



- FRIENDS DEFEATS ILLEGAL ZIMMERLY MINING AGAIN, AND AGAIN, AND AGAIN
- SHELL BY SHELL: PROTECTING THE GORGE'S TURTLE SANCTUARIES
- SHARE THE WONDER CAMPAIGN UPDATE

pg. 11

HOLDING THE LINE

HOW THE GORGE COMMISSION WAS SAVED

The Washington legislature's reckless attempt to strip funding from the Gorge Commission was met with swift resistance from Friends and our community of supporters.

PASSAGES



Dear Friends,

As I write this, we are three months into the new presidential administration, and many feel their worlds upended. Federal agencies are being gutted and several of our innovative partnerships, particularly at Cape Horn and Catherine Creek, are in limbo. Federal cuts are rolling into state budgets, affecting funding for agencies like the Columbia River Gorge Commission (more on page 11). And nonprofit partners, such as Trailkeepers of Oregon and Washington Trails Association, are facing operational shortages due to federal cuts.

Oregon and Washington Trails Association, are facing operational shortages due to federal cuts.

So what is a person to do? First, we must speak up and engage. Now is not the time to sit on the sidelines. Examples abound, including Gorge legend Barbara Robinson (tap the QR code to watch “The Wildflower Woman,” a documentary Friends produced about her last year), who has advocated for Gorge lands for over seven decades and across 10 presidential administrations.



In the coming months, Friends will highlight more people like Barbara—individuals who radiate light in dark times. This includes Xakài Arquette, a young Native filmmaker working with Friends on a documentary project around the importance of Gorge wildflowers to Indigenous communities. We’ll also soon be launching “Keepers of the Gorge,” a video series that will celebrate the people who make the Gorge so special. People like this share a commonality. While they pay attention to politics, they don’t let media and their screens drive them. They turn to nature to navigate challenging times.

There are other Gorge visitors and residents who could be most impacted by today’s politics yet remain blissfully unaware. Visiting bald eagles returned to the Gorge in January 2025, enjoying the views and eating salmon before heading north. Resident grass widows emerged from the rocky soil of Catherine Creek in March, perhaps moved by the serenades of the migrating western meadowlarks. Weeks later, the endangered northwestern pond turtles woke from their winter brumation (a lighter version of hibernation) to soak up some sun on the logs of our preserves’ ponds.

This reclusive species, with a Gorge population of less than 100 as recently as 1993, now number over 1,000 due to the efforts of Washington Fish & Wildlife, the U.S. Forest Service, the Oregon Zoo, and Friends of the Columbia Gorge. It is an extraordinary example of government collaboration.

Viktor Frankl, a psychologist and Holocaust survivor who wrote the seminal book “Man’s Search for Meaning,” said, “Forces beyond your control can take away everything you possess except one thing, your freedom to choose how you will respond to the situation.”

May we always remember that how we respond is entirely up to us.

Kevin Gorman, Executive Director

contents



3

Friends Defeats Illegal Zimmerly Mining Again, and Again, and Again



6

Carrying the Torch: Introducing Friends’ Land Trust New Director Ryan Ruggiero



7

Shell by Shell: Protecting the Gorge’s Turtle Sanctuaries

Holding the Line: How the Gorge Commission Was Saved

11



Connecting Communities: Progress on the Mosier-to-The Dalles Trail Plan

15



“Rolling Boldly” this Spring with Friends Guided Outings

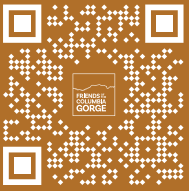
19





This edited image shows what the Eastern Gorge near Lyle could look like with the development of large subdivisions. Photo by Paloma Ayala. Edit by Chane LeBrun.

Since we published “What if the National Scenic Area Never Existed?” in our winter 2024 Passages magazine, we’ve heard from dozens of people who were struck by how powerful—and terrifying—that alternate timeline was. With the Gorge Commission’s funding threatened and the U.S. Forest Service being pressed to massively increase logging and mining, this cautionary tale is gaining legs. Unchecked development in the Gorge is no longer a distant threat. It’s a real possibility if efforts to defund the Gorge Commission continue in future legislative sessions. But Friends and our community are working hard to make sure that doesn’t happen. Tap the QR code to read the article and view the AI images.



FRIENDS DEFEATS ILLEGAL ZIMMERLY MINING AGAIN, AND AGAIN, AND AGAIN



Opposite: Pictured here, the Zimmerly mine illegally discharged millions of gallons of sediment-laden mining runoff into Gibbons Creek and Steigerwald Lake, destroying endangered salmon habitat and earning Zimmerly nearly \$200,000 in fines for causing devastating environmental damage. Photo by Brady Holden.

Text by
Nathan Baker

Senior Staff Attorney

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SINCE 2017, FRIENDS HAS ZEALOUSLY OPPOSED ILLEGAL gravel mining on the Zimmerly property in southeast Clark County, just inside the gateway to the Washington side of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. In 2020, Friends successfully got the mining activities stopped. Since then, Friends has had an unprecedented string of legal victories against the Zimmerly team and their affiliates in their seemingly never-ending efforts to mine the property, with or without permits. Friends' string of victories continues into 2025.

In December 2024, the Clark County Council for the second time unanimously rejected a proposal by Zimmerly to convert the privately owned SE 356th Avenue from a quiet, rural residential road into a publicly owned industrial-scale mining haul road. The Council had previously unanimously rejected the same proposal in July 2024. Six months later, the Council reconsidered the proposal and ultimately stuck with its prior rejection.

Both times, Friends was joined by hundreds of concerned community members who spoke out against the proposed public road dedication, helping the Council realize that the road that was being offered to the County was a Trojan horse loaded with problems. By twice rejecting Zimmerly's offers, Clark County has forcefully repudiated the untold hidden liabilities, risks, and costs that would have come with the road.

More recently, Friends and neighbors of the Zimmerly property prevailed in an important appeal decided by the Commissioners of the Columbia River Gorge Commission. Friends won on two major categories of issues, including the need for Zimmerly to obtain permits for the unpermitted drainage system on the property and to resolve important questions about whether the numerous seeps and springs on the property generate any water resources that deserve protection from mining.



