

Friends of the Columbia Gorge

Protecting the Gorge Since 1980

Winter 2016-17 Newsletter

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Friends of the Columbia Gorge

FOUNDER NANCY RUSSELL, 1932-2008

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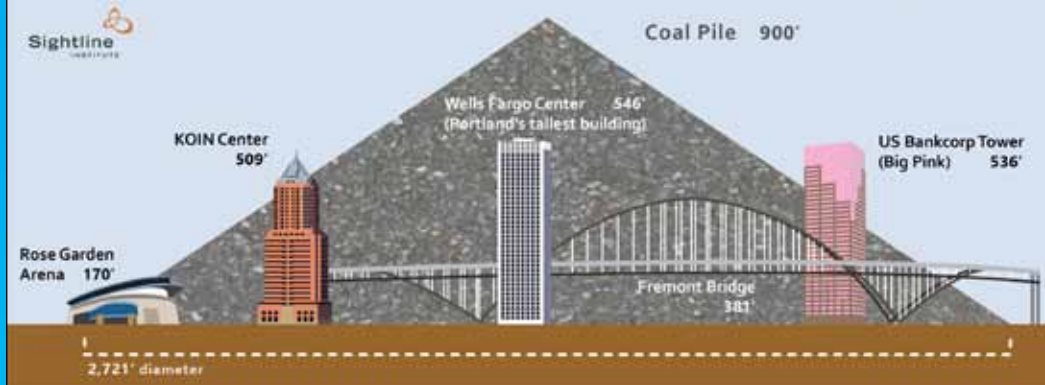
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Link to us on Twitter and Facebook
from our website: www.gorgefriends.org

The 44 million metric tons of coal slated to come through Portland annually would make a pile over ½ a mile in diameter and over 350 feet taller than the Wells Fargo Center.



Take Action: Stop Millennium Now!

Friends of the Columbia Gorge has worked with the Power Past Coal coalition for five years, opposing six coal terminal proposals throughout Oregon and Washington. Five of those terminals have been defeated thanks to tireless work of volunteers and activists across the region. Today, only the Millennium coal terminal proposal in Longview, Washington, remains.

This terminal would see 44 million tons of coal shipped through the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area every year. A significant volume of coal dust and debris already drift off trains every day passing through the Gorge, and we're currently suing BNSF Railway for violating the Clean Water Act with this pollution. The Millennium terminal would intensify the problem, and the eventual burning of the coal would accelerate climate change.

Last spring, thousands of activists turned out to hearings held by the Oregon

Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) in Longview and elsewhere, under the State Environmental Policy Act. Hundreds of thousands of comments were submitted on that Environmental Impact Statement, and the final statement should factor heavily into DEQ's decision on that permit.

The Army Corps of Engineers is initiating its own review of the Millennium proposal under the National Environmental Policy Act, and taking comments on their own Environmental Impact Statement. A hearing was held on October 24, and comments will be accepted until Tuesday, November 29.

Comments can be submitted online at www.gorgefriends.org/LongviewComments, or mailed to:

Millennium Bulk Terminals NEPA EIS
c/o ICF International
710 Second Avenue, Suite 550
Seattle, WA 98104

Our email Action Alerts provide the most timely, effective way to take action for the Gorge. Subscribe at www.gorgefriends.org/subscribe, or call Ryan at 971-634-2034.

Citizen Action Makes the Difference! www.senate.gov or www.house.gov
Your voice is vital to Gorge protection. Let Congress hear from you.

Oregon

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www.wyden.senate.gov/contact
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Sen. Maria Cantwell, 202-224-3441
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Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler, 202-225-3536
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Email your **Congressional Representative** by logging on to www.house.gov/writerep

Cover: *Wahclella Falls in winter.* Photo: Vince Ready/lastinglight.photo

Director's Letter

The words “what if?” always catch my attention. A “what if” question forces me out of my conventional thinking to imagine what could be.



Photo: Ryan Rittenhouse

Last year, a Friends donor posed a “what if” question that changed our world. She was praising our newsletter and the staff’s great work when her question came. Understanding that markets and the economy are cyclical, she asked me “what if” the economy tanked and the stock market crashed? What work of ours would continue and what work would cease?

Her question wasn’t rhetorical. She was considering endowing a staff position at Friends and was challenging me to make the case for the staff position that is critically important in our ever-changing world. I was thrilled and taken aback. Staff positions are endowed at universities, so why not Friends of the Columbia Gorge? This donor, like you, wants our most critical work to go on beyond her lifetime, and this was her way to ensure that happens.

