



SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 21-021

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also REPRESENTATIVE(S) Will, Amabile, Bennett, Bird, Carver, Catlin, Cutter, Daugherty, Duran, Geitner, Gonzales-Gutierrez, Herod, Hooton, Jackson, Jodeh, Kipp, Lynch, McCluskie, McCormick, McLachlan, Mullica, Pico, Ricks, Roberts, Sandridge, Snyder, Titone, Valdez D., Van Beber, Young.

CONCERNING THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY'S SUPPORT OF THE STATE OF COLORADO'S EFFORTS TO PRESERVE THE STATE'S FLORA AND FAUNA THROUGH THE PROTECTION OF WILDLIFE HABITAT CONNECTIVITY.

WHEREAS, Colorado's natural environment and numerous native plant and wildlife species contribute greatly to the economy and play a vital role in ensuring a sustainable future for current and future generations of Coloradans and enhancing their quality of life; and

WHEREAS, Sporting and outdoors enthusiasts and tourists from across the world visit Colorado to experience our state's outdoor landscapes and abundant wildlife; and

WHEREAS, Colorado boasts the largest Rocky Mountain elk herd in the world, which contains over 250,000 animals, and the state is also home to significant populations of other iconic big game species such as mule deer, bighorn sheep, pronghorn, and moose, as well as numerous other endemic wildlife species; and

WHEREAS, The 2019 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan reports that outdoor recreation contributes more than \$62 billion to the state's economy, and in 2017 employed about 511,000 people, was

responsible for about one-tenth (\$35 billion) of the state's gross domestic product, and brought in \$9.4 billion in local, state, and federal tax revenue; and

WHEREAS, One in five species is at risk of extinction in the United States, and Colorado is home to 33 threatened or endangered species; and

WHEREAS, Changing climate conditions are exacerbating the existing pressures on the natural habitats of wildlife, and protecting wildlife corridors and maintaining connected habitats is recognized as one of the most ecologically effective climate adaptation and biodiversity conservation measures; and

WHEREAS, Intact habitats and intact wildlife corridors that connect those habitats are vital to ensuring that Colorado's wildlife populations continue to thrive; and

WHEREAS, Protecting wildlife corridors has been shown to improve the herd vitality of big game species that are critical to Colorado's outdoor recreation economy; and

WHEREAS, Wildlife corridors serve to connect wildlife habitat areas and allow for the movement, migration, and dispersal of native fish, wildlife, and plant species; and

WHEREAS, Wildlife corridors provide benefits to humans, including increased property values of land adjacent to wildlife corridors, increased food security, and additional ecosystem services such as pollination, carbon sequestration, erosion control, and air and water purification; and

WHEREAS, Colorado's population continues to grow, placing pressure on the natural habitats that wildlife depend upon for survival; habitat loss and fragmentation are major contributors to declines in populations of native fish and wildlife, particularly species that migrate annually between seasonal habitats; and roadways disrupt annual big game migration, and vehicular collisions with wildlife pose risks to people, property, and the animals that contribute so much to Colorado's reputation as a place to admire natural wonders; and

WHEREAS, In Colorado, nearly 4,000 vehicle crashes involving

wildlife are reported to law enforcement every year, resulting in injuries and fatalities to humans and costing an estimated \$80 million annually; this figure does not include the value of wildlife killed in vehicular collisions, the impact on the health of wildlife populations, or the loss and fragmentation of the vibrant habitats wildlife call home; and

WHEREAS, Wildlife crossing structures built within important wildlife corridors increase public safety and are highly effective at reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions and the costs associated with those collisions; and

WHEREAS, The state of Colorado, through the governor's office and state agencies including the Colorado department of transportation (CDOT), the department of natural resources (DNR), Colorado parks and wildlife (CPW), as well as tribal governments, counties, federal agencies, and nongovernmental partners that represent academia, nonprofit organizations, and biological and engineering sciences, have all demonstrated commitments to protecting wildlife corridors and reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions; and

WHEREAS, These efforts are reflected in, among other policies, Colorado Executive Order (EO) D 2019 011, "Conserving Colorado's Big Game Winter Range and Migration Corridors"; the CPW State Wildlife Action Plan; the CPW "Colorado Action Plan", the 2020 Colorado State Action Plan to implement U.S. Department of Interior Secretarial Order 3362: "Improving Habitat Quality in Western Big-Game Winter Range and Migration Corridors"; the Colorado Wildlife and Transportation Alliance, formed in 2018; the 2007 Western Governors' Association Wildlife Corridors Initiative and subsequent multistate efforts including the Critical Habitat Assessment Tool and CPW's collaboration with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish to develop and implement a "decision support system" that will enable government decision-makers and others to identify crucial habitats and wildlife corridors along the states' border early in any planning process for development activities and energy projects; the "Colorado Habitat Stewardship Act of 2007" and implementing regulations that require oil and gas operators to review maps of sensitive wildlife habitats and restricted-use occupancy areas that are maintained by the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission to determine whether a proposed drilling location is within such an area; the Eagle County Comprehensive Plan (2005); and the Summit County