Meet The Zimmerly Grinch (aka the “Zinch”), a gravel-slinging scenic-area scofflaw with a knack for losing in court. Inspired by the real-life recidivism of the company behind the illegal Zimmerly mine, this pint-sized polluter keeps trying (and failing... and failing... and failing...) to illegally mine in the protected Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. With noisy polluting trucks, no permits, and a total disregard for law, landscape, and wildlife, little Zinchy is back at it again, but so are the people fighting to protect this national treasure. Visit gorgefriends.org/zinch or tap the QR code below to enjoy our rhyming adventure through the Gorge, where courts, communities, and conservationists take a stand against environmental destruction.





Even though the mining has stopped on the Zimmerly property, new violations continue, including unpermitted road-building (left) and dumping of fill material on the property (right). Photos from Friends' archives.

When Zimmerly's attorney, Jamie Howsley, filed a land use application with Clark County seeking mining permits on the property, he purposely excluded from the application the unpermitted drainage ditch and related improvements that his clients had constructed in the 1990s as part of their mining operations. Despite using this unpermitted drainage system to illegally discharge millions of gallons of sediment-laden mining runoff into Gibbons Creek and Steigerwald Lake National Wildlife Refuge in years past, and despite voluntarily signing a legally binding consent decree with the Gorge Commission agreeing to seek land use permits for the construction and use of the drainage ditch, Zimmerly never followed through on these commitments, leaving these serious violations unresolved for more than two decades.

The Gorge Commissioners have now formally agreed with Friends on these issues and decided that Zimmerly cannot seek land use approval for mining activities on the property without also seeking approval for the unpermitted drainage system.

In numerous places on the Zimmerly property, groundwater discharges to the surface through natural seeps and springs. Despite knowing about these seeps and springs for decades, Zimmerly has never disclosed whether they generate any water resources—such as wetlands, ponds, or streams—that must be protected under the National Scenic Area rules. In their appeal decision, the Gorge

Commissioners agreed with Friends that any land use application for mining on the Zimmerly property will need to definitively resolve whether the property contains any such water resources.

Finally, in April 2025, the Clark County Council dashed Zimmerly's hopes of obtaining a surface mining overlay zoning designation across all of Zimmerly's property—including the proposed mining haul road—by voting to exclude all such site-specific requests for new mining designations from the County's environmental review of its Comprehensive Plan in 2025.

Unfortunately, new violations on the property, including newly constructed roads and the disposal of unwanted fill material on the property, have continued even after the mining activities stopped. Those new violations are currently under investigation by Clark County and Gorge Commission staff. In addition, a new land use pre-application submitted by Howsley is pending before Clark County.

With the help of our members and supporters, Friends has prevailed against Zimmerly 20 out of 20 times in various court cases, appeals, contested motions, and government decisions since 2023. For the sake of the Gorge and its sensitive and unique resources, may this string of victories continue unbroken long into the future.

CARRYING THE TORCH OF GORGE PROTECTION

by Ryan Ruggiero, Friends of the Columbia Gorge Land Trust Director



When the opportunity to join Friends of the Columbia Gorge as its Land Trust Director came up early last fall, I was consumed by a range of conflicting emotions. It was back in June 2024 that I was profoundly saddened to learn of former Land Trust Director Dan Bell's untimely death at 52—my current age. I met Dan back in about 2011 or so, when he arrived in Oregon from North Carolina and we were both working on land protection in the Willamette Valley. I liked Dan right away, appreciating his mellow but strong demeanor, his creativity, and his “there-must-be-a-way” mindset.

Dan was someone who embodied both quiet resolve and a deep, steadfast commitment to the land. His passing was tragic, but the great work he carried forward at Friends' Land Trust can't be allowed to fade. It needs to be honored, extended, and evolved. I wanted to be the one to carry that torch—if only they'd give me the chance. Thankfully they did.

I've always been drawn to Friends' clarity of purpose and place—the focus on the Columbia River Gorge as both a national treasure and a locally revered, hyper-accessible, and exceedingly popular destination. The backdrop is more than sweeping vistas, wildflower meadows, and vibrant communities; it's thousands of years of continuous habitation by our region's Indigenous peoples. The Gorge is not just a beautiful place with arresting views and breathtaking biodiversity, but one with rich cultural histories that continue to be revealed to those willing to pay attention.

Joining Friends now, I see myself not just stepping into a role, but stepping into a legacy. “Carrying the torch of Gorge protection” means honoring the groundwork laid by Dan and so many others before him, while keeping our eyes fixed on what still needs to be done. It means holding fast to the vision of long-term, permanent land protection and access—for nature, for people, and for future generations.

Friends of the Columbia Gorge has a clear, concise, and multi-dimensional mission to protect the Gorge and its many wonders. Fundamentally, Friends' work is all about building community—I'm all in. Leading the Land Trust and its dedicated, talented staff is a true honor and privilege. Together, we have a lot of important work to do—and we can't do it without your support.

Seeing what is going on right now, with the senseless and indiscriminate dismantling of our federal resource agencies, the Gorge needs Friends—and our allies, supporters, and donors—as much as it ever has. This is not a time to sit back. It's a time to harness our fears and anxieties and channel them into action. A moment to redouble our commitment and our efforts. A moment to protect the Gorge out of love for what it is—and what it can still become.

Let's all roll up our sleeves and get back to work, just as Dan would. We'll carry the torch, together.

I look forward to meeting you all in the weeks, months, and years to come.

Ryan

IN APRIL 2024, FRIENDS ACQUIRED ALASHÍK PRESERVE, AN ECOLOGICALLY CRITICAL PROPERTY NESTLED IN THE WOODED VALLEYS OF SKAMANIA COUNTY. THE ACQUISITION MARKS A MAJOR CONSERVATION WIN, PERMANENTLY PROTECTING HABITAT FOR THE ENDANGERED NORTHWESTERN POND TURTLE AND SHIELDING THE LANDSCAPE FROM THE THREATS OF LOGGING AND MINING.

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EEP IN THE VALLEY BETWEEN DOG AND Wind Mountains in Skamania County, Washington, Turtle Haven and Alashík Preserves are thawing out from the cold winter, and the northwestern pond turtles that live there are waking

up from months of brumation (a state of dormancy similar to hibernation). With the weather now trending in our favor, Friends of the Columbia Gorge's on-the-ground work to restore these areas will begin anew.

