



SPRING 2026



# SPRING FORWARD

*A season of change, victories, and momentum*

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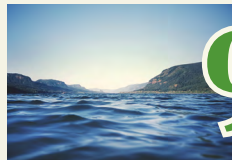
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Dalles Mountain Ranch. Photo by Monique Trevett

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## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Photo by Monique Trevett

**IN MARCH**, the board hired Gabe Sheoships, former executive director of Friends of Tryon Creek, as the new executive director of Friends of the Columbia Gorge and people have asked what I think of my successor. I think the board made a great hire. I've known Gabe for over six years and aside from his work elevating Friends of Tryon Creek, Gabe has had a profound impact on land trusts throughout Oregon.

Gabe helps lead the Oregon Land Justice Project (a program of the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts of which Friends is a member) connecting Oregon land trusts to Indigenous people and communities throughout the state. An enrolled member of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR), Gabe led dozens of Oregon land trusts through an education of indigenous history and values, relationship building with numerous Tribes and instituting organizational changes to bring tribal voices into our work.

I had the pleasure of seeing Gabe in action when he brought 20 or so land trust staff to the Umatilla Reservation. He introduced us to tribal leaders and we saw their conservation efforts firsthand. Gabe took us to his childhood home and his mother and aunties honored us with a first foods dinner. It was a profound experience and moved many executive directors to rethink our work and how we support Tribes.

The Umatilla tour was followed by trips to the Siletz, Warm Springs, Coos, Klamath and Yakama Reservations. Each trip relied on Gabe bringing land trusts and Tribes together. Since the creation of the Oregon Land Justice Project, the Wallowa Land Trust and Nature Conservancy have hosted first food gatherings at the Zumwalt Prairie, several land trusts have transferred lands back to Tribes (Friends has two properties in the works), the Columbia Land Trust created a co-management agreement with the Chinook Tribe and five Oregon land trusts, including Friends, have adopted organizational Tribal engagement plans (see page 4) to drive their work.

Gabe has conservation credentials I didn't have when I joined Friends 27 years ago. But his greatest strength is his ability to connect with people, all people. I'm excited to see where he takes the organization.

I'll be transitioning with Gabe through May and then embark on my next chapter. I have no doubt that this is the right moment to pass the baton and Gabe is the right person to take it. Come connect with us at the annual meeting on May 17. Registration details are on the back cover.

Kevin Gorman, Executive Director



### A MESSAGE FROM PLESCHETTE FONTENET, CHAIR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Friends' board of directors conducted a careful search for the organization's next executive director. We are excited to welcome Gabe Sheoships and are confident in the leadership he brings to protecting the Columbia Gorge.

Kevin Gorman's nearly three decades of leadership have shaped Friends into the strong organization it is today. The board is grateful for the foundation he leaves and looks forward to working with Gabe as the next chapter begins.

# IN HIS OWN WORDS AN INTERVIEW WITH GABE SHEOSHIPS



Photo by Monique Trevett

## **Your family has been part of the Gorge for time immemorial. How does that connection inform the work ahead?**

“The connection with the Gorge is important. I grew up listening to my grandmother, Mabel Sheoships (Thompson), share stories of her time traveling and camping at Celilo Falls and visiting the many communities along the river. She spoke of things that I could only imagine, then and now. Stories and cultural history are important to share with future generations so they will know what this landscape is truly capable of.”

## **You are the first enrolled member of a Gorge Treaty Tribe to serve as executive director. What does that mean to you, and what do you hope it will mean for Friends’ members and the Gorge community at large?**

“The Gorge Treaty Tribes, or River Tribes, have been dedicated to the protection, health, and legacy of the Gorge since time immemorial. It is important to recognize the historical and contemporary contributions of our local Tribes. My hope is for stronger relationships and connections on issues related to the integrity and future of the Gorge and Columbia River.”

## **If there is one thing you want the Gorge community to know as you step into this role, what is it?**

“I care deeply about this place and am honored to step into this role at this moment in the world. Friends has established a strong community and organization dedicated to this work. I believe it takes everyone to do this work, we are all part of this ecosystem.”

## **How did you first start working in outdoor education and conservation? Has becoming a parent changed how you relate to the outdoors?**

“I knew from an early age that I wanted to work to benefit the natural world and Tribal First Foods, though the pathway to getting there was less clear at the time. For a long time, I considered attending law school and pursuing this work through the policy route. Being a parent has certainly changed how I relate to the environment. I have now been a parent for more years than I have not, and am grateful for that. I often think about what places like the Gorge will look like when my children are my age.”

### **READ MORE OF THIS INTERVIEW**



Scan to read the full Q&A with Gabe Sheoships.

# TRIBAL ENGAGEMENT ACCELERATES

by Land Trust Director Ryan Ruggiero and Executive Director Kevin Gorman

FOR DECADES, Friends of the Columbia Gorge has allied itself with various tribal partners in advocating for the Gorge and its protection. This has taken various forms, from opposing oil and coal trains running through the Gorge, to taking a firm position on the removal of the lower Snake River dams to, in more recent times, opposing “green energy” projects that threaten tribal ways of life and limit access to tribes’ ceded lands.

In February, working in coordination with land trusts throughout Oregon, Friends adopted a Tribal Engagement Policy that codifies our intention to collaborate with tribal partners in every aspect of the work Friends does. In doing so, Friends commits to building and strengthening relations as much as reactively responding to threats and challenges.

## FRIENDS HAS SEVEN DIFFERENT TRIBAL PARTNERS WITHIN THE COLUMBIA GORGE:

### **The four treaty tribes recognized within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area:**

- Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon
- Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation
- Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
- Nez Perce Tribe

### **Two other federally-recognized tribes have ceded territory within the Columbia Gorge:**

- Cowlitz Indian Tribe
- Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde

### **Finally, there is the previously federally-recognized but currently unrecognized :**

- Chinook Nation

## THE KEY ELEMENTS OF THE TRIBAL ENGAGEMENT POLICY INCLUDE:

### **1. Respect for Sovereignty**

Treat tribes as the rights holders they are, including within Friends’ service area.

### **2. Recognition of Indigenous Traditional Ecological and Cultural Knowledge**

Seek consent; minimize harm and extraction; look for opportunities to elevate native voices and perspectives in all Friends program work.

### **3. Prior Engagement and Organizational Learning**

Engage with ALL (treaty and non-treaty, recognized and unrecognized) Tribes with connections to Friends’ service area.