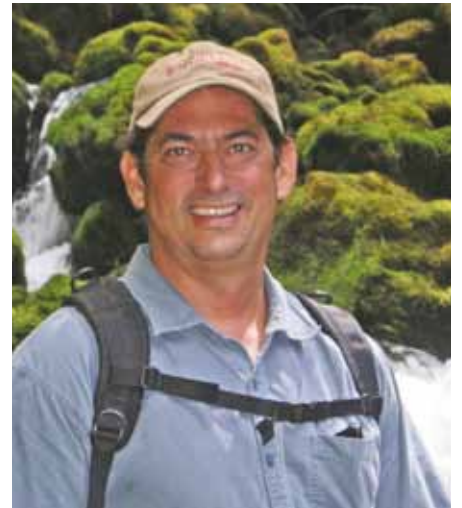
To answer her, I went back to the beginning. Advocacy and litigation have been in Friends’ DNA since our inception in 1980, and when we started the land trust in 2005, our board directed us to “do no harm to the advocacy.” As staff and board discussed the endowment gift, it became clear that the position to endow was the conservation director, who oversees our advocacy and legal work.

We’re fortunate that for more than two decades this position has been held by Michael Lang. Michael has navigated Friends’ way to a strong record of conservation successes and his lead article on page 4 of this newsletter exemplifies the importance of his position to our work to protect and enhance the Gorge.

Endowing our conservation director position institutionalizes our role as a watchdog protecting the Gorge. I’ve seen larger, older organizations slide away from advocacy and litigation in favor of less controversial pursuits, but the Columbia Gorge can’t afford that kind of shift, now or ever.

The Conservation Director endowment is one of the largest gifts in Friends’ history. But the story doesn’t end there. It’s just

Photo: Friends of the Columbia Gorge



Conservation Director Michael Lang has been a passionate advocate for Gorge protection for two decades.

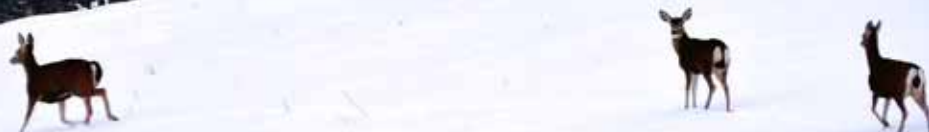
beginning. Our legal staff positions are equally important. Thinking of the visionary donor who asked me, “What if,” I can’t help but think of another “what if” question: What if there are others who care like she does? I can’t wait to find out.

Kevin Gorman, Executive Director
kevin@gorgefriends.org

Friends of the Columbia Gorge works to ensure that the beautiful and wild Columbia Gorge remains a place apart, an unspoiled treasure for generations to come.

Winter beauty in the Klickitat Wildlife Area.

Photo: Debbie Asakawa





Opposition to oil transport on rails is visible in Gorge communities.

Photo: Rick Rappaport

Oil Trains and Rail Expansion Meet Their Match

Mosier and Gorge residents fight back

Michael Lang, Conservation Director, michael@gorgefriends.org

Last June, a Union Pacific tanker train hauling nearly three million gallons of crude oil derailed and burst into flames in the town of Mosier, on the Columbia River in Wasco County, Oregon. The City of Mosier is still recovering from the June 3 derailment, which ignited an intense fire and spilled more than 40,000 gallons of crude oil that contaminated groundwater and leaked into the Columbia River. Burning fuel and toxic fumes required emergency evacuation of Mosier School and many residents.

Then just four months later, to the community's dismay, the Wasco County Planning Commission voted to approve

a Union Pacific proposal to expand rails through Mosier.

Poor safety record

The Federal Railroad Administration released a report on the derailment in June, which found that Union Pacific had failed to follow safety and rail inspection requirements. Nationally, Union Pacific has a poor safety record, with more accidents and equipment failures than the industry average.

Union Pacific claims that the track around Mosier presents the biggest bottleneck for rail traffic in the region. To remove the bottleneck and allow trains to pass one another at full speed, Union

Pacific has proposed construction of four additional miles of mainline track through Mosier. This would enable longer trains and significantly more rail traffic to pass through the Gorge, negatively impacting recreation sites, wetlands, Native American cultural resources, and communities like Mosier throughout the Gorge.

