

FRIENDS ^{OF} THE COLUMBIA GORGE

Spring 2021



Moving To What Shall Be

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Founded in 1980, Friends of the Columbia Gorge is the only conservation organization entirely dedicated to protecting, preserving, and stewarding the Columbia Gorge for future generations.

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FRIENDS OF THE COLUMBIA GORGE

Gorge trails are open for socially distanced personal hikes this spring. For hike information, check gorgefriends.org/find-a-trail.



Wild nootka roses in the western Gorge. Photo: Lisa Cooper

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Cover: A bald eagle perched in the Columbia Gorge. Photo: Sean O'Connor | Story Gorge

Director's Letter

Last December, my college-aged daughter was home for winter break when she received a text that led the two of us to drop everything and quickly embark on a 12-hour road trip. The reason? She was notified by the nursing home where she works near her campus that she was eligible to receive a Covid-19 vaccination. We both had busy year-end schedules, but we didn't hesitate. We rushed her back in time to ensure she would receive the vaccine that will start moving us all past the virus that has altered the world.

Now, as I await my turn to be vaccinated, it's clear that the treacherous hold of 2020 and the hopeful promises of 2021 both exert a constant pull in my world. More than 350,000 Americans lost their lives to coronavirus by the end of 2020, leaving innumerable parents, children, and communities bereft as numbers continue to climb. Here in the Pacific Northwest, thousands of families face economic, food, and housing insecurity due to the pandemic and the devastating fall wildfires. All across the country, the unremitting, unequal harms and pain of institutional racism were widely exposed and experienced socially, economically, and in pandemic impacts.

At home, Friends of the Columbia Gorge got through 2020 with even more grit and resilience than I could have imagined. We achieved real gains, from ensuring an improved Gorge Management Plan to acquiring a key property at Catherine Creek. But the impacts of 2020 still ripple through, and the social fabric of this organization—woven of personal connections made on trails, at community meetings, in coffee shops, and at public hearings—is frayed and in need of mending. What COVID-19 swept away in months will take years to rebuild.

If the Columbia Gorge has given me anything, it is patience and preparedness for surprises and turns that come our way. Consider the various natural disruptions the Gorge faces yearly—fires, floods, landslides. The Gorge doesn't go back to "normal"



Kevin and his daughter, Meghan, at Catherine Creek. Photo: Michelle Kinsella

after these events. Waters may recede, forests reborn. But the Gorge is changed, and sometimes strengthened, by these disruptions.

And so it should be with us. The year 2020 was marked by disruption, but with vaccines and a new political environment at hand, we must embrace change and celebrate new voices. A 22-year-old black poet who shares my last name brilliantly affirmed that sentiment at the inauguration of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris. Amanda Gorman looked out to each one of us and said:

*So while once we asked,
how could we possibly prevail over catastrophe?
Now we assert
How could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?
We will not march back to what was
but move to what shall be ...*

I, for one, am very hopeful for what shall be.

Kevin Gorman

Kevin Gorman, Executive Director
kevin@gorgefriends.org

Defending Gorge Protection and Citizen Participation

Michael Lang, Conservation Director

One of the most critical roles that Friends of the Columbia Gorge plays in protecting the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area is ensuring that responsible government agencies properly implement all legal requirements under state and federal law and incorporate the best available science into their decisions related to Gorge protection.

Friends and other nonprofit watchdog groups are vital to guaranteeing that our democratic form of government functions within its legal requirements and is accountable to the people. Our responsibilities include ensuring the rights of citizens to participate in decision-making; educating and mobilizing citizens to participate and effect change; developing policy recommendations to further Gorge protections; bringing monitoring

data and recent scientific recommendations to agencies; and persuading decision-makers to adhere to the law and incorporate the best available science. When necessary, Friends defends laws and policies in the courts if Gorge protections are challenged. We also litigate to hold agencies legally accountable when they fail to enforce laws or when they adopt rules or policies that violate applicable statutes.