### **4. Consensus Building and Collaboration**

Build collaborative, trust-based relationships; included in all planning and activities, at the level desired by our tribal partners; align priorities where possible.

### **5. Timely and Meaningful Engagement**

Flexibility; prioritize engagement over efficiency; follow Tribes’ lead on appropriate communication channels and frequency.

CHAPTER TWO:

# AMERICAN BULLFROG

LOVE IS IN THE AIR

Sara Woods

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Stewardship Program Manager



American bullfrog in pond weed. Photo by Peter Ziminski

***This is the second article in a three-part series on American bullfrogs. In the first, we introduced the scale of the challenge and why bullfrogs pose such a serious threat to native species. Here, we move into the spring season to look at how this work unfolds in the field.***

***Spring has sprung! Flowers are blooming, birds are singing, and bullfrogs are on the prowl. They've reenergized from their winter downtime and are now increasingly on the move, establishing territories, and hungry. Early in the season, hunting for food becomes a bullfrog's top priority, particularly for females carrying eggs. Males, on the other hand, are working to secure prime habitat to impress females and mate. This seasonal shift marks the start of an intensive fieldwork period in the Gorge.***

**T**

#### **THE MATING SEASON FOR BULLFROGS**

is variable and highly dependent on external factors like pond water temperatures or the increasing hours of daylight. These two factors tell the organ responsible for secreting hormones of female

frogs that it's spring and it's time to find a mate.

By mid-May, the first calls can be heard by males if the conditions are just right, with warm temperatures, free of wind and clouds. Males stage themselves in the water next to key locations along the pond's edge, near vegetation ideal for attaching egg masses. These semi-vegetated areas are preferred. They must be somewhat hidden from predators, but they also must have sun exposure for egg development. Think of the "perfect" breeding location like the bed in the book *The Princess and the Pea*, but slightly less particular.

Males call sporadically during the day and more typically in the evenings in synchrony. Females approach the loudest and most robust males at their calling locations. Here she allows him to join her in amplexus, the mating embrace where the male attaches to the female's back, and holds on with his arms. In fact, males have specialized "nuptial pads" on their thumbs that develop during the breeding season to better latch on to females.

The pair may remain attached for several hours or until the eggs have been fertilized. The female then moves to submerged vegetation, where she will extrude up to 20,000 eggs.

Egg fertilization occurs externally, and as the female releases her eggs, the male releases sperm simultaneously. The egg mass has a protective jelly layer surrounding it that quickly expands as it absorbs water, growing many times its original size. The mass can swell to cover an area more than 12 inches in diameter.

Egg masses are usually fixed to emergent vegetation and may sink lower in the water column, which can make them more difficult to detect. Eggs hatch within 2-5 days, depending on water temperature. This short window requires frequent and vigilant monitoring to locate and remove egg masses before they hatch and disperse as larvae. Teams often return to the same ponds multiple times in a single week during this period.

## EGG MASS SURVEYS

By late May, Friends of the Columbia Gorge and U.S. Forest Service staff begin surveying more than 20 ponds for egg masses. The season often starts slowly as colder temperatures are not ideal for egg development and varies each year depending on spring conditions. **This early-season work sets the stage for managing bullfrog populations in the months ahead.**

Egg mass surveyors head out with their kayaks, rain or shine, prepared to make two laps around each pond. On the first lap, surveyors paddle around the



U.S. Forest Service employee Bailey Henderson doing egg mass surveys.

pond's edge, keeping about 5 feet from the bank. They train their eyes to spot subtle differences on the water's surface, looking for anything that may look slightly off.

What they're looking for is a spit-like quality, think frothy, like the texture of the first few whips of egg whites. It's the trapped bubbles in the mucus that signal the need for a closer look. Sometimes egg masses are disguised by algae or plant material, making their otherwise clear-to-slightly-opaque appearance with a single black dot in the center appear varied in color. There's a lot of touching and grabbing at random pond debris until the skill is mastered.

The second lap around the pond is identical to the first, but 15 feet from the bank, offering a different perspective on the water's surface. This level of detail and repetition is what allows teams to reliably detect and remove egg masses before they hatch.

When an egg mass is found, surveyors settle in and remain in that location for at least an hour to fully remove it. The work typically happens from a kayak, where surveyors use a knife to cut away the vegetation attached to the mass, taking care not to break off any eggs. Ideally, the entire mass is removed using buckets and brought onto land to desiccate. **Each removal represents a significant investment of time and care.**

Once the egg mass is removed and both laps are completed, surveyors move on to the next pond, lugging the kayak, buckets, paddle, and nets to the new location. Then to the next pond, and the next. Two days later, the entire process is repeated. This cycle continues across the season, with teams moving steadily from pond to pond.

Searchers must visit ponds every other day and if even a single visit is missed, an egg mass may sink and become undetectable, allowing up to 20,000 tadpoles to make the pond their new home. **Having experienced staff is critical for maintaining consistency over time; it's what makes this work effective.**

Photo by Aida Bagheri Hamaneh

## THE CHALLENGES

Managing bullfrogs is a moving target because their breeding times are not synchronized. Ponds warm at different rates depending on their hydrology, depth, and surrounding vegetation. There is also concern that climate change may prolong breeding seasons and create longer windows of favorable conditions for reproduction. This allows female bullfrogs to have multiple clutches (egg masses), further compounding the management.

With federal and state budget cuts and shifting priorities, predictable funding is more important than ever. While Friends pursues grant opportunities whenever possible, but those often come with short timelines, limited funding, or significant administrative requirements that don't align well with the long-term nature of this work. **Long-term conservation work depends on stability, not short bursts of support.**

It's hard work, but it's work we care deeply about.



Photo by Riley Janquart

Bullfrog egg mass.

## WHAT IT TAKES TO STAY AHEAD OF BULLFROGS

- Repeated visits to each pond every 1-2 days
- Skilled staff trained to identify and remove egg masses
- Careful, hands-on removal to prevent a single egg from escaping
- Transporting equipment between multiple sites, rain or shine
- Ongoing coordination across seasons to keep progress from slipping



**This work is ongoing and requires steady, long-term commitment.**

### SUPPORT THE WORK THAT KEEPS BULLFROGS IN CHECK



Scan to make a gift.


This work must happen quickly during a short season. Your support funds crews removing egg masses before they hatch, giving young native turtles a chance to survive.

### WATCH OUR NEW VIDEO ON THE INVASIVE BULLFROG'S IMPACT ON TURTLES



Scan to watch video.

