FRIENDS OF THE COLUMBIA GORGE

SUMMER 2020

The Road Ahead
WHO WE ARE

Founded in 1980, Friends of the Columbia Gorge is the only conservation group entirely dedicated to protecting, preserving, and stewarding the Gorge.

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*Gorge Area Residents

New Look, Same Commitment

The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area brings together two states, six counties, and 13 towns and urban areas. The Scenic Area is also home to a host of natural wonders, including more than 200 species of birds, 800 species of plants, and at least 15 endemic species of wildflowers found nowhere else on the planet.

This combination of nature, community, and culture makes the Gorge a unique and special place. The common thread running through is the majestic Columbia River, whose thundering currents carved and shaped the Gorge millions of years ago.

More than four decades ago, Friends of the Columbia Gorge led the fight to create the National Scenic Area, and today we work to ensure that this natural wonder will be preserved for generations to come. Being an effective long-term advocate and steward of this amazing place means building bridges across different points of view.

Our new logo represents the river and the land surrounding it. We know that to meet the challenges of the decades ahead we will have to build a diverse coalition of people and communities who love the Gorge and share a commitment to protecting it.

We thank all who have been a part of our accomplishments over the past 40 years and look forward to welcoming new faces and partners on the journey ahead.
This newsletter issue has been a long time coming. For years, I’ve wanted to simplify the look and feel of Friends’ communications, starting with a simple, clean logo. In our early years, famed architect and Gorge protector John Yeon drew a Gorge view of Vista House from the Women’s Forum that became our masthead, and twenty years later, then-board member Spencer Dick had a graphic designer develop a window decal with a similar view featuring a young female hiker. Both images were artful, but neither fully spoke to who we are and who we hope to be.

When we hired our first communications director, Burt Edwards, the impact of an unplanned logo became clear. Someone had sent Burt our job listing but, scanning our website quickly, he determined the job wasn’t for him. As a conservationist and African American looking to return to the Pacific Northwest, our decal logo told him we were an organization for white hikers. When he dug deeper into our work, he saw our efforts to take on coal and oil transport and to work with kids of color in our youth education programs, programs that gave him a broader perspective of Friends. Concurrently, as we’ve grown our base of members living in the Columbia Gorge, Gorge residents have asked, “Why does your logo represent a Portland view, always looking into the Gorge from the west?” It was time for a change.

In 2018, Grady Britton, a leading communications B-Corporation in Portland, selected Friends for their annual nonprofit grant award. This meant we could launch a serious rebranding effort, and since then, we’ve honed how we talk and use images and language, to engage all who live in and love the Gorge.

We wanted a logo that would include you, no matter who you are or where you live. Our name comes first, within a more holistic presentation of the river coursing through the square, bridging both states that anchor the Gorge.

We planned a great series of events in 2020 to mark our 40th anniversary, unveiling our new logo at our annual meeting in April. But given our current pandemic, we’ve had to scale back, simplify, and put safety first. Still, we’re very excited. As our recent photo contest winners demonstrated, simple, clean images can be powerful conservation tools. This narrowing of plans and sharpening of focus for 2020 aligns perfectly with our rebranding and may well light the way for our next 40 years.

Kevin Gorman, Executive Director kevin@gorgefriends.org
Nearly everyone thinks about community differently today than they did before the coronavirus pandemic, and those of us at Friends are no different. More than ever, we appreciate that to keep the Gorge a vibrant, living place we need to ensure regional recreation effects are balanced with the health needs of local communities.

Friends has a long history of partnering with Gorge officials and community leaders. Even if we don’t always see eye-to-eye on every issue, when critical issues arise, we work together to address serious threats to the Gorge and the people who live here. Collective action this spring to quickly close trails across the Gorge to support regional coronavirus mitigation efforts is just another example of these community collaborations.

Warning: Dangerous curves ahead

Problems began in mid-March as beautiful spring break weather threatened to overshadow the stay-at-home recommendations and subsequent formal orders from the Washington and Oregon governors. Trailhead parking areas overflowed up and down the Gorge. Long lines formed at restrooms and bumper-to-bumper traffic backed up on the Historic Highway. Safe, social-distance hiking was nearly impossible, with the Gorge’s narrow trails, small overlooks, limited facilities, and crowded parking lots.
Gorge communities suddenly faced an unsettling influx of visitors. With restaurants closed, grocery stores were packed. Hotels and short-term rentals were full. People filled local parks and popular hangouts like the Hood River waterfront. Calls poured in to local leaders, as well as to Friends, urging fast action.