PRESERVING A "UNIQUE LANDSCAPE"

Evergreen forests, patches of open meadow, and abundant streams and ponds characterize the valley between Dog and Wind Mountains.

"The geography of the area, particularly how wet it is, is really unique," Frances Fischer, preserves manager for Friends of the Columbia Gorge, says. "The land is idyllic for turtles because they prefer ponds, but need meadows and open forest close by for nesting."

The valley has been a priority for conservation efforts since the early 90s, when northwestern pond turtles were listed as an endangered species by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. At the federal level, Northwestern pond turtles are now being considered for status as a threatened species. The ruling was proposed in 2023, and a decision will likely be made later this year.

In 2015, Friends' increased its focus on the valley between Dog and Wind Mountains in light of data

from The Nature Conservancy that recognized the land as "highly resilient" to climate change. "Highly resilient" means the valley is expected to provide healthy habitat for many different plants and animals, even when other nearby habitats are no longer suitable. The Turtle Haven and Alashík Preserves make up roughly one-fifth of this 1,000-acre valley.

"A WHITE WHALE FOR CONSERVATION"

Friends acquired Turtle Haven in 2015 and began the arduous process of restoring the land. But even as restoration neared completion at Turtle Haven, the adjacent Alashík property still belonged to a family with numerous timberland holdings across the Gorge, as it had since at least 1919.

"Alashík was a bit of a white whale for conservation efforts in this area," Sara Woods, stewardship manager for Friends of the Columbia Gorge, says.

When the property finally came on the market in 2024, it was listed as timberland. Additionally, the owners sought to maintain the mineral rights to the property. This would have allowed them to mine the property after it was logged by its new owners.

Mining would have had devastating impacts on Alashík, Turtle Haven, and the surrounding lands. Alashík sits directly above Turtle Haven at slightly higher elevation, so winter rains would have carried logging debris and mining runoff through the forests and ponds that Friends and the U.S. Forest Service worked for years to restore and protect.

Friends put in an offer on the property that matched



As you see here, Alashik Preserve lies on the western slopes of Dog Mountain. If the property would have been clearcut and mined, sediment-laden mining runoff could have devastated the fragile ecosystems of Turtle Haven, which sits directly below Alashik. Photo by Monique Trevett.

the asking price, but the owners were not inclined to give up the mineral rights and accepted a competing offer from a timber company that allowed them to retain mineral rights. But when the competing offer fell through during closing, it left an opening for Friends to buy the property.

The late Dan Bell, former land trust director for Friends, spearheaded the effort to acquire the property and finalized the deal in April 2024. With the acquisition of Alashík, all of the critical turtle habitat in the valley is now under the control of conservation organizations or federal agencies.

“We were stoked,” Woods says of the acquisition. “It was a miracle.”

Friends named the property Alashík, the Sahaptin word for turtle. Sahaptin is spoken by several Tribes throughout southern Washington and northern Oregon.

“THE BLUEPRINT FOR TURTLE RESTORATION”

Looking back, Woods describes the Turtle Haven efforts as “phase one” of restoration in the valley.

“I learned everything about turtle habitat restoration

by working at Turtle Haven,” says Woods, who has managed the property since it was acquired in 2015. “Now we have a blueprint – we can apply what we learned at Turtle Haven directly to the efforts at Alashík.”

Friends will begin restoration at Alashík by working with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), Mt. Adams Resource Stewards, and the U.S. Forest Service to control the American bullfrog population, an invasive species that multiplies prolifically and eats baby northwestern pond turtles. They will also focus on removing invasive Himalayan blackberry bushes that obstruct turtle movement.

Finally, Friends will make improvements to ensure ideal breeding grounds for northwestern pond turtles. For example, they mow the grass at Turtle Haven every fall, so the ponds will get enough sun exposure to warm them to meet the turtles’ nesting preferences.

RETURN OF THE NORTHWESTERN POND TURTLE

But simply restoring the land will not bring back the endangered turtle.

The northwestern pond turtle is a bit like an orchid, requiring very specific conditions to survive and thrive. They are small and timid, take a long time



WITH THE ACQUISITION OF ALASHÍK, ALL OF THE CRITICAL TURTLE HABITAT IN THE VALLEY IS NOW UNDER THE CONTROL OF CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS OR FEDERAL AGENCIES.



to mature, and lay only a few eggs at once — all of which make them extremely vulnerable to declining populations and extinction.

That’s where a program to raise and release northwestern pond turtles comes in. WDFW, the Oregon Zoo, and the Woodland Park Zoo in Washington capture a portion of baby turtles at the end of the summer and raise them at the zoos for

nearly a year. These tiny turtles — just the size of a tablespoon when they hatch — are kept in perpetual summer-like conditions, allowing them to triple in size by the time they are released the following summer. When they are released, their size protects them from being eaten by bullfrogs.

Zoo-reared turtles were released at Turtle Haven in 2019 and again in 2020. Woods says a turtle release at Alashík could happen in the coming years, following restoration efforts.

By all accounts, the turtle release is a delightful experience. “It’s all so cute,” Woods says. “Baby turtles cannot be disliked by anyone.”

When held above the pond, the little turtles start to kick their legs as if they are already swimming. They are gentle and quiet – and above all – “they’re determined to get in the water,” Woods says.

A CANARY IN THE COAL MINE FOR CLIMATE CHANGE

Despite their diminutive size and skittish nature, the northwestern pond turtle is critical to informing climate and restoration efforts.

Because these turtles are highly sensitive to changes in the landscape, they are considered a “sentinel species” — essentially, a canary in the coal mine for climate change that provides scientists and conservation managers with a gauge of the severity of climate change and its impacts.

Ensuring that animals and landscapes continue to thrive in a changing climate will not only benefit these natural resources, they will also have downstream impacts for people.

“You have so many communities around the Columbia Gorge that rely on this area for drinking water, recreation and more,” Gorman says. “By preserving this land and supporting its resilience to climate change, we can help lessen the risks of threats like wildfires and decreasing water supply, and have a positive impact on communities, agriculture and tourism.”

Focusing conservation efforts on habitats that are well-suited for endangered species and on landscapes that are naturally resilient to climate change allows Friends to maximize their impact.