Bullfrogs are impacting Northwestern pond turtle populations. Watch our new illustrated video to see how we're helping.



# KEEP THE COLUMBIA RIVER WILD — NOT WIRED

Photo by Nicole Marks

*By Renée Tkach, Conservation Director*

## THE CASCADE RENEWABLE UNDERWATER TRANSMISSION

Line is a proposal to run a large power cable beneath the Columbia River. The line would stretch for about 100 miles, carrying electricity from eastern Oregon and Washington across the Cascades to the western part of the region. Putting this kind of infrastructure directly in the river raises a number of concerns.

Building the line would mean digging a long trench in the riverbed to bury the cable, stirring up large amounts of sediment and disturbing the river bottom across many miles. Even once the sediment eventually settles, the construction could harm water quality and disrupt important habitat for fish and other wildlife.

The Columbia River is already struggling, especially when it comes to salmon and other native fish. Many species are threatened or endangered, depending on healthy river conditions to survive and migrate. A high-voltage cable under the river would create heat and electromagnetic fields that may affect these fish in ways we don't fully understand. A study on salmon and sturgeon in the San Francisco Bay, where a similar cable was installed in 2010, demonstrated that both sturgeon and salmon experienced an average decrease in successful migrations — a 4.0% decrease for sturgeon and an 11.1% decrease

for salmon. Adding this sort of stress to an already damaged ecosystem is a real concern.

The river is also deeply important to Tribal nations. It supports fishing, culture, and traditions that have existed for generations. Disturbing the riverbed and potentially harming fish populations, cultural artifacts, and even human remains that were buried before the dams inundated the countryside could impact Tribal treaty rights and ways of life that are legally protected.

There are also safety and maintenance issues. The Columbia is a powerful, ever-changing river. Strong currents, shifting sediment, earthquakes, and boat traffic could damage or expose the cable over time. Fixing those problems would likely mean more work in the river, creating ongoing disturbance.

Beyond the immediate impacts, this project could set a troubling example. If one transmission line is allowed in the Columbia River, it may open the door for more projects like it. Over time, this could turn the river into a corridor for industrial infrastructure. Protecting this river should remain a top priority for the region.



Photo by Larry McCombs

Western gray squirrel.

# ONE STEP CLOSER TO CRITICAL HABITAT FOR THE WESTERN GRAY SQUIRREL

*By Nathan Baker, Senior Staff Attorney*

**ON FEBRUARY 9, FRIENDS AND FOUR ALLIED CONSERVATION** groups prevailed at the Washington Court of Appeals in litigation filed to help protect the western gray squirrel. This important legal victory brings the State of Washington one step closer to designating critical habitat for this imperiled wildlife species.

The court of appeals confirmed in its decision that Friends has standing to sue the Washington Department of Natural Resources and Commissioner of Public Lands for their ongoing failures to perform mandatory duties required by state law.

The DNR was required to propose critical habitat for the squirrel and perform other duties for the species within 30 days of its state listing as endangered in late 2023. More than two years after its January 2024 deadline, the agency still has not performed its mandatory duties.

The western gray squirrel's numbers have steadily declined in Washington for several decades, primarily due to habitat loss. The species is now at serious risk of being extirpated from the state. In 2023, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife identified timber harvest as the primary factor contributing to an ongoing loss of habitat for the squirrel's Columbia Gorge (a.k.a. South Cascades) population.


If and when critical habitat is designated, it will require state agencies to assess the impacts of forest practices on the western gray squirrel and its habitat when reviewing forest practices applications. This will, in turn, inform the agencies' future plans for ensuring that the species survives and, ideally, recovers to viable levels over the long term.

At oral argument, the court of appeals signaled that its patience is wearing thin with the DNR's protracted delays and noncompliance.

For example, Judge Ian Birk told the DNR, "You're running up against a certain level of judicial impatience here." Judge Birk elaborated: "It's not unreasonable for a court to put the agency to the choice of either follow the rule you adopted according to your rulemaking powers that is the law of Washington, or if you think it should be something else, change it. But don't come to court and say whether we follow the law is optional."

The court of appeals remanded the case to the superior court for further proceedings.

The DNR is now more than two years overdue in proposing critical habitat. Friends will continue our efforts to hold the agency accountable for its unreasonable, illegal delays, and we will keep litigating and advocating for the western gray squirrel.



# A LAND GRAB WITH LASTING CONSEQUENCES

## SETTING A DANGEROUS PRECEDENT FOR PUBLIC LANDS

Photo by Montique Trevett

*By Renée Tkach, Conservation Director*

**A DANGEROUS LAND GIVEAWAY PROPOSAL IS NOW SITTING** in the U.S. Senate. H.R. 655, The Dalles Watershed Act, introduced by Congressman Cliff Bentz, would transfer approximately 150 acres of public land from the Mount Hood National Forest to the City of The Dalles. This land transfer would allow the city to triple the capacity of a reservoir that stores water from the Dog River, a snowmelt-fed tributary of the Hood River.

Friends of the Columbia Gorge has joined a coalition of organizations calling on Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley to oppose this legislation. H.R. 655 would permanently transfer public lands out of federal ownership, sidestepping oversight and setting a dangerous precedent for the disposal of lands that belong to all Americans.

The City of The Dalles has framed this proposal as an effort to streamline the process. In reality, it risks sidelining meaningful public engagement from local, regional, and national stakeholders who care deeply about cold water, salmon recovery, agriculture, and the future of public lands. Foundational environmental laws like the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act exist for a reason: they safeguard the water we drink, the fish we depend on, and the air we breathe. Weakening or bypassing these protections undermines public trust and long-term environmental health.

The environmental consequences could be severe. The Hood River serves as a vital cold-water refuge for endangered and threatened salmon and steelhead migrating through the Columbia River system. Increasing water withdrawals from the Dog River would likely reduce flows and raise water temperatures, conditions that can be harmful, and even fatal, to these already vulnerable fish populations.

Especially concerning is that the proposal appears closely tied to the rapidly expanding Google data center campus in The Dalles, where water demand has surged in recent years. While these facilities bring economic activity, they also place significant strain on local water supplies. At the same time, residents are expected to bear the cost. Water utility rates in The Dalles are projected to nearly double by 2036, placing an unfair burden on households and small businesses while accommodating the needs of one large industrial user.