Across the Gorge, community members, public health officials, and land managers were alarmed for the health and well-being of residents and workers. Conditions were changing rapidly; fast action was needed.

**Putting community first**

Those concerns were felt along the river in Mosier, Oregon. Over the years, Mosier’s roughly 500 residents have graciously welcomed hundreds of seasonal hikers passing through to visit Friends’ Mosier Plateau preserve. On a warm spring day many of our neighbors in Mosier join guests from around the region to enjoy the spectacular wildflower displays or cool off in the small swimming hole along Mosier Creek.

But this spring was different. This time, spring recreation had potentially dangerous consequences. In our conversations with Mayor Arlene Burns and other town leaders, everyone recognized that the health and safety of the community had to come above all else. We heard the same message from community leaders throughout the Gorge. Action was needed, and the voices that mattered most in this crisis were those from our Gorge communities and neighbors.

Moving quickly, for the first time ever Friends closed the public trails on our Land Trust properties. Being a good neighbor meant helping deter those visitors for a while. Gorge communities could not shoulder the risk that recreation might present.

**Turning up the volume**

Just west of Mosier, Friends’ staff connected with Hood River Mayor Kate McBride, aligning our efforts and media communications to illustrate the additional pressures that visiting hikers could put on Gorge first responders during this unprecedented public health crisis. Within a day, Mayor McBride ordered a closure of all Hood River city parks and asked short-term visitors to return home.

Building on our rapid response experience during the 2017 Eagle Creek fire, Friends engaged the press and the public to broadcast the message to would-be visitors: Stay at home and recreate locally. We partnered with the U.S. Forest Service and a coalition of local first responders and trail groups in a “Do the Right Thing” press and social media campaign. Key elected leaders like Hood River Mayor McBride and Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler helped amplify the message.

During such a turbulent time, these combined efforts clearly helped reduce the risk of exposure for our friends and neighbors in the Gorge. We hope Friends’ work in support of our community partners during this crisis will have lasting positive impacts, much as it did after the Eagle Creek fire. In time, the coronavirus crisis will subside. When it is safe to do so, trails will reopen—including ours. But safety must always come first.

Like the early motorists on the Columbia River Highway, we're all trying to navigate unpredictable terrain. There will be curves and bumps in the road ahead. Around the next bend we might find a rockslide impeding our progress. Or we might find a spectacular vista of the wondrous Columbia Gorge and a clear road ahead. That possibility keeps us moving.

Whatever lies ahead, one thing that will not change is the collaboration that Friends has developed with Gorge community partners. Our efforts to protect, preserve, and steward the Gorge will become even stronger as a result.
The Columbia River Gorge is a place of unparalleled natural beauty with diverse wildlife, endangered salmon runs, five major ecosystems, 800 species of flowering plants, and rich cultural traditions. The National Scenic Area Act—the federal law that protects the bistate region—charged the U.S. Forest Service to protect and enhance federal lands and created the Columbia River Gorge Commission to protect and enhance the nonfederal lands in the 292,000 acres within the National Scenic Area. There’s no doubt that it’s a big job to protect such a diverse landscape loved by millions.

The question is: Are the Gorge Commission and the U.S. Forest Service fulfilling their roles as protectors of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area? Sadly, recent evidence shows that these agencies are severely challenged in their ability to protect the Gorge for our children and future generations to experience.

Mounting development pressure, increasing visitation to popular recreation sites, wildfires, limited authority over urban planning in Gorge communities, and funding constraints are serious challenges. However, the Commission’s unwillingness to enforce existing Gorge protection laws, as seen in the ongoing Zimmerly mining case, harms both the environment and local communities. And the collective inability to “look around the corner” to plan for new resource threats, such as climate change, hurts the agency’s credibility.

The Gorge Commission and Forest Service are in the fourth year of reviewing the Management Plan. Until recently, there has not been a lot to show for it. Thousands of public comments have been submitted to the Gorge Commission requesting action on climate adaptation and mitigation, including improved protections for streams and salmon habitat. While the Gorge Commission has repeatedly assured the public that climate adaptation would be a major focus of its Management Plan review, progress on these issues has been slow. Finally in May, the Commission drafted new policies requiring a climate action plan and limiting expansion of urban area boundaries.