Disputed impacts

The proposed new track would pass through some of the most ecologically sensitive lands in the Gorge. It would also facilitate the use of long, heavy trains traveling at high speeds carrying explosive crude oil bound for terminals proposed throughout the Northwest. This includes Tesoro's proposed Vancouver Energy oil terminal in Vancouver, potentially the largest oil-by-rail terminal in North America.

Union Pacific claims that rail capacity would “only” increase by five to seven trains per day. However, rail traffic experts retained by Friends of the Columbia Gorge issued a report finding that the proposed expansion would result in a much greater increase in the number of trains that could travel through Mosier, but it would not provide the health and safety benefits touted by the railroad. Due to the track’s location, seemingly small changes would have tremendous ripple effects throughout Wasco County and the Pacific Northwest, including a potential increase of rail capacity from the current 30 to 48 trains per day up to 75 to 100 trains per day.

Public opposition

In early September, nearly 200 people attended a hearing at the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center in The Dalles to oppose Union Pacific’s proposal. Other than the rail company’s brief statement supporting their proposal, every individual who testified was opposed to the project and expressed concerns about increases in dangerous oil train traffic, congestion, and impacts to scenic, cultural, and recreational resources of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.

Numerous elected officials from throughout the Gorge who oppose the project were present, including representatives from Stevenson, Washington, and from Hood River, Mosier, the Mosier Fire Department, Cascade Locks, and the Wasco County School Board in Oregon. At a rally prior to the hearing, the mayors of The Dalles, Mosier, and Hood River (Steven Lawrence, Arlene

Burns, and Paul Blackburn, respectively) joined together in expressing concerns and opposition to the proposed rail expansion and the negative impacts it would have on their communities.

Unpopular decision

The concerns of Gorge residents did not influence the Planning Commission. Over objections from the county planning staff, the Commission removed or modified several conditions of approval that might have lessened the project’s impacts on tribal treaty rights, river access, recreation, air quality, water quality, and scenery within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.

The bi-state Gorge Commission stayed notably silent through most of the process. Other than filing a brief comment letter last spring, the Gorge Commission did not participate in Wasco County’s review process, even though it related to one of the most significant threats to Gorge resources to emerge in decades.

Friends, Columbia Riverkeeper, and Physicians for Social Responsibility all appealed the decision to the Wasco County Board of Commissioners. The Yakama Nation appealed as well, due to the project’s violations of treaty rights and the National Scenic Area Act. Union Pacific also appealed the decision, seeking to further weaken conditions of approval affecting tribal fishing access to the Columbia River.

Victory for the Gorge

In response to the appeals, the Wasco County Board of County Commissioners held

a public hearing on November 2, where they voted unanimously to deny the proposed Union Pacific rail expansion through Mosier, basing their decision on National Scenic Area laws that prohibit adverse effects on tribal treaty rights. Of the numerous reasons to deny this project, violation of tribal treaty rights is the most salient, and Friends applauds the Commission’s decision.

Friends of the Columbia Gorge remains committed to enforcing Gorge protection laws for all Gorge communities. We will continue to alert our members and the public about citizen actions to help protect the Columbia River Gorge from the unprecedented dangers of unneeded rail expansion and crude oil transport through the Gorge. ■



“Mosier came very close to being lost on June 3, and we cannot endorse any infrastructure expansion that would lead to even more crude oil or coal trains through our communities and the National Scenic Area.”

– Mosier Mayor Arlene Burns



Umatilla tribal member Cathy Sampson-Kruse (above) and other Gorge leaders, including (at left, left to right) Mayor Steven Lawrence of The Dalles, Mosier Mayor Arlene Burns, and Hood River Mayor Paul Blackburn, addressed community members opposed to the rail expansion at a hearing in The Dalles in September.

All photos: Rick Rappaport



Uncovered coal trains spew tons of pollution into Columbia Gorge waterways every year.

Photo: Kathy Fors

Friends Battles Dirty Coal Trains in Court

Nathan Baker, Senior Staff Attorney, nathan@gorgefriends.org

Friends of the Columbia Gorge and four allies are continuing our efforts to force BNSF Railway to stop its illegal discharges of toxic coal pollution into the Columbia River and other waterways in Washington state.

