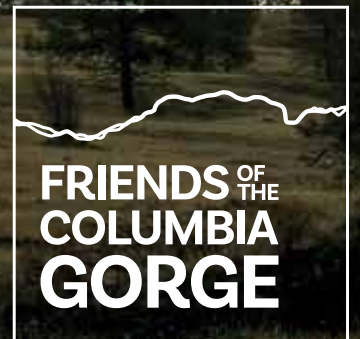


July 2019 – June 2020
ANNUAL REPORT



Board Reflections



In 2015, I accepted a career opportunity in Portland, Oregon, without ever visiting the Pacific Northwest. I extensively researched the city and read several stories of other transplants to know what to expect. Excited

to turn the page of my next chapter in life, I sold my home in Austin, Texas, and drove with a friend eager to complete his quest to visit all 50 states.

Our journey lasted 32 hours, and I was dozing as we drove along I-84 and entered the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. My friend exclaimed, “You must wake up for this!” As I woke up, I was mesmerized and thought to myself, “How did I miss this in my research?” We agreed that a mere photograph from the car could not convey the majesty of what we were witnessing.

Since then, the Columbia Gorge has become my heaven on earth. A couple of years after my move, I was invited to join Friends’ Philanthropy Committee and was met with warmth and kindness. I welcomed a later invitation to join our Board of Directors, and I’ve explored even more trails and worked with my fellow directors to safeguard the many geological wonders, preserved by earlier trailblazers and Gorge conservationists in decades past.

Over the past 40 years, Friends has faced twists and turns its founders never could have imagined. We’ve had many successes, some

set-backs, and some areas where we’ve fallen short. But along the road, Friends has always pushed itself to look towards challenges on the horizon. And as you’ll see in our annual report, Friends’ work to preserve vital habitat, drive hard conversation on the growing threat of climate change, and to educate new generations of Gorge protectors continues.

When visitors from Texas question how I was able to adapt to such a new city so seamlessly, I relish the opportunity to play show and tell, driving them to iconic, easily accessible Gorge sites like Rowena Crest, Bridge of the Gods, Multnomah Falls, and the Vista House. Every visit to the Gorge yields the same enchanted reaction from friends and family, whether it is my 11-year-old niece or my 50-year old cousin.

I am especially grateful to serve as a member of a fierce team dedicated to protecting the Gorge with integrity, while driving inclusion to ensure everyone can enjoy this one-of-a-kind wonder, now and in the years ahead.

Pleschette Fontenet, Board Member
Friends of the Columbia Gorge

New Life at Steigerwald

For the first time in more than 50 years, a safe rest stop in the western Columbia Gorge will soon reopen to migrating salmon and other species making their long journeys to and from the Pacific Ocean.

In 1966, a levee was built between the Columbia River and what is now Steigerwald Lake National Wildlife Refuge, cutting off the river from its natural, fertile floodplains—exactly the kind of habitat that a variety of native fish and waterfowl depend on to grow and thrive.

In late 2020, however, construction crews will breach that levee, removing more than two miles of it, in order to reconnect the river to the refuge. The largest restoration project ever on the lower Columbia, the project is the culmination of a decades-long vision by Friends and multiple conservation partners.

“This project wouldn’t exist without Friends having acquired Steigerwald Shores,” says Chris Collins, a principal restoration ecologist with the Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership. A 175-acre riverfront parcel, Steigerwald Shores formerly was part of a cattle ranch abutting the refuge on its eastern border. In 2017, after eyeing the tract for decades, Friends purchased the property with funds raised through its *Preserve the Wonder* campaign.

“Our role was to buy the land as soon as it became available, before someone else developed it,” notes Dan Bell, land trust director for Friends. “We’d always intended to transfer it to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, once they secured their funding.”

Transfers like this are part of how the refuge has grown to its current 965 acres—piece by piece, over 34 years, through numerous public and land trust acquisitions, Bell explains.

In April 2020, the refuge was expanded to include Steigerwald Shores, where the river will flow into and out of the floodplain through four discreet channels, while new levees protect surrounding properties.