Despite these far-reaching environmental and community impacts, H.R. 655 has already passed the House of Representatives and is now before the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. The decisions made next will shape the future of the Columbia Gorge, its communities, its fisheries, and the public lands that belong to us all.



Photo by Paloma Ayala



Photo by Debbie Asakawa



Photo by Monique Trevett



# The Final Phase of a Campaign Shaped by Land, Care, and Commitment

Through Share the Wonder, Friends has protected the Heartleaf Bluffs and Alashík Preserves, restored habitat, and moved trail connections forward. A community of Gorge protectors like you made it all possible.

**Just \$250,000 remains of our \$6.6 million goal.**

The summit is in sight. Donate today and help us reach it.



Every cent counts.  
Scan to give today.

## WILDLIFE SPOTLIGHT

*By Frances Ambrose Fischer, Preserves Manager*



The Morrison Bumblebee  
*Bombus morrisoni*

Photo by Leif Richardson Xerces Society

As you enjoy the spring wildflowers in the Gorge, make sure to take note of the importance of our native pollinators, including the Morrison Bumblebee, found at Friends' Mosier Plateau Preserve. The queen bumblebee emerges alone from her ground nest in early spring to forage and build out her nest for the year. Some queens are building an entirely new nest, digging into the ground all by themselves to lay their eggs and start their little colony. Her babies will emerge weeks later to pollinate your favorite Gorge wildflowers. Some flowers specifically need bumblebees and other long-tongued bee species to pollinate them properly, including lupine, larkspur, and beebalm.

The Morrison Bumblebee has been classified as a vulnerable species. Like many native bee species, its numbers have been in decline, likely due to habitat loss. Preserving land like Mosier Plateau and actively restoring it to its natural state is one of the most meaningful ways we can support pollinators like the Morrison Bumblebee. You can be part of that work. Stay up to date with our stewardship work parties and join us as we restore habitat so species like the Morrison Bumblebee have healthy, thriving places to call home.

Visit [gorgefriends.org/events](https://gorgefriends.org/events) to get involved. Happy buzzing!

# SHARED

## FROM VISION TO VISUALS BEHIND THE SHARED WILD FILM SERIES

*By Monique Trevett, Digital Content Producer*

**SHARED WILD** is a short film series directed by Friends' Digital Content Producer Monique Trevett, built around the idea that recreation and conservation go hand in hand — you cannot truly recreate in a place you are not willing to protect. Through the stories of community members, conservationists, activists, and Friends' staff, the series celebrates the people making the outdoors more accessible and elevates the voices of those working to protect the public lands and landscapes we all share.

**EXPLORE  
ALL SIX FILMS  
IN THE SERIES**



# WILD

## BARKING FOR PUBLIC LANDS



Meet the people barking loudest for Mt. Hood: the conservationists, snow riders, and community members who are watching, defending, and refusing to look away.

## WHERE COMMUNITY RIDES FORWARD



Hood River mountain biker and business owner Bekah Rottenburg is on a mission to make mountain biking more accessible, more diverse, and more welcoming for everyone.

## FRIENDS FOR THE FUTURE



Follow Friends of the Columbia Gorge into the field as guided outings and stewardship work parties inspire people to protect, preserve, and steward the Gorge for future generations.

## WHERE ROCK MEETS FLIGHT



A climber, a birder, and a park ranger explore what it truly means to share the Gorge, and why protecting what makes it wild requires all of us.

## SALMON AND SWELLS



Ten years after the Condit Dam came down, the White Salmon River is thriving, and the people, Tribes, and wildlife that call it home are too.

## WYLDE CURRENTS



Two world-class paddlers are using their love of the Columbia River to teach Gorge communities how to recreate on it safely.



Photo by Monique Trevett

I knew I wanted to feature new perspectives on what it means to coexist in outdoor spaces. That's why I started this project by asking: what does the full spectrum of recreation really look like across the Gorge and how can we expand the reach

**ONE EARLY MORNING LAST SPRING, I TOOK A DRIVE TO CATHERINE Creek.** Just as I was passing Coyote Wall, looking up at its massive silhouette, I thought: I wanted to see a mountain biker race through that silhouette. That'd be so sick!

That imaginary visual became the vision for the Shared Wild short film series.

Friends was founded on the belief that experiencing the Gorge firsthand, boots on trail, eyes on the landscape, is what turns people into passionate advocates. Bringing community members to iconic scenic sites was how we built a movement to protect this place. Over the years, we have grown beyond our hiking roots to embrace the full spectrum of ways people connect with the Gorge. As we've grown, so has our vision. The Shared Wild Film Series is Friends intentionally taking another step forward, exploring the diverse ways Gorge community members recreate and connect with nature. It's also a tool for deepening the conversation on how the conservation and recreation communities can explore ways to authentically collaborate to protect this remarkable region we call home.

With our recreational roots in mind, a light bulb lit up. What if we were missing entire communities of Gorge recreationists simply because we had traditionally told stories about protecting and stewarding the Gorge too often through a hiker's lens?

of our storytelling to make room for a wider diversity of voices, perspectives, and lived experiences of different Gorge recreationists.

My search for answers started with conversations with Friends staff, board members, volunteers, and community partners. A good chunk of our staff lives in the Gorge, and an even larger number have an outdoor hobby or recreational activity, myself included. I love to surf in the summer, snowboard in the winter, and hike everything in between. Surely we aren't the only ones, people who love to do all kinds of things outdoors but also care for something so much greater than just the adrenaline rush.

I don't mountain bike, climb, or kayak. I'm still learning to snowboard. To make this film series work I knew I needed to push myself, look for new perspectives beyond those in Friends' immediate circles. After a year of brainstorming, meetings, and detours, somehow the way forward became crystal clear. Meet people outside and take my conversations from the field to film.

My search turned out to be a year-long journey. The result, a six-part mini documentary series born out of a daydream.

The goal of Shared Wild is simple — bring together and celebrate conservation and recreation by highlighting community members who are making the outdoors more accessible. And using film to elevate the voices of conservationists and

recreationists alike, we can start building the bridges needed to protect the public lands and landscapes we all share and love in the Gorge.

From bike instructors and birders to a Coast Guard officer and a whitewater kayaker, we found a phenomenal group of people to feature. What started as a simple highlight reel of recreationists and conservationists sharing why they love the Gorge turned into something much deeper. Once we brought on local independent filmmaker John Lopez to mentor the project, everything changed. His guidance and filmmaking expertise helped develop each sport into its own fully realized segment. One film at a time, we started chipping away, and somewhere along the way, the path started revealing itself.