Defending Gorge Management Plan improvements

In October 2020, the Columbia River Gorge Commission adopted a revised Gorge Management Plan that incorporates several hard-won improvements. These include requirements to address climate change, improve salmon and wetland protections, establish new limits on development on farm and forest land, set strict limits on future urban expansions, and initiate mandates to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion. These improvements would not have come about without the unrelenting advocacy of Friends, our allies, and especially Gorge residents young and old, who stepped up for Gorge protection time and time again.

In December, proponents of urban expansion, including Wasco County and the Port of The Dalles, appealed the revised management plan to the Oregon Court of Appeals. We won't know their specific issues until they file a brief, but they are likely focused on new policies that limit urban expansion into protected lands in the Scenic Area. In January, Friends filed a motion to intervene in the case to defend the management plan. Friends' motion was promptly granted by the court.

In previous litigation, Friends has been the only entity that has ever successfully appealed provisions of the Gorge Management Plan. Since 2004, Friends has brought several appeals in state and federal court that resulted in improved resource protections and limitations on residential development in Special Management Areas and industrial development in the Scenic Area. At times, the courts have also ruled against Friends on other claims, deferring to the Gorge Commission and the U.S. Forest Service in their interpretations of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act.

In this most recent appeal, Friends will collaborate with the Gorge Commission to defend the revised management plan as consistent with the act and within the commission's discretion.

Defending citizen rights to participate and hold agencies accountable

In a separate case, Friends' attorney Gary Kahn appeared before the Oregon Supreme Court this January for oral arguments on Friends' appeal of new rules adopted by the Oregon Energy Facility Siting Council (EFSC). Joining Friends in the appeal are a broad range of nonprofit groups, including Oregon Wild, Central Oregon Land Watch, WildLands Defense, Thrive Hood River, Greater Hells Canyon Council, Oregon Natural Desert Association, Oregon Coast Alliance, Audubon Society of Portland, and Columbia Riverkeeper. The new rules limit public participation in contested cases brought before EFSC and unlawfully grant Oregon Department of Energy staff the authority to expand the site boundaries of energy facilities without any public process to amend the council's siting decision, called a site certificate.

This is at least the fourth time in less than three years that EFSC has voted to weaken statewide regulations for modifying large energy projects. The new rule adoption is yet another step by the council to thwart public participation and decrease transparency, making it harder than ever for concerned citizens to oppose projects that could harm wildlife, threaten human health, degrade scenic views, and exacerbate climate change.

While the outcome of this appeal won't be known until the Supreme Court issues its opinion later this year, the council and its staff know that Friends and our allies will continue to act as watchdogs guarding the Columbia River Gorge and Oregon's many other treasured places.

The laws that protect the Gorge are only as strong as their implementation. Without strong watchdog organizations encouraging citizen involvement and holding government agencies accountable, special interests can erode laws that protect our national scenic treasures from inappropriate development. Going forward, Friends will continue to fight for the rights of citizens to participate in decisions that shape the future of our region. ■

