



April 24, 2025

House Committee on Judiciary

RE: SB 179-A – Support

Chair Kropf, Vice-Chairs Chotzen, Wallan, and members of the committee,

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 (“National Scenic Area” or “Gorge”). The Friends of the Columbia Gorge Land Trust holds over 1,500 acres in the Columbia Gorge, including two public preserves.

**Friends strongly supports SB 179-A**, a bill that would provide continued recreational immunity protections for public and private land open for recreational opportunities.

As of 2023, there were 90 land trust properties open for public use in Oregon. The Oregon Public Use of Lands Act encourages public and private landowners to make their land available to the public for recreational purposes by providing landowners immunity from liability. In 2023, an Oregon Court of Appeals decision undermined the immunity guaranteed in the Act, threatening access to public and private land available to Oregonians for their recreational use and enjoyment.

In the 2024 legislative session, lawmakers passed SB 1576-A to temporarily restore recreational immunity protections on public and private land. The legislation added “walking, biking, and running” to the list of recreational activities and extended liability protections through January 2, 2026. Friends is eager to see the protections initially afforded by SB 1576-A made permanent through passage of SB 179-A.

**Friends owns and maintains a public trail on our 44-acre Mosier Plateau preserve**, located immediately adjacent to the City of Mosier in Wasco County. This 3-mile loop enables users to hike directly from the heart of town and take in seasonal wildflowers and stunning Columbia River Gorge views without even needing to drive to get there. Part of Friends’ ambitious *Gorge Towns to Trails* initiative, the Mosier Plateau Trail and others like it throughout the Gorge are attractions and drivers of local economic activity, and Friends is proud to offer the trail as an amenity to the Mosier community. Without the protections afforded by SB 179-A, Friends and other trail providers will be forced to consider permanent closures as the only viable option to protect ourselves from costly future litigation.

As nonprofits, land trusts could face costly litigation and increased liability insurance premiums due to the decision in *Fields vs. City of Newport*. The passage of SB 179-A would extend important safeguards so we can continue to allow public access to the Mosier Plateau Trail and other recreational opportunities on our lands over the summer season.

Please support the passage of SB 179-A in the 2025 legislative session. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ryan C. Ruggiero", with a stylized, sweeping flourish at the end.

Ryan C. Ruggiero  
Land Trust Director

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Renée M. Tkach", with a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Renée Tkach  
Conservation Director