It’s encouraging to see the Commission and Forest Service begin taking steps to require a climate action plan, but the proposal lacks specific actions and timelines to make the Gorge more resilient to climate change. It’s also significant that the Commission has proposed policies to prohibit urban sprawl. The Columbia River Gorge is irreplaceable, and Gorge Commissioners should commit now to action that will protect this national treasure for coming generations.
For three years, staff for the Columbia River Gorge Commission has assured the public that climate change policies would be an overarching priority in its review and recommended updates to the Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.

Until recently, not a single climate policy has been proposed by the staff. Then in May, Gorge Commissioners directed the staff to develop a climate action plan and to include some specific requirements. The Commission also proposed measures to prevent urban sprawl. This is progress. Still, the draft climate policies only require development of a climate action plan; there is no timeline. There also are no specific measures to better protect salmon and other at-risk species and their habitat, or other climate adaptation or mitigation measures.

Please send a letter to the Gorge Commission at the addresses below. Thank them for beginning to make some progress. Ask them to take specific meaningful actions on climate change and on curbing urban expansion now, before it’s too late.

Friends of the Columbia Gorge’s suggested talking points are available on our website at gorgefriends.org/planreview.

Columbia River Gorge Commission
PO Box 730
White Salmon, WA 98672
Gorge Commission Online Contact Form: GorgeCommission.org/about-crgc/contact

You can also submit a comment online through our website at gorgefriends.org/takeaction.
For decades, the dedication and passion of Friends’ members, volunteers, activists, and other supporters have been the heart and soul of our work. For safety reasons we made the hard decision in March to cancel our annual meeting, spring guided hikes, and a host of special 40th Anniversary activities we’d planned. But while we haven’t been able to gather and share in these activities, the resilience of our community has shown through some of the darkest weeks of the spring coronavirus pandemic—as evidenced by the overwhelming response to our Spring Haiku Challenge and resharing of posts celebrating our newest Gorge photo contest winners.

One of our greatest assets is the community of dedicated photographers who have worked with us to help provide Friends with stunning images to help our public engagement efforts and support of our conservation advocacy, land protection, and stewardship efforts. We’ve also been heartened to see new voices and faces join the community as we’ve increasingly explored the connections between art and conservation in recent years. We hope in the years ahead to keep developing new ways, both virtually and on-the-ground, to strengthen regional public support for Gorge conservation initiatives and broaden the faces and voices joining in the discussion on how to best protect the Columbia Gorge.

Wapato Mirror Pond below Crown Point. Photo: Daniel Rappaport
Challenging our souls
Angel’s Rest or Ruckel Ridge
Nature heals our hearts
– Susan M. Souers
Photograph: Neil Cadsawan

Turtles bask on logs
Unaware of us working
Stewards of the Gorge
– Alice Weaver
Photograph: Bill Partin

Little Beacon Rock
Climate immigrants shelter
Lichen rock caves: Meep!
– Donna Acord
Photograph: Tara Lemezis
Because of COVID-19, our upcoming work parties have been cancelled, with over 1,000 hours of volunteer effort lost. But like the cougar, the ecosystem will continue as it always has. On one hand, it’s unfortunate because weeds are returning without us there to pull them. But with no one hiking trails or visiting these natural areas, the ecosystems will follow their own restoration plan. Native plants will grow unhindered by trampling from visitors trying to take photos. Falcons will nest undisturbed on the cliffs. Deer will graze in peace until cougars come out of hiding, well hydrated.

As we mourn the loss of the time we could be spending restoring the outdoors, let us be comforted that this year the outdoors will do its own work while we stay home.
Coronavirus Won’t Stop Friends’ Advocacy Work

Peter Cornelison, Gorge Field Representative

As Friends’ field representative, I’ve been building support and activism among Gorge residents for nearly twenty years, but never before have I had to completely rely on solitary, home-bound organizing.

Earth Day is always an important time of year for field organizers, as conservation groups, government agencies, and community organizations – from churches to workplaces to schools – join together to tackle environmental challenges and celebrate our victories for this shared home we call Earth. For years I’ve worked to organize Earth Day projects and events that reach as many as possible. This April, though, community safety was our primary concern.

Since the global pandemic struck in early spring, Friends has switched from on-the-ground community organizing to a virtual, at-home approach. Like others, we’ve seized the virtual world of online tools to continue advocacy and stay connected as a community.