Every year, hundreds of fully loaded BNSF coal trains travel through the Washington side of the Columbia River Gorge, continuously spewing coal from

the tops and bottoms of the railcars into Gorge waterways and the surrounding environment. Each discharge of coal from each railcar into each waterway is a separate violation of the federal Clean Water Act subject to monetary penalties.

In 2013, Friends joined the Sierra Club and other environmental organizations in filing a citizen suit against BNSF to hold the company

accountable for its repeated violations of the Clean Water Act. Since then, BNSF has repeatedly attempted to exclude key evidence of its violations from the

case and even to throw our entire case out of court. But each time, we have prevailed and our case has moved forward.

In our lawsuit, Friends and the other plaintiffs present overwhelming evidence that BNSF is illegally discharging coal into numerous waterways. We are asking the court to penalize BNSF for its illegal discharges and to order the company to stop polluting the Columbia River and other waterways with coal. The case is likely to be resolved in the coming months. ■

Shell Oil Terminal Expansion Canceled

Ryan Rittenhouse, Conservation Organizer, ryan@gorgefriends.org

The Stand Up To Oil Coalition lodged a major victory this fall, when the Shell Oil refinery in Anacortes, Washington, announced it would no longer be pursuing an oil terminal expansion to their facility. The Shell expansion project has been one of the coalition's major targets over the last few years, along with the Tesoro Savage oil terminal proposal in Vancouver, and three oil terminals proposed for Grays Harbor.

This terminal would have had a capacity of 60,000 barrels per day, and would have added a mile-long oil train every day to rail traffic passing through the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. These additional hundreds of trains each year would have carried explosive crude oil from the hydraulic fracturing operations in North Dakota, identical to the train that derailed and caught fire in

Mosier this past June, and the train that exploded in Lac-Mégantic, Quebec, in 2013 killing 47 people.

Friends and our coalition allies had been collecting comment cards about the Shell proposal for months, and were preparing for hearings that were expected to be held throughout Washington in November. Shell's sudden announcement that it is cancelling the

Millennium Coal Terminal Proposal Update

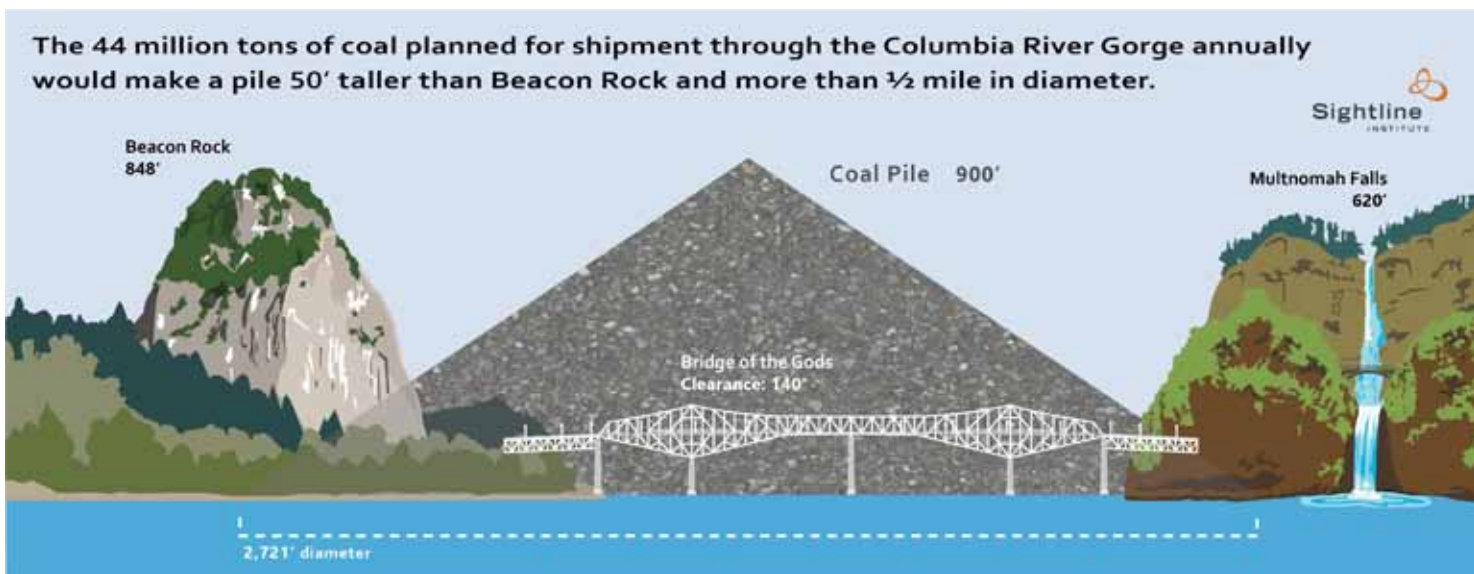
Ryan Rittenhouse, Conservation Organizer, ryan@gorgefriends.org

The Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) held two hearings in October for the Millennium Coal Terminal proposed for Longview, Washington. The Millennium comment period for the Federal Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) that is part of the Corps' National Environmental Policy Act review will close on November 29 (please see our *Take Action!* section on page 2 for more information). The project would result in eight additional coal trains per day traveling through the Columbia River Gorge.

This comment period and the federal permit process are related to – but should not be confused with – the Washington

State Department of Ecology's review of the project. The Corps' DEIS is unlawful because its limited scope of review only considers impacts directly related to the project site in Longview and surrounding area. It ignores any impacts on the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area or any other sensitive regions the coal trains for this facility would pass through. It also ignores any impacts related to global warming, climate change, or other cumulative effects. A decision on the state and federal permits is expected to be issued in the spring of 2017.

The sole backer of the Millennium project is Lighthouse Resources Inc., since Arch Coal filed for bankruptcy and sold its share of the project earlier this year. Lighthouse was formerly known as Ambre Energy North America; its name was changed after shareholders of the Australian parent company voted to sell all North American assets to Resource Capital Funds, a private equity firm that holds 92 percent interest in Lighthouse. Lighthouse announced last month that they had abandoned an appeal of Oregon's denial of a permit for their proposed coal export terminal on the Columbia River in Boardman, Oregon. ■



project has brought those preparations to an end.

Shirley Yap, the refinery's general manager, said in a statement that, "When we look at current crude oil supplies, prices, and markets globally, and the cost of the project, it just doesn't make economic sense to move forward at this time." The Anacortes refinery supplies about 25 percent of the Pacific Northwest's fuel, but this terminal expansion project would have exported crude oil out of the Northwest, and likely completely out of the country into global crude oil markets. ■



Pacific Crest Trail:

Return to Wild

Kate McBride, Land Trust Manager
kate@gorgefriends.org

With the support of Friends of the Columbia Gorge, the Pacific Crest Trail Association, and Gorge businesses, a critical but contentious land acquisition by the U.S. Forest Service was finalized in October. It will restore one of the most degraded sections of the 2,659-mile Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT).

Three years ago, the owner of this 274-acre parcel northeast of North Bonneville began the process of moving their land into public hands. The

property includes Gillette Lake, a mile along the east bank of Greenleaf Creek, and 1.5 miles of a logged-over section of the Pacific Crest Trail.

Friends' Land Trust and a conservation buyer were looking into purchasing the property when the U.S. Forest Service stepped in to work directly with the owner. Skamania County Commissioners objected to the Forest Service purchase, but more than 20 local businesses and the City of Stevenson voiced support for the acquisition. Eventually Congresswoman Jaime Herrera Beutler

brought Skamania County officials and Forest Service staff together to craft a plan so the acquisition could go through.

With this agreement in place, as the land heals and young trees mature, the area will become wild again. Stronger guidelines will protect Greenleaf Creek and the beautiful lakes on the property from future logging. This important acquisition will benefit hikers, habitat, and the forests along the legendary Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail for generations to come. ■

Greenleaf Creek, along the Pacific Crest Trail.

Photo: Dan Huntington

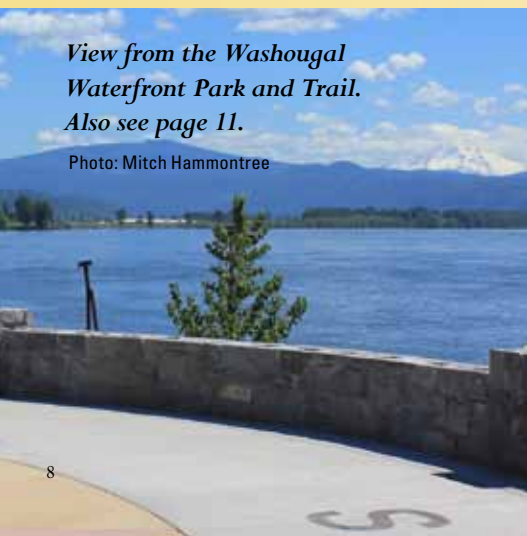


Gorge Towns to Trails: Washougal

Washougal Waterfront Trail and Park Grand Opening

View from the Washougal Waterfront Park and Trail. Also see page 11.