“We’re not only restoring floodplain and wetland habitat, we’re also improving the quality of it,” Collins says. The expansion and improvements will enable a wider range of plants and wildlife to flourish, and the richer riparian forests will provide expanded trails for all to enjoy.

“This project wouldn’t exist without Friends having acquired Steigerwald Shores.”

— Chris Collins, principal restoration ecologist, Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership



Turtles sunning at the Steigerwald Refuge. Photo: Debbie Asakawa



Photo: Grady Britton

New Look, Same Commitment

Friends has worked for decades to connect the public to its Gorge protection efforts. Yet as its conservation efforts evolved, Friends' look and voice lagged behind, failing to effectively connect with the region's growing diversity.

In order to better convey the depth and breadth of its work, Friends launched an initiative in the wake of its response to the 2017-18 Eagle Creek fire, to update its visual identity, refresh messaging, and broaden public engagement. The 2018 award of a \$25,000 matching grant from Grady Britton, a noted Portland marketing

agency, was a vital step forward. The brand refresh was launched in May 2020 as part of Friends' 40th anniversary.

"Over the years, Friends had outgrown their logo," says Ethan Nguyen, Grady Britton's senior art director. "Our job was to help Friends align their brand with who they had become, a visionary protector of the Gorge with a comprehensive approach to conservation."

Nguyen created a clean, modern logo with elements that conveyed a holistic perspective: a map view of the Columbia River, as if looking

down from the sky. Trust and stability: a square. Vitality: a field-green color palette. And lastly, approachability: a flowing, san-serif bold typeface.

Grady Britton also partnered with Friends staff to develop a messaging guide to help Friends' multiple teams—legal, conservation, land trust, stewardship, and public engagement—speak with a cohesive and inclusive voice.

As Friends Executive Director Kevin Gorman says, "Instead of telling stories from silos, we need to focus on how these disparate parts, or tools in our toolbox, work together toward common outcomes." Gorman explained, "For instance, how do we take our wonky policy work and tie it to things that resonate with people, like pika protection? Over 600 people signed up to watch our recent Gorge pika webinar, and almost half were new to Friends."

Moving forward, Gorman hopes that more people will check out Friends, and join its thousands of members, volunteers, and activists—a broad-based coalition that shares a deep and enduring love for the Gorge.



American pika near Beacon Rock. Photo: Linda Steider

Stewarding the Gorge in the Time of COVID-19

In mid-March, when the coronavirus shuttered much of the Pacific Northwest, Friends canceled all volunteer events through the end of June. The result? The sacrifice of countless hours in the field, although, on a positive note, the birth of a new program: Land Stewards.

“For years, we’d envisioned a program in which Gorge residents and others could, on their own time, help us with restoration work,” says Friends Stewardship Volunteer Coordinator Mika Barrett. “COVID-19 fast-tracked that idea’s implementation.”

Barrett works with Friends of the Columbia Gorge Land Trust, which, based in Hood River, manages volunteer stewardship efforts across the Gorge. In late June, she and her colleagues launched the pilot phase of Land Stewards with three pairs of experienced participants who, during the summer, extracted a variety of invasive plants from two land-trust-owned preserves. The idea: build volunteer capacity, while adhering to social-distancing guidelines. Prior to the pandemic, Friends’ staff would have led such efforts with dozens of people working side by side.

Friends assigned husband-wife team Jane Corboy and John Rogers of Mosier, Oregon, who are both medical physicians and longtime conservationists, to the Mosier Plateau Preserve and Lyle Cherry Orchard. At least once a week, the couple suits up



in long sleeve shirts, pants with gaiters, hiking boots, hats, and leather work-gloves for several hours of hiking and removing noxious weeds.

“The work can be exhausting, especially in the heat,” says Dr. Corboy. “And yet, we feel it’s crucial to protect and preserve the things we love.”

Plus, as Dr. Rogers explains, the rewards are immediate. “You see the differences in the pre- and post- photos we take,” he says. “Piles of yellowstar thistle on the ground, and swaths of teasleheads, gone.”

When safe to do so, Friends will continue to cultivate more and more land stewards to join the team.