“It’s like getting the most bang for your buck,” Gorman says.

“WE CAN DO HARD THINGS”

On the 10th anniversary of purchasing the Turtle Haven preserve, and embarking on the next phase of the project at Alashík, this project is a bright example of how conservation work at Friends and in the Gorge has evolved.

Decades ago, much of the valley was vulnerable to logging and development.

“I remember wringing our hands, thinking, ‘What is going to happen here? Are we going to be able to protect this?’” Gorman says. “To now look back and think, yeah, we did. It’s a really good feeling to see that happen.”

The progress “shows me we can do hard things,” Woods says.

Tess Wrobleski is a Seattle-based freelance writer specializing in scientific and climate-centric writing. Find more of her work at tess-wrobleski.com.



DISCOVER ALASHÍK: Tap the QR code for an inside look at Alashík Preserve featuring an aerial tour, CGI glimpse of a clearcut future that never was, a walkthrough with our land trust team, a baby turtle release, and the story behind the land’s protection.





Text by
Renée Tkach

Conservation Director

HOLDING THE LINE FOR THE GORGE

THE COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE COMMISSION IS THE FRONTLINE DEFENSE AGAINST UNREGULATED DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION, AND CLIMATE CHANGE THREATS ACROSS THE 292,500-ACRE COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE NATIONAL SCENIC AREA. IT ENSURES THAT LAND-USE PLANNING, CONSERVATION EFFORTS, CLIMATE RESILIENCE STRATEGIES, AND RURAL COMMUNITY VITALITY INITIATIVES REMAIN AT THE HEART OF GORGE POLICY AND CONSISTENT ACROSS ALL SIX COUNTIES. BUT AFTER THE WASHINGTON STATE HOUSE VOTED TO DEFUND THE AGENCY, ITS FUTURE WAS PUT IN JEOPARDY.

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N MARCH 27, THE WASHINGTON STATE House voted to strip all funding from the Gorge Commission. Because the Commission is jointly funded by Washington and Oregon under a bi-state compact, any funding reduction from one state

triggers a matching reduction from the other. As a result, Washington's decision represented an existential threat to the Commission. Without it, the Gorge could be left vulnerable to residential sprawl and intensive commercial and industrial development, transforming the Gorge's rural towns into hubs for short-sighted, profit-driven expansion.

Friends responded by leading an advocacy campaign to reverse Washington's decision. Our Advocacy & Conservation team—Renée Tkach and Madison Kenney—engaged legislators in Olympia, submitted written testimony, and built a coalition of other conservation groups and community allies. They also worked with our communications team to launch a

public campaign urging our supporters to take action by submitting letters to their elected officials in Olympia. The response has been staggering and inspiring. Nearly 1,300 people flooded legislators' inboxes with a clear message: the Gorge is not up for grabs.

The situation escalated when, on April 8, Commissioners from Skamania County, Washington, and Wasco County, Oregon, sent letters to lawmakers in both states (including both governors) complaining about Friends working to restore funding to the Commission. Skamania County even sent a letter to Brooke Rollins, the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, claiming that the Gorge Commission was acquiring land in the National Scenic Area and "eroding [the county's] tax base." This claim is demonstrably false, as the Commission does not—and never has—acquired land. Either the Skamania County Commissioners were deliberately misleading the public, or they simply don't understand the very agency they're attacking.

We're thrilled to report that, thanks to a

groundswell of public support across Washington and lobbying from Friends, the Washington State House and Senate reached an agreement to fund the Gorge Commission for the 2025–27 biennium.

Amid a statewide budget crisis, nearly all agencies faced reductions, and the Commission was no exception. While it requested \$2.2 million from Washington, the final allocation came in at \$1.6 million. Because Oregon is required to match Washington’s contribution, the Commission’s total budget for the biennium will be \$3.2 million—down from the \$4.4 million originally requested. While this funding level may result in staff reductions at the Commission, it still represents a major victory for Friends, for our supporters who joined the grassroots effort, and for all who believe in the long-term protection of the Columbia River Gorge.

This campaign was a powerful reminder that when our community speaks up, decision-makers listen. Thanks to all of you who raised your voices, the Gorge Commission will continue to lead efforts to protect and manage the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.

In Oregon, we are still awaiting final approval from lawmakers to fully fund the Gorge Commission, and we remain actively engaged to help ensure a positive outcome there as well.

OTHER KEY LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES IN OREGON

Recreational Immunity: Oregon’s recreational immunity law protects public and private landowners who open their property for recreational use from liability claims if someone is injured. A temporary law providing this immunity is set to expire in 2026. Without a permanent solution, landowners—including conservation organizations like Friends—may be forced to limit public access to protected lands. Securing a strong recreational immunity law is essential to keeping our land trust properties open to the public.

Standing Up to Factory Farms: Though there are no factory farms within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, large-scale confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs) in eastern Oregon’s Lower Umatilla Basin are impacting air and water quality in the region. These massive farms release pollutants like sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and ammonia, which contribute to air pollution and haze in the Gorge.

Friends is part of the Stand Up to Factory Farms coalition, which advocated for a moratorium on new or expanding

WHY STATE ADVOCACY MATTERS

Protecting the Columbia Gorge requires more than just appreciation—it requires action. State-level legislation in Oregon and Washington plays a pivotal role in shaping policies that impact conservation, recreation, and land-use planning in the Gorge. That’s why Friends of the Columbia Gorge is deeply engaged in advocating for funding, policies, and protections that will ensure the Gorge remains preserved for generations to come.

With both Oregon and Washington in the midst of their long legislative sessions, Friends’ Advocacy & Conservation team has been hard at work tracking key legislation, submitting testimony, and meeting with policymakers. Our top priority? Ensuring the Columbia River Gorge Commission receives the funding it needs to continue its vital work.

CAFOs in designated Groundwater Management Areas during this legislative session. Unfortunately, SB 80, the Stand Up to Factory Farms bill, did not make it out of committee this session, and the bill is now dead. However, Friends remains deeply committed to this issue and will continue to work toward stronger protections during the next legislative session in 2026.