Photo: Mitch Hammtree



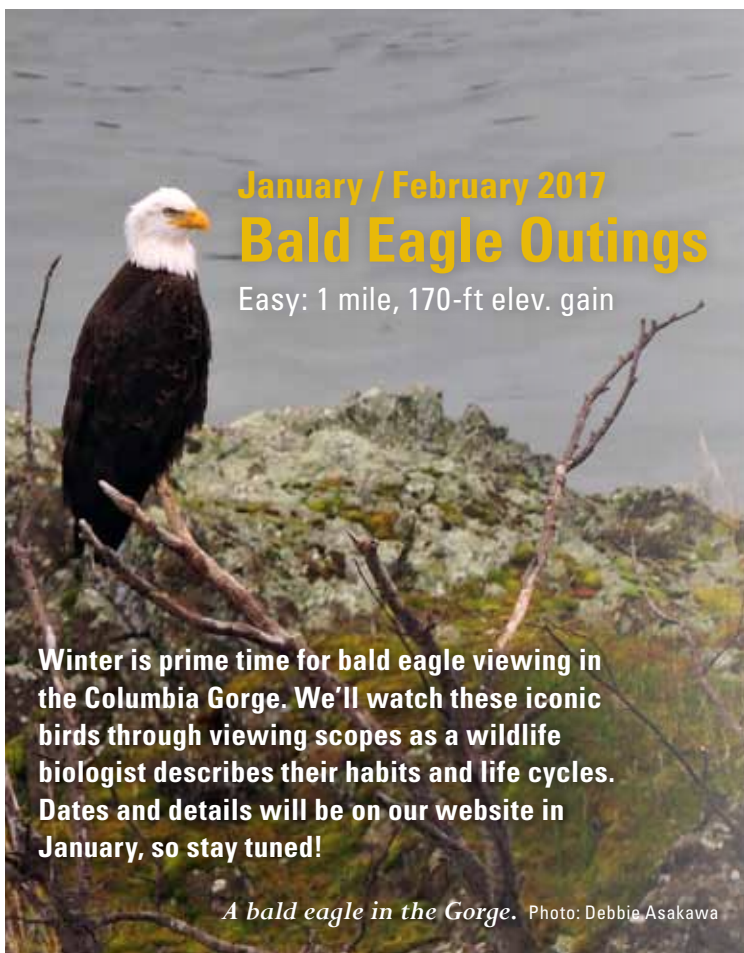
More than 100 community leaders and Washougal residents gathered in September to dedicate the new Washougal Waterfront Park and Trail, celebrating a significant investment that connects Washougal to the Columbia River and links it to the bigger vision of *Gorge Towns to Trails*.

At the dedication, *Gorge Towns to Trails* Project Manager Renee Tkach praised the partnership between local government and citizens' groups. With Governor Jay Inslee's economic recreation policy advisor

in the audience, she challenged the gathering to keep the momentum alive by continuing to work together on this project. Renee painted a vision of *Gorge Towns to Trails* that is more expansive than a local or even regional attraction. The project, she said, can become an international destination drawing visitors from around the world to Washougal and other communities in the Columbia Gorge.

Friends has worked with Port of Camas-Washougal staff and commissioners since 2012, providing support to help make this new section of trail a reality. Washougal is now the first official *Gorge Towns to Trails* gateway community on the Washington side of the Gorge. ■

Maegan Jossy, Outreach Manager
maegan@gorgefriends.org



January / February 2017
Bald Eagle Outings
Easy: 1 mile, 170-ft elev. gain

Winter is prime time for bald eagle viewing in the Columbia Gorge. We'll watch these iconic birds through viewing scopes as a wildlife biologist describes their habits and life cycles. Dates and details will be on our website in January, so stay tuned!

A bald eagle in the Gorge. Photo: Debbie Asakawa



Greg Lief Piano Concert:
A Benefit for Friends

Saturday, February 25, 7 – 9 p.m.
The Old Church in Portland, OR

Greg Lief's annual concert for Friends features a classical and ragtime repertoire. His stunning Gorge photography is offered by silent auction during intermission.