Finding the right stories, the right partners, and the right sports to spotlight was only half the battle. The Gorge itself had its own plans. The Gorge will humble you and test you at every turn, from chasing peak light to enduring sudden temperature drops, wind gusts, and unpredictable weather. But those moments are a reminder that things won't always go according to plan, and that's okay. If anything, the unpredictability pushed us to be more intentional with each story we told.

The Columbia Gorge is diverse in every sense of the word, and we wanted this film series to reflect that, not just in the landscapes we captured, but in the people we highlighted. We had a kiteboarder lined up who was eager to share his experience as a person of color in water sports, but a broken leg took him out of the project entirely. As an Asian woman in outdoor spaces myself, I know firsthand how hard it can be to find people of color represented in outdoor communities, and roadblock after roadblock made that reality impossible to ignore. Despite the challenges of finding that representation in outdoor recreation, we were able to pivot by highlighting the people who are actively creating safe and welcoming entry points for newcomers of all backgrounds and ages.

By the end of filming, a few clear themes had emerged. Every person we interviewed expressed

a desire to see more accessibility for kids and beginners, and our conservation partners echoed the need for deeper collaboration with the recreational community. The message was consistent across every conversation: we all want to see more people working together to protect our public spaces for both recreation and conservation.

Three things came up again and again:

- More accessibility: fewer barriers to entry
- More inclusion: of all ages and backgrounds
- More diversity in the great outdoors

The threats facing the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area are far greater than any one community can tackle alone. It requires all hands on deck, from every corner of the Gorge, no matter how people recreate or connect with the landscape. For Friends, that means continuing its efforts to cast a wider net, reaching new communities, and building a broader movement united by one shared purpose: protecting the place we all call home.

By the end of my production journey, seeing this film project come to life affirmed that every challenge had been worth it. What kept me going was the joy of it: Friends staff opening doors to people in their own community, new relationships forming with nonprofits, agencies, and community leaders, and collaborations in conservation deepening with every film. Each step of the journey kept me excited to steward every story in this series. Because it's personal. Being able to highlight the individuals who are paving the way for the next generation, who one day will look like me and find themselves in workplaces like mine, makes it all worth it.

To watch the Shared Wild Film Series, scan the code on page 13 to visit our YouTube channel.

*Thank you to the Public Engagement team and John Lopez for the endless encouragement, and to our staff and partners for helping us believe in the vision for what we are trying to protect. And to our longtime Friends community and the new supporters who found us through this film series, thank you for joining the fight to protect the Columbia Gorge. The Gorge is our shared wild, and it will take all of us to protect it.*



Photo by Monique Trevett

# WILDFIRES ARE CHANGING THE GORGE

## THE COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE COMMISSION IS RESPONDING

Friends' Heartleaf Bluffs Preserve after the 2025 Burdoin wildfire.

*By Steve McCoy, Staff Attorney*

LAST YEAR, TWO MAJOR FIRES SWEEPED THROUGH THE Columbia Gorge, causing unprecedented damage. The Rowena Fire in Oregon and the Burdoin Fire in Washington burned nearly 15,000 acres and destroyed 75 homes. Even more disturbing, these fires occurred in June and July — well before the typical peak of fire season around Labor Day. A warming climate is driving earlier, longer, and more intense wildfire seasons, increasing risks for both communities and the landscape.

As more homes are lost, more families face the challenge of rebuilding. This creates pressure on permitting agencies to process a growing number of applications quickly. In response, the Gorge Commission amended the Gorge Management Plan in January to include new rules aimed at streamlining the application process and providing more flexibility for those rebuilding after wildfires. The amendment includes several key changes. It

extends the timeline for rebuilding from two years to ten, giving landowners more time to navigate the process. It also allows temporary housing such as recreational vehicles, plus on-site storage during the recovery period. In addition, it simplifies standards for “in-kind” replacement, making it easier for homeowners to qualify for a reduced amount of review when rebuilding a structure of the same size and in the same location.

Friends of the Columbia Gorge supported the intent behind the amendment and worked to ensure it remained consistent with the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act, which protects scenic, cultural, natural, and recreation resources. Early versions raised concerns, particularly around impacts to cultural sites and sensitive habitats. Through engagement and advocacy, the final amendment was strengthened and approved.

# FRIENDS LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES PASS IN SALEM & OLYMPIA

## WASHINGTON LEGISLATURE

ONE OF FRIENDS' KEY PRIORITIES FOR THE WASHINGTON legislature was to advocate for supplemental funding for the Columbia River Gorge Commission and to ensure that the existing funding remained intact with no additional cuts. The final legislatively approved budget came through with \$75,000 in supplemental funding to cover the licensing fees for the Gorge Commission's new Enterprise Permitting & Licensing system.

As he did during the 2025 legislative session, Representative Travis Couture (LD 35), ranking member of the House Appropriations Committee, proposed an amendment to eliminate all funding for the Gorge Commission. However, Representative Monica Stonier (LD 49) pushed back and was successful in defeating his proposed amendment. This exchange revealed that while more outreach is still needed to educate members of the Washington legislature about the essential work of the Gorge Commission, Friends' advocacy over the last year has been highly effective.

Additionally, Friends' staff attended the Washington Association of Land Trusts (WALT) Advocacy Day to meet with legislators about policies affecting land trusts. Participating in coalition advocacy efforts helps Friends strengthen partnerships with other organizations and creates additional opportunities for engagement with policy makers.



Photo by Madison Kenney

Over 200 supporters of HB 4134 rallied outside the Capitol in Salem during the 1.25% for Wildlife Advocacy Day.

## OREGON LEGISLATURE

IN THE LEADUP TO THE START OF THE SESSION, FRIENDS STAFF met with key legislators on the Joint Committee on Ways & Means to advocate for the Gorge Commission's budget. Oregon's final budget included matching supplemental funding to Washington's appropriation.

The legislature passed HB 4134, also known as 1.25% for Wildlife, to address Oregon's wildlife funding gap. The bill raises the statewide transient lodging tax by 1.25% to generate millions in dedicated funding for conservation. These funds will support programs including Oregon's State Wildlife Action Plan, wildlife rehabilitation and stewardship programs, and wildfire prevention through the Oregon Conservation Corps.



Photo from Friends' Archives

Advocacy & Policy Coordinator Madison Kenney at the Oregon State Capitol for the 1.25% for Wildlife Advocacy Day.