Protecting Rural and State Lands: Beyond our primary priorities, Friends has also been carefully tracking and weighing in on numerous other land-use bills that could threaten rural landscapes, farmland, forestland, and state-owned lands across Oregon and Washington. These bills, if passed, could set dangerous precedents for sprawl, undermine conservation efforts, and weaken protections that are critical for maintaining the natural character and sustainability of our rural communities. Our advocacy team remains vigilant, ensuring that the Gorge’s values of stewardship and smart growth are upheld in every piece of legislation that moves through both statehouses.

YOUR VOICE MATTERS

As the legislative sessions in Oregon and Washington continue, Friends will remain vigilant, advocating for policies that protect this special place. But we can’t do it alone. Public engagement is key to shaping policy decisions. By staying informed, reaching out to lawmakers, and supporting conservation efforts, you can play a role in ensuring the Columbia Gorge remains protected. Tap the QR code to sign up for our Action Alerts to stay updated on how you can help. Together, we can make a lasting impact.





Cascade torrent salamander. Photo by John Clare.

by Kenzie Hammond, Youth & Community Education Specialist

As you hike in waterfall alley this summer, take a closer look around the splash zone of our beautiful falls or along the streams and you might notice an uncommon yellow and brown salamander called the Cascade torrent salamander (*Rhyacotriton cascadae*). Endemic to the Pacific Northwest, the Columbia Gorge offers excellent habitat for this species with its abundance of waterfalls and cold, clear streams. This salamander is small bodied and rarely exceeds 2.25 inches in length. With a brown back, a yellow belly, and white speckled sides, they camouflage well into their environment, blending into the mossy rocks and leaf litter that surround their home.

Cascade torrent salamanders are active year-round at their lower elevation range in the Gorge, and are thought to breed in the spring. However, scientists don't know for sure since eggs haven't been observed in the wild; females are thought to hide their eggs deep in crevices of rocks or in springs. Larvae develop slowly and can take up to five years to metamorphose into adults, an adaptation to the consistently cool, moist environments where they live.

Because of their sensitivity to temperature and moisture, these salamanders are considered an indicator species, meaning their presence can reflect the overall health of their freshwater habitats. The Cascade torrent salamander currently doesn't have an International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN—the organization that maintains the global Red List of threatened and endangered species) status for vulnerability, but it is considered a species of concern in Oregon and Washington due to threats from temperature variation, sedimentation from logging and road construction, and the impacts of climate change. Preserving old-growth forests, protecting riparian buffers, and limiting development near streams are essential actions to ensure this elusive amphibian—and the delicate ecosystems it represents—can continue to thrive.

Tap the QR code to watch our webinar, “Under the Surface: The Hidden World of Gorge Salamanders.”



CAPE HORN & CATHERINE CREEK: The houses at Cape Horn and Catherine Creek are gone! At Cape Horn, the former home site is fully graded like the house was never there. We will be planting a protected patch of native Oregon white oaks where the house used to be. The seedlings that we planted as acorns in fall 2023 will be planted into the area where the house was this fall.

At Catherine Creek, the house is gone, and the crew will soon complete the final demolition on the foundation. After deconstruction is complete, the property will be cleared of any manmade items. If you drove by the Catherine Creek property before Friends owned it, you would be amazed that we have been able to remove all manmade items since our purchase in 2020! Take a look at the series of photos below, showing pre-cleanup (left), post clean-up (center), and post-house removal (right). These are milestone achievements in returning these lands to their native ecosystems—brought to life by investments from our community and donors to our Share the Wonder campaign.

Frances Fischer, Preserves Manager



SmokeReadyGorge.org is a resource developed collaboratively by the Oregon State University Extension Service in Wasco County, the Hood River County Health Department, and the Healthy Gorge Initiative that works toward public education around clean air in Wasco County, Hood River County, Skamania County, Klickitat County, and beyond. It was created to protect our health and prepare for future smoke events. As we gear up for another beautiful summer, here are some tips on preparing for wildfire smoke:

- Check the Air Quality Index (AQI) at [SmokeReadyGorge.org](https://www.SmokeReadyGorge.org). AQI measures smoke and pollution in the air. The higher the AQI, the greater the health concern. If the AQI is above 100, it can be unhealthy for children, older adults, pregnant people, and people with cardiovascular and respiratory conditions. If the AQI is above 150, it can be unhealthy for everyone.
- Choose indoor activities.
- Close your windows and doors.
- Create cleaner air at home using air filters and air purifiers.
- Watch for symptoms like eye, lung, and throat irritation, coughing, difficulty breathing, and dizziness. If you notice these, get to a place with clean air and seek medical care if needed.

TAP TO VISIT THE WEBSITE



To find more tips, check the air quality, and sign up for emergency alerts, visit [SmokeReadyGorge.org](https://www.SmokeReadyGorge.org). Let's be Smoke Ready together!

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES: PROGRESS ON THE MOSIER-TO-THE DALLES TRAIL PLAN



The Mosier-to-The Dalles path will start at Friends' Mosier Plateau preserve, pictured here. Photo by Cate Hotchkiss.

Text by
Nick Kraemer
—
Senior Planner

Big things are on the horizon for Gorge trail lovers! A bold new vision is taking shape to connect the towns of Mosier and The Dalles with a trail network that weaves through some of the most beautiful landscapes that the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area has to offer.

The Mosier-to-The Dalles Trail Concept Plan—a collaboration between Friends of the Columbia Gorge and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS)—continues to progress. The project outlines potential trail routes, access points, and alignments across a patchwork of public and conservation lands, stitching together iconic locations like Mosier Plateau, Memaloose Hills, Rowena Crest, and Tom McCall Point.

Over the past year, the trail planning team—led

by Friends' Senior Planner Nick Kraemer, USFS's Claire Fernandes, and consultants from Seattle civil engineering firm Parametrix—has been hard at work. From Spanish-language focus groups to trail scouting missions, they've gathered knowledge to shape a draft plan that reflects the region's recreational needs and dreams. In January 2025, a Community Representative Group made up of neighbors, public agencies, user groups, and accessibility advocates came together to review the draft and provide feedback.

The trail plan envisions more than just a route. It aims to create a trail experience for everyone. That means including accessible parking and pathways where terrain allows, preserving sensitive ecosystems like the wildflower-filled slopes of Memaloose and



Pictured here, Friends' Mt. Ulka Preserve will connect the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center & Museum to The Dalles Riverfront Trail as part of the Mosier-to-The Dalles trail. Photo by Cate Hotchkiss.