Advance tickets \$15, available now at www.gorgefriends.org/concert, or \$20 at the door.

Photo: Cheryl Hill

Our Newest Board Member

We are delighted to welcome David Michalek to Friends' Board of Directors. A Gorge lover since a windsurfing trip in the 1980s, the Texas native now lives in Hood River with his wife, Beth.

David's first exposure to Friends was on a guided hike, and eventually he became an activist, collecting coal dust and working to capture live action video of coal trains polluting Gorge waterways. David was a leader of one of the nation's largest solar companies, and since retirement his passions have included kiteboarding, mountain biking, snowboarding, and hiking in and around the Gorge. David was motivated to join our Board to help protect this great natural treasure.



Photo: Vince Ready / lastinlight:photo

David Michalek



Six books, a new stocking cap, a Gorge trails map, and a *gorgeous* 2017 calendar make great gifts for Gorge enthusiasts. And gift memberships are perfect stocking stuffers! Proceeds all support our work to protect this magical place. Order today at www.gorgefriends.org/holidaygifts.

*This Season,
Give a Gift of the Gorge!*

A winter hike on Larch Mountain. Photo: Debbie Asakawa

Kate Harbour, Membership Coordinator, kateh@gorgefriends.org

Fighting Fire with Fire

In 2014, Margie Kircher received word that a large-scale fracking project was planned on the farm her family had owned in Oklahoma for three generations. “At first I actually wept,” Margie recalled, “thinking about what would happen to the land.”

To complicate matters, several family members still share mineral rights on the property, and Margie would receive some profit from the fracked oil. She was uncomfortable being a party to fracking, but the family no longer owned the land and she couldn’t stop it. She considered washing her hands of the fracking rights entirely, but realized that selling her shares would only benefit the oil company. Then she had an idea.

As a Friends member since 1997, Margie volunteers with us in the fight against fossil fuel transport through the Gorge. She testifies at hearings and



Photo: Courtesy of Margie Kircher

Margie Kircher and Watson, taking a break on the Angels Rest trail.

rallies about the impacts of air toxins on neurodevelopment in children. So she decided to sign the agreement and accept the mineral royalties, and pass that money straight on to Friends of the Columbia Gorge

and other local groups fighting against fossil fuels. She noted recently, “As long as that company is still in business and pumping fracked

oil, I am happy to contribute my revenues to Friends’ well-placed work trying to slow or stop this madness.”

Margie is optimistic about the progress that Friends and the Stand Up to Oil coalition are making toward preventing new oil terminals from being built. She sees the activism inspired by these fossil fuel battles as a silver lining, bringing diverse individuals and communities together in their shared values and love for the Pacific Northwest.

Thank you, Margie! ■



Thank you Conservators and Guardians!

Conservators gathered for “An Evening with Friends” in October.

Photo: Kate Harbour

In October, Friends’ Conservators and Guardians of the Gorge gathered for an annual appreciation event, “An Evening with Friends.” Conservators and Guardians give an annual gift of \$1,000 or more to support our work. These donors are only 2.5 percent of our membership, but they contribute nearly 60 percent of our donations. Thank you, Conservators and Guardians! You are the true driving force behind Gorge protection. ■

Special Gifts

July 22 – October 14, 2016

IN HONOR OF DEBBIE ASAKAWA AND
THE TRAILMIX HIKING CLUB
KATE SWABEY

IN HONOR OF JIM AND NINA POLLOCK
GAIL PANZER

IN HONOR OF DAVID AND
LAURIE SHERBURNE
TIM SHERBURNE

IN HONOR OF BOB RINEER AND
DEBBIE THOMAS
ROBERT SINGER

IN MEMORY OF
BROUGHTON H. BISHOP SR.

LINDA ASHLOCK
VERNA ASHTON
HOLLY BARD
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SYLVIA BISCHOFF
C. M. AND MARY LANG BISHOP
SUSAN BISHOP AND HAL LEE
LARRY AND SUSIE BLACK
HARVEY AND NANCY BLACK
NANCY AND PAUL BRAGDON
ELIZABETH BROOKE
DARLENE BROUGHTON
ELIZABETH ANNE CRUMPACKER
ALICE DAVIES
LINDA EDGERLY
J. McANDREW AND
MOLLY FINCH JONES
JUDY FORKNER
CORINNE AND STEPHEN GENTNER

Featured Hike: Washougal Waterfront Trail and Park

Maegan Jossy, Outreach Manager, maegan@gorgefriends.org

Enjoy a winter walk on the newest trail in the Gorge! With stunning views of the Columbia River and Mount Hood, this mile-long, ADA-accessible path is the latest connection in the *Gorge Towns to Trails* project, and it will make a great winter outing without getting your boots muddy.