“In the long run, the challenges we’ve confronted over the past year will actually help us grow our capacity to steward the Gorge,” Barrett says.

So watch out, weeds. Land Stewards has taken root and is starting to grow.

Jane Corboy and John Rogers, physicians and stewardship team. Photo: Mika Barrett

Tribes Partner with Friends to Protect Wildlife Refuge

In August 2018, Clark County staff notified BNSF Railway that its expansion project between Washougal and Mount Pleasant, Washington, required a Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area permit.

However, the railway company, which had already begun grading the land early that summer, disagreed, and continued building a second-line track, which traversed a section of Steigerwald Lake National Wildlife Refuge. In addition, BNSF sued Clark County.

“BNSF’s lawsuit was an attempt to exempt itself from laws that protect the Columbia Gorge,” says Friends of the Columbia Gorge Staff Attorney Steve McCoy.

BNSF contended that a federal statute, the Interstate Commerce Commission Termination Act of 1995 (ICCTA), preempts the National Scenic Area Act’s regulations and, therefore, allowed the railroad to proceed without a permit.

“If that were the case, it would mean railroad companies could, without oversight, place tracks throughout the Gorge, regardless of any potential harm to the area’s scenic, natural, and cultural resources,” McCoy states. “ICCTA was never intended to override local codes that implement federal laws.”

In February 2020, the federal district court in Tacoma, Washington, ruled in favor of BNSF. In August, Friends and the Columbia River Gorge

Commission appealed the ruling to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.

“We want BNSF to repair the construction damage it caused to sensitive habitat and wildlife, like salmon, and avoid or mitigate future damage to the area as more trains, some of which haul crude oil and other hazardous materials, travel through the refuge,” McCoy says.

On August 21, three Columbia Basin Treaty Tribes, who depend on the Columbia River’s resources for their livelihood, submitted an amicus brief to the court in support of Friends’ position. It asserts, “a decision in BNSF’s favor would dilute the intent of the National Scenic Area Act and nullify the protections it affords to the Treaty Tribes.”

The case has far-reaching implications concerning the overall health of the Gorge, McCoy explains. Increased train capacity and railroad self-rule means harm to communities and sensitive resources, as well as a greater chance of another oil spill like the 2016 disaster in Mosier. Arguments and a decision are expected in 2021. These dangers underscore Friends’ commitment to keep fighting to require railroads to comply with laws that protect the Columbia Gorge.

BNSF’s rail expansion would support increased rail traffic through the Gorge, including unit trains transporting volatile crude oil. Photo: Jozsef Urmos





Bringing Down the House

year process. When Friends began conducting boundary surveys, the surveyors discovered minor discrepancies such as old fence lines. Those differences needed to be cleaned up before the sale could proceed, Bell explained. That meant resolving boundary concerns, another meticulous and time-consuming undertaking.

In 2019, after navigating through legal issues, Friends engaged Gorge-based Green Home Design to deconstruct the house. The project involved salvaging most of the materials for donation to the Gorge Rebuild-it Center, a nonprofit dedicated to reselling quality building supplies at affordable prices. Friends also hired contractors to remove a septic tank and power lines. In January, Friends organized a volunteer party to pick up demolition debris and reseed the site with native grasses and other herbaceous plants.

“This spring, the bluff exploded with wildflowers, as if the house were never there,” Bell said—almost as if time ticked back to preserve the splendor of this magical place for generations to come.

What once existed as a glaring intrusion amid a ridge of oaks and pines, greens and golds, cliffs and curves, is now simply gone.

Last winter, after a decade of hoops and hurdles, Friends finally dismantled a house on land trust property on Memaloose Ridge. The tall, reflective-glass-fronted A-frame had sat for years just above Memaloose State Park on the Historic Columbia River Highway.

Today, its construction would not be permitted. “Under the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act, passed in 1986, new residential or commercial development must be visually subordinate to the landscape,” said Friends

Land Trust Director Dan Bell. “In other words, your eye shouldn’t be drawn to it. From many viewpoints in the Gorge, this house stood out.”

