this outcome.

Sincerely,

Eric Hanson, Co-Chair & Policy Lead,  
California Chapter  
**Backcountry Hunters & Anglers**

Kevin Emmerich, Co-Founder  
**Basin and Range Watch**

Aimee J. Byard, Associate Director/Biologist  
**Bighorn Institute**

Fred Harpster, President  
**Black Brant Group**

Chriss Bowles, President  
**California Bowmen Hunters/State Archery Association**

Don Martin, President  
**California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation**

Dan Whisenhunt, CEO  
**California Deer Association**

Lori Jacobs, President  
**California Houndsmen for Conservation**

Roy Griffith, Legislative Director  
**California Rifle & Pistol Association**

Mark Hennelly, Vice President of Government Relations  
**California Waterfowl Association**

Linda Castro, Assistant Policy Director  
**California Wilderness Coalition**

Ileene Anderson, Public Lands Deserts Director  
**Center for Biological Diversity**

Sierra Pencille, Tribal Council Chairperson  
**Chemehuevi Indian Tribe**

Philip A. Francis, Jr., Chair  
**Coalition to Protect America’s National Parks**

Pamela Flick, California Director  
**Defenders of Wildlife**

Edward L. LaRue, Jr., M.S., Chairperson  
**Desert Tortoise Council, Ecosystems Advisory Committee**

Jocelyn Silverlight, Executive Director  
**Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve**

Wendy Schneider, Executive Director  
**Friends of the Inyo**

Kelly Herbinson, Executive Director  
**Mojave Desert Land Trust**

Chris Clarke, Board President  
**Mojave National Preserve Conservancy**

Steve Bardwell, President  
**Morongo Basin Conservation Association**

Debra Chase, CEO  
**Mountain Lion Foundation**

Neal Desai, Senior Program Director  
**National Parks Conservation Association**

Michael Madrigal, President  
**Native American Land Conservancy**

Fraser Shilling, Director  
**Road Ecology Center**

Gary F. Brennan, President  
**San Diego County Wildlife Federation**

Cathie Nelson, President  
**San Francisco Bay Area Chapter  
Safari Club International**

Kim Floyd, Conservation Chair  
**San Geronio Chapter, Sierra Club**

Kenneth R. Ramirez, Chairman  
**San Manuel Band of Mission Indians**

Lisa C. McNamee, Legislative Coordinator  
**SCI CA Coalition**

John D. Wehausen, Ph.D., President  
**Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep Foundation**

Frazier Haney, Executive Director  
**The Wildlands Conservancy**

Steve Miller, President  
**Tulare Basin Wetlands Association**

Laura Cunningham, California Director  
**Western Watersheds Project**

Gray N. Thornton, President & CEO  
**Wild Sheep Foundation**

cc:

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein, U.S. Senator  
The Honorable Alex Padilla, U.S. Senator  
Toks Omishakin, Director, Caltrans  
Chuck Bonham, Director, California Department of Fish and Wildlife  
The Honorable Fiona Ma, State of California Treasurer  
The Honorable Betty Yee, State of California Controller  
Mark Tollefson, Deputy Cabinet Secretary, Governor's Office  
Mike Gauthier, Superintendent, Mojave National Preserve, U.S. National Park Service  
Joe Stout, Associate State Director, U.S. Bureau of Land Management

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<sup>i</sup> 6/11/2020 Forbes article on Fortress Investment Group, which owns Brightline:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/alanohnsman/2020/06/11/inside-a-wall-street-tycoons-plan-to-get-americans-off-the-highway---and-on-his-trains/?sh=182631b87a04> and [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cc6\\_3uNXcqC](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cc6_3uNXcqC)