

**Okanogan Trails Chapter**

To: Roger Millar  
Secretary of Transportation  
Washington State Department of Transportation  
P.O. Box 47300  
Olympia, Washington 98504-7300

August 29, 2018

Subject: Highway 97 Underpass Support

The Okanogan Trails Chapter of the Mule Deer Foundation was founded in 2014 with it's flagship project and main reason for forming to support safe-passage for people and mule deer between Riverside and Tonasket, Wa. on HWY 97.

This 12 mile stretch of highway has over 350 vehicle-deer collisions each year and at a societal cost of over \$6,000 per accident is costing close to 2 million dollars per year in vehicle repairs, removal of carcasses by WSDOT, state patrol response, insurance costs, medical bills, and the lost value of the deer for recreational viewing and or hunting. Fortunately, no one has yet been killed in an accident.

Our chapter hosts a banquet/auction every year to raise money for worthwhile mule deer habitat projects and the safe-passage project. To date we have dedicated over \$10,000 towards a multi-partner effort to buy and install the first underpass on HWY 97 in partnership with WSDOT. MDF Chapters from all over the state are dedicating funds to help raise the \$300,000 necessary to get started! MDF National is expected to match chapter's donations and combined with donations by other non-profits and the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation we are getting close to that goal!

For the last 5 years we have sold 200 rifle raffle tickets per year to members of the local community to generate funds for this project. We contact a broad spectrum of the community to sell those tickets and with each sale we emphasize through visuals and fact sheets our message of "safepassage" for people and mule deer on HWY 97. Of the several thousands of people we have talked with or sold raffle tickets to we have never once heard someone say they think this is a bad idea. The support for doing something to stop this total waste of wildlife, and prevent potentially fatal accidents is unanimous with those we have spoken with!


Our chapter has hosted well attended Mule Deer Summits for people to learn about the project and funded scholarships upwards of \$7,000 for high school kids to create visual and written essays about the reasons safe-passage is needed on this stretch of highway. At the proposed location of the first underpass we have worked with a local landowner to create a water source to draw deer towards and to use the underpass. At the well used Carter Mountain trailhead we refurbished and fenced the parking lot in partnership with Back-Country Horsemen, Conservation Northwest and WDFW and built an informational kiosk highlighting the need for the underpass in that location. We have purchased and installed game cameras along the route to help determine best locations for installation of underpasses.


We have assisted in working with landowners along the proposed project path to understand the project and to hear any concerns they might have in how it might or might not affect them. We have in turn passed any concerns along to WSDOT to consider in their design of the project.


We understand that the entire safe-passage project of 12 miles will logically be completed in phases, with the first phase of about 3.5 miles to include three underpasses' ( including the underpass we are helping to fund) along with all necessary fencing, gates, or side road cattleguards to assure wildlife will be routed to and use the underpasses.

In summary, the entire committee of the Okanogan Trails Mule Deer Foundation would like you to know of our full continued support for the installation of the first phase of this safe-passage project and the eventual completion of the full installation along the entire 12 miles of highway.

Sincerely  
Okanogan Trails Mule Deer Foundation  
Committee

Matt Marsh 

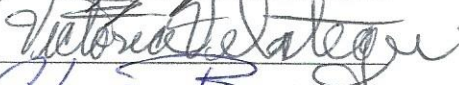
Jay Kehne 

Andy Townsend 

Lee Malm 

Allisa Carlson 

Joe Hoagland 

Victoria Velategui 

Chris Branch 

Jim Olson 

Justin Haug 

Jeff Hardesty 

Rick Barnett 