Friends purchased the 10-acre parcel in 2009 with plans to remove the structure, restore the natural habitat, and then sell the property to the U.S. Forest Service, which owns neighboring tracts along the bluff. The successful January 2020 transfer to the Forest Service represents more than a decade of planning, tenacity, and patience to deliver a clean, unencumbered piece of property.

For the Forest Service to receive approval and funding to purchase the land required a multi-

Leaders of Today and Tomorrow Push for Climate Action, Now

In December 2019, Lottie Bromham, then 17, testified before the Columbia River Gorge Commission, urging them to mitigate the effects of climate change in the Gorge. At the time, she belonged to the Earth Action Club at Hood River Valley High School.

“I don’t love being front and center, but it’s important that kids’ concerns are heard,” says Bromham, now a freshman at Portland State University. “The commissioners were hard to read, so I couldn’t really tell how it went.”

However, according to Michael Lang, conservation director for Friends, Bromham made a significant impact. “Her testimony, both passionate and articulate, was very compelling,” he said. “Several commissioners told me they really appreciated Lottie’s remarks. The more we can get diverse, young voices talking to the decision makers, the better, particularly about climate change and our future.”



Climate activist Lottie Bromham. Photo: Peter Cornelison

During the last four years, Friends and its allies—including landowners, community leaders, and students—have requested that the Gorge Commission apply a climate lens to all aspects of its Gorge-wide management plan, slated for its first update in 16 years this September. Many of the plan’s 30-year-old protection policies need to be revised. “The plan is out of step with the latest science and policies to build climate resilience,” says Lang.

During the summer, the Gorge Commission added a chapter to the new draft, which requires its staff to create a climate action strategy. The change falls short of the immediate, comprehensive amendments that Bromham and Lang advocated, but they concur that the effort moves in the right direction.

“To a degree, the commissioners were receptive,” says Bromham. “Perhaps taking the time to address climate change as its own project will be a good thing.”

Other preliminary revisions include better protection of wetlands and critical salmon habitat, which, among other benefits, supports tribes’ treaty rights to continue fishing in their ancestral areas, Lang explains. The Gorge Commission has also proposed more limits on new residential development in forest zones to help prevent wildfires and protect lives and property, matters of increasing concern in the Gorge as global temperatures rise.

“The more we can get diverse, young voices talking to the decision makers, the better, particularly about climate change and our future.”

—Michael Lang, Friends conservation director



Forecasting the Unknowable

One year ago, no one would have predicted the world we live in now. However, in last year's annual report, we correctly predicted two of our three emergent themes: a house removed from our land trust property and credible progress on strengthening climate policies in the Gorge, which is occurring through the Gorge Commission's plan review process. One thing we got wrong was our 40th anniversary celebrations, which have been moved to 2021.

With an unpredictable future, here are a couple of priorities we see on the horizon in the coming year:

More conservation to come

In a major legislative surprise of 2020, Congress passed and the president signed the Great American Outdoors Act. In addition to providing needed maintenance funding for our federal lands and related buildings, the

act also permanently funded the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the major source of acquisition for federal, state, and local lands for the past half century.

More than 50 percent of the trails in the Gorge today owe their existence to the Land and Water Conservation Funds. In 2021 and beyond, we expect more opportunities for public land acquisition to preserve scenic views, mitigate climate impacts, protect habitat, and support more trails and parks.

In the weeds with climate

In late 2020, the Columbia River Gorge Commission drew a line in the sand with its decision to create a climate plan to mitigate climate impacts in the Gorge. In the coming year, the details will get filled in. The decisions made and policies created now could limit climate impacts for decades ahead. Will the

commission go bold or allow the status quo to keep marching along? That depends on all of us, but the window of opportunity is open.

Expanding access and equity

While Friends has been undergoing introspection around diversity, equity, and inclusion issues, expect some of that introspection to roll into actions in the coming year. We've posted bilingual signage on land trust preserves and will be reimagining our outdoor programs to better support under-represented communities. We also expect to announce plans to create new levels of accessibility for one of the Gorge's most iconic sites.

Our fifth decade got off to a rocky start in 2020, but resiliency is a hallmark of this organization, and we're setting the stage for Friends to be even better and stronger in the years to come.