Collaboration Furtherers Safety Planning at Beacon Rock

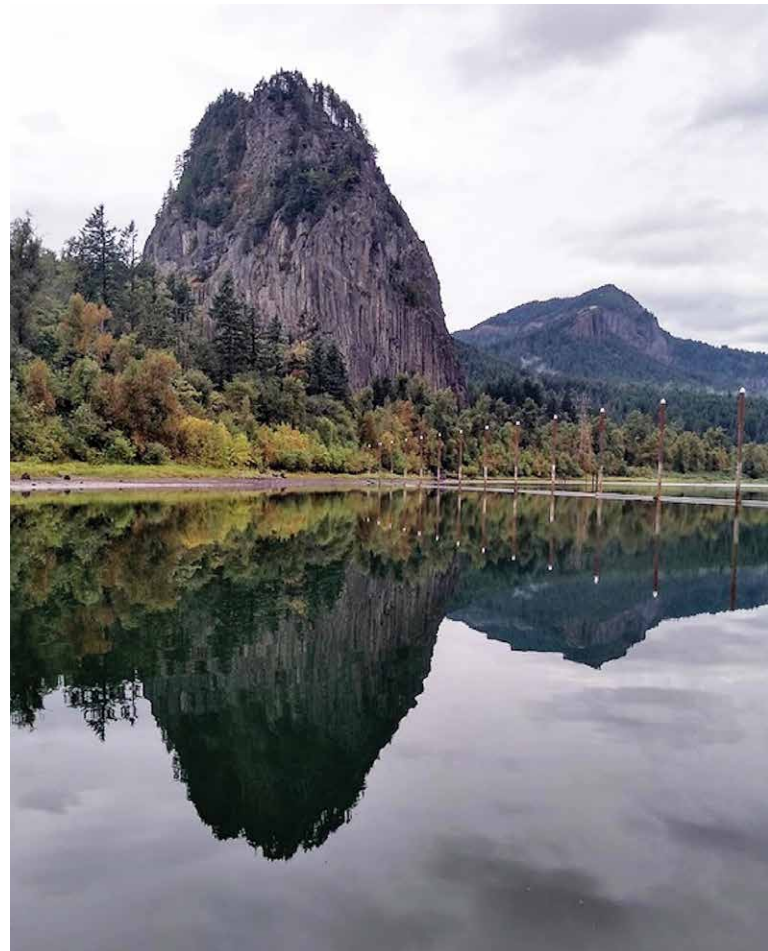
Renee Tkach, *Gorge Town to Trails Manager*

After years of discussion, the iconic entrance to Beacon Rock State Park is now in the process of being reimagined. And an adjacent land parcel recently acquired by Friends of the Columbia Gorge Land Trust will play a critical role in making access to the park safer.

The existing park entrance area, just off Washington State Route 14, was designed and built in the 1930s. Since then, the park has seen continual growth in visitor numbers, while the highway has carried an accompanying increase in vehicle traffic as population in southwest Washington has grown. The combination of increased traffic volume and speed of vehicles has led to numerous safety concerns for park visitors and area motorists.

In 2019, Washington State Parks launched the public phase of a multiyear, comprehensive planning process to design safer parking areas, relocate the park's vehicle entrance, and provide infrastructure to separate pedestrians from vehicle traffic. A new pedestrian underpass across SR14—allowing increased, safer access to the park for visitors with mobility challenges—was one of the key safety features proposed by park managers. But this expansion could only happen if a neighboring private property could be purchased for the park.

The couple who had owned the land for more than two decades were deeply committed to conservation and had spent countless weekends on their property gazing up at Beacon Rock from their weathered picnic table. When those long-time property owners approached



Friends' land trust about a possible sale, we knew we had an important opportunity to step in and act. Working in partnership with the manager of Beacon Rock State Park, Heath Yeats, Friends was able to quickly purchase the land with the intention of holding it until state parks funding becomes available and Washington State Parks can move ahead with their plans.

Our partnership with Washington State Parks at Beacon Rock demonstrates the cooperative approach that has been successful for Friends throughout the Gorge and has improved both safety and access to iconic Gorge recreation experiences. This teamwork builds on the collaborations and relationships we've developed through our work on *Gorge Towns to Trails*.

As an early supporter of *Gorge Towns to Trails*, Washington State Parks has advocated for the program and explored possibilities west and east of the park. We look forward to continuing our work together to enhance safe, environmentally sensitive recreation opportunities in the Columbia Gorge. ■