Chatfield Hill, and building potential loops through orchards and wineries or even equestrian-friendly areas near Seven Mile Hill.

As the project moves into its next phase where we'll conduct outreach to local property owners and community members, the goal is clear: finalize a plan by the end of 2025 that brings this dream trail closer to reality.

This effort is part of Friends' broader Towns to Trails vision—a long-term initiative to link Gorge communities with recreation through a world-class network of trails. Once completed, this 200-mile loop trail will offer hikers, bikers (in some cases), and nature lovers not just a path through the Gorge, but a powerful connection to its people and culture.



INTERACTIVE MAP: Tap the QR code to track progress through the years of our Gorge Towns to Trails initiative.



Share the Wonder.

It's not just the name of our capital campaign—it's a guiding promise and a call to action. A reminder that the Columbia Gorge belongs to everyone, but only if we work together to keep it that way.

Right now, we have an extraordinary opportunity to protect new landscapes, restore iconic places like Cape Horn and Catherine Creek, and create new connections through our Gorge Towns to Trails vision.

This is our moment to come together around a shared dream for the Gorge's future. When you support Share the Wonder, you become part of a dedicated community of citizen conservationists protecting this natural treasure—now and for the generations who will follow.

We're so grateful to have you by our side.
Let's write the next chapter of Gorge conservation, together.

**Make a gift today to help keep the Gorge
wild, wondrous, and welcoming to all.**

Explore the campaign, learn more about ways to give, and make your contribution by visiting **sharethewonder.gorgefriends.org** or by tapping the QR code.



\$5.7 Million and Growing: One Year of Wonder

Building momentum since its launch in April 2024, Friends' Share the Wonder campaign has channeled community energy into \$5.7 million for new land acquisitions, on-the-ground restoration, access improvements, and wildlife protections. We're closing in on our \$6.6 million goal!

At Catherine Creek, what was once a car junkyard surrounded by wildlands has been transformed into a gateway for inclusive outdoor access. Over 30 abandoned vehicles, numerous outbuildings, and a residence have been removed, opening up space for future accessible trails to connect to existing U.S. Forest Service trails so that people of all abilities can experience the wonder of the Eastern Gorge.

Cape Horn Preserve has begun its journey back to native splendor. A house has been taken down, and in its place, oak seedlings have been planted. Native berries and trees are also taking root as we reestablish the forest's natural diversity. Your gifts have also supported oak woodland restoration; forest thinning to promote the growth of large, sturdy trees; and protection for young saplings from deer and invasive weeds.

At Alashík Preserve, acquired last year through the Share the Wonder campaign, we're helping northwestern pond turtles make a comeback. Invasive bullfrogs are being managed and habitat restoration is underway, all with the goal of giving these endangered creatures a safe home. We will begin offering tours of this magical place in the coming months.

You are also helping to build climate resilience in the Gorge. At Heartleaf Bluffs and other sites, habitat restoration efforts funded by Share the Wonder are reducing wildfire risk and supporting biodiversity. Projects like planting fire-resistant native vegetation and controlling invasives are not only healing the land but preparing it for a more resilient future.

Finally, the dream of a Gorge-wide trail system is advancing. Your support has powered planning with the U.S. Forest Service for a trail connecting Mosier to The Dalles, turning vision into reality through the Gorge Towns to Trails initiative.

Every habitat restored, every trail built, and every species protected begins with you—proof of what this community can achieve together.

From all of us at Friends of the Columbia Gorge, thank you for sharing the wonder. Tap the QR code below to watch a video update on our campaign.



Lori Warner
Director of Philanthropy



“ROLLING BOLDLY” THIS SPRING WITH FRIENDS GUIDED OUTINGS

by Melissa Gonzalez, Public Engagement & Outdoor Programs Manager

We're off to a strong start this spring, and it feels great! The season is underway with a vibrant mix of outings led by our incredible volunteers, dedicated staff, and inspiring community partners. From classic hikes to creative new ways of connecting with the outdoors, we're focused on offering something for everyone, whether your connection to nature comes through movement, mindfulness, culture, or curiosity. This year, we're expanding our events to meet people where they are and celebrate all the ways we belong in nature.

In April, Friends partnered with Geoff Babb, founder and creator of the AdvenChair, to offer two accessibility hikes. Thanks to Geoff's innovation and support, along with the help of incredible community partners, these outings brought people together to explore the Gorge in new ways.

On April 12, we enjoyed a beautiful, breezy, and sunny day at Catherine Creek for our spring wildflower outing. Led by Columbia Gorge wildflower expert Barbara Robinson, our group took a relaxed, educational walk along the Universal Access Trail, surrounded by colorful blooms like Klickitat Desert Parsley, Poet's Shooting Star, Camas, Columbia Desert Parsley, Small-Flowered Lupine, and Bicolored Cluster Lily. With the help of AdvenChairs, we navigated the trail with ease. A smaller group continued on to the north side of Catherine Creek, taking in views of the Columbia River and the iconic Catherine Creek Arch. It was a joyful day of flowers, sunshine, and connection in the Gorge.

The next day, April 13, brought a clear, sunny sky for our birding outing at Steigerwald Lake National Wildlife Refuge. We were treated to one of the most active bird days of the season, with exciting sightings and great observation opportunities. Photographer and birder Ken Pitts from Vancouver Audubon and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Ranger Sarah Williams Brown shared insights about the refuge's thriving wetland restoration. We spotted multiple Bald Eagles, Great Blue Herons, a Belted Kingfisher, American Kestrel, Great Egrets, a Purple Martin, and a variety of waterfowl, right from the trail. With the help of the AdvenChair, we were able to enjoy a smooth, accessible experience while taking in all the sights and sounds of spring migration.

A heartfelt thank you to Geoff and Yvonne Babb for being an integral part of our accessibility hike partnership. We're so grateful for their ongoing support and look forward to continuing to "roll boldly" with AdvenChairs. Stay tuned for more accessibility outings.

If you're interested in joining us out in the Gorge for one of our guided outings, we'd love to have you. Visit gorgefriends.org/outings to explore upcoming opportunities and sign up.