A Classroom Like No Other

Providing hands-on opportunities to introduce youth around the region to the wonders of the Columbia Gorge is a vital part of Friends' work to create a strong and enduring corps of passionate Gorge advocates and stewards.

Our Outdoor Youth Education program has worked with a number of schools in the six counties of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area to organize special outings and workshops for hundreds of students. In recent years, Friends has supplemented its efforts with special youth stewardship events, family-friendly educational hikes, and support for youth climate advocates in the Gorge.



Photo: Brandon Davis



Photo: Peter Cornelison



Photo: Brandon Davis



Photo: Eric Strid



Photo: Brandon Davis



Photo: Mika Barrett



Photo: Kate Lindberg



Photo: Frances Fisher

From helping secure vital funds to serving as education program volunteers, Friends board members have been essential for decades in the success of our outdoor youth education and engagement efforts.

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*Gorge resident

Friends welcomes this year's new members of the Norman Yeon Legacy Circle, whose names on these pages are noted with asterisks. They join our growing list of legacy supporters whose generous, visionary planning will ensure that Friends' work to protect, preserve, and steward the Gorge continues far into the future.



**NORMAN YEON
LEGACY CIRCLE**

Norman Yeon Legacy Circle members who have passed away over the years are noted in blue. Their far-sighted commitment ensures their place in Friends' history. We're saddened by the passing this year of Erika Heider and

Jill McLean, who both included a legacy gift to Friends in their estate planning.

We extend great thanks to all our devoted Legacy Circle members for their dedication to ensuring that the Columbia Gorge remains a place for all to enjoy, now and for generations to come.

*Above the valley
between river and sky, this
is where angels rest*

— Curt Jennewine

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Photo: Ethan Nenadic



Photo: Debbie Asakawa

*Dazzling yellow fields
Soon the balsamroot will bloom
I long to see it*

— Karen Johnson

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23 Anonymous Members

Names with * = New this year
Names in blue = Passed

*Hamilton Mountain
silence high above river
then wind in tree tops*

— Janet Carter

Photo: Micheal Drewry



Member-driven Conservation

Though we may be the tools for much of this work, the ownership is all yours. The annual support provided by our members funds advocacy, education, stewardship, community engagement, and all of our work to protect the Gorge.

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A bald eagle near Multnomah Falls. Photo: Scott Christianson

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American kestrels at Steigerwald Lake.

Photo: Bill Kirkland



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THANKS**
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\$236,629 to
protect the
Gorge!

Endemic Columbia kittentails (*synthyris stellata*). Photo: Angie Moore

Finances and Operations

Weather Uncertain Times

Friends of the Columbia Gorge
Fiscal Year July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2020

The generosity of our donors has continued to increase as our programs and work expand to meet the ever-changing needs of protecting, preserving, and stewarding the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area.