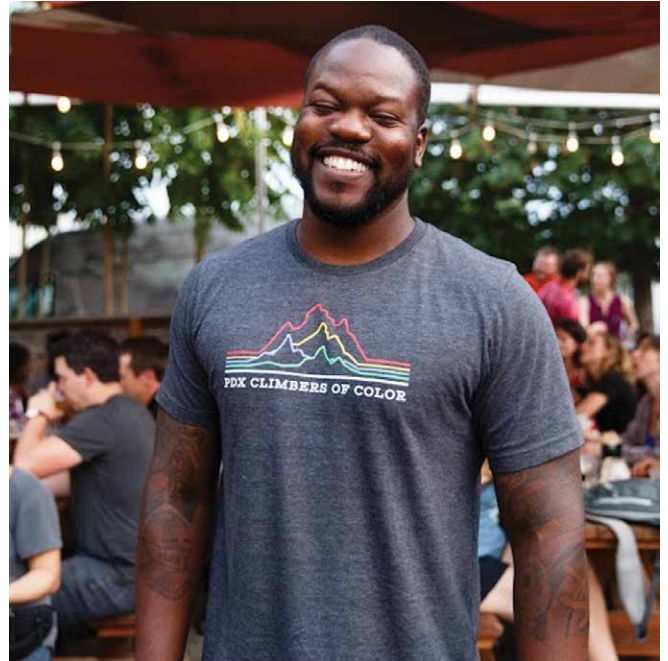
The 2020 Virtual Gorge Wahoo!

Natasha Stone, Community Engagement Specialist

As 2020 began, COVID-19 still seemed like a remote concern and I looked forward to exploring nature with students of our outdoor youth education programs. Instead, I spent nearly all of 2020 working remotely at home, quarantined with my dog. It was a tough time and I could only imagine how our students felt, having their spring school trips to the Gorge canceled.

As fall approached, I resolved to find a way to make our fall *Great Gorge Wahoo!* program for St. Andrews Nativity School happen. If we couldn't get the students to the Gorge, I'd bring it to them—something to leave them as wowed as those waterfalls would have, and feeling ownership as future stewards of the Gorge. For that to happen, it's important for youth, and especially youth of color, to relate to the land managers and conservationists they meet. It's hard to feel ownership of something if you don't see yourself reflected or represented there. That's where Rikeem Sholes comes in.

I first met Rikeem Sholes in fall 2019. A fish biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and a hike leader with People of Color Outdoors, Rikeem says his job is to “spy” on fish, which he does in a non-invasive way, monitoring fish populations with high-tech devices like drones. He's youthful and kind, and I knew the seventh and eighth graders at St. Andrew School of Nativity would connect with him—and that he in turn could entice them to see biology and conservation as a meaningful and interesting



Fish biologist and avid hiker Rikeem Sholes. Photo: Nic Raingsey

career. With the school's demographic makeup, I also hoped the students would relate to Rikeem as a young, Black “fish nerd” who loves science and loves the outdoors even more.

In December, Rikeem and I presented online to 54 St. Andrews students, offering Friends' first virtual *Great Gorge Wahoo!* program. We were joined by Loring and Margaret Winthrop, who helped found the *Great Gorge Wahoo!* in 2011 in memory of their son. I was nervous at first, because it can be difficult to engage teenagers in a classroom, let alone keep them engaged virtually from a computer screen. Rikeem started off talking about his life—why he decided to become a biologist and what his job is like. It was a huge hit, and the kids were full of curiosity. Even better, they were engaged, asking questions, and having fun.

Now it's 2021, and I again look forward to the chance to be out in the Gorge with our outdoor youth education students. But as the 54 smiling young faces in our Zoom class made clear, physically distanced, virtual programs can still be impactful. And you never know who or what those connections may inspire in the years and decades to come. ■



Students at 2019 *Great Gorge Wahoo!* Photo: Nick Wiltgen

Winter Eagle Watch

Photo: Sean O'Connor | Story Gorge

Melissa Gonzalez, Outdoor Programs and Communications Specialist

Winter in the Columbia Gorge might mean hibernation for some species, but for the American bald eagle it is migration season. Every January and February, great numbers of bald eagles migrate into the Gorge to find large trees to roost in and open water for fishing, creating plenty of eagle-watching opportunities.

