



May 4, 2023

Joint Committee on Ways and Means

**Re: Friends of the Columbia Gorge's comments -2 amendments to HB 5008**

Dear Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and for all your work on the state budget during this difficult and uncertain time. We understand the magnitude of the difficulties before you.

The funding request submitted by the Gorge Commission last fall consisted of 6 Policy Option Packages. Only half of these were included in Governor Kotek's budget and through to the -2 amendment. The following POPs were not included: **Building Climate Resilience** in the Gorge, **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion outreach and plan implementation**, and additional resources to **hire a second attorney** to manage the increasingly complex and heavy workload overseen by the Gorge Commission. These three POPs must be restored.

**Funding for the Gorge Commission is reliant on equal funding by both Oregon and Washington.** The lowest approved budget sets the budget for the other state. **The approved final budget from both houses of the Washington Legislature includes full funding for all six Policy Options** (Decision Packages in the Washington State format) at the requested level. Reducing the Oregon contribution by \$360,000 by eliminating these 3 POPs eliminates \$720,000 from the Gorge Commission's budget. Compared to other agencies, the Gorge Commission's request is relatively small. The restoration of the Gorge Commission's full budget request is a very modest ask that will leverage hundreds of thousands of dollars from Washington State and result in outsized impacts for the people of the Gorge.

Friends of the Columbia Gorge (Friends) is a non-profit organization with approximately 5,000 members dedicated to protecting and enhancing the resources of the Columbia River Gorge. Our membership includes hundreds of citizens who reside within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. The Gorge Commission was created in 1986 as a result of Friends' lobbying of Congress. Friends has a long relationship with the Commission and a direct interest in ensuring its budget is adequate to accomplish the necessary work to protect and enhance the scenic, cultural, recreation, and natural resources of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. **Friends asks that you restore the Gorge Commission's original proposed budget and fully fund it.**

**POP # 103 would allow the Commission to hire a second attorney.** The Gorge Commission's lone attorney is responsible for responding to all litigation against the

Commission, which has been a heavy workload over the past few years and is likely to increase as development pressures increase. While the Commission can contract with the Attorney General for legal help, that is prohibitively expensive for the Commission given its budget constraints. An additional attorney not only benefits the workload and turn-around time for legal matters but provides counties and communities with additional resources for planning and development within the Scenic Area. Cost of this POP: \$173,423.

**POP # 104 is funding to help the Commission build resiliency to climate change within the Gorge.** In December of 2022 the Commission adopted a Climate Change Action Plan that includes specific action to mitigate and adapt to climate change in the Gorge. The plan has been in development for the last two years. This work is vitally important if the natural resources of the Gorge are to be protected. But the plan also focuses on community protection and collaboration between various groups throughout the Gorge. This work dovetails with Executive Order 20-04 requiring Oregon agencies to use all their powers to address climate change and Friends asks that you fund it. Cost of this POP: \$137,423.

**POP # 105 would allow the Commission to implement its Diversity Equity and Inclusion plan and have the outreach resources to ensure success.** Friends asks that you fund this critical work as it not only supports diversity, equity and inclusion but also the efforts of the Commission's Climate Change Action Plan. Recent legislative efforts such as farmworker overtime (HB 4002) and protecting the public from bias crimes on public land (SB 289) are examples of statewide efforts benefiting people who live, work and recreate in the Columbia Gorge. POP # 105 would provide staffing so that the Commission can reach out to diverse communities and ensure that all voices are heard when decisions are made about how to manage the Gorge, including in the implementation of the Climate Change Action Plan. Cost of this POP: \$50,000

Thank you for your attention to this important matter as the Columbia River Gorge Commission is a critical partner protecting this one-of-a-kind treasure. **We urgently ask you to not only fully fund the -2 amendment to HB 5008, but to restore POPs 103, 104, and 105 to their original, modest asks.**

Sincerely,

Rudy Salakory  
Conservation Director  
Friends of the Columbia Gorge  
123 NE Third Ave., Ste 108  
Portland, OR 97232