



## FRIENDS OF THE COLUMBIA GORGE

Comments on SB 1510

By Michael Lang, Friends of the Columbia Gorge

Before the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee

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Good afternoon Chair Dembrow and members of the committee. Friends of the Columbia Gorge ("Friends") appreciates the opportunity to comment on SB 1510. Friends' mission is to protect the scenic beauty and the natural and cultural heritage of the Columbia River Gorge area. We achieve our mission by educating the public about the outstanding resources of the Gorge, ensuring implementation and enforcement of laws that protect the Columbia River Gorge from inappropriate development and by supporting the purchase of land from willing sellers for the purpose of resource protection and enhancement. Friends has 5,200 members, including hundreds of who live within the Columbia River Gorge area.

Conceptually, Friends supports the creation of a state environmental review process for projects that would have likely significant impacts on the environment. The Columbia River Gorge is jointly managed by the states of Oregon and Washington and the U.S. Forest Service under the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act. Projects within urban areas in the Gorge or outside of the boundary of the National Scenic Area are exempt from review under the National Scenic Area Act, but can have significant adverse impacts on the Columbia Gorge and its communities. Since Washington has a State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) that has been in place since 1971, projects are reviewed to determine, avoid and/or mitigate significant adverse impacts to the environment. For major projects that have a likelihood of significant adverse effects, preparation of an environmental impact statement is required to consider the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of major proposed actions, including the impacts on the Columbia River and nearby communities.

The advantages of a state environmental policy act similar to Washington State are the following:

1. Threshold determinations weed out projects that would have no significant impacts on the environment and identify the few projects that would have significant impacts requiring an environmental impacts statement.
2. For major projects requiring an EIS, consideration of a range of alternatives helps identify the best sites and project designs that would have acceptable impacts on the environment.

3. Substantive standards - Unlike the National Environmental Policy Act, Washington SEPA requires consideration of mitigation measures that would reduce or offset overall project impacts to acceptable levels.
4. Consideration of indirect and cumulative effects so that communities are better informed of a project's likely impacts.
5. Better informed decisions by permitting agencies.

For example, coal export proposals in Washington are subject to SEPA. These projects must be analyzed for the impacts of transporting millions of tons of coal per year through the Columbia River Gorge and rail communities throughout Washington in open-topped coal cars. Oregon does not have this ability under existing state law. Another example is the siting of major energy projects. In Washington, major energy projects and oil terminals are subject to review under the SEPA. In Oregon, the same projects are subject to much more narrow review that fails to consider the broader, long-term effects.

While Oregonians consider themselves to be national leaders in sustainable development that protects the environment, Oregon has no such mechanism to identify and analyze the probable environmental effects of major proposed actions that require a permit from a local or state agency, including the indirect and cumulative effects of these actions and the consideration of alternatives. In the absence of a state environmental policy act, permitting agencies are forced to limit their scope of review without considering the broader, long term effects of the action.

There are currently 16 states and the District of Columbia that have some form of a state environmental policy act, including California, Connecticut, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Montana, New Jersey, New York, N. Carolina, South Dakota, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin.

Friends believes that it is time for Oregon to step forward and allow its communities to better understand the impacts of major new projects that require state or local permitting. We support Oregon adopting a state environmental policy act similar to Washington State.

Thank you very much for considering these comments.