Adapting to social distancing has meant canceling all of Friends’ in-person events, workshops, and presentations and recreating them online. By creatively utilizing video conferencing tools like Zoom, we can provide a forum for conversations and community building to continue. The Columbia Gorge Climate Action Network (CGCAN.org), which is supported by Friends, hosted a series of live community webinars on a range of Earth Day issues.

Using these tools, we extended the Earth Day climate conversation for the whole month of April. A strong turnout of participants joined us on Zoom, including people from out of state. And others who had previously been unable to join our events in person were now able to join the conversation.

The ability to quickly inform and activate support remains critical for Gorge protection, so in late April we launched the Gorge Protection Network, a new Facebook group for Gorge residents and activists. The group has nearly 300 members and will keep growing.

We look forward to the day when we can see everyone again at rallies, meetings, and events, but until then it’s great to have these technologies where we can create new, safe, virtual spaces for our members and activists to get informed, ask questions, and stay connected.
A sunny spring day in 2018 was forecast for my annual climb on Mount Hood, the mountain long known by Native American tribes as Wy’east. I had spent months training on steep trails in the Gorge, thrilled at the prospect of seeing the mighty canyon from a unique perspective. Just before midnight, I met my climbing companions at Timberline Lodge to begin our trek. I thought I would be up and down the mountain before noon, but an unpredicted thunderstorm rolled in. Mountain climbing teaches persistence and unwavering commitment. I clung to those lessons as gusts of wind jeopardized our stability and whiteout conditions weakened visibility.

In the end, my Mount Hood climb took five hours longer, but the challenges along the way made the experience even more rewarding. Moving forward on Friends’ diversity, equity, and inclusion journey requires organizational and personal growth and the understanding that with each step, we can better serve the Columbia Gorge. On this climb, we will face storms, difficult issues, and ugly truths about ourselves and the world around us, but we won’t shy away. We will move forward with an unwavering and persistent commitment, one step at a time.

Mika Barrett, Stewardship Volunteer Coordinator and DEI Committee Chair

Friends of the Columbia Gorge is embarking on a journey now that’s like climbing a mountain, one without a clear summit or end point, which will give us new perspectives. We’ve embraced the challenge of advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in our organization.

The Columbia Gorge is home to a diverse group of individuals, tribes, and communities. Our narrative at Friends should reflect the stories of all who live and find inspiration in the Gorge. And we must recognize our responsibility to effectively engage historically marginalized and underrepresented communities in regional conservation efforts.

To guide Friends’ DEI journey, we have formed a steering committee comprised of board members and staff of varying ages, professional levels, genders, and backgrounds. The first phase of our climb focuses on developing a strong foundation through training and education. We’ve been exploring historical and present-day issues of inequality, including tribal treaties in the Gorge, the detainment of Japanese-American citizens in the 1940s, and the environmental racism that contributed to the tragedy of the Vanport flood. We’re also working to enrich Friends internal culture by integrating a DEI lens into our policies and programs.

Mika Barrett atop Mount Hood, June 2018. Photo: Marina Williams
A shared love of the Columbia Gorge is one of many things that unite Linda Besant and Martha Goetsch. Linda grew up backpacking, skiing, and hiking in Colorado. When she arrived in the Pacific Northwest for college, a group of friends made a simple suggestion: let’s go check out to Multnomah Falls. For Linda, that day changed everything. The power and beauty of the plummeting falls and lush understory overwhelmed her. A seed was planted in her heart and mind.

A few years later, driving through the Gorge, Linda stopped to take in the sunset at Crown Point and was struck by the thought that this was probably the best and most beautiful place to live in the world. The roots had taken hold and the seed was able to sprout.

Martha’s early calling to conservation was born of theory and philosophy, rather than epic moments of realization. Growing up in Berkeley, she enjoyed hiking up the hills behind her house to behold the magnificent San Francisco Bay, but she also witnessed the negative impact of population growth there.

When Martha moved to Portland, she knew that the Gorge had to be protected or it would be lost forever. Realizing that conservation is a relay race in which the baton is handed to later generations, Martha wanted to continue the conservation work of those who came before her. An ob-gyn physician with a day-and-night job, Martha decided that while she was busy caring for patients, she wanted to contribute to the organization that was devoted to caring for the Gorge.

Linda and Martha both increased their Friends commitment largely because of its leadership: our board and Executive Director Kevin Gorman. As a former executive director herself (of an outdoor adventure program for people with disabilities), Linda appreciated solid vision and focus. Both wanted to leave a legacy gift to a healthy, well-run organization and decided to include Friends of the Columbia Gorge in their estate plans.