Connectivity Plan (2017-2019); and

WHEREAS, CPW has an existing statutory mandate to "maintain records of areas used by wildlife for migration purposes" (and make such information available upon request), section 33-3-105, C.R.S., and is required to collect scientific information necessary to fulfill its duty to protect wildlife habitats, section 33-1-110 (4), C.R.S.; and

WHEREAS, CDOT is already invested in wildlife crossing projects across the state including but not limited to: The U.S. 285 Nathrop Wildlife Crossing Project, completed in 2018; a partnership between the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, CDOT, and CPW to construct a big game overpass and underpass near the US 160/State Highway 151 intersection between Bayfield and Pagosa Springs; on State Highway 9, the construction of two overpass bridges, five underpasses, 20 miles of wildlife fencing, and over 60 wildlife escape ramps between Silverthorne and Kremmling; and the US 550-US 160 Connection Project that will install two landscape bridges to allow for wildlife movements and one large game underpass on US 550; and

WHEREAS, Dozens of Democratic and Republican state and local elected officials have signed letters calling for legislative action to conserve and restore habitat connectivity in Colorado; and

WHEREAS, In 2020, the Colorado House of Representatives introduced a tribute recognizing the state's leadership in advancing wildlife connectivity and calling for increased efforts to reconnect priority landscapes, conserve migration routes for big game and other species, and ensure habitat protection through partnerships, planning, and policies; and

WHEREAS, Legislation to increase funding available for wildlife-vehicle collision mitigation measures and legislation to protect wildlife corridors are under consideration in both the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate, and such legislation would contribute to highway safety, protect wildlife corridors on federal land holdings within the state, and provide a source of revenue to the state to protect wildlife corridors and pursue highway mitigation projects; and

WHEREAS, Comprehensive identification, designation, and protection of wildlife corridors is a crucial strategy for bolstering

Colorado's ecosystem resiliency and for ensuring the long-term viability of wildlife populations and communities; and

WHEREAS, Wildlife corridors are not bounded by property ownership or administrative boundaries, and therefore their protection requires recognition of private property rights and negotiations between different sovereigns (tribal, states, federal) and land managers (federal, tribal, state, county, municipal, and private); and

WHEREAS, Understanding the state's habitat connectivity status and potential would benefit from consideration of all relevant data, including data from federal, tribal, and state agencies and surrounding states, nonprofit organizations, universities, and private landowners; and

WHEREAS, Many state agencies, nonprofit organizations, and coalitions, as well as public-private partnerships, that are interested in advancing connectivity across this state and in surrounding states could benefit from a science-based understanding of current and potential wildlife corridors; and

WHEREAS, Protecting wildlife habitats and wildlife corridors requires significant financial investments, and the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of all the existing efforts in the state would be enhanced by a comprehensive and coordinated effort; now, therefore,

*Be It Resolved by the Senate of the Seventy-third General Assembly of the State of Colorado, the House of Representatives concurring herein:*

That the general assembly:

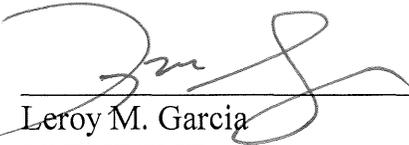
- Supports EO D 2019 011 and its mandates;
- Recommends the development of a working group including representatives of CPW, DNR, CDOT, other affected agencies, the governor's office, tribal nations and communities, sporting organizations, wildlife conservation organizations, the outdoor recreation industry, private landowners, insurance companies, and other stakeholders, to consider and develop policy proposals to assist in the implementation of EO D 2019 011 and to assist the legislature in crafting legislation necessary to support the

governor's vision and protect wildlife corridors across the state of Colorado;

- Encourages CPW, in coordination with DNR and CDOT, pursuant to its mandate under section 33-3-105, C.R.S., to extend the scope of activity under EO D 2019 011 to develop or collect data regarding the relationship of all wildlife habitat areas and the connectivity of those areas for all game and nongame species. CPW is encouraged to use the data to develop a plan to provide guidance for state agency decisions and future policymaking and to develop targets for the designation and protection of wildlife corridors. CPW is encouraged to design the plan to preserve long-term habitat connectivity for all native fish, wildlife, and plant species to facilitate natural movements, migration, dispersal, safe road crossing, genetic exchange, and adaptation to climate and other environmental changes; and
- Supports the 2019 federal "Wildlife Corridors Conservation Act" and programs included in 2020 federal transportation legislation (S. 2302 and H.R. 2) that would provide funding for states to build wildlife crossing structures and implement other measures to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions, and urges Colorado's congressional delegation to support these provisions.

*Be It Further Resolved*, That copies of this Joint Resolution be sent to U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack; U.S. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland; U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg; each member of Colorado's congressional delegation; the Colorado Municipal League; Colorado Counties, Inc.; and the Colorado City and County Management Association, and that these entities be requested to share the

resolution with the relevant planning commissions and highway authorities.



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