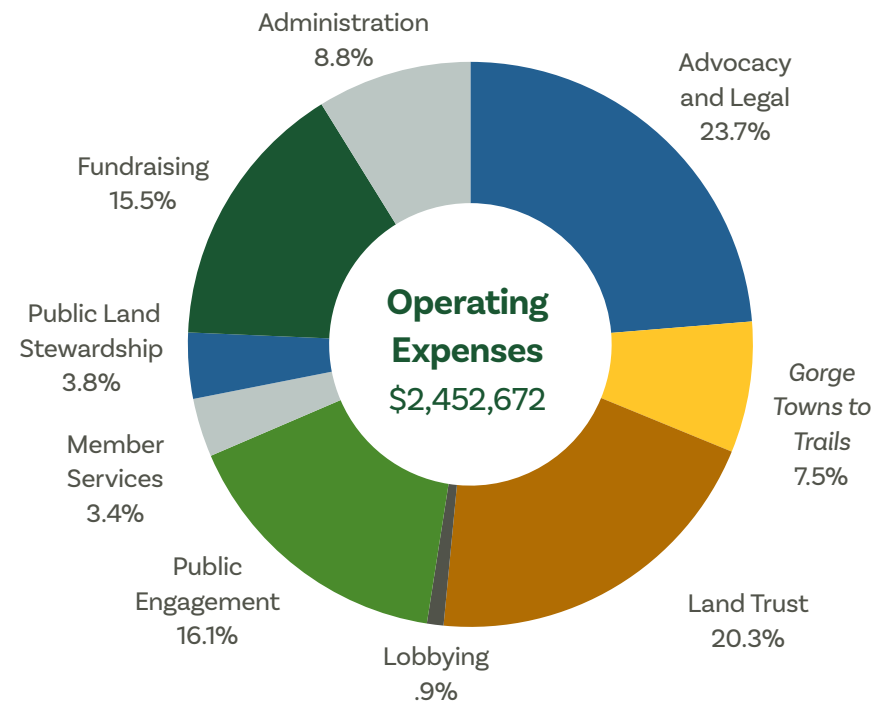
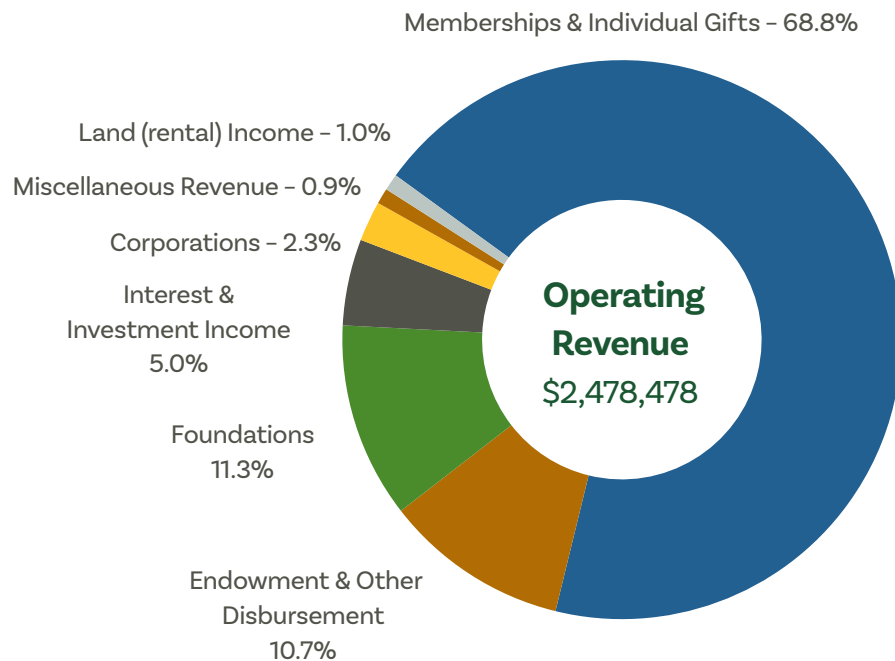
Consolidated results in fiscal year 2019-2020 show operating income at \$2.48 million and operating expenses at \$2.45 million. Our endowment disbursement was set at 4 percent and we had other disbursements from prior year board designated and restricted funds. In

addition to operating income, we received two donated properties and an easement worth \$215,500. We sold three preserves to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, one preserve to the U.S. Forest Service, and we purchased one privately owned property.

Although preserves owned by Friends of the Columbia Gorge Land Trust are eligible for property tax exemption, we paid \$50,855 in property taxes to support local communities and schools.

Our \$6.3 million endowments include the newly established Matthew Winthrop Fund for youth education, the Vic Clausen Fund for outdoor youth education, and the Marjorie Abramovitz Fund for land trust activities. Endowments for general operations include the Conservation Director Endowment, the Mary D. and Thomas W. Holman Fund, the Nancy Russell Institutional Fund, and the Barbara Pooley Wilson Fund.

Endowment funds are managed by Ferguson Wellman Capital Management and monitored by Friends' board finance committee.



