



March 13, 2025

RE: HB 5508 – SUPPORT

Joint Committee on Ways & Means
Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Co-Chair Frederick, Co-Chair Levy, and Committee Members:

Friends of the Columbia Gorge (“Friends”) is a non-profit organization with approximately 5,000 members. Friends is dedicated to protecting and enhancing the scenic, cultural, recreation, and natural resources of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (“Gorge” or “National Scenic Area”).

Friends supports HB 5508 which appropriates \$2,076,661 from the General Fund to the Columbia River Gorge Commission (Gorge Commission). Friends work closely with the Gorge Commission and its staff to advocate for continued preservation of the National Scenic Area.

The Gorge Commission is vital to protecting the 292,500-acre Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, one of our nation’s most treasured landscapes. Stretching 85 miles along the Columbia River, the Gorge’s natural beauty, biodiversity, and cultural heritage depend on strong land-use planning, conservation, and climate resilience efforts.

The Gorge Commission serves as the governing body overseeing all land use decisions happening within the National Scenic Area. The Gorge Commission’s responsibilities include maintaining and updating a management plan, reviewing land use decisions made by planners in five of the National Scenic Area counties, making decisions on the land use applications for one remaining county, and serving as the appellate board for any appeals of land use decisions. Additionally, the Gorge Commission has implemented a Climate Change Action Plan with a series of goals aimed at mitigating the effects of climate change and preparing the National Scenic Area to adapt to the changing climate. These goals include wildfire preparedness and risk reduction for the forests and communities in the Gorge.

Oregon and Washington jointly fund the Gorge Commission pursuant to the Columbia River Gorge Compact, which calls on the state legislatures to provide funding necessary to fulfill the duties imposed upon and entrusted to the Commission. Oregon and Washington must provide equal funding to the Gorge Commission, but the state offering the higher budget allocation must reduce it to equal the state offering the lower budget allocation. By securing equitable funding, the Gorge Commission can sustain its work in balancing development with conservation, supporting communities, and maintaining this national treasure.

Please support HB 5508 so the Gorge Commission can continue its essential work to protect the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.

Sincerely,
Renee Tkach
Conservation Director

Madison Kenney
Conservation Organizer