AN ACT TO REQUIRE THE MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE, FISHERIES AND PARKS, IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY AND THE MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION, TO IDENTIFY EXISTING AND NEEDED WILDLIFE CORRIDORS; TO FILE A REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares that:

(a) It is recognized as a public good that habitat connectivity, including wildlife corridors and habitat linkages, be maintained and expanded. It is the policy of the State of Mississippi to encourage, wherever feasible and practical, voluntary steps to protect the functioning of wildlife corridors through various means, as applicable.

(b) Areas containing diverse ecological and geological characteristics are vital to the continual health and well-being of the state's natural resources and of its citizens.

(c) Connectivity between wildlife habitats is important to the long-term viability of the state's biodiversity.

Preserving and connecting high-quality habitats for wildlife can
create habitat strongholds. Increasingly fragmented habitats threaten the state's wildlife species.

(d) Analysis of the state's habitat connectivity benefits from the consideration of all relevant data, including information from private and public landowners.

SECTION 2. (1) Because of the importance of wildlife corridors for assisting in adapting to warming temperatures and shifting habitats, for creating habitat strongholds, for protecting ecosystem health and biodiversity, and for improving the resiliency of wildlife and their habitats to existing and potential changes, the Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, in collaboration with the Department of Environmental Quality and the Department of Transportation, shall identify existing and needed wildlife corridors, including riparian corridors, and including potential crossings of transportation arteries. The Executive Director of the Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks shall direct the department to audit existing statutes, rules and regulations that affect wildlife corridors and shall make recommendations concerning any necessary changes.

(2) The executive director shall file a report containing the department's findings and any recommendations to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate no later than June 30, 2022.

(3) For purposes of this act, "wildlife corridor" means a habitat linkage that joins two (2) or more areas of wildlife
ST: Wildlife; require the Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks to identify existing and needed wildlife corridors.

SECTION 3. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after its passage.