Friends Receives \$297K from Payroll Protection Plan

Following the COVID-19 shutdown, Friends' revenues dropped precipitously and a loan from the Payroll Protection Program provided a buffer to prevent drastic cuts. Friends buckled down at the start of the coronavirus pandemic and pivoted to a new way of working and connecting with our members. Face-to-face contact was replaced with phone calls and Zoom webinars. Expenses were cut, including the executive director voluntarily taking a 20 percent pay cut for the months of May and June. And plans were considered for deeper budget cuts and reductions in programming and staff pay.

After extensive consultation with board leadership, we chose this spring not to institute staff cuts, as we had spent prudently over the previous nine months. Combined with other budget cuts, this savings would allow Friends to carry forward vital funds into our next fiscal year (starting July 2020). But April revenues showed the full impact of the shutdown as fundraising dropped 40 percent, which, projected over 12 months, would have resulted in a \$750,000 drop in income. Action was needed to stave off potentially devastating staff cuts in coming months and Friends staff moved quickly to apply for the newly created federal Payroll Protection Plan. In early May 2020, Friends received a \$297,200 loan from the Payroll Protection Fund in their second round of funding.

This is an unaudited financial statement. Friends' board engages Kern & Thompson, LLC, to perform an annual independent audit.

What Friends has done with our Payroll Protection funds

With the assurance of the Payroll Protection funds, staff were able to focus on the work of protecting, preserving, and stewarding the Columbia Gorge. This work has included:

- Hosting Spring 2020 wildlife webinars (pikas, bees, and western pond turtles) that were viewed by more than 1,000 people;
- Transferring a 175-acre property to U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, which allowed a 900-acre salmon-restoration project to begin in the Steigerwald Lake National Wildlife Refuge this summer;
- Advocating to the Columbia River Gorge Commission and U.S. Forest Service to include a Climate Resilience Plan in the revised Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area;
- Launching a haiku challenge championed by Oregon's 2019 poet laureate, Kim Stafford, that generated more than 230 haikus;

- Reimagining our public and land trust land stewardship to accommodate social distancing and safety for our volunteers; and
- Collaborating with federal and state entities, local nonprofits, and businesses to create the Columbia Gorge Stewardship Network

In these uncertain times, Friends' board, led by its Finance Committee, will work to ensure that the organization remains a wise steward of its funds as it continues working to protect, preserve and steward the Columbia Gorge.

Indigenous petroglyph at Columbia Hills State Park.

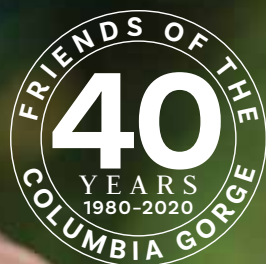
Photo: Junelle Lawry



Consolidated Statement of Financial Position

	June 30, 2020	June 30, 2019
Land and related assets	\$7,363,937	\$9,670,630
Cash and investments	\$13,026,348	\$11,484,381
Other assets	\$160,907	\$155,656
Total assets	\$20,551,191	\$21,310,667
Liabilities	\$388,808	\$830,255
Net assets	\$20,162,383	\$20,480,412
Total liabilities and net assets	\$20,551,191	\$21,310,667

Editor: Betsy Toll | LuminCreativePDX.com
Design: Kathy Fors and Kathleen Krushas | tothepointcollaborative.com
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Land Trust Takes A Big Step Forward

August 2019 was a big month for Friends Land Trust, gaining its inaugural accreditation by the Land Trust Alliance and releasing the first batch of western pond turtles on its Turtle Haven preserve in southwest Washington. Both accomplishments are the result of almost a decade of work.

Launched in 2006, the Land Trust Alliance's accreditation process evaluates an organization's commitment to sound finances, ethical conduct, responsible governance, and lasting stewardship. The first-time application for accreditation is a rigorous, years-long process. Awarded for a five-year term, the initial accreditation applies to both Friends and the land trust (founded in 2005 as a 509c3 support organization of Friends).

Acquired as part of Friends' *Preserve the Wonder* campaign, Turtle Haven is now one of six locations in Washington with a known population of western pond turtles. The effort is part of a partnership with the Oregon Zoo, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the U.S. Forest Service.



A western pond turtle hatchling ready to release at Turtle Haven Preserve.

Photo: Vince Ready | Lasting Light Photography