The Washougal Waterfront Trail and Park is a community gem that is also a significant link in the 30-mile trail planned between Washougal and Stevenson, and may eventually extend much further west, to Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge. This is an excellent hike for families and for anyone looking to enjoy a relaxing stroll along the river, where there are picnic areas and a non-motorized boat launch. Visit www.gorgefriends.org/washougalwaterfronttrail.

Driving Directions: From the east (Bridge of the Gods): Take WA Hwy 14/West to Exit 14 in Washougal, and follow the traffic roundabout to the third exit. Then continue to the second roundabout, and take the second exit there. Continue straight to the stop sign and park in the parking lot.

From the west (I-205/Glenn Jackson Bridge): Take the exit for WA Hwy 14/East, and continue east about 8.5 miles to Exit 14. Follow the traffic roundabout to the second exit and continue straight to the second roundabout, and take the first exit. Continue straight to the stop sign and park in the parking lot.

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RONALD AND LEE RAGEN
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AMY AND RALPH RISCH
JOHN SIEBERT
BETSY SMITH
MOLLY AND GEORGE SPENCER
WELLS, SARAH, AND
FRANCES TALMADGE
LEDERLE TENNEY
PAT AND MACY WALL
NANI WARREN
REBECCA WOOD
ANONYMOUS

IN MEMORY OF
JESSE "PAT" BLEAKNEY
DONALD AND SHIRLEY CLARK

IN MEMORY OF WILLIAM STEPHEN GEROULD
CAROLYN SCHIRMACHER AND
STEPHEN GEROULD

IN MEMORY OF HELEN GRAMS
GLENN AND MARY ANN TEAGUE

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EVELYN TURNER

IN MEMORY OF CAPT. DALE B. RUSSELL
NICOLE AUE

IN MEMORY OF TOM SENIOR
PRISCILLA SENIOR

IN MEMORY OF
GEORGE 'BING' CROSBY SHELDON, JR.
DONALD AND SHIRLEY CLARK

IN MEMORY OF ALLEN AND
LORRAINE THOMPSON
DOUG AND SUSAN SOWLES

IN MEMORY OF MATTHEW WINTHROP
JOAN ERCOLINI
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LORING AND MARGARET WINTHROP



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Know Your Gorge *The Highway to the Gorge*

Visitors have eagerly embraced the beauty of the Columbia Gorge since the Historic Columbia River Highway first opened in 1915. Advertisements carried scenic Gorge photos all across the country, and those same sights – Vista House, Beacon Rock, Multnomah Falls, and Rowena Crest – still attract travelers from around the world today.

During the early 1920s, businesses began popping up alongside the Columbia River Highway, eager to serve the steady stream of visitors arriving on trains and touring buses, and even in modern automobiles. Incomparable vistas and panoramic scenery awaited them, along

with restaurants, inns, general stores, and curio shops that soon dotted the highway. Taverns and roadhouses served locally distilled spirits, in spite of Prohibition.

As America’s romance with the automobile bloomed, car travel eclipsed the popularity of trains and buses. Sam Hill, the legendary Gorge road advocate, captured the mood of the era when he noted:

“Tourists want three things: a good road to drive on, something worthwhile to see, and something worthwhile to eat. We will cash in, year after year, on our crop of scenic beauty, without depleting it in any way.”

He was right. The stream of tourists and travelers in the Gorge steadily bolstered local economies during those years. And that stream has continued to grow, especially in recent years. Popular trails get crowded on weekends, and favorite recreation sites have become clogged with traffic.

So this past summer, the Oregon Department of Transportation launched the Columbia Gorge Express. Public transit came full circle, and the new bus system provided car-free, round-trip access for some 15,000 visitors from Portland to iconic Multnomah Falls, in the heart of the Columbia Gorge. ■

A Columbia Gorge Motor Coach and driver, circa 1928.

Photo: Courtesy of the History Museum of Hood River County



Some information in this article was drawn from the Oregon Secretary of State website: sos.oregon.gov/archives/exhibits/columbia-river-highway.