Another key issue that was addressed during this legislative session was recreation liability waiver reform. Waiver unenforceability in Oregon is an issue that has affected organizations like Friends that host outdoor programs, as well as ski resorts, guiding companies, and outfitters. The legislature passed SB 1517, which reflected important compromises after multiple rounds of amendments. Key provisions in this bill that were important to Friends include covering "environmental restoration and maintenance" in addition to traditional examples of outdoor recreation, and recognizing liability waivers signed for minors by a parent or guardian.

# NEW ZONING PROTECTIONS FOR GORGE LANDS

By Nathan Baker, Senior Staff Attorney

**THIRTEEN YEARS AFTER FRIENDS AND PARTNER ORGANIZATION Save Our Scenic Area (SOSA) filed groundbreaking litigation against Skamania County for violations of state law, the county has finally adopted zoning for all privately owned, previously “Unmapped” (unzoned) land throughout the county.**

In 2012, Skamania County prematurely abandoned its countywide zoning work and repealed a development moratorium that had protected nearly 14,000 acres of privately owned, unzoned land from unregulated development. The county’s actions left these lands at risk of large-scale residential, industrial, and commercial development, without any zoning review. In response, Friends and SOSA sued the county for violations of the Growth Management Act and Planning Enabling Act.

After years of litigation, the Washington Supreme Court in 2015 upheld Friends’ right to sue the county. The supreme court’s decision also established helpful statewide precedent involving “failure to act” claims brought against local governments under state law.

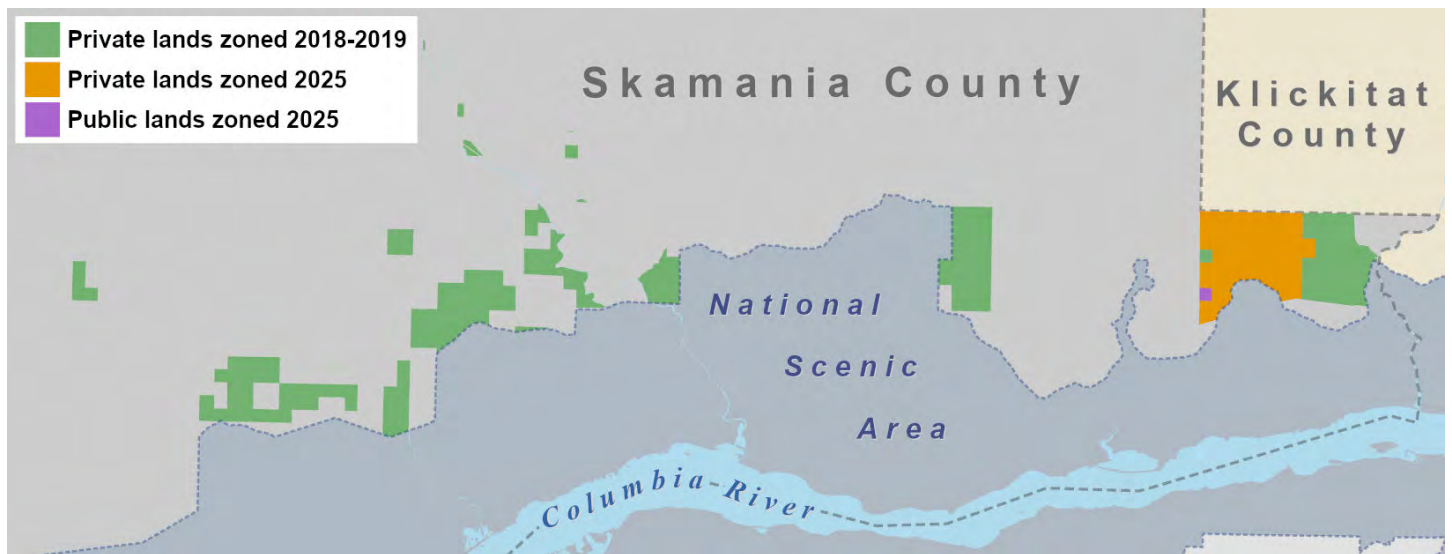
Following that court decision in Friends’ favor, the county agreed to resume its zoning efforts. Significant progress was made over ensuing years, particularly in 2018 and 2019, when thousands of acres of land were zoned.

Thereafter, the County’s zoning work was put in limbo by uncertainties with the Whistling Ridge Energy Project, a controversial wind energy project approved by state officials in 2012 but never pursued. The official termination of that project in 2024 cleared the path for the county to complete its zoning work.

In December 2025, the county finished the job, adopting zoning for more than 2,000 acres of previously unzoned land in north Underwood.

All told, from 2018 through 2025, the county zoned approximately 13,870 acres of land, mostly located in the Columbia River Gorge, adjacent to or near the National Scenic Area. A couple acres are in the North Bonneville Urban Area, and the rest is in the High Lakes area in the far northwestern part of the county.

Although the specific zones chosen for individual parcels were not always optimal, the adopted zoning boosts protections of forest lands for forest uses and will protect the property rights of Gorge landowners by providing fairness and certainty about the uses allowed in their communities. All of this was achieved because Friends and allies have doggedly enforced the law through litigation and advocacy, starting many years ago.



About 62% of land in Skamania County zoned since 2018 is in the Columbia Gorge.

Map by Andrew Oldham

# FRIENDS AND GORGE LANDOWNERS PREVAIL IN CELL TOWER APPEAL

By Nathan Baker, Senior Staff Attorney

IN NOVEMBER 2025, FRIENDS AND GORGE LANDOWNERS prevailed in an appeal at the Columbia River Gorge Commission involving a proposed extension of a cell tower in Cook, Washington, in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.