In the year before the stay-at-home orders, Linda and Martha enjoyed hiking along the Klickitat River and biking on the newest segment of the Historic Columbia River Highway. They love the natural variety within the Gorge and can’t wait to join some service trips once the Gorge has enjoyed a breather from people. They are hopeful for the future of Gorge protection and agree that collaboration will be the key to ensuring Friends is able to succeed.

Thank you, Linda and Martha!
Last farewell

In late April we were saddened by the loss to our community of Allen King. The owner of Environmental Paper and Print, Allen worked with Friends for more than two decades, helping to produce our newsletters, annual reports, and other printed materials. Beyond that, he was also an advocate, volunteer, and generous donor of Friends of the Columbia Gorge. Though his death was not due to COVID-19, it hits especially hard at this time.

In addition to being a gracious and knowledgeable business partner, Allen was a dedicated Oregon environmental activist. He spent much of his life volunteering and working with conservation organizations, and it somehow seems fitting that Allen passed away on Earth Day.

We can’t thank you enough

Last month, Kari Skedsvold termed off our board after eight years of guiding our financial health. Kari joined Friends’ finance committee in 2011, bringing skills as a certified public accountant and partner at Rubino & Skedsvold Ameriprise Financial Services. She was elected to the board in 2013 and became the organization’s treasurer in 2015.

Always striving for better financial information and processes, Kari helped shepherd our transition from reliance on an outside bookkeeper to hiring our first financial director. She helped drive upgrades to our financial reporting for better decision making, and was central to creating our multi-year financial plan and updating and revising internal controls. We’re so grateful for all Kari brought to the organization, and we look forward to her continued participation on the finance committee.

Geoff Carr, former Friends board chair and a current land trust trustee, will serve as the new board treasurer.
Special Gifts

Through April 30, 2020

IN HONOR

In honor of Phyllis Clausen
Sandy Wallsmith

In honor of Kevin Gorman
Debra Apple-Baum and Charles Baum

In honor of Mary Grout
Scott Grout

In honor of Grace Jeffreys
Grace Jeffreys

In honor of Brian McClintic
Catharine Fairchild

In honor of Emily Nolan
Mark Naylor

In honor of Joanne Rubin
Patricia Pingree

In honor of Sharon Stern
Helen Stern

In honor of Gail Webb
Annie Dudley

IN MEMORY

In memory of Judith Abele Baker
Anne Jekel
William Moore

In memory of Tovey Baron
Gary Berger
Robin Bowerfind
Rob Flecker and Mary Reed
Sarah Brody Webb
Amy and Charlie Kirschbaum
Lori and Paul Kovacevic
Robert Kravitz
Susanne Raab
Martha Prinz
August Sabini
Henry and Liza Sanford-Crane
Terry and Marie Sullivan
Jennifer Wright

In memory of Walter Baumann
Jennifer Baumann
Robert Edstrom
Kenneth Wolfgang

In memory of Dennis Scott Brand
Donald and Shirley Clark

In memory of Sandra Cohen
Bruce and Diane Follansbee

In memory of Bill Duerden and Frances Ream
Barbara Duerden

In memory of Allen King
Jane Harris
Patrick King
Betsy Toll

In memory of Owen Klinger
William and Susan Lennertz

In memory of Marge Lindquist
Diane and Richard Hohl

In memory of Alice Lux
Kevin Still

In memory of Ed McAninch
Sheila and William Good

In memory of Mark M. Miller
Marilyn Wilder

In memory of Guido and Lauree Rahr
William Rahr

In memory of Naomi Stokes
Mindy Richards

In memory of Magaret S. Weil
Robert Weil

In memory of Matthew Winthrop
Michael and Sheila Giordano

Sunrise at Cape Horn. Photo: Daniel Rappaport
Want to Change the Future of the Gorge for the Better?

Donations made by June 30 will be matched. Double your donation.

You are the engine behind Gorge conservation work. For 40 years, you have kept this incredible place protected. That’s why we’re so pleased that one of the Gorge’s fiercest protectors is matching donations, up to $40,000, in honor of our 40th anniversary. These matching funds will expire when our fiscal year ends on June 30, so don’t wait to double your impact on Gorge protection work.

Visit gorgefriends.org/donate before it’s too late!