



FRIENDS OF THE COLUMBIA GORGE

Oregon House Committee on Natural Resources

Testimony in Support of HB 3378

Dear Representatives:

Friends of the Columbia Gorge (“Friends”) is a nonprofit group with 7,000 members dedicated to protecting the scenic beauty and the natural and cultural heritage of the Columbia River Gorge for our children and future generations. Our members live, work and recreate within the Columbia River Gorge.

Friends supports HB 3378, which would appropriate \$1,500,000 from the general fund to design a bike and pedestrian lane to the Bridge of the Gods at Cascade Locks. As trail users, land managers, and people who care about the health and safety of Oregonians and the vitality of Oregon communities, we believe this investment is both critical and timely for the reasons enumerated in the bill:

- The Bridge of the Gods is a key transportation link in the Columbia River Gorge;
- Hiking and biking are key components of the recreation-based economy in the region;
- The State of Oregon and the federal government are investing significant resources in expanding biking opportunities in the Columbia River Gorge;
- The Pacific Crest Trail crosses the Columbia River on the Bridge of the Gods, and in 2018 over 7,000 hikers used the bridge crossing;
- Hikers and bikers must share the narrow 1926 bridge with vehicular traffic; and
- There does not exist a safe passageway for hikers and bikers to cross the Columbia River between Portland and The Dalles.

The Bridge of the Gods is an iconic landmark, sitting at the crossroads of commerce, recreation and history. The only river crossing for 50 miles between Portland and Hood River, it is critical to commercial and recreational vehicular traffic, as well as non-motorized travelers within the recreation-rich Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.

We commend the Port for identifying outdoor recreation as a principal economic driver for their local community, and for incorporating safe passage for non-motorized recreationists and travelers in its new strategic plan. Significant transportation improvements such as take time and deliberate planning. We thank the Port for getting the process underway in 2012 with an initial feasibility study, and working now towards the next phase of planning. We are part of the broad and diverse community behind this important project, and we support the legislature's efforts to advance funding towards its completion.

A non-motorized lane across The Bridge of the Gods also supports *Gorge Towns to Trails* – a collaborative vision led by Friends' of the Columbia Gorge to develop a destination trekking network encircling the Columbia Gorge, connecting communities, rural areas, and wilderness trails.

Please pass this bill with full committee support for this critical appropriation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Renee Tkach". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.

Renee Tkach
Gorge Towns to Trails Project Manager
Friends of the Columbia Gorge