This year, as a pandemic-safe, virtual alternative to our popular winter eagle hikes, Friends of the Columbia Gorge participated in a month of special online programming, offered in February as part of this year's Eagle Watch. Efforts included coproducing an original eagle short film with Story Gorge, a Hood River video-storytelling firm; a live eagle webinar organized in collaboration with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Columbia Gorge Discovery Center; and a month



of joint, digital, public education activities with other Eagle Watch partners including the Rowena Wildlife Clinic and the U.S. Forest Service.

To see the whole program archive or learn more, visit gorgefriends.org/eagle-watch.

Comings & Goings

Paige Unangst, Finance Director



Photo: Courtesy of Hannah Anderson-Dana

Friends is excited to welcome **Hannah Anderson-Dana** (at left), who joined our staff in November. A native Portlander, she is delighted to return to the Beaver state, joining our philanthropy team as our new membership coordinator. Hannah received a bachelor's degree in art history from Macalester College in Minnesota, then journeyed east to Washington, D.C., where she worked on the development teams at the National Archives Foundation and the Washington Area Bicyclist Association. She's thrilled to be back in Oregon, where she can again enjoy her love of hiking, biking, and rooting for the Trail Blazers.

A heartfelt thank you as we say goodbye to **Sophia Aepfelbacher**, who finished up her efforts as Friends' philanthropy communications coordinator in early January. Sophia's assistance with our year-end fundraising and the annual Give!Guide campaign—along with helping onboard Hannah as the new membership coordinator—was invaluable. We were delighted Sophia took on those roles while starting her graduate program at Portland State University and we wish her well in her studies.

Protecting the Gorge's Past and Future

Pam Davee, Director of Philanthropy

Kathy Tack moved to the Pacific Northwest in 2016 to be closer to her daughters, and she fell in love with the Columbia Gorge on her drive west from Iowa. Though she had visited Multnomah Falls and Hood River before, she hadn't taken in the full landscape until that road trip. The eastern Gorge reminded her of Iowa with its expansive views, the colors of the scenery, and the cold, windy weather.

As Kathy got to know the Gorge better, she was repeatedly blown away by the wildlife and nature she saw on her hikes and realized the necessity of protecting it. She joined Friends on her first Sternwheeler cruise. "Having a different perspective of the Gorge from the river, instead of looking down on it, really made me appreciate its beauty, history, and variability even more," Kathy recalled. But the tipping point that motivated her to become an active member of Friends was the Eagle Creek fire. "Seeing the forest burn and being so concerned that it might not recover made me want to help the organization that does so much to protect the Gorge," Kathy noted.

When asked what her vision was for the future of the Gorge, Kathy said, "I'd really like it to remain the way it is—protect it from climate change and stop inappropriate

development so that it stays beautiful for future generations. In some ways, I'd like to see it go back to the way it used to be when Native people had control of the land."

She would also like to see more Gorge habitat improvement efforts, like the work at the Steigerwald Lake Wildlife Refuge. "It's not that I don't want to move forward, but I want there to be clean water and habitat for lamprey, salmon, and other fish and wildlife, too," Kathy said.



Kathy decided she wanted to help not only with her current support of Friends work—she wants the Gorge to be part of her legacy. "Once I became involved, I realized the scope of Friends' work and wanted to do more to keep it going when I am gone," she explained. "I also realized it would be easy to do with some available investments and decided 'what better way to put them to work?'"

Kathy, thank you. We appreciate your support and vision for a safe and beautiful Gorge! ■



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Save the Date!

Join us on April 18

for a special, virtual Annual Meeting to hear about the successes and challenges of the past year and learn about plans for the future.

Though 2020 was a year like no other, protecting the Gorge did not stop. And as a member of Friends, YOU are the most important tool for ensuring the Gorge remains protected. We will miss gathering in person, but we're working to make this the next-best thing!

An American pika in the Gorge.

Photo: Linda Steider

41st Annual Meeting – Virtual Event | Sunday, April 18, 2021 | 1:00 p.m.

Watch for your email invitation or visit gorgefriends.org/annualmeeting for registration details.