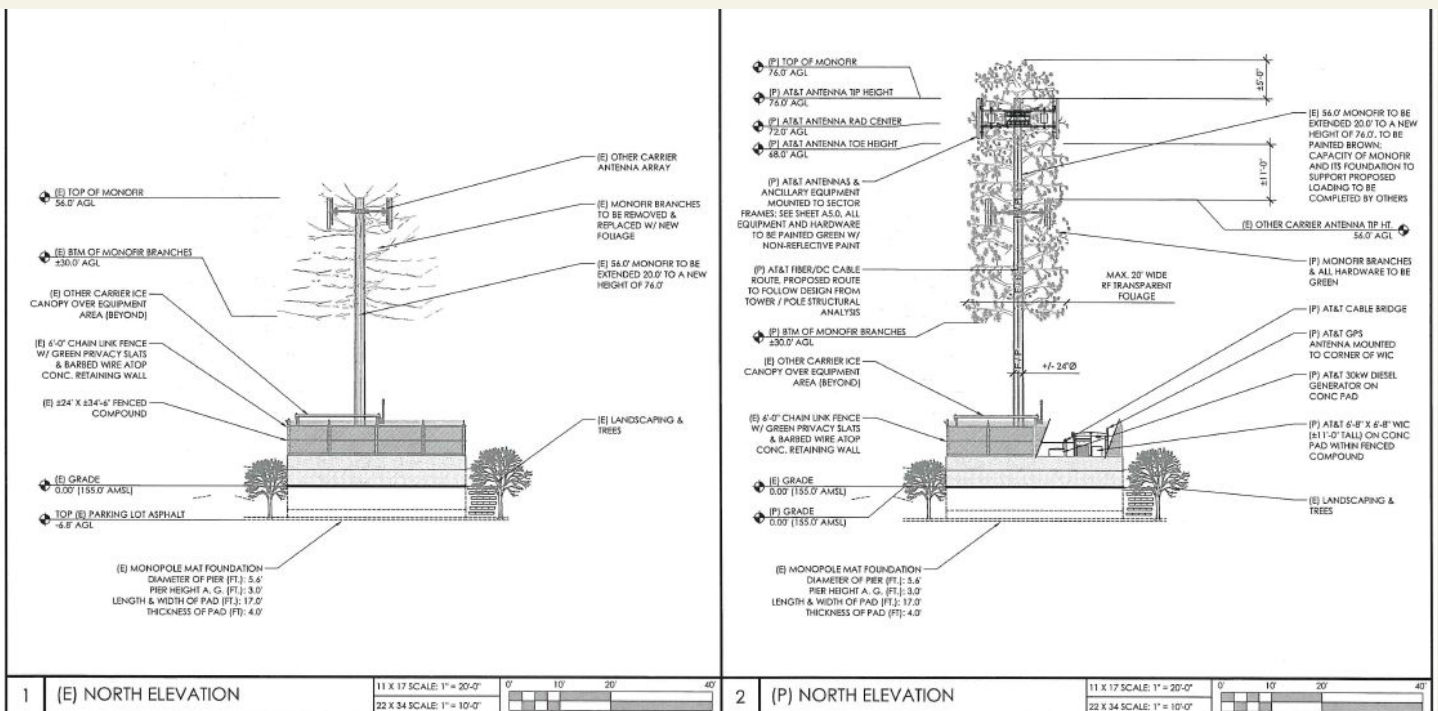
Skamania County, in a final decision issued by its hearing examiner in 2024, agreed with Friends and the Cook landowners on two key procedural issues. First, the county decided that the project was not exempted from National Scenic Area land use review by federal telecommunications law. Second, the county decided that the project requires full review under the National Scenic Area rules rather than “expedited” review, which means more robust rules (including stronger scenic standards) apply.

The cell tower companies then appealed to the Gorge Commission. This was the second time this very project was brought on appeal to the Commission.

In its final written order, the Commission upheld Skamania County’s decision on the two key procedural issues. The Commission also reiterated and reaffirmed its previous ruling that when the original cell tower was constructed more than twenty years ago, it was not built in compliance with the county’s conditions of approval.

The Commission concluded by sending the project back to the county planning department to conduct a full review under the National Scenic Area rules. No party appealed the Commission’s decision, which is binding on all parties.

## BEFORE AND AFTER PROPOSED CELL TOWER MODIFICATIONS



These diagrams from the land use application illustrate the tower before and after the proposed modifications.

# WHEN UNUSED MILES BECAME A GIFT A MEMBER STORY

by Lori Warner, Director of Philanthropy

## FREQUENT FLYER EXPLORES CREATIVE PHILANTHROPY

Karey Reid has been part of Friends' community since 2012, supporting the organization through events, membership, and as part of our Norman Yeon Legacy Circle. Her most recent gift, however, took a different form: one that moved conservation work forward in a very practical way. Karey donated three round-trip airline tickets for staff to travel to a remote part of Idaho to strengthen our tribal engagement efforts.

These days, you're more likely to find Karey cruising a winding backroad with her dog, Albert, than flying to satisfy her wanderlust. Karey and Albert travel slowly now, windows cracked, turning down whatever roads look interesting. No itinerary and no rush. Most trips are week-long stretches along the Oregon and Washington coasts, with an occasional day trip through the Gorge.

Karey had accumulated significant frequent flyer miles over the years, but flying meant leaving Albert behind and that no longer felt worth it. Her travel style evolved from runways to road trips to accommodate her co-pilot. Rather than allowing her frequent flyer miles to go unused, she decided to put them to a good cause.

## WHERE THE MILES WENT

The work Friends does relies on developing authentic, personal relationships, and relationships are best nurtured in person. Karey's donated airline miles enabled Friends staff to avoid a long and



Photo by Humane Society for Southwest Washington

Karey's dog, Albert, is now the face of the Humane Society for Southwest Washington's mobile veterinary clinic, which provided essential care to 5,830 animals in 2024.

potentially treacherous winter drive to the Nez Perce Reservation in Idaho. The trip was for an important meeting between the tribe and several land trusts that operate within the ceded lands of the Nez Perce.

"Trust takes time to develop, but that process accelerates when we interact in person, which is why the gift of airline miles was so impactful," Friends' Land Trust Director Ryan Ruggiero said.

## NOT EFFORTLESS, BUT WORTH IT

As Karey learned, transferring miles isn't seamless. "It wasn't exactly simple," she said. The process involved phone calls, online navigation, and some persistence, but she stayed with it. "I figured if I could get through it once, I could do it again." Now that she's done it, she knows the steps, and she's glad she stuck it out.

## THE MEANING OF NON-CASH GIVING

Not every way of giving involves writing a check or clicking "donate." Sometimes it's as simple as asking, "Could this be useful?" Generosity takes many forms, and in this case, it was as simple as looking at unused airline miles.

### OTHER WAYS TO GIVE BEYOND CASH

- Airline miles
- Stock
- IRA distributions
- Real estate



Photo by Monique Trevett

Wildflower hike at Catherine Creek.

