

**United States Senate**  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 12, 2014

Governor John Kitzhaber  
State Capitol Building  
900 Court Street NE, 160  
Salem, OR 97301

Governor Jay Inslee  
Office of the Governor  
PO Box 40002  
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor Kitzhaber and Governor Inslee:

In a great display of bipartisanship and bi-state cooperation, Congress enacted into law the **Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act** in 1986, permanently protecting one of our nation's most treasured landscapes for future generations.

The key to enacting this landmark bill was an agreement from Oregon and Washington to establish a non-federal Gorge Commission to protect and enhance the National Scenic Area's natural, cultural, scenic, and recreation resources while supporting economic development on both sides of the Columbia River. For its first 20 years, the Commission met that challenge, but today we understand the goals of the Commission may be hamstrung by reduced funding at the state level to carry out its responsibilities.

The Act makes clear that the Federal government, as well as the states of Washington and Oregon, each have designated responsibilities. Over the past 20 years, Congress has made efforts to keep pace with its obligations. The U.S. Congress has supported land acquisitions and exchanges to benefit the public as well as private landowners; helped fund both Skamania Lodge in Skamania County, Washington, and the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center in Wasco County, Oregon; funded the United States Forest Service's participation in the National Scenic Area; and supported economic development grants and loans.

In conjunction with the states' Columbia River Gorge Compact, the Act makes clear that Washington and Oregon are responsible for providing sufficient annual funding to carry out the mandated requirements and duties imposed upon and entrusted to the Commission. We are concerned, however, that recent funding reductions may hamper the Commission's ability to fulfill its statutory obligations. For example, during the recent recession, the Commission lost 30 percent of its operating revenues and 45 percent of its staff, and we are concerned that a further

reduction, made by one state and matched by the other under the terms of the Compact, could further reduce the Commission's activities.


We understand that Oregon and Washington are experiencing difficult fiscal challenges, and that already thin budgets must be stretched even more. But we also recognize the unique resource we have available to us in the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area, the recreational and scenic opportunities it possesses, and the need to preserve this special landscape, while providing economic opportunity to its inhabitants, in a thoughtful manner. We know that as the governors of Oregon and Washington, you also value the National Scenic Area and recognize the important role the Gorge Commission plays in protecting and enhancing this special area for generations to come. Therefore, we look forward to working with you to ensure that the Federal government, and the states of Oregon and Washington, continue to implement the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act, and the states' Compact, in order to maintain our commitment to one of our country's greatest landscapes.

Sincerely,

  
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Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Patty Murray  
United States Senator

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator

  
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Jeff Merkley  
United States Senator