Pictured here, the AdvenChair is a human-powered, all-terrain wheelchair designed to enable individuals with mobility challenges to safely experience the serenity and grandeur of wild places with family and friends. Photo by Monique Trevett.



AdvenChairs made spring blooms accessible to all during our April 12 wildflower hike at Catherine Creek, where participants rolled along the Universal Access Trail surrounded by camas, lupine, and sweeping Gorge views. Photo by Monique Trevett.



On April 13 at Steigerwald Lake National Wildlife Refuge, we enjoyed an accessible day of spring bird migration magic—spotting eagles, herons, and kingfishers along a trail rich with restored wetland life. Photo by Monique Trevett.

BON VOYAGE PAIGE!

This spring, Friends bid farewell and happy retirement to our longtime Finance and Operations Director Paige Unangst. Paige joined Friends in 2013 as business manager and in a decade's time, transformed Friends' financial and operational systems. Behind the scenes, Paige increased our financial integrity, improved hiring practices, and helped build a culture that has made Friends of the Columbia Gorge a wonderful place to work. As the organization grew, Paige's scope of work greatly expanded and her responsibilities are now being handed off to two new staff: Operations Director Heather Odden and Senior Accountant Erin Randall. Paige's warmth and dedication will be sorely missed by staff and board as she and her husband Steve relocate from the Pacific Northwest to Florida. Safe travels Paige, and thanks for your decade-plus of service!



TRIBUTE GIFTS

November 20, 2024 - April 11, 2025

In honor of Amy Alpaugh
Caroline Attanasio

In honor of Andrew Hyman
Stern Tech Law

In honor of Art and Olive Fletcher
Karen Fletcher

In honor of Barry Daigle
Tracy Hyland

In honor of Bowen Blair, Nancy Russell's biographer
Annie Munch

In honor of Brad Johnson and Julie Beeler
Bill Beeler

In honor of Carrie Noble
Lindsay Schlobohm

In honor of Debbie Asakawa
Carl Asakawa

In honor of Elly Leslie
Tim Leslie

In honor of Fernanda Gwinner
Lindsay Schlobohm

In honor of Georgina Hartford Garth
John Garch

In honor of Glenn Morris
Joanne Brown

In honor of Holly Coit
Susan Coit

In honor of Ian Palmer
Gayle Palmer

In honor of J. Isaac
Lauren Adele Isaac

In honor of Jane Heffernan
Dermot C. Noonan

In honor of John Nicholas
Mary Edwards

In honor of Kathryn Foster
Gordon Foster

In honor of Kevin Gorman and Michelle Kinsella
Justin Carroll

In honor of Landmass Wines
Anne Koch

In honor of Mat Coleman
Susan Chappell

In honor of Melinda Jackson
Reva Basch

In honor of Mike and Debbie Youmans
Scott Devenney

In honor of Nathan Baker
Joe Campbell

In honor of Neel and Arya
Gautami Newalkar

In honor of Nick Clote
Carey Wickham

In honor of Paige Unangst
Tim Dobyms

In honor of Pleschette Fontenet
Lindsay Schlobohm, Hannah Amend

In honor of Pleschette, Carrie, Fernanda and Monique
Jeanie Nguyen

In honor of Polly Jackson
Gloria Henning

In honor of Richard L. Stratton
Jim Stratton

In honor of Rick Ray
Jeff Wright

In honor of Stephen E. Parker
Mary Bramucci

In honor of Stewart Bradway
Kelly Bradway Parret

In honor of William Savery
Daniel Johnson

In honor of Edna Chapman
Susan Abel

In memory of Aaron Tyler Bliss
Susan Sheldahl

In memory of Arne & Joyce Skedsvold
Karl Skedsvold

In memory of Barbara Bruch-Connelly
Bruce Connelly & John Connelly

In memory of Bertha Guptill
Kris Guptill

In memory of Bob Salinger
Bob Del Gizzi

In memory of Dan Bell
Leslie Bach, Kenneth Popper, Deanna Brown,
Goulder Family Foundation

In memory of Dr. Jay Nelson
Ivy Velarde

In memory of E. Joseph Dean
M. Susan Dean

In memory of Earl Zentzis
Daniel Monaghan

In memory of Elizabeth Gibson Wehr
Christopher Gibson

In memory of Frank Coale
Lisa Coale

In memory of Fred Rothchild
George E. Cummings

In memory of George Schmidt
Marcia Schmidt

In memory of Greg Moulliet
Carol Collier

In memory of Hannah May & Cynthia Gage
Patricia Toccalino

In memory of Janice Staver
Jennifer Hohenlohe

In memory of John Harrison
Dawn Harrison
Mary E. Sisson, Marilyn Adams

In memory of John Lovell
Jude Russell

In memory of John Reynolds
Karen Johnson

In memory of Mrs. Mary Nwakaego Mbah
Stephen Mbah

In memory of Linda Gray
Anonymous

In memory of Marilyn McFarland
Alison Myers, Bobbie Hasselbring

In memory of Mark Evertz
Tim Hohl

In memory of Mark M. Miller
Maureen Esser

In memory of Marna Moore
Kary Reinke

In memory of Mary and Steve Rives
Albert Rives, Ray Chestnut

In memory of Mason Van Buren
Evans Van Buren

In memory of Matthew Winthrop
Amy Winthrop, Howard W. Baumann

**In memory of Mrs. Margaret E. Henderson, Mother
of the Columbia River Hwy**
Linda Holden

**In memory of My parents, Jagadeeswari and
Ramakrishnarao Pidaparthy**
Kamesh Pidaparthy

In memory of Nancy Russell
Annie Munch

In memory of Phyllis Clausen
Jane Harris

In memory of Robert Sidney Hallock
Kelly Nelson

In memory of Sandy Hays
Tim Hohl

In memory of Tom Baillie
Patricia Hoover

In memory of Hal "Skip" White
Sue Ellen White

by *Fernanda Gwinner, Philanthropy Officer, and
Lori Warner, Director of Philanthropy*

WHY DO WE SHARE THESE STORIES?

Because behind every act of support is a story. The stories of our members reflect the deep, lasting connections people form with the Columbia Gorge. These conversations are more than snapshots of generosity; they reveal the values, histories, and hopes carried by those who stand up for this place we all cherish. Through their words, we glimpse how love for the Gorge takes root, grows, and is passed along. Protecting this place is about more than land - it's about legacy. We're deeply grateful to our member community not only for the financial support that powers this work, but for sharing stories that inspire and guide others by example.

