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*Director of Advocacy &
Field Operations*

September 11, 2023

Ventura County Board of Supervisors
800 S. Victoria Avenue
Ventura, California 93009
clerkoftheboard@ventura.org

**RE: Wildlife Crossing Structure Setbacks in Northern Ventura County
(Agenda Item 68)**

Dear Chair LaVere and Members of the Board,

Los Padres ForestWatch appreciates this opportunity to convey its support for the proposed wildlife crossing setbacks for 14 crossing structures in the northern Ventura County unincorporated area.

This proposal marks the culmination of a multi-year effort by the Planning Division to strike a balance between private property interests and the essential need to protect Ventura County wildlife from the very real threat of vehicle-related mortality. Injury or death while crossing roads and highways is growing problem as wildlife habitat becomes more and more fragmented due to expanding development.

The proposal is “smart-planning” that helps ensure that wildlife is protected while still allowing for development on private property. There are 27 exemptions from the proposed ordinance that include fuel modification activities for fire safety, allowances for commercial agricultural activities, maintenance of existing structures, and more.

This proposal has overwhelming support. It was unanimously approved by the Planning Commission in November 2022. 386 out of 388 letters submitted prior to the December 6, 2022 Board of Supervisors hearing were supportive of the proposed ordinance. When two of those letters expressed concern about the necessity of setbacks for certain crossings, the December 6th hearing was postponed so that County staff could follow up to evaluate vehicular traffic in these locations. As a reflection of this due diligence, two crossings on Lockwood Valley Road that were originally included in the proposal have been removed.

The community continues to express overwhelming support for this proposal. Between December 6th, 2022 and today, and additional 395 comments regarding this proposal have been submitted, with all but a few expressing support.

Additionally, we would like to direct the Board's attention to the December 5, 2022 comment letter (Attachment 1) submitted by 18 conservation organizations, which expressed support for this balanced approach to wildlife protection.

We are grateful for the County's due diligence and commitment to thoroughly evaluate and design this proposed ordinance. On behalf of all those who have expressed their support, as well as the wildlife that will benefit from these proposed protections, we encourage the Board to consider this proposal favorably.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Benjamin Pitterle', is written over a light gray rectangular background.

Benjamin Pitterle
Director of Advocacy and Field Operations
Los Padres ForestWatch

Attachment 1

December 5, 2022 Multi-NGO Comment Letter:



CALIFORNIA
NATIVE PLANT
SOCIETY



**DIETRICK
INSTITUTE**
Applied Insect Ecology



WWW.OJAIRAPTORCENTER.ORG

poison free Malibu



QUAILSPRINGS



**RUNNERS FOR
PUBLIC LANDS**



December 5, 2022

Ventura County Board of Supervisors
800 S. Victoria Avenue
Ventura, California 93009
clerkoftheboard@ventura.org

Re: Wildlife Crossing Structure Setbacks in Northern Ventura County (Agenda Item #75)

Dear Chair LaVere and Members of the Board:

More than three years ago, the Board of Supervisors voted to give wildlife more room to roam in Ventura County by establishing unique and important protections for habitat connectivity and wildlife movement corridors linking the Santa Monica Mountains and Los Padres National Forest. Adoption of those ordinances established Ventura County as a leader in wildlife protection in California and throughout the nation.

The Planning Commission recently added to this legacy by recommending that your Board adopt additional amendments to the Non-Coastal Zoning Ordinance (NCZO). These amendments would further protect wildlife movement in Ventura County by establishing 200-foot setbacks from 16 key wildlife crossing structures in the northern part of the county where the previously approved wildlife movement corridor protections do not apply. The undersigned organizations, which represent thousands of your constituents, strongly support the proposed amendments to the NCZO.

There is no doubt that, if adopted, the 200-foot setbacks will benefit a variety of animals from mountain lions to steelhead. The 16 identified wildlife crossing structures in northern Ventura County are vital to the ability of these animals to safely cross roads. Certain types of development and land uses immediately adjacent to the crossing structures could negatively impact the willingness of animals to utilize them, possibly leading to riskier movement across roads where vehicle-related mortality is common. Animals directly crossing roads rather than using structures such as underpasses endangers not only the wildlife but also drivers. And when one animal is struck by a vehicle on the road, it may attract scavengers that are then in danger of being struck as well, creating a dangerous feedback loop.

The proposed amendments are not overly burdensome to landowners, and they would affect a relatively small number of wildlife crossing structures in Ventura County. However, these small changes to the NCZO will go a long way in protecting both wildlife and public safety in Ojai, Cuyama Valley, Lockwood Valley, and along the well-used Maricopa Highway.

We urge you to vote for wildlife, healthy ecosystems, and driver safety by adopting the proposed amendments.

Sincerely,

Jan Dietrick
Policy Team Leader
350 Ventura County Climate Hub

Nick Jensen
Conservation Program Director
California Native Plant Society

Linda Castro
Assistant Policy Director
California Wilderness Coalition

Aaron Kreisberg
Staff Ecologist
Channel Islands Restoration

Haley Ehlers
Associate Executive Director
Climate First: Replacing Oil & Gas

Rose Ann Witt
Co-Founder
Conejo Climate Coalition

Pamela Flick
California Program Director
Defenders of Wildlife

Allyson Gialketsis
Board Chair
Dietrick Institute of Applied Ecology

Mary Brooks
Manager
Frazier Park Mountain Neighbors

Mary Brooks
Manager
Frazier Park Mountain Progressives

Alasdair Coyne
Conservation Director
Keep Sespe Wild

Bryant Baker
Director of Conservation & Research
Los Padres ForestWatch

Kimberly Stroud
Executive Director
Ojai Raptor Center

Kian Schulman
Director
Poison Free Malibu

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Ventura County Wildlife Trackers