# SPRING IS CALLING – COME EXPLORE THE GORGE WITH FRIENDS

By Melissa Gonzalez, Acting Public Engagement & Communications Director

The Gorge pulls at you in unique ways every season and spring might be its finest hour. This is phenology at work (the study of nature’s seasonal rhythms), with wildflowers carpeting the hillsides on cue, pollinators stirring back to life, and birdsong returning to familiar perches. The Gorge is waking up, and the trails are waiting.

This spring, Friends is offering guided outings for all ages and experience levels. Walk through balsamroot fields at Dalles Mountain Ranch, chase waterfalls on a wildflower hike at Upper McCord Creek and Elowah Falls, or dig into the ecology of Larch Mountain Crater with a knowledgeable hike leader by your side. Come experience the Gorge as it was meant to be experienced: outside, in good company, and in season.

Visit [gorgefriends.org/events](https://gorgefriends.org/events) to browse upcoming outings and reserve your spot.

## TRIBUTE GIFTS

December 10, 2025 - April 5, 2026

**In Honor Of Lucinda Brouwer**

Sheena Rolston

**In Honor Of Richard & Carmen Burkhardt**

Paul Burkhardt

**In Honor Of Brian Campbell**

Doug Hagen

**In Honor Of Chi Fang Chen**

Krystal Li

**In Honor Of Bruce & Barb Connelly**

Kathleen Schueler

**In Honor Of Barry Daigle**

Tracy Hyland

**In Honor Of Jean Dunlap**

Deborah Murphy

**In Honor Of Shari Dunn**

Laurie Battaglia, Aligned at Work

**In Honor Of Audrey Evans**

Jared Buckmaster

**In Honor Of Kyle Goble**

Kyle Gordon

**In Honor Of Kevin Gorman**

Kate McBride, Gayle Rothrock, Gabe Sheoships, Alex and Clare VonderHaar

**In Honor Of Zach & Noah Gwinner**

Fernanda Gwinner

**In Honor Of Henry Halvorson**

Ryan Bulson, Randy Dennis, Jonathan Halvorson, Blair Lonsberry, Kari Raglione-Tissot

**In Honor Of John Hunt**

Kathy Foldes

**In Honor Of Madison Kenney**

Steve Kenney

**In Honor Of Lilla Knowles**

Kim Knowles

**In Honor Of Michael Levy**

Julie Edwards

**In Honor Of Darryl Lloyd**

Marita Ingalsbe

**In Honor Of Whitey Lueck**

David Myers

**In Honor Of Beth Flake & David Michalek**

Felton Jenkins

**In Honor Of Kathie Millett**

Mary Marchant

**In Honor Of Dana & Mike Mills**

Norma Zack

**In Honor Of Lindsey Novak**

Tim Dobyns

**In Honor Of John Holmes & Victor Possada**

Dawn Harrison

**In Honor Of Mark Pynch**

Cynthia Addams

**In Honor Of Gabe Sheoships**

George Alderson

**In Memory Of Gail L. Achterman**

Gail L. Achterman Fund

**In Memory Of Sharlane Blaise**

Elizabeth Carnes, William Carpenter, Janet Hitti, Bruce Swanson

**In Memory Of Dan Brandl**

Kathryn Field, Aaron Lande, Kori Norsell

**In Memory Of Mike Broad**

Anne Holtz

**In Memory Of Jeffrey John Buck**

Donna Herzfeldt-Kamprath

**In Memory Of Mason Van Buren**

Evans Van Buren

**In Memory Of John R. & Susan B. Campbell**

Kathryn L Campbell

**In Memory Of Patricia Chance**

Donna Schaeffer

**In Memory Of Barbara Bruch Connelly**

John Connelly

**In Memory Of Kay Floria**

Christine Smith

**In Memory Of Elmer Galbi**

Lisa Boone

**In Memory Of James Hall**

Ardith Hall

**In Memory Of Marty Hanson**

Lori Laduke

**In Memory Of John Harrison**

Linda Enders, Dawn Harrison

**In Memory Of John Hook**

Charlotte Kingsley

**In Memory Of Alice M. James**

Denyse McGriff

**In Memory Of Norman E Douglass Jr**

Carol Douglass

**In Memory Of Beverly D. Klock**

Leonora Ko

**In Memory Of Kenneth Lauhon**

Anonymous, Gayle Palmer

**In Memory Of Peter Lovely**

Sherry Mills

**In Memory Of Hannah May**

Patricia Toccalino

**In Memory Of Marilyn McFarlane**

John Parkhurst

**In Memory Of Bob & Margaret McGill**

Meg McGill

**In Memory Of Curtis Perry**

Jessica Perry

**In Memory Of Bill Florine & John Reynolds**

Cynthia Barrett

**In Memory Of Fred Rothchild**

George Cummings

**In Memory Of Nancy Russell**

Annie Munch

**In Memory Of Meredith & William Savery**

Daniel Johnson

**In Memory Of Robert Shoemaker**

Joan Hoffman

**In Memory Of Janice Staver**

Jennifer Hohenlohe

**In Memory Of Bob & Verna Strubel**

Leslee Strubel

**In Memory Of Harold & Barbara Tyler**

David Tyler

**In Memory Of Nancy Wallace**

Evona Brim

**In Memory Of Shep Wilson**

Lyndon Wilson

**In Memory Of Matt Winthrop**

Linda Chelsky, Kevin & Ann Winthrop

**In Memory Of Earl Zentzis**

Daniel Monaghan

# FRIENDS OF THE COLUMBIA GORGE

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Photo by Skamania Lodge

## 2026 Annual Meeting and Luncheon

Sunday, May 17 | 11:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Skamania Lodge, Stevenson, WA

*A moment of transition, rooted in decades of work. The work continues.*

**Join us** on the banks of the Columbia River at Skamania Lodge in Stevenson, Washington, as we mark a meaningful transition for Friends of the Columbia Gorge.

After 27 years of leadership, executive director Kevin Gorman will be recognized as he steps into the role of emeritus director. We will also welcome Gabe Sheoships as Friends' new executive director as he begins his work with Gorge communities.

We will share an exciting update on the Share the Wonder campaign and what lies ahead for protecting and caring for the Gorge.

**Space is limited. Registration closes at midnight on Tuesday, May 12.**



RSVP by scanning the code above or visit [gorgefriends.org/annualmeeting](http://gorgefriends.org/annualmeeting)



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](http://gorgefriends.org) to learn more. Send inquiries to [info@gorgefriends.org](mailto:info@gorgefriends.org) or call 503.241.3762.

[gorgefriends.org/sharethewonder](http://gorgefriends.org/sharethewonder)



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