In times like these, when the fight to protect the Gorge feels more urgent than ever, we find strength in those who've carried the baton before us, and in those now calling on us to carry it forward into the next chapter. For nearly two decades, Igo and Cookie Jurgens have been part of that ongoing relay: exploring, advocating, and helping ensure this place remains protected for future explorers and land stewards. Their legacy is stitched into the trails they've walked and the work they've supported,



Friends members Cookie (left) and Igo (right) Jurgens at Cape Horn Preserve. Photo from Friends' archives.

reminding us that every step forward builds on the dedication of those who believe this place is worth fighting for.

But their journey here stretches further back: a hippie-era road trip in a broken-down van, an escape from smoggy Chicago for their son's health, and a landing in Oregon that became a 55-years-and-counting love story with the Pacific Northwest—and with each other. As they reflect on their journey with Friends, their words offer both wisdom and hope for all who continue the race.

A LASTING CONNECTION: IGO AND COOKIE JURGENS ON THE GORGE, COMMUNITY, AND GIVING BACK

*Answers to this Q&A have been edited by the author for clarity.

Q: Let's start at the beginning. How did you and Cookie meet?

Igo is originally from Estonia, moving to the Bronx



Cookie Jurgens sets up family lunch on a beach in Mexico outside the couple's "hippie van" in 1970. Photo courtesy of Igo and Cookie Jurgens.

when he was 11. Cookie was from Pittsburgh. They met in college at the University of Cincinnati. Before Oregon, before conservation, there was a dance—a chance meeting at a college art show. Igo was studying architecture. Cookie was pursuing nursing. Cookie thought Igo was a good dancer and liked his accent. They weren't supposed to be together that night (in fact, Igo had come to the dance with Cookie's roommate!), but sometimes fate has other plans.

Q: How did you end up in Oregon?

In 1970, Igo and Cookie set their sights on Oregon, seeking fresh air and a better climate for their infant son's asthma. But somewhere along the way, their hippie van took a detour to Mexico. A misadventure at the border involving a train and bolt cutters nearly stranded them there, but eventually, they pointed the van north in search of clearer skies and cleaner air. They didn't know it then, but Oregon would be home for the next 55 years and counting!

Q: How did you first connect with Friends of the Columbia Gorge?

In the Gorge, Igo and Cookie found more than hiking trails—they found their people. After years of exploring the region on their own, they were craving a sense of shared purpose. Their previous attempt at community—through a governing board tied to their Sandy River home—left them disillusioned. But Friends of the Columbia Gorge was different. It wasn't about rules or control; it was about shared values, a love of place, and “people who gave a damn.”

Q: Any favorite memories of time spent in the Gorge with your family?

Multnomah Falls. Larch Mountain. Mount Defiance (which they call “Mount Destruction”). Lyle Cherry Orchards. Catherine Creek. Explore the Gorge trips with Friends of the Columbia Gorge (Igo especially loved the winery stops). One favorite spot: a bench with a view looking downriver past Mosier—inviting enough to climb under the fence and just sit and take it all in. Over the years, they documented it all—turning snapshots into narrated shows, complete with music and handmade captions.

Q: You mentioned your kids and grandkids had great times in the Gorge. What do you hope they carry with them from those times in nature with you?

For Igo, it was a treat to watch his children—Tree and Sage—explore the Gorge for the first time, and it had a lasting impact. Both still hike the Gorge as adults. His granddaughter, now in medical school, makes time for Gorge hikes between rotations. His grandson, a musician in Brooklyn, still talks about the cliffside picnics.

Q: How did you find a sense of community with Friends of the Columbia Gorge and fellow members?

Igo and Cookie's journey into the Gorge-loving community was an organic one. After joining Friends, they found a group of welcoming, like-minded people who shared a commitment to protecting the Gorge. Compared to past groups where conflict was the norm, Friends felt refreshingly united.

LAND STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

Friends' Land Stewards are gearing up this spring to perform community science research on native turtles via Visual Encounter Surveys at the Alashik Preserve. Although Friends staff and land stewards conducted intermittent observations in late summer 2024 to gain preliminary information, no official surveying has been completed throughout the entire basking season. In fact, no population data has been collected on turtles at this site since the early 1990's due to private ownership and our curiosity is piqued! Working under the guidance of Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, volunteers will engage in systematically collecting turtle presence data for Northwestern pond and Western painted turtles to better estimate their population sizes at the preserve. These observations will inform and support the long-term conservation strategies of the area all while engaging volunteers and community in wildlife conservation work, a continuing mission of Friends.

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DONATE TO SHARE THE WONDER BY PHONE, MAIL, OR ONLINE

**Thank you for joining us to protect the Columbia Gorge.
We're honored to have you on our team. Your support makes our work possible.**

- To donate by phone or connect with our philanthropy team to learn more about ways to give to our Share the Wonder campaign, including stocks, QCD gifts, or donor-advised funds, call **503.241.3762**.
- Please address mailed donations to: Friends of the Columbia Gorge, 123 NE 3rd Ave., Suite 108, Portland, OR 97232, with checks payable to "Friends of the Columbia Gorge."
- Give now or make a donation pledge online on Friends' secure website at sharethewonder.gorgefriends.org/give or by tapping the QR code on the right.
- Credit card gifts: Friends accepts Visa, Mastercard, and American Express. Make one-time gifts or schedule monthly installments.



Spring wildflowers in bloom at Dog Mountain. Photo by Ken Park.



There are many ways to include Friends of the Columbia Gorge in your legacy plans. When you include Friends in your will or estate plan, you're making an investment in the future of the Gorge's wondrous and wild living places for generations to come.

We would be happy to talk with you about the Norman Yeon Legacy Circle or other gift planning options.
Call **503-241-3762** or email Lori Warner at giftplanning@gorgefriends.org.



Passages is a triannual magazine produced for members of Friends of the Columbia Gorge.

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. Friends has offices in Portland and Hood River, Oregon, and Washougal, Washington. Visit gorgefriends.org to learn more. Send inquiries to info@gorgefriends.org or call 503.241.3762.

sharethewonder.gorgefriends.org/give

