



April 5, 2021

Senator Wagner, Chair
Committee Members
Senate Rules Committee
State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Appointment to the Columbia River Gorge Commission

Dear Chair Wagner and Members of the Senate Rules Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the appointment of Ashley Thompson to the Columbia River Gorge Commission (“Commission”). Friends of the Columbia Gorge (“Friends”) is a 40-year old organization with approximately 7,000 members dedicated to protection, preservation and stewardship of the Columbia River Gorge. Friends asks the Rules Committee to postpone the consideration of Ms. Thompson and ask the Governor to reconsider her nomination.

The Oregon Senate’s role in considering appointments to boards and commissions must be meaningful. It is vital to ensuring that governor’s appointees are the most qualified applicants to represent the people of Oregon. It also provides the only opportunity for stakeholders and members of the public to weigh in and express support or concern for persons nominated by the Governor. This is especially important because of the lack of public involvement or transparency by the Governor’s office in the appointments process prior to recommending an applicant for the appointment. Stakeholder input was not sought prior to candidate selection. Due to the lack of transparency and public involvement, it shifts the responsibility to the Senate to publicly vet nominees.

The Columbia River Gorge is a national scenic treasure loved by all Oregonians. The Columbia River Gorge is protected by the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act and Oregon’s interstate compact with the state of Washington.

One of the most important roles for the Governor to fulfill to protect the Gorge is to appoint the members of the Commission. The Governors of Oregon and Washington appoint six of the twelve voting members of the Commission, with the remainder appointed by the six counties having lands within the boundaries of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. Since each county appoints a representative to the Commission and this makes up half of its voting members, there is a strong local government voice built into the composition of the Gorge Commission. To provide a balance, the Governors’ appointments to the Commission should



represent the regional and national interests in protecting and enhancing the scenic, natural, cultural, and recreation resources of the Gorge for generations to come. By so doing, the balance between local, regional and national interests is maintained, as intended by Congress.

For this reason, it is vitally important for the Governor to appoint members to the Commission who know the Gorge and have some experience in environmental policy, land use policy and resource protection. Appointees must have a long-term, regional view of Gorge protection. This was a primary motivation for Congress to pass the National Scenic Area Act and for the states to enter into the Columbia River Gorge Compact: to provide a regional mechanism for protecting and enhancing the resources of this incredible region for all people to experience and enjoy.

Unfortunately, Governor Brown has put forth a candidate who is the least experienced applicant that has applied for this position. Ms. Thompson, who has lived in the Gorge for three years, has no record of being involved in any capacity with the National Scenic Area Act or Gorge protection. Applicants with far more experience and impressive letters of recommendation were ignored. Oregon can and should do better.

In conclusion, Friends asks the committee to please postpone the confirmation of Ms. Thompson, request that Governor Brown reconsider this appointment, seek stakeholder input and select the most qualified applicant for the position.

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

/s/ Michael Lang

Michael Lang
Conservation Director